

Bishop's Letter



**This month's
theme:
Looking back
at 2008**

December 2008/January 2009

In Healthy Congregations, leaders provide immune capacities

"Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." I Corinthians 15:58

This column's title is curious. "Now what's he talking about?" you might wonder. Immune capacities? Say what?

Let me be clear: this is not hard to understand in the cold and flu season. Some of us, myself included, have already wrestled with one "bug" this autumn. It's miserable, right? And those viruses sure can hang on!

So here's the question: What causes infections? The quick, obvious answer is: germs or "bugs"—right? But that's really only half of the reason. The other reason is that we are vulnerable hosts. We get sick when two things happen: a virus attacks AND our immune capacities are "down."

Our bodies are always being assaulted by viruses, germs, cancer cells. If that's all that caused illness, we'd be sick all the time. But fortunately, our bodies have wondrous defense systems that ward off the bugs. And, thankfully, most of the time our immune systems are strong and sturdy. But when they weaken—when we grow weary or malnourished in any way—opportunistic invaders can gain a foothold.

The same holds true in congregations. Congregations face multiple threats every moment of every day. Some of these are large and easily identified: demographic decline, economic recession, a neutral if not hostile culture, etc. Other threats come in the back door, though. The "cells" (members) of the Body of Christ can act like viruses, attacking the host.

I'm not just talking about specific individuals in the church—although there are persons who fit the bill. "Persistent troublemakers" can be found in every congregation.

But even more seriously, there are virus-like traits that *all* of us display from time to time. We all have moments when our anxieties

This is the ninth of an 11-part series of articles based on the *Healthy Congregations* training materials by Dr. Peter Steinke. Bishop Larry encourages church councils and other leadership groups to use these articles for devotions/discussion as they meet.

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Front row, from left: Linnae Grabner-Hegg, Laurie Natwick, Marsha Hendrickson, Larry Wohlrabe. Back row: Michael Stein, Shirleen Wyland, Bob Larson, Steve Peterson, Erin Anderson

*A Very Happy and
Blessed Christmas to
all from the staff of
the Northwestern
Minnesota Synod*



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"Connections," a congregational newsletter/bulletin insert is included in this issue (and also available on our website). Please share this information with your congregation.

Coach Bus Seats for National Youth Gathering Available

Calvary Lutheran in Perham has 20 seats available on a coach bus heading to the National Gathering in New Orleans. Call Rob at 218-346-4780 if you have interest in these seats for your group.

“The Lutheran” to feature Northwestern Minnesota Synod insert

Watch for the January issue of “The Lutheran,” which will include the first of four quarterly inserts produced by and for the Northwestern Minnesota Synod.

Let your congregation(s) know about this exciting event.

Trinity receives Wheat Ridge Ministries Health and Hope grant

Trinity Lutheran Church, Moorhead, was among 14 Lutheran congregations to receive a \$26,610 Congregation Health and Hope grant from Wheat Ridge Ministries for its parish nurse program.

The purpose of the Congregation Health and Hope Grants is to facilitate the initial development of congregation-based health and wellness ministries. All Lutheran congregations, individually or in partnership with other congregations, are eligible for these grants.

“Christian congregations are centers of health and healing ministry,” said Brian Becker, Vice President for Ministry Programs. “It is a privilege for Wheat Ridge Ministries to assist congregational leaders as they develop new ministries of health and hope that touch the lives of people in the congregation and local communities.”

The focus of the grant is on new congregation-based health ministries developed under the auspices of a congregation health committee or cabinet. Projects must support and promote the health and well-being of people in the congregation and local community.

Bishop's Message, continued

Leaders resist undermining forces

overflow into the Christian community. We're all tempted to form “triangles,” bypassing the person we need to speak with and conversing instead with a third party. We all, on occasion, operate secretly rather than openly and above-board.

There are enough obstacles and viruses assaulting the congregation to make it sick most of the time. But, thankfully, our congregations are not sick all the time. Why is that? It's because God protects us from such viruses, largely through the leaders God raises up in each congregation.

Leaders provide immune capacities in the Body of Christ. Leaders resist forces that undermine a congregation, forces that take our eyes off God's mission, forces that tempt us to act in under-handed ways. God graciously gives us leaders who are “steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord” (I Cor. 15:58).

But “immovable” doesn't always sound like a good thing, does it? We associate being immovable with being inflexible—and that's not always good in a leader, is it? The kind of immovability the apostle Paul speaks of, though, is about holding the line against forces that threaten Christ's church. In I Corinthians 15, Paul is defending the reality of the resurrection in the Christian life. It doesn't get more basic or foundational than that! Leaders provide immune capacities when they are clear and “immovable” about what God's word and God's mission is for us—and when they're willing to resist any and all forces that threaten that. That's a wonderful sort of “immovability.”

But what does such “immovable” leadership look like or sound like? Imagine some brief exchanges between a virus-bearer (V) and an immovable leader (L):

V: “Some of us are having a secret meeting to talk about problems with our church staff.”

L: “Isn't that why we have a personnel committee? Why don't you take your concerns to them, or better yet, speak directly to the staff members who trouble you?”

V: “If our congregation starts this new worship service, I know some members will leave.”

L: “I'm sad to hear that. But we've been carefully considering the new worship service for a long time. It will enhance our ministry, and as a congregation we *have* decided to do this for the sake of our witness in the world.”

V: “I'm so worried about the economic recession! We need to



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More than 900 attend Soul2Sole Junior High Youth Gathering

Well over 900 junior high youth and their adult leaders attended the 2008 Northwestern Minnesota Junior High Youth Gathering, Soul2Sole, at the Alerus Center in Grand Forks, N.D., November 21-23. Romans 10:15, the theme verse, reminds us, "*How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!*" Perhaps this was highlighted best as we joined in mission together to collect and box more than 1000 pairs of shoes for *Shoes 2 Share*, a ministry based in Delaware that helps provide shoes around the world and in the United States for those who don't have any. Thank you for making a difference in the lives of those who will be touched by your gifts and thank you for making the largest gathering held in our synod a huge success!

2009 Soul2Sole Senior High Youth Gathering slated for Craguns Resort

Youth Leaders, please watch for registration information and mark your calendars now for the Northwestern Minnesota Senior High Youth Gathering, April 17-19, 2009, at Craguns Resort near Brainerd, Minn. Registration packets will be sent out in January.

Synod disaster response mission trip to Iowa in the works

A mission trip to help with disaster relief from the floods in Iowa is currently in the early planning stages for a possible February trip. Please watch for more details very soon about the trip and about how those interested in this type of mission can take part, team up and help respond in a great way. If you have an interest in this area of mission or would consider serving on a synod *Disaster Response/Mission Trip Team*, please contact Erin Anderson, Assistant to the Bishop at eranders@cord.edu.

Passing on a Vibrant faith Conference

Luther Crest Bible Camp and the Youth and Family Institute offers churches around the state an opportunity to attend "Passing on a Vibrant Faith Conference!" The conference, Thursday January 8, 2009, 9 – 4 p.m. at Luther Crest Bible Camp in Alexandria, will provide you with an overall, transformative vision for ministry in your congregations, homes and daily living. Clergy and lay leaders, volunteers, parents, youth workers, councils and committees and synod staff will engage in beginning the process of solidifying practical and proven faith practices of passing on a vibrant faith to their communities.

You are invited to attend. Call now and reserve your seats today. Cost is \$40 per person, which includes lunch, snacks, and conference materials. Visit the Luther Crest website for registration materials at www.luthercrest.org, or email David Holtz, Executive Director, daveh@luthercrest.org for more information.

Roster updates

Prayers and sympathy to

Pr. D. Rolf Aanestad in the death of Rolf's father Pr. Ragnvald Aanestad who died November 14 at age 98. Pr. Rolf serves Bethlehem Lutheran, Ulen.

Pr. William Reck and family in the death of his wife Loree who died November 23. Loree had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease in 2000. Her funeral was held November 25 in St. Paul's Lutheran, Crookston where Pr. Reck serves.

Congratulations

Prs. Paul and Katie Koch on the birth of a son, Martin Roland, November 20. Pr. Paul serves Bethesda Lutheran, Skime, Pine Grove Lutheran, Roseau and Riverside Lutheran, Wannaska. Pr. Katie serves Our Savior and United Lutheran Churches, Gatzke.

Pr. Melodi and Eric Hagen on the birth of a daughter, Anna Mae Hagen, December 1. Pr. Melodi serves Sion Lutheran Church, Lancaster.

Consecration

Sister Shana Williams, deaconess, Salem Lutheran, Cummings, ND, November 22. She serves as the High Adventure Director for Pathways Outdoor Ministries, Bemidji.

Installations

Pr. Elaine Leone, pastor, St. Paul's Lutheran, Lowry and Nora Lutheran, Kensington, December 7.

Pr. Gary Van Hunnik, senior pastor, Cormorant Lutheran, Lake Park, December 14.

Resignation

Pr. Kristen Larsen-Schmidt, pastor, First Lutheran, Mahnomen effective January 25, 2009.

Congregations in Study/Interims/Seeking Pastors

Ada, **Grace**, senior and associate pastors recently resigned, interim Pr. Cheryl Berg and part-time visitation contract Pr. Don Walker

Alexandria, **Bethesda**, pastor resigned, interim Pr. Don Reisig (starts 1/1/09)

Audubon, **St. Peter's** & Detroit Lakes, **Augustana**, pastor resigned, interim Pr. Jill Steichen

Barrett, **Peace**, part-time interim contract Prs. Cordell & Mary Carol Strug

Battle Lake, **First**, in self study, interim Pr. John Martinson

Celebrating the year's good

Central Lutheran, Pelican Rapids

During 2008, we have been able to complete a new addition to our church. Our church is about 132 years old and was in need of handicap accessibility. In addition, the bathrooms were not handicap accessible and the kitchen needed a major overhaul.

A committee was set up and had been working on this project back when I was an intern here in 2002-2003.

The congregation took a leap of faith and voted to do this project. We had hundreds of volunteer hours as the men from Central did everything from driving skid-loaders to moving the soil to staining the woodwork. The women provided meals for the workers all last winter. Other congregation members pledged funds for this project.

In June we had a dedication service to bless our new addition that had grown to include a new fellowship hall, new secretary and pastor offices and a new conference room.

We are growing in numbers slowly but surely, and have been blessed with five additional couples who worship with us during the summer months. We have started a nursery once again after many years of having no need for one. Our youth group meets every month. A highlight of the year is a Valentine dinner served by the youth. Each year a different theme is chosen and the youth decorate and transform our fellowship hall into an amazing assortment of venues.

For the past three years we have taken a widowed grandmother raising her two granddaughters under our wings. Two couples in our congregation volunteer to pick them up for Sunday school and church. Whatever need arises, we provide what is necessary for them. We have grown to love these two girls and include them in our lives. This is a one-to-one kind of evangelism that speaks directly to the heart.

We are a small congregation but we strive to serve our Lord.

May the peace that passes all understanding fill your heart and mind with love,
Pastor Zinta Sundby

Immanuel Lutheran, Osage

One of the good things that has happened to our congregation is Pastor Phil (Johnson), who has given us a view of what a really good minister can be like. There is hope.



The women quilters number only 6-8 women but we have continued to make quilts each week to donate to missions, and local charities.

Our Sunday school has grown this year. Many country churches don't even have a Sunday school.

We are a very caring congregation, always concerned about our local neighbors, with cheer baskets, fund raisers, just helping out when needed.

I have faith that Immanuel will survive through our rough times and be bigger and better in the future.

Vicki Heydt

Hope Lutheran, Fergus Falls

Good news abounds again this Christmas season at Hope Lutheran in Fergus Falls. Interestingly enough, this year more than any other, there has been a steady stream of generous people walking through my office door with gifts for those who are in need. Without being asked, several people have handed me hundreds of dollars worth of gift certificates and checks with the instructions that these gifts are to be given anonymously to someone who may be having financial trouble. This kind of generosity has occurred every year. But this year the gifts have increased significantly in number and amount.

In these tough economic times it's touching to see such an outpouring of kindness. This is especially true given the fact that I serve a very blue-collar congregation. These generous people are not affluent, but they recognize the needs around them and are responding in a tangible and meaningful way. It truly is the church at its best. In this season of grace and love God's gifts are being made manifest in unexpected and wonderful ways.

Pastor Jon B. Olson

news around our synod!

Bethel Lutheran, Fergus Falls

The “Kids Against Hunger Store” re-opened Sunday, December 7, with a group from Bethel packaging meals. One member of the group, Missy Rocholl, is thankful that there is a local organization for people in our community to come in and really make a difference. We often forget that hunger and poverty aren’t just global issues; there are starving children right here in our county. “It’s sad that is what so many kids have to eat,” Missy shared as she filled a soy container. “I’m overwhelmed! But we do this for the kids.”

Since March 2008 our community has packaged **523,335** meals. **10 percent** of those meals stay local and go to the food shelf and Someplace Safe. That means that there are more than **52,000 nutritious meals** for families in need in our community! Jill Fazio from Someplace Safe says that these meals are an important part of their ministry and work. The meals that go to Someplace Safe are distributed to walk-ins and families and victims of assault, abuse and other crimes.

“Before we were able to take advantage of this, there was nothing for us to do except give referrals to the Salvation Army or the food shelf,” Fazio explained.

Pastor Matthew Martin



Vining Parish

On November 2, the OTC LYO (Vining parish, Good Shepherd Henning, First Lutheran Battle Lake, Eagle Lake Lutheran, Zion Lutheran Amor, Underwood Lutheran parish) had 60 youth and 10 adults attend a “Kids Against Hunger” event in Fergus Falls. We packaged 15,552 meals and donated \$1780 to the ministry.

Pastor John Okan

Kids Against Hunger



Trinity Lutheran Church, Moorhead

Small Group Ministry continues to thrive in our congregation, not just in numbers of people who join one of the many small groups, and not just in those folks who step forward feeling called to lead a small group, but in the relationships. People are growing as disciples together in a small group, as they come to know each other and as they listen for God’s voice. Caring and praying and serving together happen in wondrous ways.

The “Support our Troops” small group gathers to pray for troops, track address changes of deployed military, and pack and send cards and boxes to troops on Independence Day, Veterans Day and Christmas. The Prayer Shawl small group makes shawls, and knits a prayer into the stitches. Upon completion, each shawl is blessed in a special service and a note of blessing is tagged to each one.

A prayer shawl is packed into each box that is prepared for mailing to each soldier. The boxes also contain granola,

dried meats, candy, drink powder, personal care items, puzzle books, small Bibles, and magazines.

One of the soldiers who received a box from the 4th of July mailing has asked to have some time to give a temple talk during his next leave time at home. He wants to thank our congregation and honor the Support our Troops small group by presenting a flag that he flew in honor of them during one of his missions in Iraq.

Yes, they are called ‘small’ groups, yet they have large and powerful impacts in many ways as people of God meeting together in Jesus’ name, praying, caring, and serving; in this instance, for deployed military on the other side of the world.

Valerie Nielsen, TiM Program Assistant & Director of Small Group Ministry

Celebrating the year's good news

Salem Lutheran, Stephen

Salem Lutheran Church, rural Stephen, celebrated their 125th anniversary as part of their Midsummer Celebration. Two young brothers, Lane Steer and Austin Gehris, served as acolytes. Lane and Austin are from the sixth generation of the founding families of Salem. Two daughters of Salem, Rev. Marlene Anderson and Rev. Janna Koontz delivered the messages. On Saturday, Rev. Peter Schmidt spoke at the Midsummer Celebration. It was a day of celebrating Salem's past, enjoying the present, and looking forward to the future!



L to R Back Rev. Janna Koontz, Rev. Marlene Anderson, Rev. Curt Matz, Darlene Larson Matz, Erin Anderson.
Front: Austin Gehris, Lane Steer-brothers, sixth generation at Salem

Bethesda Lutheran Church, Strandquist, is a small church with a large ministry through the Food Shelf it sponsors, which serves over 50 households a month. In an economically depressed area, this Food Shelf is greatly appreciated. The Food Shelf was blessed this year to receive a grant from ELCA World Hunger, which has enabled it to provide more food to those in need. The current Thrivent Challenge has raised an additional \$1,000+ from Bethesda and its sister congregations, Gustav Adolph, Strathcona; Salem, rural Stephen; and First, Middle River.

Darlene Larson Matz, SAM

New Life Lutheran Church, Rothsay

The best thing that happened in our congregation in 2008 is that **we were born!** On January 6, 2008, the congregations of Our Savior's Lutheran Church and Hamar Lutheran Church, across the street from each other in Rothsay, voted to close and to form a new congregation, New Life Lutheran Church. As of this writing, and only 11 months old, NLLC has had a marvelous year.

Our congregational lives have blended beautifully as we have worshipped, played, celebrated and mourned together. We find great strength as the Spirit guides our cooperative nature and we are looking forward with profound hope as we strive to serve God and his people together in this place. We have held very successful gatherings together with our parish partner, Little Bethany Lutheran Church, such as spring, summer and harvest worship festivals. We held an ingathering of food and offerings for local and world hunger at our Harvest Festival. Despite the uncertainty of completion of the harvest of soybeans, sugar beets and corn, and the downturn of the national economy, our community responded with great generosity and grace. We distributed nearly a ton of food and over \$1000 to four area food pantries just in time to help meet their Thanksgiving needs. Our congregation's first year budget is operating in the black, as we learn how to be good stewards of God's great gifts.

On December 7, we voted by an overwhelming margin to build a new church home for our new congregation, so we will begin that whole process soon. Many people here have worked hard together to get us to this point, and by God's grace we will continue to do so.

GOD IS GOOD -- ALL THE TIME!

Pastor Paul Huso

American Lutheran Church, Long Prairie

We added 50-plus new members in 2008. All I can say is that our members are reaching out to people in the community and inviting them to come. And when people do come, they are warmly received. We also had a "Friend Day" in October. We spent a month preparing for that in the sense that we focused on friendship as a theme in both preaching and Sunday School with the design that people think intentionally about reaching out to others they know and invite them to church. It's a way of doing evangelism without calling it that....particularly mobilizing church members to all be on the same page when it comes to reaching out to others in the community.

Pr. William Bakewicz

The Bishop's Letter is available on
our website:
www.nwmnsynod.org

Then Mary said...

By Assistant to the Bishop Pr. Stephen Peterson

"Then Mary said, "Here I am the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her. *Luke 1:38*

In his book, "Creating a Life With God," Dan Wolpert has a chapter titled PRAYER AND LIFE IN THE WORLD, The Rubber Meets the Road. He talks about use of material goods and material giving along with what he calls The Impossible Project, stepping out in faith to do something challenging and new as activities that can be seen as prayer practices which put us at God's disposal and put us in a position of trust and intimacy with God. Hmm... sounds like two big chunks of my position description – congregational renewal/transformation and stewardship. It also sounds a lot like advent discernment. It also seems to me to echo the voice of Mary the mother of Jesus, "Here I am the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.



A common thread among people who listen to God in quiet prayer is the more they pray, the less stuff they seem to need or want or even have. It's a little different than the slogan that proclaims the one with the most stuff wins. A lot of what this relates to is developed and developing trust and a fullness that comes from dwelling in the grace of God and being filled with the bread of life.

Tithing, for example, can be seen as a prayer practice that helps us to dwell in the grace of God and have an enhanced sense of growing faith and trust and intimacy with God. Why does the average percentage of giving in mainline churches range from only one to three percent of a person's income? It may not be for most people because they do not value their church, but quite simply, because it is hard to tithe 10 percent. At least, it's a hard decision to make and may take a hard bit of getting used to. Tithing can be seen as a spiritual practice precisely because it is hard. That doesn't earn us merits or brownie points with God, but it does force us to relate to God in a more trusting and intimate way as we participate in the practice. We must ask God for what we need and trust that God will provide. We are challenged to look at what we regard as important as people of faith. How do we spend our time and our money? Communicating with God about these concerns helps develop intimacy and trust and joy in our relationship with Jesus. As we live our material life more conscious of God's care and guidance we slowly become more aware of God being with us in all that we do all of the time. And the void we would fill with material things is filled instead with the bread of life. Like Mary we are learning to "Let be according to God's Word."

Transformation/Renewal can also be seen as a spiritual practice, as a kind of prayer practice. Once again we are putting ourselves, like Mary, at God's disposal. God is in charge and not us. It begins

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Roster updates, continued

Battle Lake, **Trefoldighed**, part-time contract, Pr. Lyle Hoxtell

Bemidji, **Aardahl & Guthrie, Malvik**, interim Pr. Linda Tenneson

Blackduck, **Zion**, call pending, interim Pr. Melody Kirkpatrick

Cimax, **Climax, Grue, Sand Hill**, in self study, interim Pr. Donald Reisig (through 12/31/08)

Crookston, **Trinity**, senior pastor resigned, interim Pr. Paul Svingen

Erhard, **Tonseth**, pastor resigned

Glyndon, **Glyndon**, pastor resigned, interim Pr. Paul Miller

Halstad, **Halstad & Augustana**, call pending, interim Pr. Marsha Burt

Hitterdal, **Salem**, in self study, interim Pr. Sandra Hollands

Kelliher, **Our Savior & Waskish, Bethlehem** (part-time), pastor resigned

Lake Bronson, **Zion & Kennedy, Maria**, interim Synodically Authorized Minister Kathy Levenhagen

Mahnomen, **First**, pastor resigned

Newfolden, **Bethlehem & Holt, Nazareth**, pastor resigned

Osage, **Immanuel**, pastor retired, interim Pr. Phil Johnson

Park Rapids, **Calvary**, senior and associate pastors resigned, interims Prs. Kenneth Nyhusmoen & Matthew Williams

Pelican Rapids, **Grove Lake**, interviewing, interim contract Pr. Darrel Saathoff

Shevlin, **Clearwater & Solway, Solway**, pastor resigned, interim Pr. Karol Hendricks-McCracken

Turtle River, **New Salem**, call pending, interim Pr. William Beyer

Warren, **First & Immanuel**, pastor resigned, interim Pr. Mark Rittmann

Association of Lutheran Church Musicians National Conference

“Brimmed for Pouring: Pastors, Musicians and the Whole People of God” is a summer continuing education opportunity for all Lutheran pastors, musicians, and worship leaders. Come to Milwaukee, Wis., from August 2-5 2009 and experience days filled with engaging speakers, inspiring worship and valuable connections with colleagues.

For more information and to register, visit www.alcm2009.com. Young Lutherans Sing, a summer choral experience for 4th – 8th graders will be held on the campus of Carthage College in Kenosha, Wis., July 28 – August 1. The final day will connect with the ALCM pre-conference event. Visit www.alcm.org for more information.

Bishop's Message, continued

Shoring up your immune capacities

cut our spending and stop giving away so much money to missions beyond our congregation.”

L: “Now is not the time to panic. God has not abandoned us. God is still blessing us. We need to act out of our hopes, not our fears.”

Do you see how, in each of these examples, leaders increase the “immune capacities” of congregations? It's amazing! Thank God for leaders who know when to be flexible and when to be “steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord.”

Bishop Larry Wohlrahe

Reflect on your own experience with illness and your immune system. When are you most vulnerable to a cold or flu bug? How do you shore up your bodily immune capacities? Recall a time when you or someone you know acted like a “virus” in your congregational system. What was the outcome? Did the “virus” encounter a steadfast, immovable leader—and, if so, what happened? Why is it challenging for leaders to provide immune capacities in the congregations they serve? How can we encourage such leadership in our communities of faith?

ELCA Presiding Bishop's 2008 Christmas Message

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.' -- Luke 2:15

Let's go! Now! When angels came to some shepherds with a brilliant message one night long ago, the shepherds had a brilliant idea. Let's go! Let's see what God is doing!



The unknown dangers of the night did not hold them back. Perhaps they knew that some of God's best work is done under the cover of darkness -- the creation of all things, wrestling with Jacob, Israel's escape from slavery.

Or maybe they didn't. Maybe all they needed was the announcement of what God was up to this time. This time God would be conducting a rescue like none before -- saving the whole world, bringing peace and goodwill. Once again it's an undercover operation -- God hidden deep in the flesh and working “under the sign of opposites” (as Martin Luther called it). Arriving as a baby in diapers, God's Son recruited tax collectors and fishermen, social misfits and despised sinners in a rescue mission that culminated in the hidden power of the cross.

What if the shepherds had yawned, “That's interesting, some other time,” and remained sitting in the night, in the dirt, in the comfort of predictable hardships and familiar enemies? Would promised joy have found them anyway?

Let's not test that speculation with our lives. Let's go!
Let's see what God is doing!

The Rev. Mark S. Hanson

Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

“And Mary said...” continued

with noticing God's presence and being available to God's direction, leading, guidance and sustaining will. When we embark on some “Impossible Project” that represents transformation and renewal in our congregational life and mission we are stepping out in trust and faith that demands that the group rely on God for help and guidance. It requires prayer that includes listening to God in quiet prayer, scripture, and the conversation of the saints and in the community. Transformation and Renewal that takes shape in “Impossible Projects” involves a group seeking a life with the God who has showered them with grace and is calling them to live that life in service in the world.