

## **Bishop Pederson's Written Report for the 2010 Synod Assembly**

It would be easy to be discouraged during the time since our last Synod Assembly in May of 2009. Congregations were reeling from the downturn in the economy, financial anxiety was high, and cutbacks in ministry occurred in many churches. Stir into the dismal economic mix a pinch of controversy resulting from the 2009 CWA decisions on human sexuality and ministry policies, and this past year has resulted in difficulty for all the expressions of our church—congregations, synods, and churchwide.

Votes to Leave the ELCA: To date, seven congregations of the NWSW have taken a vote to leave the ELCA. Of the seven, four chose to remain in the denomination. Of the remaining three, one completed the process to leave; one didn't follow constitutional process and remains an ELCA congregation, and one has taken a second first-vote to leave and is in the period of consultation with the bishop. Thus, to date, we have gone from 212 congregations in the NWSW to 211.

While our synod's loss of one congregation and individuals from various congregations is relatively small, I grieve the loss of *anyone*. As I travel throughout the synod and speak with congregations and rostered leaders, I conclude that a vocal minority are struggling, the vast majority of those in the middle (whether they like CWA decisions or not) find the mission of the church more important than matters of sexuality, and some are elated that the ELCA has provided an option for those congregations that choose to recognize same gender relationships or call a pastor in a committed same gender relationship.

The aftermath of the 2009 CWA has certainly consumed the energy and attention of the church, but I stand in awe of the awakening that is underway, an awakening of the Spirit that is seizing the imaginations and hearts of leaders and congregations alike. The movement from maintenance to mission is underway. The response to the "Talking Turkey" presentations and the attendance of nearly 500 persons at the "Walking Together" event on March 20 are evidence of a hunger to be a church that is more than a comfortable club that serves its own members.

There is a clear recognition that if the church is to be faithful and effective as it seeks to witness and serve in the present and in the future, it will need to step out of the church building and deeply engage the world—both near and far. *This* is mission, and I'm seeing renewed commitment to exploring what it means to be a missional church and commend leaders who are courageously taking risks to lead communities of faith in a missional direction.

Thus, I'm far from downhearted due to the economic downturn or sexuality controversy. In spite of this double punch, most congregations of our synod are moving ahead in mission. I am particularly heartened by:

- undesignated mission support to the wider church that is not only holding its own, but beginning to grow again; a real witness to the trust that our congregations have in letting God work within our partnership in the gospel;
- the energy created from the recent visit of 15 Malawians who have inspired and blessed us;
- how our seminaries are equipping graduates with missional leadership commitment and gifts;
- the consultations of congregations all over the synod who are exploring creative partnerships;
- the number of education offerings in our synod for laity and rostered leaders with a missional thrust;
- congregations who are streamlining how they are organized to be nimble and effective for mission;
- the development of Living Water, our newest congregation, and the partnership grant for St. Paul's, Medford, both examples of how our mission support translates into real ministry through cooperation of the three expressions of the church (41 new ELCA starts were approved last year);
- the extensive participation in the Book of Faith initiative to plunge people into the Word of life;
- the opportunity to partner with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi to provide a Pastors'

- Academy in Lilongwe for solid continuing education; two of our pastors will teach this fall;
- the intentional strategies to grow disciples, not members, through Bible study and spiritual practices;
  - the likelihood of another Seibert grant to emphasize the household as a primary place where faith is passed from one generation to the next;
  - the preliminary plans to develop a mission academy in our synod to equip laity and rostered leaders for mission in the context of a rapidly changing modern world;
  - the amazing “on the ground” work of Lutheran Disaster Response;
  - the leadership of the women of the synod in modeling accompaniment;
  - the emergence of “mission tables” made up of leaders who will hold mission front and center;
  - the increasing conversation among ecumenical partners about partnership possibilities;
  - the savings realized and the improved health of leaders because our synod attained the health assessment goals through the Board of Pensions;
  - the fact that one in 50 Americans are touched by social ministries of the Lutheran church;
  - the leadership development with youth that happens on account of the LYO board;
  - the five new congregation-to-congregation matches with Sinodo Centro Campanha Sul in Brazil;
  - the growing importance of our synod’s youth ministry network, and its focus on supporting and equipping those working within this ministry to form missional young leaders; and
  - the completion of 16 years of Lay School of Ministry, and its ongoing role in undergirding lay leaders with theology and biblical knowledge needed to lead missionally in their households, congregations, and communities.

In sum, this particular time, our time, *God’s* time, is fraught with opportunity! This is an amazing time to be the church, and I am convinced that God is leading us into missional ways, the likes of which we are only beginning to comprehend. It is my intent as the bishop of the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin to lead, support, badger, follow, and encourage the congregations and leaders of our synod wherever the Spirit is at work.

On behalf of the amazing staff with whom I am blessed to work, thank you for your partnership in the Gospel and for your commitment to “walking together for the sake of mission God’s world.” It is an honor to be your synod pastor!



Duane Pederson, Bishop