

**2008 Annual Report of the Bishop of Synod**  
**The Reverend Doctor Kevin S. Kanouse, Bishop**  
*Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod*  
*Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*  
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DiscipleLife: Formed

*The Word of the Lord came to me, saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, Before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."  
"Ah, Sovereign Lord," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am only a child."  
But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the Lord.*

Jeremiah 1:4-8

Imagine it! Before you were formed in the womb, God knew you! And then God began forming and molding, creating and making, nurturing and growing, and behold, you are who you are today...and yet you are not finished. God is not yet done with any of us, for God is always at work in our individual lives forming, transforming, creating, and re-creating. We are not yet what we shall one day become...by God's grace, by God's love, by God's redemption. This is true of us individually and it is true of us as a synod, as a Church, as God's people in the whole world. We are continually being *Formed for DiscipleLife*.

With a command, thus, to go and speak, to tell the Good News of Jesus Christ who continues to work a new work within us, we are a Church ever in formation and in service to God's mission. To *Sow and Grow Disciples of Jesus* is our mission! To Cultivate a Culture of Congregational Growth and Renewal; to Nurture and Support our Youth and Families; to Give Public Witness to Peace and Justice; to Affirm our Evangelical Lutheran Identity; to Encourage Generous Hearts; and to

Strengthen Partnerships will be the means by which we will carry out our DiscipleLife as a synodical community of faith. Last year we affirmed these directions for synodical formation and I promised to report to you the progress we are making at each Synod Assembly in this five-year DiscipleLife emphasis. So how are we doing?

Immediately after last year's Synod Assembly, synod leadership set out to select the best Team Leaders to guide our six Strategic Objectives. Those who agreed to serve as Team Leaders were in place by September and their Team Members were pretty much gathered by the beginning of October. The entire group of synodical staff, DiscipleLife Team Leaders, Team Members and advisors met in October and again in February to implement the individual Priorities. This total group is called the DiscipleLife Council and the energy and enthusiasm, the creative theological and missional thinking, the commitment to moving our ministries forward is palpable in our DiscipleLife

Council meetings. Elsewhere in the Book of Reports you have some of the stories from the Team Leaders, themselves. Here are my observations and reflections on the progress

that is being made in the implementation of our DiscipleLife Strategic Priorities.

### **Goal A: Congregational Growth and Renewal (CGR)**

#### **Pr. Marc Hander, Redeemer Lutheran Church, Greenville**

The first of the four priorities in this area deals with 12x12, that is, 12 new mission starts by the year 2012. This past year we established a new Spanish-speaking Synodically Authorized Worshiping Congregation under the leadership of Jesus Escamilla in Alvarado and have witnessed the blossoming start-up of a new Spanish worship service, sponsored by Santa Maria, Irving, meeting at First Lutheran Church in Garland. These are our first two projects in the 12 x 12 arena. In addition, the Oromo ministry of Dallas celebrated their first anniversary in September with 75 or more Oromo Lutherans already involved in the ministry! We are on our way to accomplishing the 12x12 priority.

Two of the CGR goals involve rostered leaders (100 %) and congregations (80 %) intentionally being involved in missional and transformational activities by 2010 and 2012, respectively. More and more congregations and pastors are engaging in Transformational Ministry projects and seeking to involve the Mission

Director, Pr. Steve Kanouse and Bishop Assistant, Pr. Nancy Fisher in discernment of their future. Exact numbers of congregations and pastors have not yet been discerned; but one exciting illustration is one congregation in the Dallas area that began Natural Church Development more than a year ago and through their annual self-assessment saw their ministry descriptors rise significantly. They have grown spiritually and have deepened their outreach and missional understanding substantially.

In regard to the *Spread the Spirit's Fire* events, four of six were held this past year in Lubbock, Grand Prairie, Temple, and Ericksdahl. More than 200 people were involved in conversations and learning about DiscipleLife activities, stewardship, World Hunger, worship leadership in the congregation and other topics. This coming year the focus will be on *Book of Faith: Lutherans Read the Bible*, but other workshops will be included in the array of conversations to be held.

### **Goal B: Nurturing and Supporting our Youth and Families (NSYF)**

#### **Pr. Paul Krupicka, St. Matthew's Lutheran Church, Waco**

In support of Youth and Family ministries, the Finance Committee has included the addition of the part time Director of Youth and Family Ministries in the Spending Plan for half of 2008 and the proposed Mission Strategy for all of 2009.

The Goal Team has been working on the Position Description, making plans to call someone later this year.

The continuing efforts to organize the youth and family ministry leaders from

across the synod are moving forward. The group has held a second meeting at Briarwood recently and looks for ways to reach out to others who are not participating in this group to this point in time.

The operations at Briarwood are undergoing significant change and updating. The Board is looking for a new full time Executive Director and re-organizing staff. We need to support their request for a new *Call to Action* for Briarwood. It is my understanding that at Chrysalis and Luther Hill 40-50 % of operating revenue comes from individual and congregational gifts on a regular basis. At Briarwood, just about 25 % comes from individual and congregational gifts. This leads to an on-going operating deficit that needs to be addressed. We are at a critical juncture in the life of Briarwood, with the opportunity to build a new cabin from donated funds and new ministries that can be started.

In support of the NSYF Goal, Billye Jean and I hosted a trip to Sierra Leone during Spring Break (which also happened to be Holy Week) for 14 young adults from

our synod. Seven of them were from clergy families and more than half have served as counselors at Briarwood in the past. As you will hear at noon on Saturday at the Assembly, this was exciting and faith-renewing experience for these young adults who grew in their faith and their personal lives by experiencing Holy Week in Sierra Leone, West Africa. I want to thank the Synod Council, the Synod Mission Endowment Fund, various congregations and many individuals who provided scholarship donations to make this trip a reality for these college-age and post college young adults.

We plan to provide another round of *Safe Training* to the rostered leaders of our synod later this year. As you will note elsewhere, it has become imperative that we include a provision in our governing documents to perform background checks on elected leaders of the Synod Council and we will discuss the recommendations from the Churchwide office as to how to implement this procedure in our synod. All synod staff have undergone and passed such a check.

### **Goal C: Giving Public Witness to Peace and Justice (PWPJ)**

#### **Goal Team Leader: Pr. Chuck Hubbard, Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Garland**

What does it mean to be a Church in the public square? That will be the challenge of those serving on this Goal Team. I look forward to some of the challenges for conversation and reflection that will be placed before the people of our synod over the next 4 years as we move forward in this area.

We have the opportunity to be involved in an ELCA project related to training clergy and laity in public life

initiatives. I will be providing information to this team about the opportunity and encouraging our participation over the next several years.

The Public Witness Goal Team has been evaluating the response rate of congregations in support of World Hunger efforts and will be striving to engage every congregation in an intentional, meaningful response to the ELCA World Hunger Appeal. A report that was recently prepared

showed that more than half of our congregations made such a contribution in the past year...there's room to grow! A resolution to be acted on at this Assembly urges every congregation to make a meaningful, annual contribution to the World Hunger Appeal and that we work toward doubling our overall contribution level as a synod to World Hunger. The donation of a special offering at Thanksgiving time is a great way to fulfill this Priority.

Work on identifying resources to lift up a social issue for study and discussion in our synod's congregations is underway. The Goal Team will be providing resources to discuss issues around the immigration questions that are being addressed in our society. They plan to provide resources to guide us in learning how to discuss difficult social issues in a spirit of listening and supporting each other—even when we disagree.

### **Goal D: Affirming our Evangelical Lutheran Identity (AELI)**

#### **Goal Team Leader: Pr. Ryan Mills, Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, Grand Prairie**

This Goal Team is hosting a multi-media “Luth-Booth” in our assembly display area, showcasing how the Gospel of Jesus Christ is being proclaimed and lived across our Synod. You are also invited to be a part of the conversation and record what you love about being a Lutheran. Plans are in the work for upcoming LutheranFests to be held regionally around the Synod. Their common goal is to discern how we can enhance, celebrate, and share our Lutheran identity in the Gospel.

I see the Churchwide Assembly's passage of ***Book of Faith: Lutherans Read the Bible*** as a bold, important action of our church. Whenever faithful people read and study scripture together there is a renewal within the church. Lutherans spending more time in the scriptures will surely be a means of spiritual renewal and DiscipleLife growth across the ELCA! I look forward to the publication of the *Lutheran Study Bible* that is scheduled for release later this year or,

more likely, in 2009. I urge you to support the Synod Council's resolution to become a “Book of Faith” synod, along with many others...and to urge members to involve themselves in the resources that are now becoming available for our use in the church. Special thanks to Pr. Kerstin Hedlund for serving as our ***Book of Faith*** advocate for this venture!

I have been very pleased with the reception and use of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* in the congregations of our synod and across the ELCA. More copies of this worship resource have been sold and are in use after one year than Augsburg Fortress expected to see in the first several years. People are seeing this hymnal as much more than a source of hymns. It is a teaching tool, a spiritual guide book, a snap shot of the best of Lutheran worship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. That so many are claiming it and using it is a sign of the important of our Lutheran Identity in these times.

### **Goal E: Encouraging Generous Hearts (EGH)**

#### **Goal Team Leader: Mr. Jim Level, Trinity Lutheran Church, Fort Worth**

I would like to emphasize the two Stewardship Academies planned for this fall in Waco (St. Matthew's) and in Fort Worth (Trinity Lutheran Church). Our priority urges that fully half of our congregations and pastors will participate in a Stewardship Academy by the end of 2010. We had to cancel both of this past year's Academies due to lack of registrations. I believe that this priority is one of the most important ones we have as it will serve as an important tool to help congregations carry out ministry in local communities more effectively! There is a strong need to grow in our understanding of year round stewardship and tithing as a gift of grace. The personal spiritual discipline of tithing is important to

me personally and pastorally for the church. I look forward to the implementation of the Priority to teach about the importance of this dimension of our stewardship. It will take the commitment of our pastors to lead the participation of congregational members and I urge all pastors in our synod to consider signing up for this coming year's Academy in your area.

The assets of the Mission Fund continue to grow and now stand at over \$ 600,000. Leadership is in place to begin to undertake the larger mission of growing those assets to \$ 2 million through a campaign to be held 2010 through 2012.

### **Goal F: Strengthening Partnerships (SP)**

#### **Goal Team Leader: Pr. Jane Mar, Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Granbury**

The ELCA's Office for Synodical Relations has provided for our Synodical Communications and Ministry Audit, which I will report on verbally as part of my report at our Assembly. We have received a final, written report and the results while not encouraging in some ways, are very encouraging in others. In all, about 125 people met in one of the 9 Listening Posts set up around the synod and several hundred more participated in an online survey.

Another priority in this area is receiving special attention: clergy health and wellness, Priority 3. I have engaged the leadership of the ELCA Board of Pensions with the support of Thrivent Financial for Lutherans to lead the 2008 Bishop's Convocation on a cruise ship out of Galveston in October 2008. For a very

reasonable price, clergy and lay paid staff from across our synod will be learning about different dimensions of the Wellness Wheel, dealing with Spiritual, Physical, Emotional, Financial, and other areas of health and wellness in our lives. In addition to the cruise on Health and wellness the SP team will be leading a workshop at this coming year's *Spread the Spirit's Fire* on this important issue. It will be geared for clergy and laity.

Telling the stories of what's happening in the congregations of our synod and our related ministries is one of the initiatives of this Goal and it was identified as one of the great needs and desires of our congregational leaders during the Audit. How can we connect? How can we be more effective in learning what works and what

does not work in the churches of our synod? These are questions we will try to explore over the next few months.

The annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity celebration in Dallas, this year, was one of the ways we were able to connect ecumenically. This year, several Lutherans took part in a community-wide service hosted by the Episcopalians in Dallas and a significant number of folks from various traditions attended. The

ecumenical movement has been declining in recent years due, I believe, to the fact that denominations are struggling to keep up with their own issues. Looking inwardly, we are not looking outwardly as we once did. I am grateful for the opportunity to work with the various Christian judicatories around the Dallas and Fort Worth areas and to involve other clergy and lay leaders in other sectors of our synodical territory such as Denton, Lubbock, and Louisiana.

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All-in-all, as you can see, we are making strides in efforts to implement the goals of our Strategic Priorities. Yet, there is much to continue doing and you can be at the center of the implementation of these Priorities.

We are in the year of **DiscipleLife: Formed** and I continually teach and preach about the marks of **DiscipleLife** in which we are daily being formed. We are people of the cross and, as such, have an important message to share with the world...a world

wrapped up in accumulation of wealth and personal gain at whatever cost to others. I call upon you, as leaders of the church in this synodical territory, to join with me in engaging more faithfully the marks of **DiscipleLife**: prayer, bible study, weekly worship, telling the story, social justice and care for the poor, tithing, and growth in grace and connectedness; all means by which we are Formed for **DiscipleLife**. We have Good News to share in Jesus Christ!

Living with you in God's Amazing Grace,

*+ Kevin S. Kanouse*

Kevin S. Kanouse,  
Bishop