



Southern Ohio Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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April 2011

Dear Friends,

While we wait, we also keep moving: For several years I have served on a number of committees and performed several functions for the Conference of Bishops and the church-at-large. These included committee leadership in Global Mission, Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, Pensions and Annuities, Companion Synods, and on the ELCA Church Council. Recently, I lessened my responsibilities and declined new management duties in order to focus on more creative approaches to leading our synod. The next 4-6 years will be crucial for structuring and designing new ways for the ELCA and its synods to function. The work has already begun.

While we wait for the ELCA to make recommendations about key priorities, a new structure, and new patterns for synodical ministries, we've generated some sound ideas for our strategic plan (Advancing God's Mission) and synod structure.

As I announced at the 2010 Synod Assembly, we are reviewing our ministry in order to revitalize our approach to mission opportunities. The Synod Council has begun this process, and our Synod Assembly will also engage in this important work.

The ELCA Conference of Bishops is deeply engaged in such discussions too. It will take time to sort things out, but in the meantime, we have many worthy ministries and partnerships that we must support.

Hey, what's The Big Idea?: One creative idea that the synod has been working on is a flexible framework to involve more people in the life and work of the synod. This Big Idea was shared with over 125 congregational officers a few weeks ago. Their suggestions were incorporated into this framework.

The Big Idea is something like the "Southern Ohio Synod meets the County Fair." This multi-day event including worship and Bible study, the Lay School of Theology, theological conference for rostered leaders, Global Mission involvement, ministry resources and workshops for congregations, justice and social ministry forums, engagement with the work of our ministry agencies and institutions, reflection on who we are as Lutherans and our purpose today, recreational activities, service projects, a program for youth, and more.

We still have to work out the details, but the leadership strongly affirmed the concept and many have volunteered to help implement this endeavor. Launching in 2012, it will be family-friendly, with a variety of housing options, including camping. We aim to:

- renew a foundation for our disciples to connect their ministry to their passions;
- broaden our understanding of our Lutheran heritage;
- provide resources that support vigorous leaders and congregational life; and
- use this event as something inspirational, educational, and mission-focused for our disciples.

Common Stress Points: A growing number of congregations across the country are in conflict. My colleague bishops and I note that most of these conflicts are related to economic pressures, affiliation votes, and the low number of pastoral openings in the call process. We are experiencing the same tightening mobility pressures here in Southern Ohio Synod, a direct result of the general economy (specifically, the inability to sell houses and spouse employment).

In the midst of financial struggles we experience within and beyond the church, the synod ended the 2010 fiscal year with a soft landing. We reduced the budget several times because of reduced income from congregations. A few congregations stopped giving without notice or redirected

Companion Synods

East of Lake Victoria Diocese,
Tanzania

Evangelical Lutheran Church of
Mecklenburg, Germany

Evangelical Lutheran Church in the
Republic of Kazakhstan

Sinodo Espirito
Santo a Belem, Brazil

mission support dollars for other purposes. Some made heroic efforts, but simply could not reach their stated intent.

However, we can all rejoice for those congregations that met or surpassed their intent to support our ministries, as well as for those that tried their best to do so. Some have shared gifts and carried out faithful work beyond dollars. For this, we give thanks to God and encouragement to them. I am optimistic about 2011, but we will continue to exercise prudence in spending.

I want to express my thanks to those supporting our agency ministries and chaplaincies in addition to their regular mission support. Campus ministries, social service ministries, specialized ministries, and outdoor ministries are especially vulnerable when we make spending reductions. Some of our congregations depend on the support that can only come through the synod and church-wide ELCA. Let us thank God for the partnerships we have as we strive to strengthen them.

Money Matters: The budget will be monitored and adjusted throughout the current fiscal year so that we end the year with a balance. I rejoice that so far our income for 2011 is slightly ahead of 2010. I pray that we can restore support for ministries that depend upon synod funding.

We must constantly make sure that we make budget cuts and restorations by plan and by priority and not by chance. We are prosperous, despite what we hear and see in frantic news reports. We intend to ensure fairness in spite of having to say 'no' to friends and pet projects. We all make and live with these tough decisions.

I hope that our synod support for church-wide ministries will exceed what the synod assembly determined when the fiscal proposal was amended from the floor. Careful planning and faithful giving will make this possible.

All These Lutherans: I consulted with the other two Ohio Bishops and my staff to consider ways of keeping *productive* relationships with our former partner congregations and their pastors. I have also consulted the leaders of our common agencies about this. There is good support for this idea.

My aim is two-fold: 1) I believe it is the right thing to do with any ecumenical or Lutheran partner. The issue of disaffiliation has divided households, congregations and gatherings. 2) I believe that we all bear responsibility for our common Lutheran witness and support for our common ministries. Some of our ministries are at financial risk and need full support from all the Lutheran ministries in the synod.

By working together, we can create common ground for mission and continue support of our shared ministries.

To make this possible, the synod will offer a simple clearinghouse for funds. Some of them lack the mechanisms for handling an array of designated gifts and handling payroll and other expenses (Southern Ohio Lutheran Campus Ministry is one example).

Ministerium: Mark your calendars. 2011 is the Tenth Anniversary of our Called to Common Mission with the Episcopal Church, USA. Southern Ohio Synod and the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Ohio have planned a worship service and joint gathering of our ministeriums for June 30, 2011 at the Trinity Lutheran Seminary and Bexley Hall Seminary. Bishop Breidenthal and I will lead worship. Leaders of the two seminaries will take part in leading the gathering. Our friends in the Episcopal Diocese are very excited about this, and many of our people are getting prepared. You and all our members are invited to the worship service. The clergy will meet and have a forum immediately after. More information will soon be released, so STAY TUNED!

Status of Congregations Voting on Affiliation: Since last year, I have met with 63 congregations deliberating their affiliation or disaffiliation with the ELCA. While 15 of these have held votes, most decided not to hold *any* votes at all.

Southern Ohio Synod congregations that have left the ELCA are:

Faith, Cincinnati	Upper Arlington, Columbus
Grace, Springfield	Zion, Obetz
Faith in Christ, Springfield	St John, Greenville
St. Paul, Greenville	Israel, Amanda
Trinity, Lancaster	Trinity, Springfield
First English, Marysville	

Four congregations that voted to leave have failed to do so, and 3 congregations are in the process of voting. *Up-to-date statistics for other synods are available from the ELCA Office of the Secretary.*

I am grateful for their partnership in the Gospel through the years. Let us all to pray that their decisions are the right ones for them, and that they will grow in grace and strength for God's mission in their new church homes.

Here are some other immediate and important reminders:

-Submit your Rostered Leader Annual Report to the Bishop NOW.

-Take the ELCA Board of Pension Health Assessment. It saves your church 2% on their contributions to your healthcare costs, and totals \$43,500 for the synod as a whole.

TAKE IT NOW.

-Submit your Congregational Parochial Report NOW.

-Submit your congregational Statement of Intent for Mission Support NOW.

-Be present for the Joint Lutheran-Episcopal Ministerium and Celebration of Called to Common Mission on June 30, 2011.

-Register for the Southern Ohio Synod Assembly (or officially seek to be excused) NOW.

-Support our Lutheran Malaria Initiative and World Hunger ministries ALWAYS.

-Invite your congregation to enroll in our Companion Synod and Congregational Partner Ministries in either Tanzania, Brazil, Kazakhstan or Germany.

-Study the agenda and Social Statement materials for the upcoming ELCA church-wide Assembly in August 14-20, 2011.

"And be of good courage, for God has called you, and your labor in the Lord is not in vain."

Cal Holloway

Bishop Southern Ohio Synod, ELCA