

Bishop's Report  
Eastern Washington and Idaho Synod Assembly  
May 1-3, 2009  
Yakima, Washington

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

I pray that each of you has been encouraged, nurtured, and emboldened by the resurrection of our Lord! There has never been a more important moment for us to be a robust and missional church! The great issues of our day have to do with trust—who we will trust; the basis for that trust; and trust as our launching pad for God's mission in the world. We who have been saved by Jesus Christ know that the heart of our salvation is that we trust Jesus; we trust Jesus as God's resurrected will on earth; and now we are called to entrust our lives in following Jesus on behalf of this same world. In this way the work of God continues, through us.

Imagine! Just imagine! God who created the universe; God who led the people out of slavery into freedom; God who offered covenant after covenant, teachers, kings, and prophets, now addresses the human family through the Son, Jesus Christ, and through us, Jesus' ambassadors (2 Cor 5:20). This same God has abandoned justice and invented mercy for our sake, and by this mercy calls forth lives of gratitude, purpose, and hope. To live within the astonishing mercy of God is to live restored and propelled lives, our trust ignited by the gift of the Holy Spirit, and drawn into a future that is guaranteed. We will never have to live confused about who to trust or the direction for our lives. We live without fear. All this has been given by God and we who are empowered to receive this mercy in humility and gratitude have a call and a cause in the world!

Our Guiding Principles, our values as a synod, have never been more relevant and it is time for us to take these values and to begin crafting objectives and goals in pursuit of this ministry. Here is how I spoke about these values at our February Synod Council meeting, with some emendations:

*Where are we?*

- *We have a Vision Statement: Equip God's People for Ministry!*
- *We have Guiding Principles (our values):*

*Jesus: First, Last and Always*

*Gratitude, Gratitude*

*No Fear! Transformation!*

*Miracles of Hope*

*Yes! Everybody Come!*

*Come Lord Jesus*

*"Guiding principles articulate the things we need to remember and be accountable for in living out our purpose."*

*---Dave Daubert*

- *We have a poster of the Guiding Principles in each congregation.*
- *We have a bible study in each congregation on the Guiding Principles.*
- *Synod Assemblies and Bishop's Convocation have, for the past three years, focused on renewal of mission.*

So, if the Guiding Principles are “value” statements, let’s review the values that flow from our Guiding Principles:

**Jesus: First, Last, and Always**

Jesus is the center of life encompassing us from birth to death and beyond.

Jesus is our “ultimate concern.” We are connected to ultimacy.

Jesus anchors us in this life, a constant touchstone. We are safe (Col. 3:3)

To say Jesus is First implies a priority for us and makes us living voices for this priority.

We believe life is better for people, families, and the human family when Jesus is the Lord, guide, and model.

To know and live with Jesus in this all-encompassing way makes life Good!

We believe this is an URGENT, LIFE OR DEATH word of mission and ministry! [What do you think of that one?]

**Gratitude; Gratitude**

We are marked (+) for deep joy through the forgiveness of our sins.

This focused, Good Life is one for which we are overwhelmingly glad.

We live from a full sense of abundance instead of a grasping sense of entitlement or “scarcity thinking.”

Part of our witness to Jesus involves sharing this deep gratitude.

We live “expectantly” not anchored in guilt, demand, or the expectation of perfection. We are saints and sinners.

We live light with our “stuff.” “Stuff” does not define us.

**No Fear! Transformation**

Our world needs people who are anchored in reality, open to the future, and unafraid.

Because our confidence is anchored beyond this life, we are not defined by our fears or by a need to preserve today’s reality.

Transformation (Metamorphosis, Rom 12:2) requires reconfiguration of existing parts.

We will remain patient and confident as things come apart.

We are not afraid because essential DNA remains the same.

Our confidence makes possible times of uncertainty or ambiguity.

If we feel “lost” for awhile, that’s ok. We know who holds us (Col. 3:3).

We long to see how God will re-knit us for a new day!

**Miracles of Hope**

Reconfigured to serve the world in Jesus’ name, our eyes are opened and we see more deeply.

Having believed, we see. This is different than “seeing is believing,” awaiting or demanding proof.

Related to “gratitude; gratitude” we recognize and celebrate what is rather than ruminate over what is missing (entitlement thinking).

Prolepsis (John’s Gospel): Awareness of the Kingdom breaking in now, A vision guiding our Today.

Do we dare imagine that New miracles of hope are possible through us?

**Yes! Everybody come!**

*It is clear God is seeking all in this comprehensive vision, so we welcome all.*

*If God's is a comprehensive vision, we are brought a part of God in each person we encounter.*

*Each person is, like us, saint and sinner.*

*Expectant, not grudging. God is opening the new by addition without subtraction. God never stops making the appeal.*

*The least worthy are the likeliest objects of God's desire.*

**Come, Lord Jesus.**

*We commit the end of all things to God, in trust.*

*God's purposefulness is enough and will be enough.*

If this articulation of our values is authentic and faithful, how should we en flesh these values with concrete plans and objectives? These are the questions we asked:

*How shall we be accountable to the values expressed in our Guiding Principles?*

*Under these Guiding Principles, "Who are we to become?"*

*What new behaviors shall we adopt that obligate us to this future?*

*What objectives might we adopt to assist us in this transformation?*

*How shall we measure movement toward our objectives? [Daubert]*

Here are some of the directions I can imagine us going, listed under the questions above and related to specific Guiding Principles:

Who are we to become?

*A synod noted for a clarity of devotion and intensity of study about the figure of Jesus.*

*A synod that expresses confidence in life lived in trust of Jesus.*

*A synod that expresses expectation and hope rather than scarcity, futility, entitlement, or cramped thinking.*

*A synod that takes chances for the extension of mission. A synod not afraid to try and fail.*

*A synod willing to try new things while preserving the essence of Lutheran theological tradition.*

*A synod determined to discover where God is at work and to celebrate that.*

*A synod that constantly seeks new voices and perspectives in the confidence that such inclusion enlarges our understanding of the world Jesus loves and desires to bless.*

What new behaviors shall we adopt that support the values inherent in our Guiding Principles?

*The synod will **sponsor** one event each year, pitched to members and guests they will invite, that in some form presents Jesus as a figure of deep interest and devotion.*

The synod **will grow** in its capacity for ministry by asking members to “return thanks”--express gratitude—for the life of Jesus by making it possible to reach out to others.

The synod **will direct** designated and undesignated funds toward the growth of ministry in order to love and to bless the people of our area of influence.

The synod **will assemble materials** reflecting on congregational health and will provide for **regular consultations** on behalf of growth in ministry.

The synod will **define itself in mission and elect** in the next bishop a candidate who is a partner in pursuing the synod’s defined mission.

The synod publications will **tell the stories** of prayers answered and invite prayers for those things sought in furtherance of the synod’s deepening ministry.

The synod **will embark on a deliberate process** of inviting unchurched Hispanic neighbors to find a spiritual home in one of our congregations.

The synod **will investigate** what other segments of our population experience rejection in our congregations or have no access to our ministry i.e. prisoners, mentally ill, (who else?) and will **open doors** of invitation.

The synod **will identify and sponsor** programs to break down cultural isolation through personal interaction.

The synod **will be deliberate** in sponsoring interfaith dialogue.

The synod **will find ways to celebrate and extend** full communion relationships.

The synod, through all its publications, programs and budget, **will express to the world** an absolute and grateful confidence in the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth and invite people with little or no hope to join us in trusting Him to the end.

What objectives should we pursue with these new behaviors?

A sponsorship fund of at least \$100,000 for an annual Jesus event, to be held at multiple or rotating sites in the synod.

The synod will set as a major priority for the Director of Evangelical Mission the deliberate and persistent task of stewardship education, advancement, and growth for all phases and locations of ministry.

The synod budget will express the priority of growth in and expansion of mission by increasing the Outreach Committee budget each year.

The synod will adopt a plan to increase our benevolence to ELCA to 55%.

The synod SHARE fund will grow by the systematic invitation of new gifts.

The synod will examine the campus ministry review process for tools to assess and grow ministry faithfulness and productivity in the synod and congregations.

The synod will constantly evaluate and adapt the pastoral call process to provide Congregations with better tools for mission-setting and focus.

The synod bishop’s job description will continue to express the intention that the Bishop be the Chief Missionary of the synod.

The synod will seek opportunities in regional publications/media of all kinds to make creative invitation to those with no faith community.

The synod will sponsor training for gifted leaders in Family Systems theory in order to assist the synod and its leaders in defining themselves as Christian in the communities of our synod.

*The synod will constantly build its financial contributions to Lutheran Community Services and define it in our documents as the official social ministry of our synod.*

*The synod will continue to expand the partnership with our Companion synod.*

*The synod Council will designate members to plan for the growth in ministry of each of its members using secular and religious Board Development tools.*

NOTE: The above represents the thinking of ONE person so far, Martin Wells. These thoughts are offered in this report in order to stimulate your thinking and assist us in moving forward. How will we add to, subtract from, seek alternatives to, this list until it becomes the genuine product of the synod? How shall we discipline ourselves in order to achieve our objectives? What role are you prepared to take in order to achieve these objectives? These are the questions we face in advancing our intention to be a Great Commandment and Great Commission synod.

So what else is happening in the Synod?

The Beacon at Southridge: This is the name given the senior housing development in Meridian, Idaho, and represents the Synod's effort to increase and extend our capacity for new mission. This extraordinary effort has several goals: To begin new ministry with senior citizens; To begin a new worshipping community within the housing; To obtain a new site next door to the housing for a ministry yet to be determined; and To provide funding for additional ministry (perhaps Latino) in the Treasure Valley. These goals continue to dominate the work of the Synod Council. By this work the Council is seeking to fulfill the Guiding Principles of the Synod and demonstrate a creative path to expanded mission. As with all growth, this effort has transformed us (dying and rising).

Two years ago this new ministry was capable of being financed completely based on demand for housing and available capital. Since then the capital markets have crashed and it has become much more challenging to secure permanent financing. The financing that is available is structured differently and requires a much higher equity contribution than in the original plan. This means the Synod is expected to bring a more substantial investment to the table before lenders will participate. A bridge loan, intended to fund a project between conception and final financing, currently requires a firm commitment on the final financing package before being available. This is a change from the day we initiated this effort. As a result the "start-up" costs, about \$200,000, which were borrowed from internal accounts under the Council's authority, and which were intended to be repaid through bridge financing, have not been paid back and are beginning to cause cash flow problems with the Synod's operating budget. Resolution 2 would permit the Synod Council to invest (invest, not spend) a portion of our SHARE Fund for Mission in this new ministry effort, giving the Synod a modest equity stake in the project. Interest would be paid to the SHARE fund. I believe Resolution 2 is also important because it allows us to diversify SHARE investments, leaving us less vulnerable than when all the money is in one pot. Endowments like ours, created today, would be invested in several kinds of assets, including the Mission Investment Fund.

What is the future for the Beacon project? It is still hard to tell when or if final financing might be available and on what terms. My own priority is that we raise enough money from within the

synod to allow the Mission Investment Fund to sell us the 20 acres they purchased on behalf of our project. It would be an unfaithful insult to walk away while a partner ministry is left holding this land! The Synod Council will consider alternatives for raising money to purchase this land at the meeting immediately prior to Synod Assembly.

If it is not possible for this expansion of ministry to go forward the land will be sold and the net debt for development costs will be repaid over the next several years from the annual distributions from the SHARE Fund. One of the first aphorisms I remember learning as a child is, "Behold the turtle; he gets no where unless he sticks his neck out!" I continue to pray that God will show us a path that permits us to expand our ministry through this project. As the nation's credit markets recover, and with additional investments and contributions toward this mission, we hope that we will be able to move forward in this ministry. If not, we will put this effort in the "magnificent failure" category and press on to the next place where God is calling us to expand our ministry, now with more experience!

The other places God is calling us to expand our ministry: One of the most satisfying aspects of this last year has been the work of two of our pastors who have served as "mission surveyors" on behalf of expanded ministry. Pastor Helga Jansons and Pastor Dick Sansgaard were taken to mission-developer training last summer and then set loose to evaluate prospects for new ministry in the Tri-Cities area, and the Treasure Valley area, respectively. Pr. Jansons was funded from the creative gift of Good Shepherd Lutheran, Richland, WA, who, when they closed their ministry in 2005, left funds for the birthing of new ministry in the Tri-Cities area. Helga spent four months interviewing community leaders, talking with the Area Ministry Strategy Team, and consulting with congregations who had prospects for new ministry. The congregations of the Tri-Cities have now received a "Call for Proposals" that we pray will result in new ideas for the expansion of ministry. Good Shepherd's legacy lives on in this multi-year effort to grow the ministry of our church!

Pr. Dick Sansgaard was funded by an ELCA ministry development grant aimed at examining the prospects for new ministry on the site of the Beacon development. Pr. Sansgaard visited community leaders, worked with the Treasure Valley Mission group, and visited several sites doing ministry in new ways. As the Beacon project has been slowed by the US economic downturn, survey work has been suspended and the emphasis of the Treasure Valley group has turned to building missional capacity in the existing congregations. We continue to pray that this effort, using consultant Dave Daubert, will result in even more vibrant and mission-oriented congregations and that there may be another chance to assess the possibilities at the Beacon site and beyond.

Candidacy: This is the official process of the ELCA for enlisting, sponsoring, encouraging persons to consider the call to rostered ministry. We currently have more than 25 candidates in preparation for various rosters. Much of the work of candidacy has shifted to the synod office because of the change from a multi-synodical committee and the demise of the support positions at Region 1. \$13,000 dollars worth of Fund For Leaders scholarships were given away this year for students in training.

Call Process: The workload in this area has remained about the same. At any given time about 10% of our congregations are in call process. We are blessed with a cadre of skilled and faithful interim pastors who guide congregations during the call process. Are we getting the seminarians

we need? Yes, we took in one new seminarian this year. Experienced candidates have been available for other calls.

Congregational health: The anxiety in the culture is playing out in creative and destructive ways in our congregations. Inner city congregations in Spokane have done a spectacular job in increasing their capacity for mission. Other congregations are struggling to account for the economic realities of their (primarily) rural locations. We anticipate using more Lay Licensed ministers in the future. About 15% of the congregations have acted deliberately to set Guiding Principles for their own ministry. Congregations are uncertain about their capacity for outreach when “keeping the doors open” takes so much effort. The inspiration of our members for focused ministry is the answer to this uncertainty.

Synod Staff: Job descriptions have been clarified and a consultant has been employed to assist the staff in absorbing more work tasks because of the close of Region 1 ministries. A new Director of Evangelical Mission, a position mostly funded from Churchwide, will begin work in the next couple of months. This is an example of our Churchwide partner moving tasks closer to the congregational foundation. We are blessed with a staff that has worked together for almost 9 years and continues to function at a high level. Please say “thank you” to Laurel Eschenbacher, Mark Nelson, and Cathy Steiner.

The Synod Council: This group of leaders guides the synod between meetings of the Synod Assembly under the leadership of Vice President Susan Berg. Many of those going off Council this year have been directly responsible for the Synod’s growth in outreach and mission. We owe them a great debt of thanks. Please thank Lisa Kraft (King of Glory, Boise), Bill Martin (Shepherd of the Valley, Boise), Tammy Heimgartner (St Paul, Connell), Ole Gunderson (Our Saviors, Clarkston), David Olson (First, Sandpoint), Tom Vertrees (First, Kennewick), Donn Gehret (Central, Spokane), and Sarah Comi, (Prince of Peace, Spokane). We pray that those elected to fill these positions will be so faithful!

Jerusalem: Susan and I traveled to Jerusalem in January. Some initial impressions are posted on the Synod website and my complete report will be available by the first of June under “Bishop’s Report.” ([www.ewaidssynod.org](http://www.ewaidssynod.org)). I’m available to show slides and offer a program for your congregation about this trip.

The Synod Budget: We are “maintaining” though some staff members have received minimal or no raises for the past three years. In my “thank you” letter to congregations this year I have proposed that we move toward an average benevolence of 8% for synod and Churchwide ministries. This means for every dollar received in the congregation’s offering plate, 8 cents be offered to extend ELCA ministry beyond the congregation. If we do this we will maintain the present staffing and answer our constitutional obligations to the Churchwide partner.

A personal note: Our family continues to open and grow in wonderful ways. Susan will complete this summer a two year process of editing a book in the Practicing Our Faith series. Magdalena (23) has survived a first year as a junior high school math teacher in the Teach For America program located in Kansas City, MO. Mary Emily (25) will graduate from Yale Divinity School in May and she and her husband, Jason Duba, son of Pastor Gail and Dr. David Duba, will serve the next year in Bolivia with the Maryknoll volunteers. PhD studies will follow *Deo volente*.

It continues to be a real joy and challenge to serve you in this role. As we are attempting to grow in our Synod's capacity to expand ministry each of us in leadership roles, myself included, have found limits and opportunities, fears and failings, courage and wisdom. We are all learning to trust the call to be an evangelical church even when it involves venturing into unknown territory. It is scary but I believe we are growing because I can feel myself growing and because I can see the Synod Council growing in its capacity to measure and take risks for mission. We are not a church standing still! We are not a church satisfied to take refuge in the notion of a "none zone" in the Pacific Northwest! We are a church attempting to show confidence in our call from God by serving those who are searching for a Holy center to trust. We give thanks for this splendid opportunity to answer this call. Thank you for all your kindnesses!

Pr. Martin Wells  
Bishop