

Bishop's Letter



This month's themes:
Stewardship
Young adult ministry

November 2008

In healthy congregations, leaders challenge people

“Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, ‘You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.’ When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.” Mark 10:21-22

Do you ever wonder what it would be like to converse with Jesus, face to face? The gospels offer some pretty strong clues about how Jesus related to people. For one thing, Jesus seems utterly comfortable in his own skin—he knows who he is and what he is about. Jesus also is “transparent” and brutally honest with others. If I were in a conversation with Jesus I’d expect him to look me right in the eye and say exactly what he’s thinking, even if that troubled me.

This is the eighth 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.

This means that Jesus can comfort or challenge others, depending on what they most need. In the familiar story of the rich man (quoted above), Jesus has an extended conversation with an earnest fellow who hankers for eternal life. He knows his Bible, but he lacks one thing. Gazing deeply into his heart, Jesus challenges him to give up the only thing standing between him and full life in God’s Reign: his possessions.

Jesus did not hesitate to challenge this man on the profound subject of wealth. Jesus upset the man’s equilibrium by naming the “elephant in the room.” Did Jesus do this simply to be provocative or unnerving? No. The text says that, just before Jesus issued his challenge, he looked at the man and *“loved him”* (Mark 17:21).

Leaders in Christ’s church love God’s people enough to look them right in the eyes and name uncomfortable truths. Leaders of disciples don’t shirk from upsetting the equilibrium in their rela-

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A growing mission project

“Pumpkins for Purpose” at Calvary Lutheran, Perham. Members plant and harvest pumpkins, squash and gourds, with the proceeds given to the synod, local mission efforts and disaster relief.

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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.

Additional information regarding items of interest to our synod can be found on our weekly email newsletter, Northern Lights. If you are not currently on our email list and would like to receive Northern Lights, contact Michael Stein at stein@cord.edu.



JOIN US!

Northwestern Minnesota Synod
OPEN HOUSE: Friday, December 5, 2-5 p.m.
At Our New Location:
Concordia Riverside Center, 310 4th Ave. S.

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.

ELCA Presents 'Native Nations' Documentary on ABC

WDAY/WDAZ, Fargo, will air "Native Nations: Standing Together for Civil Rights," December 7 at 1 p.m. This is a one-hour documentary exploring the role of the Lutheran church in the American Indian civil rights movement of the 1970s and 1980s. The program begins airing October 12 on ABC television network affiliate stations across the United States. At this time, WDAY is the only station in this synod airing the documentary.

"Native Nations" is "a historical documentary of the Indian civil rights movement as viewed through the relationship between the Indian people on and off the reservation and the Lutheran churches," said Syd Beane, co-producer, Minneapolis. It focuses on "the National Indian Lutheran Board and the various issues, activism and organizing events that took place over some 18 years," he said. Beane was a member of the National Indian Lutheran Board and served as its president.

Information about the television documentary, "Native Nations: Standing Together for Civil Rights," B&B Productions and how to purchase the program on DVD is at <http://www.ELCA.org/nativenations> on the ELCA Web site. A video report of this story is at <http://archive.ELCA.org/news/video.html> and audio of comments by the Rev. Sherman G. Hicks is at <http://archive.ELCA.org/audio/> on the ELCA Web site.

Synod Directories Online

Our synod directories, including listings by name, city and conference, are available online. Go to our homepage, www.nwmnsynod.org. Directories are listed on the left side of the page.

Bishop's Message, continued

Leaders challenge people

tionships with others—even to the point of challenging them to address issues and respond healthily to changing circumstances.

Of course, we'd never need to challenge one another if two things were true: (1) if sin and its effects did not exist and (2) if nothing ever changed. But because sin persists, because change is relentless and because we live our lives trying to ignore these realities we need to be challenged to "wake up and smell the coffee."

In healthy congregations leaders challenge people. Indeed, that is a central role for leaders—to be "challengers." However, this is not for the faint of heart. Most of us would rather avoid rocking the boat. But that "strategy" works only in a perfect world!

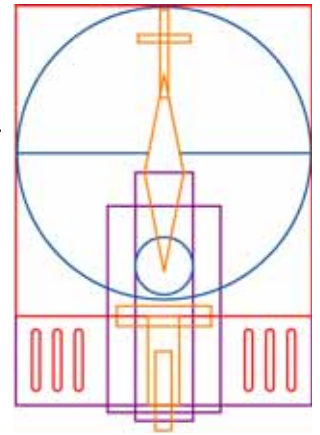
So in this imperfect world, where things are always changing, effective leaders of Christian communities will be "challengers." What does that look like, though?

- Such leaders realize that *people naturally react to change, which usually provokes anxiety in the congregation.* Such anxiety is a normal reaction to change; the issue is how this anxiety is managed.
- Such leaders *understand people's natural desire to get rid of anxiety at any cost.* As Peter Steinke puts it, "Instead of analyzing the circumstance, seeking clarity, exploring a number of responses, and planning new directions, the congregation is overfocused on its discomfort."

Such leaders *cultivate the capacity to tolerate pain both in themselves and in others.* Rather than making decisions on the basis of other persons' current "emotional temperature," healthy leaders function on the basis of their beliefs and convictions.

Such healthy leaders are also **able to take the long view of things.** They realize that if others initially resist being challenged—things may change down the line. Mark 10:17-22 ends with the rich man walking away from Jesus "grieving." But are we sure that's how his story finally ended? What if our Lord's stark challenge planted a seed in the rich man's heart that took days, weeks, months or even years to germinate?

We may never know the answer to that question. But we certainly do see congregations that flourish because they had tenacious, far-



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Opportunities for ministry

Reaching out to young adults

By Michael Stein

There's a demographic gap in our efforts to spread the Gospel, according to Pastor Josh Graber, Trinity, Moorhead. "We need to do a better job reaching young adults," he said. "It's a period of people's lives where a lot of faith formation happens."

There are "drop off" periods in the lives of young people, Graber said that after confirmation, high school and college the population gets smaller. "And there's an assumption that they come back to church after marriage and kids. That may have been the case once, but it really doesn't apply anymore."

With classes, jobs and social events, America's youth are highly programmed and scheduled. "Many don't know how to live without that list of priorities," Graber said. "But many are also looking for something more—something that isn't programmed. But we can't expect those people to come to us. We need to be more proactive and reach out to them. It needs to be part of our mission."



Accompanying photos courtesy of Pr. Jim Holthus, Bemidji

Young adults are also people in transition—often without much disposable income. "We have to include that as a factor," Graber said. "This is a very necessary part of our evangelism. We might not see immediate results, but we must trust that it will be significant and help them continue in their faith life."

"One of the challenges facing the church at the postmodern turn is how we define membership," said Pastor Leland Armbricht, Comstock & Hoff Lutheran, who is also involved in young adult ministry initiatives. "For many of us who have spent our lives in the church, membership is about having our name on the roster of those who have joined a specific congregation. This is much like the professional associations many business people make sure to list on their resume. Young adults have the same need to belong that older adults do, but they do not consider having their name on the membership list as belonging."

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The Northwestern Minnesota Bishop's Letter

Roster updates

Prayers and sympathy to:

Marsha Hendrickson of the synod staff in the death of her mother, Lois Hendrickson, on October 20. Her funeral was held October 24 in Milnor Lutheran Church, Milnor N.D.

Installation

Pr. Tessa Leiseth, campus pastor, Concordia College, Moorhead, November 5
Pr. Gary Mikkelson, pastor, Bethesda Lutheran, Moorhead, November 16

Resignation

Pr. Paul Erdal, senior pastor, Grace Lutheran, Ada, effective November 2

Removal from ELCA Roster

Pr. Randolph Smith effective October 11

Transfers

Pr. Marilyn Breckenridge (retired) to Saint Paul Area Synod
Pr. Gary Mikkelson from Eastern North Dakota Synod
Pr. Shauna Hannan to Florida-Bahamas Synod
Pr. Benjamin Johnson (retired) to Southwestern Minnesota Synod

Congregations in Study/Interims/Seeking Pastors:

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

Alexandria, **Bethesda**, pastor resigned

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

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

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

Cimax, **Climax, Grue, Sand Hill**, in self study, interim Pr. Donald Reisig

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Seminary on the Prairie

Tri-County Ministry and Luther Seminary is sponsoring the 7th annual Seminary on the Prairie Monday, January 12, through Friday, January 16, 2009 at Red Willow Bible Camp near Binford, N.D. This event is to introduce seminarians to rural ministry during the prairie winter. Church leaders, lay ministers and pastors are also invited to attend and learn more about rural church development and re-development. Any questions may be directed to Theresa Fiebiger, Tri-County Ministry Parish Administrator, at trinitybinford@mlgc.com.

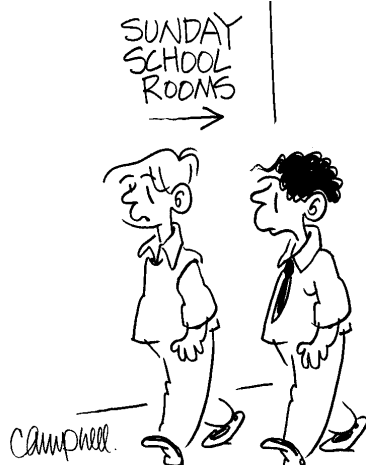
2008 Global Poverty Event

"Turning the Tide: Pushing Back Global Poverty" will be held Saturday, December 6. Registration/displays, 8:30 a.m, Event program 9 a.m. – 12:15 p.m (includes interfaith worship). Lunch & networking 12:30. Location: NDSU Memorial Union Ballroom, 1401 Administration Ave.

An informational flyer is available on the synod website, www.nwmnsynod.org

Lay Roster Word and Service Gathering Set For January

The first-ever Region 3 Lay Roster Word and Service Gathering (AiMs, deaconesses, and diaconal ministers) will be held January 26-27 at Luther Crest Bible Camp, Alexandria. An informational flyer is available on the synod website, www.nwmnsynod.org.



"I knew we were in trouble when she said, 'Hi, I'm the new Sunday school volunteer. Don't make me page your mother.'"

Stewardship faithfully transcends economic downturns

By Michael Stein

We have separation of church and state, but do we have separation of church and the general state of the economy? "Historically, no," said Pastor Charles "Chick" Lane, former synod assistant and current director of the ELCA's Stewardship Key Leader program. "I've been a pastor long enough and seen plenty of recessions come and go and I've never seen a drop in giving because of economic downturns. But then I've never served a congregation located in a town where there was massive job layoff."

Lane added that a colleague who's been doing capital appeals for 20 years assured him that he's never experienced a dramatic drop in giving during bad times. "What I have seen this year is that people are cutting back in stock gifts to congregations. Some have held back with the idea that they'll make the gift sometime during the three-year donation period when the stock has regained some value. But the vast majority of congregations that have done capital appeals this year have done just fine."



One example is Gloria Dei in Felton, which has been working to raise support for a handicapped access project for several years. This fall, the congregation overwhelmingly approved a \$379,500 addition. "The congregation and council were very concerned about the economic conditions," Pastor Karla Mickelson said. "But the congregation has been working on this project for many years and felt it was time to take that leap of faith—that God was calling us to do that. And if we waited, things just get more expensive, and a lot of careful planning has gone into this project."

There were a number of ironies that popped up during the capital appeal process: The day Gloria Dei turned in its loan application to Mission Investment Fund, the stock market crashed. A week before commitment Sunday (October 26), MIF said they would loan approximately two-thirds of the requested amount, which left a significant gap in the financial goal.

"Were we concerned about the economy?" said Mark Covey, chairperson for the Stewardship Key Leader program. "Absolutely. But this has been a long-standing goal of the church. We've had fund raisers over the last few years, and we felt we were ready to press on. After the crisis hit, we gave some consideration to putting it off, but we saw it as an act of faith."

With a goal of \$30,000 in up-front gifts and with an additional \$95,000 in pledges over a three-year period, they received just under \$42,000 in up-front gifts and a total of gifts and pledges of \$158,005. The Sunday school kids made their voices heard with \$85 in coins.

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Letting faith control our lives

"We were ecstatic," Mickelson said. "Another interesting part of Commitment Sunday was that it was almost exactly 40 years from that day when the congregation moved into the current building.



November 9 groundbreaking at Gloria Dei. Pictured, from left, Pastor Karla; Natalie Hilde, building committee chair; Mark Covey, SKL chair; Jim Hastings, congregational president.

The project was inclusive of the entire Gloria Dei congregation. "Sure, somebody could have won the lottery and given the funds," added Covey. "But things of value are cherished more when it's a shared commitment. Everyone at all income levels stepped up to be a part of it. Another factor in our success was the ELCA's Stewardship Key leader program. We sometimes go into this assuming we know how to do it. Really, it's a faith exercise and a spiritual growth experience."

In his article on page seven, Assistant to the Bishop Steve Peterson said people and congregations in general are feeling anxious about the future, but a life lived in faith will overcome the dark times. "In fact, difficult times help us rediscover what is important in our lives," Peterson said. "For some, it's a catalyst to increase their generosity; an occasion for rediscovery of the depth of their faith and making decisions based on the re-ordering of their priorities."

In more prosperous times, many have a sense that they can do everything and have everything. "In uncertain times you have to decide what's most important," Peterson said. "That's often when people realize that the spiritual is more important than the material. In the end, everything comes down to the spiritual."

"There's a general anxiety in this country," Lane added. "So this is a great time to talk about the generosity and faithfulness of God. It's easy to talk about it in good times—but now people are more ready and eager to listen to that message. If I were a parish pastor, I would be hammering that message across. God is not going to stop being generous, so the question is, are we going to let fear control our lives or let faith control our lives?"

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Augsburg Fortress changes business model

Augsburg Fortress, the publishing ministry of the ELCA announced strategic plans to renew and strengthen its dual focus: creating innovative resources for the core needs of congregations and for higher education.

Augsburg Fortress recognizes significant opportunities to increase the value of its relationships with congregations as well as colleges and seminaries, and is changing its core business strategies to provide the tools that today's customers need in order to grow and change.

"In recent years, Augsburg Fortress has focused on providing materials to meet the emerging needs of today's congregations, taking a lead among publishers of Christian resources by developing innovative web-based and print resources for use in congregational faith formation and worship, such as Here We Stand Confirmation, Sundaysandseasons.com and Akaloo," said Beth Lewis, President & CEO of Augsburg Fortress. "With the intention to fully leverage our strengths, this strategic plan centers on continuing to vigorously invest in the creation of integrated ministry resource systems employing both print and web media. We are confident that this is the best opportunity for Augsburg Fortress to excel as a Christian Publisher, and we are excited for the new direction this company is taking."



These redefined priorities presented the need for Augsburg Fortress to move away from some traditional publishing practices. The approved strategic plan includes the elimination of unsustainable portions of the business, including closing nine retail bookstores throughout the USA by May 1, 2009. However, Augsburg Fortress' long-time commitment to providing industry-leading materials for congregations and higher education will be enhanced by a greater emphasis on innovative products and superior customer service.

Regional Gift Planner Position Re-Posted

The Northwestern Minnesota Synod, in partnership with the ELCA Foundation and Pathways and Luther Crest Bible Camps, has re-posted a position for "regional gift planner." We seek applicants with experience in and talents for welcoming major gifts, bequests and other financial legacies to serve God's mission through the synod, the ELCA and outdoor ministries. Applications or nominations may be sent to David.Novak@elca.org.

Please spread the word about this important ministry opportunity!

Sacred Practice Leadership Series

The Sacred Practice Leadership Series (SPLS) is a joint venture of the Center for Renewal at Grand View College and the Alban Institute. SPLS (pronounced "splash") is designed for those who lead congregations, both in ordained and lay roles. Six renewal events at the Sinsinawa Mound Center in southwest Wisconsin from April 2009 through November 2010 will feature 12 prominent authors and theologians who will speak on sacred practices like prayer, discernment and service. By applying what is learned at the six events to their context, participants will grow in their ability to use sacred practices as a means of shaping their congregation's life and ministry. For more information, visit www.sacredpracticeseries.org.

Stewardship, continued from page 5

We are surrounded and bombarded with messages from our culture. Lately, the messages have been rather gloomy. Consumer confidence is down, world markets are plunging, unemployment and the national debt are rising. "And then there is Jesus' voice," Lane said. "He reminds us that God has always blessed us, and will always bless us. Jesus issues the invitation to faith: 'Don't be afraid.' Our Father has so richly blessed us that we might use those blessings for others. The call is to be a blessing every bit as generously as we have been blessed."

Reaching out to young adults, continued

"Open House" sign out for all

ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson has said that young adults sense that members don't expect to be changed by virtue of their presence. "Research released recently confirms what we already know," he added. "The congregations that are growing are those with virtually no tension. I am convinced (young adults) want to be part of a church that matters, where faith matters, Jesus matters, worship matters, forgiveness matters, reconciliation matters, relationships matter, and the Bible matters. They also want to be part of a church that makes a difference in the world—in a suffering, struggling world that calls us to sacrifice."

There are new initiatives, new models in effective young adult ministry. Graber is part of "The Project," a joint Northwestern Minnesota/Eastern North Dakota synod initiative. "We hope to grow a new church that brings young adults into a Christ-centered community where the gospel can be central in their lives."



Another initiative that's taking shape is a young adult pastoral community, which will include intentional conversation with the goal of developing deeper relationships and better cooperation for leadership potential. There are also inter-generational ministries with young adults and older adults forming prayer partnerships, which can only enhance a sense of belonging.

"For many young adults," Armbright said, "belonging means having a tangible, active role in something larger than themselves – being part of something that makes a difference in a community. This shift challenges the ways in which we define members—are they people who worship regularly? Those who contribute regularly? Those who engage in ministry? Many young adults have overbooked schedules and limited financial resources, especially in our current market, yet they will take the time to get involved in a specific activity that benefits the community."

Technology offers great opportunities to reach people, especially young adults, with the gospel. "For the most part we haven't utilized this resource," Graber said. "Think about how Martin Luther would use the Internet. Ultimately, we can use the *virtual* world to bring people into *real* relationships in the spiritual community. That fits in with our vision and our calling."

"Often, meeting young adults where they're at forces us to look outside of the normal parameters of our ministry," Armbright said.

"We have the theological tools that can speak to our culture," Graber added. "Luther, Kierkegaard and Bonhoeffer, for example, are voices from tradition that provide us with the vocabulary and the courage to communicate the gospel to people in transition or during a time of change."

Living by faith in the time of Darkness

By Assistant to the Bishop Pr. Steve Peterson

When the time comes to enter the darkness in which we are naked and helpless and alone; in which we see the insufficiency of our greatest strength and the hollowness of our strongest virtues; in which we have nothing of our own to rely on, and nothing in our nature to support us, and nothing in the world to guide us or give us light—then we find out whether or not we live by faith.

Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*

Wow, now there's an upper of a quote! The fact is though that darkness *is* a part of life and darkness or any thing or any time that gets us reflecting just a bit deeper on the meaning and true sustenance and purpose of our lives can be the opportunity to remind us that we live by faith.

I have heard the critique of contemporary Christianity and Church that much of the time we are “functional atheists;” we are saved by grace, believe in God, maybe some of us even go to church regularly, yet we really don't *act* as though we are looking to and expecting God to sustain us and guide our lives. We rely instead on our *greatest strength* and our *strongest virtues*. Not to mention often being guided by whatever is deemed prudent and conventional or just plain fun by the culture around us without regard to what Jesus says will give us life and give us that life abundantly. Not to mention all too often being guided by our anxieties and fears; perhaps praying, but at the same time *really* thinking somehow it is all up to us.



In some ways the times we are living in are being characterized as dark times. I must confess I don't necessarily feel that so strongly myself. Nonetheless, in our country we have an economic crisis. Many people are experiencing new economic and emotional pain in their lives. For many living in poverty, it is more of the same, only worse. In our Northwestern Minnesota synod we have many congregations wondering what has happened to them; if they will survive, and what the future might hold. We all know someone experiencing anxiety or fear or defeat, or anger, or bitterness, or self-doubt, or discouragement, or depression, or addiction or abuse or struggle to keep hope alive or deep grief or combinations of all of the above. Maybe that's us as well.

Thank God that we really can live by faith, that we can support one another in living by faith. Darkness really can be a time for rediscovering faith. So, maybe these times are a clarion call to be silent and honest in the darkness, alone and together; trusting that God is there, offering creative life, offering resurrection to new life. It

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Roster updates, continued

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

Erhard, **Tonseth**, pastor resigned

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

Halstad, **Halstad & Augustana**, interviewing, interim Pr. Marsha Burt

Hitterdal, **Salem**, in self study

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

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

Lake Park, **Cormorant**, call accepted, interim Synodically Authorized Minister Allen Brooks

Moorhead, **Bethesda**, call accepted

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

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

Park Rapids, **Calvary**, senior and associate pastors resigned, interims Pr. Kenneth Nyhusmoen & Pr. 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

The Bishop's Letter

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Planting seeds for mission

Living by faith, continued from page 7 might not be what we expect, but if we shut up and listen and, together, hope in God and not just in ourselves, there *is* the promise that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Please, I am not, of course, talking about an easy, fast, or five steps for us to do to make this happen or necessarily getting the results that we *want*, I am talking LIFE, given and lived in faith coming from God, not ourselves.

Maybe this is something to ponder, whether in the darkness before a November dawn on a deer stand thinking not just of the hunt but also your life, or when listening to a distressed friend, or while planning next years' church budget or what you will contribute to that budget. Or when you wonder what God might have in store for your declining congregation. God is with us. Even in, especially in, the darkness, God is with us. Live.

Bishop's message,

continued from page 2

sighted leaders willing to issue mission-driven challenges that **did** eventually bear good fruit.

Bishop Larry Wohlrahe

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Recall a time when you or your congregation were challenged by a Christian leader. How did you or your congregation respond to this challenge? What were the outcomes of this encounter?
2. What forces are producing anxiety in your congregation right now? How is your church responding to changes that are coming your way?
3. Assess your own ability, as a leader, to tolerate pain in yourself or in others. What impact does your "pain tolerance threshold" have on your ability to lead your congregation?

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



By Michael Stein

Discipleship is flowering all over the synod. This call to be God's disciples, to follow Christ into the world is being lived in places like Elbow Lake, where members of United Lutheran collaborated on a "Seeds for Mission" project that raised money for people in need.

The idea came about last year when United Lutheran member Jerry Larson heard about it being done in Pope County. Starting with 30 acres loaned by Larson, congregation members—young and old—picked rocks, tilled the soil and planted bean seeds, which were donated by a non-member.



Pastor Bob Toso said one of the great things about the project is that it was, "purely congregational with everyone getting behind the project. Our council vice president, Ken Griner, simply said that we have to do this. He's a great example of someone with a passion for mission and outreach."

Griner added, "I hope we can expand this program to include more land and other churches. We are called to help those in need."



Several thousand dollars are expected from the sale of the beans. The proceeds will be used to help people on fuel assistance to insulate their homes. "This is really what mission is all about," Toso said. "And it's a great thing these folks are doing."

Photos taken while preparing the soil for planting. Above, Isaac Kreft; Below, Dwaine Christianson.