

NOTES & QUOTES

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SYNOD MEANS “WALKING TOGETHER”

Bishop Thomas A. Skrenes

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My wife, Luanne, tells me that when it comes to finances, “Don’t use a lot of numbers! People will tune you out very quickly if you recite boring numbers and percentages.” Sage advice from my spouse! So, as I write about the Synod’s finances in this article, I will go light on the numbers!

Let’s talk about the Synod budget. You will recall that every dollar of unrestricted mission support (sometimes called benevolence) that your congregation sends to the Synod Office is spent this way in 2008:

53.5% is remitted to the **Churchwide ELCA** for the ministries of our Church

12% is used to support **Lutheran Campus Ministries and our Seminaries**

34.5% is spent in the **Synod** for our work together

You also know that special giving beyond mission support in this Synod from individuals and congregations funds many of our Synod ministries. These include Seminarian Scholarships, the work of Mission Outreach and the Companion Synod program with Tanzania. Special financial gifts are only used for designated projects. Not a penny of your congregational mission support (benevolence) is used for Tanzania projects, seminary scholarships or special outreach efforts. Money to fund those efforts comes from special gifts provided by our people for these specific purposes.

Regular mission support giving of our congregations to the work of the Synod and the ELCA has not grown much since the year 2000. There is a nearly flat income picture for the Synod in unrestricted mission support. Mission support has grown a total of just two percent in these past seven years. Adjusted for inflation, our dollars of Synod income are considerably below the year 2000 income!

The funding of our “walk together” remains a serious challenge for our Synod. How can we support the work of the wider Church when the dollars received do not grow? Your Synod needs to expand its ministries. We cannot do more work, or even the same amount of work, with less money. I am in forty congregations a



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THOMAS A. SKRENES, BISHOP (CONTINUED)

year visiting councils and leading worship. I am fully aware of the financial concerns that our parishes have with salaries and benefits, fuel costs, and building maintenance. I realize the national economy is in, or is close, to being in recession.

However, the reality is that a decrease in income for the Synod and the ELCA hurts ministry! When congregations do not grow in their giving through the Synod, the ministry of Jesus Christ suffers worldwide and in our Synod.

Now our congregations are telling the Synod to expect less income in 2008. The good news is that forty-six congregations are increasing their support to the work of the Synod and the ELCA. Their total combined increases are about \$46,000. Another thirty congregations are neither increasing nor decreasing their projected mission support payments for the current year. The bad news is that, in our Synod, nineteen congregations are reducing their mission support giving for a combined total of \$60,964 in 2008. Four of those congregations total \$46,000 in reduced giving!

Well - enough numbers! What do the numbers mean? The amended budgets for 2008 and for 2009 that are being submitted to the Synod Assembly for approval, are based upon your indications that the Synod and the ELCA will receive less mission support from our churches. While some congregations have indicated good increases, large decreases by a few congregations are difficult to reverse. The Synod also faces normal increases in expenses for utilities, travel and medical insurance. Thus, our Synod budget for the remainder of 2008 and for 2009 will be reduced to reflect this reality. And reducing a budget that is already "bare bones" is difficult and painful. Ministry and staff will be reduced. I will be sending a letter to all of our congregations, clergy and Synod Assembly Voting Members in a few weeks that detail the cuts presented in the budget.

On behalf of the whole Church, I am deeply appreciative of the sacrificial giving of so many in this Synod, and I thank God for you. It will be an interesting year financially. God will supply!

"The good news is that forty-six congregations are increasing their support to the work of the Synod and the ELCA."

**SEXUALITY STATEMENT**

The first draft of the proposed ELCA Social Statement on Human Sexuality is now available. Social statements of this Church are developed over a 4-5 year basis. This Social Statement on sexuality was ordered because of a resolution at the 2001 Churchwide Assembly and re-affirmed by the 2007 Assembly. This draft will be reviewed by the whole Church, and there are likely to be considerable changes before it is ready to go to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly for consideration. The recently adopted social statement on education had about one-third of its text revised during its consideration period. There will be time in 2008 for public hearings, for individual counsel, and in 2009 for Synod assemblies to weigh in on the substance. Adoption of this statement will require a two-thirds approval at the Churchwide Assembly.

THOMAS A. SKRENES, BISHOP (CONTINUED)

ELCA social statements are teaching and theological documents. This document is not intended to be a complete sexual ethic. Not every sexual issue known to humans will be addressed by it. The Statement, once adopted, will set policy for this Church and guide its advocacy in the public arena and other work. Your prayerful reflection and guidance in this Statement are critical. Two hearings for our Synod will occur on this draft this summer. Both will be in June; one will be in Iron Mountain, the other in Cheboygan - just below the bridge. More information on these hearings will be available soon. In addition, your responses to this draft can be sent to the ELCA Task Force by November 1, 2008.

The Task Force will make recommendations of the rostering of practicing homosexual persons as pastors of this Church in February 2009. There are no such recommendations in this draft.

Please encourage members of your congregations to read the document in its entirety. The responsibility to craft the statement is huge. I thank God for all those who serve on the Task Force on Human Sexuality in the ELCA, especially Pastor Corrine Johnson (Concordia and Our Saviour's, Palmer and Suomi).

Pray about your own discernment. Pray for our Church. In this matter, as in all things, we seek the will of God. It is God's future and God's Church!

CONFERENCE OF BISHOPS IN SAN FRANCISCO

Twice a year, the sixty-six bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America gather for business meetings and in retreat. At the spring meeting, annually, our spouses gather with us for worship, discussion of issues facing our Church, briefings on the work we are doing around the world, and considerable conversation on ministry, personnel and administrative issues. At this meeting in San Francisco we also:

Reviewed the resumes of the 215 graduating seminarians. The need in the ELCA for these first call pastors is greater than the supply. Our Synod received three candidates who will be nominated to our congregations this spring. I am delighted with our three prospective new pastors!

Discussed the financial situation of the ELCA with our Churchwide Treasurer. The Hunger program of our Church is the only area that is growing in income.

Received reports on the new congregational mission starts, ELCA military chaplaincy, the new subscription plans for *The Lutheran*, and the Board of Pensions.

Reviewed the First Draft of the Proposed Sexuality Statement and the timeline for its consideration by the whole Church.

Honored the nine Bishops leaving office this year. The two retiring bishops from our region include April Larson from the LaCrosse Area Synod and Phillip Haugen from Southeast Iowa.

On our free Sunday morning in San Francisco, Luanne and I attended worship at Hope Lutheran Church in San Mateo where Pastor Eric Ackerman serves. He sends his greetings to all in our Synod!

PLANNING AHEAD?

For those of you who plan ahead, the next time Easter will be on March 23 will be the year 2160. The earliest Easter date is March 22, and the years 2285, 2353, 2437 and 2505 will have these earliest Easter Sundays. I expect

we will be celebrating Easter in a new location on those dates!

TRANSITIONS

+Congratulations to **Pastor Michael Langlais** on his installation as pastor of Bethany in Norway, Michigan on February 24. On March 16, 2008, **Pastor Nancy Kauppi** was installed as the pastor of All Saints in Wakefield, Michigan and **Pastor Gerald Wittmus** was installed as pastor at Bethel in Cedarville and Zion in Allenville, Michigan. May God bless their ministry in our midst!

+Congratulations to **Lori Liverance**, Diaconal Minister and **Lee Liverance**, Diaconal Minister who have received calls to serve as pastors at Our Saviour's in Iron Mountain. The Liverances will be ordained into the ministry of word and sacrament on Sunday, April 13 at Our Saviour's. They have completed the ELCA and Synod process for ordination, and will continue their ministry with Senior Pastor Steve Cowen at Our Saviour's. God bless these preachers of God's Word!

+**Pastor David Van Kley** will be returning to our Synod this spring! Pastor Van Kley has accepted the call as Senior Pastor at Messiah and St. Mark's churches in Marquette. He and spouse, **Arlene**, come to us from Custer, South Dakota. Previously, Pastor Van Kley served our congregations in Amasa, Stambaugh, Wakefield and at Bethel in Ishpeming. We welcome the Van Kleys back and ask God's blessings upon them in their transition.

+ "Our help is in the name of the Lord." God keep **Pastor Jennifer Johnson Wrege** and her father and family as they remember with thanksgiving Pat Johnson, Pastor Johnson

Wrege's mother. Mrs. Johnson died after a short struggle with cancer. Her funeral was at one of our ELCA congregations in Amery, Wisconsin. The same week, our bookkeeper, **Betsy Koski**, and our Synod office secretary, **Louise Ingalls**, lost their mother-in-law and grandmother. Mrs. Louise Koski was buried from Grace Lutheran in Gwinn where she had been a faithful member. We give thanks to God for both families and their faithful witness to the resurrection of Jesus. For Pat Johnson and for Louise Koski, Easter came early this year.

+Congratulations to **Pastor Bayard (Bucky) Beach** on his recent marriage to **Julie Belew** of Houghton. Pastor Bucky serves Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Houghton and Lutheran Campus Ministry at Michigan Tech. Best wishes to the happy couple!

You are cordially invited to attend the
ordinations of the following individuals from our
Synod:

+ Lori Liverance

+ Lee Liverance

Sunday, April 13, 2008 at 3:00 p.m. CT

Our Saviour's Lutheran Church

Iron Mountain, Michigan

+ John Ahola

Saturday, April 26, 2008 at 10:30 a.m. ET

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

Hancock, Michigan

Clergy - Vest in Red

Thank You

+Thomas A. Skrenes, Bishop

Lutheran World Relief

Holy Trinity, Chassell

Calvary, Rapid River

Siloa, Ontonagon

Seminarian Support

Calvary, Minocqua

Tanzania Teachers' Gift

Revs. Peter Gundersen & Jimalee Jones

Rev. Rudolph & Darley Kemppainen

Marian Gronquist

Joyce Peterson

Jonathan & Jennifer Nelson

Helen Ademino

Helen Bjork

John & Pauline Kiltinen

Marianne Evans

George & Jonelle Collins

Curtis & Judith Erickson

Helen Koski

Robert & Phyllis Gottschalk

Elaine Jalonen

Kisarawe

Copper Country Conference

Lutheran Campus Ministry

Emanuel, Skandia

Bethany, Amasa

Trinity, Ishpeming

Bethany, Ishpeming

ELCA Disaster Funds

Grace, South Range

World Missionary Support

Trinity, Stambaugh

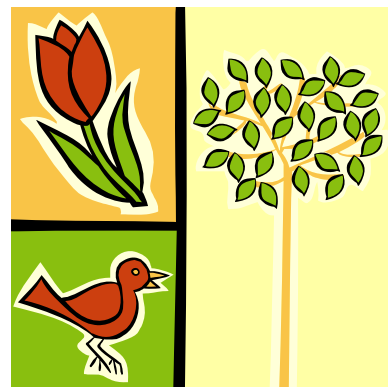
Calvary, Rapid River

Lay School for Mission

Trinity, Rapid River

Congregational Mission Support

Zion, Marinette



+ From the Assistant to the Bishop +

Pastor Jennifer Johnson Wrege

"As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."



Luke 19:36-40

THE SCENE: The early service - 8:00 a.m. - on a spring Sunday morning in a large congregation. It's the Sunday of the Easter Cantata. There is a large chorale choir of thirty-seven sopranos, altos, tenors and basses; a full orchestra with strings, woodwinds, and brass; a pianist, kettle drummer, bass player, and a drummer.

The cantata was entitled *Grace that Amazes*. It took the place of the sermon during the worship, so at the appropriate time, all the musicians entered the sanctuary. The director raised his baton, eyed his cadre of vocalists and instrumentalists, swung his arms and facing directly toward the drummer, gave the downbeat. The drummer, poised for a big, long drum roll energetically flailed his arms bringing his sticks down on drums and cymbals in a particular order, but there was no sound to be heard. The electric drum set brought forth no sound except for the faint, hollow sound of a stick hitting a stretched piece of plastic which would be heard only, I am sure, by the few of us sitting in the fourth pew from the front and the first pew with any people in it. The offering went on. The soloist began her solo. The chorale backed her up in a few measures and the cantata was launched.

The drummer continued to drum. I suppose he was hoping that the sound guy at the sound board would figure

out the problem and get him connected to the speakers. It never happened. But this young guy is a drummer at heart. He couldn't stop drumming with all the passion of one who is called. He tried. I watched him as he put his sticks on the floor in front of him. Next thing I knew, he was drumming. I watched him as he took up the bulletin to read the announcements. Next thing I knew, he was drumming. He drummed straight through a portion of the cantata that must have had a great drum part. I'm thinking that if he stopped altogether, people in the pews would have begun drumming on the backs of the pews in front of them. There was no stopping him. He was a drummer with an important part in proclaiming a message – an important message about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

So much of the time I am easily stopped. If left to my own devices, these are the things that happen:

If I pick up on a little resistance here, I will often curb my faith sharing. Sense a bit of a roadblock about some way I participate in a ministry or mission, and I will often pull back to re-evaluate. If I have a couple challenging days finding time for prayer and the reading of scripture, I can parley that into a reason for letting devotions go altogether.

Thanks be to God, I am not left to my own devices, strength, will power, abilities and on and on. Jesus calls me, provides me with what I need, takes my life in the grip of his grace-filled hand so that I can serve as a bearer of the good news of his life, death and resurrection with my words and in my actions. So, like the drummer, I might try to put down the marks of faith, but the next thing I know, I am at it again. Like the drummer, I might get distracted. I might even get distracted very often, but the next thing I know, Jesus has me back at it again.

I am called....and, so are you....to be bearers of the good news of Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

*Blessings to you throughout this
season of Easter!*



Pastoral Vacancies and Interim Pastors

Bethel, Ishpeming - Associate Pastor Vacancy

Trinity, Stambaugh & Bethany, Amasa - Pastor Doug Johnson

Central, Menominee - Pastor Ken Michaelis

Bethany, Covington & Trinity, Trout Creek - Pastor Scott Williams

Holy Cross, Baraga - Pastor Ted Koehl

Bethany, Mohawk - Pastor Peter Vorhes

Our Redeemer, Newberry - Pastor LaVonne Stephenson

Immanuel, Escanaba - Pastor Jonathan Schmidt

Grace, Gwinn - Pastor Chad Christensen

First, Ewen & Our Saviour's, Paynesville - Pastor Gerald Anderson

Congregational intents for mission support giving in FY2008 are down significantly, and this will certainly have a negative impact on the ministries of the Synod. It also becomes even more important for congregations to send in their support in a timely and consistent manner. As difficult as it is to make program cuts, we remember Proverbs 3:5-6: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths" (NRSV). As we make financial decisions in our congregation councils, may we trust in the Lord's generosity to us, so that as we have been blessed, we might be a blessing to others.

As of 2/29/08	2007	2008	\$ Change	% Change
Pledged Amount	1,045,301	1,025,753	-19,548	-1.9%
Amount Received	115,426	119,560	+4,134	+3.6%
Designated Gifts	17,689	19,851	+2,162	+12.2%



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ON-LINE DEVOTIONS FOR APRIL 2008

www.prayfaithfully.org

Mar. 30-Apr. 5 / RoseAnne Aman, Our Saviour's, Iron Mountain

April 6-12 / Susan Anderson, Sharon, Bessemer

April 13-29 / Tim Mulvaney, Bethany, Escanaba

April 30-May 3 / Fran Voyce, St. John's, Ironwood