



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

2009 Bishop's Report to the Congregations of the Northwestern Minnesota Synod

For Annual Meetings in the Winter of 2009-2010

“...*The only thing that counts is faith working through love.*” Galatians 5:6b
Looking back over the year 2009, we see how incredibly busy God has been in our midst. God's great gift of faith is, in Martin Luther's memorable words, “a living, busy, active thing.” It comes alive every day, in all sorts of ways, across the 21 counties of northwestern Minnesota

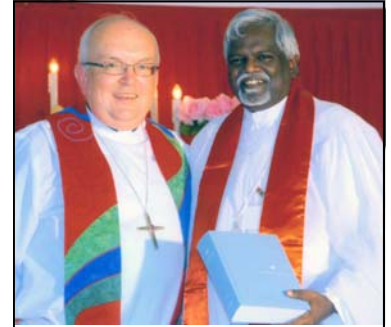
- In the lives of over 107,000 Lutheran **disciples** who bear the light of Christ into the world in their Monday through Saturday vocations in God's world;
- In the vibrant ministries of 270 passionate Jesus communities, **congregations** walking together in God's mission; and
- In the “connective tissue” of our **synod** and our **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**.

Such vibrant faith carries us through both the ups and downs of life. Despite major spring flooding, a global economic recession, a difficult harvest season and tensions over ELCA churchwide assembly decisions on human sexuality, God has remained faithful to us—continually calling forth our faithful response.

As you gather for your annual congregational meeting, I want to share three snapshots of how God is “alive and well,” at work in our Synod in 2009 and in the year to come. Someone has said that although God *can* do anything without us, God in fact *chooses* to do nothing without us. That's behind the ELCA's great tagline: God's work. Our hands.

1. *God is growing disciples in life-giving congregations*

- God is equipping us to reclaim the *Book of Faith*, our first language as followers of Jesus. ***You Are What You Eat*** was the inspiring theme for our synod assembly last May (with speakers Diane Jacobson and Mark Vitalis-Hoffman) and the theology for ministry conference in September (with teachers Mary Hinkle Shore and Rolf Jacobson). *Book of Faith* scripture studies are springing up all across our synod, and many are embracing the discipline of daily Bible reading.
- Thousands of youth from our synod attended the ELCA Youth Gathering in New Orleans last July and our synod's own senior high and middle school gatherings this past autumn under the theme, ***Reflect***. Over 50 church staff and lay leaders participated in a synod-sponsored ***Passing on Vibrant Faith*** Conference in early December.
- Three sessions of our synod's ***School for Lay Ministry*** explored the Lutheran Confessions, Martin Luther and the Reformation, and the Old Testament.



Bishop Larry Wohlrabe and Bishop Suneel Bhanu, Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church.

2. God is raising up servant leaders for a missional church

- Two ***congregation council training events*** in February involved a total 175 church council members and pastors representing 41 congregations.
- The synod pastoral staff completed a round of ***Together in Ministry*** (TiM) visits with all the rostered leaders of the synod, i.e., one-on-one “pastoral visits” in each minister’s place of service.
- One of the most hopeful signs of God’s mighty work in our midst is the fact that persons continue to answer the call to serve in ministries of the church. Over the past year our synod ***Candidacy Committee*** welcomed new members who received training in the art of “behavioral interviewing.” Right now, more than 25 members of our synod are preparing to serve as pastors or rostered lay leaders.

3. God is stirring up new and renewed approaches to evangelical outreach

- With the strong partnership of the ELCA churchwide organization, our synod and the Eastern North Dakota Synod called Pastor Keith Zeh as our new Director for Evangelical Mission. A new ***Mission Imagination Table*** is bringing fresh vision and energy to the task of making Christ known.
- Our first ***Hearts on Fire: Rally in the Valley for God’s Mission*** on August 30 celebrated outreach ministries in our region and surfaced new leaders for other emerging mission tables (teams). Our next ***Hearts on Fire*** event will take place January 16 at Climax Lutheran Church on the topic, ***Cultivating Vitality in Multiple Point Ministries***.
- This past autumn, we shared 19 ***Matters of the Heart*** conversations, across the synod, focusing on the critical relationship between our financial stewardship and God’s mission in our synod. Congregations were challenged to grow their mission support for 2010 by one more percentage point of congregational income and submit their mission support giving “off the top” each month.

These are just snapshots representing dozens of other ways that God’s work is being carried out with our hands in the Northwestern Minnesota Synod. As I write these words I remember the 12 days a small group of us spent in November in our companion synod in India, the Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church. What a joy it was to meet these Indian disciples who, like us, are sharing Christ with others, passing on the faith to the next generation, and caring for the needs of neighbors. On your behalf I shared greetings of hope and partnership—and they sent their own love and good wishes back to all of us.

God bless your annual meeting! Thank you for your partnership in God’s work!



Bishop Larry Wohlrabe
Northwestern Minnesota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America