



Northwestern Minnesota Synod

Connections



Connecting the Congregational, Synodical, and Churchwide Expressions of the ELCA

Holding fast, venturing forth

By Bishop Lawrence Wohlrabe

As we celebrate Reformation Day, we will focus on faithfulness. We'll remember Martin Luther's stirring witness and sing *Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word* (ELW 517)—pleading for God's power to think, speak and act in congruence with God's Word, the ancient creeds and the Lutheran Confessions.

I have usually assumed what might be called a "mighty fortress" view of faithfulness. Faithfulness is about fortifying protective walls, preserving what we have received, maintaining the apostolic witness in our time, hanging on to the deposit of the faith. Faithfulness is chiefly about keeping the fortress strong—standing firm and **holding fast**.

This view of faithfulness is commendable. The Gospel is always under assault, both from the outside of the church as well as from the inside. The world is always trying to conform us to its false gospels. We are forever vulnerable to being led astray, giving up the ship, throwing out the baby with the bath water. Reformation Sunday is, appropriately, a prime time to plead that God would assist us in "standing firm."

But is that, by itself, that an adequate view of faithfulness? Are there dimensions of faithfulness that receive short shrift when we operate with only a "mighty fortress" mentality?

In the last ten years God has seasoned my "holding fast" view of faithfulness with another image: that of a band of faithful souls **venturing forth** into God's world.

This view of faithfulness reminds us that heading out into the world with the Gospel is just as faithful as "holding the fort." In fact, we need both

Continued on back

The Northwestern Minnesota Synod

901 8th St. S. Moorhead, MN 56562

218-299-3019 800-452-3692 www.nwmnsynod.org

Presiding Bishop discusses challenges, goals

By Michael Stein, Synod Communications Director

In a recent interview, ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson looked back at his first term and ahead to his second term in office. Here are excerpts from that interview. The full article can be found at our website (listed on the front).

What are some of the challenges you see as we continue to define our Lutheran identity?

We're still very ambivalent about whom we claim to be in our name—and that's evangelical. I am unsettled by the restlessness with which we seem to distance ourselves (from evangelical) rather than claim that as part of who we are. In that name the gospel defines us. We spend too much time talking about how we're not like those other evangelicals. And I don't think we cease to be Lutheran because of all our ecumenical relationships.

How are we doing in terms of connections from congregations to the synods to the larger church?

I see us as a much more interdependent church, and yet we need to work harder to connect that idea with congregations. Congregations still feel disconnected from being part of the ELCA. I hear too many people refer to, "our congregation, our synod, and the ELCA," as if the ELCA is something other than them. So in the next six years I would like to deepen the way that churchwide connects with congregations, recognizing that the synods are still the connective tissue between congregations and the church.

One of the tasks of synods is to help congregations imagine what they can do together in mission that they can't do as effectively apart. While, at the same time, using the larger church to make sure congregations have the leadership and resources necessary to do ministry in their locations.

Holding fast, venturing forth

Continued from front

viewpoints to arrive at a full vision of faithfulness. Ministry and mission today must include both **faithfulness and fruitfulness**.

This two-pronged view of faithfulness colors how I hope we will engage our life in this branch of the Christian family, especially when some among us question whether our ELCA remains faithful to God's Word. Yes, by all means, let's wrestle with the question of faithfulness—but let's include within our angle of vision both the "holding fast" perspective and the "venturing forth" perspective. Faithfulness goes with fruitfulness. Let us together learn anew how to "hold fast" AND "venture forth."