



Office of the Bishop

# Northern Illinois Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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## Report of The Reverend Dr. Gary M. Wollersheim, Bishop

I would characterize this last year of our life together as a Synod to be one of new directions and continued faithfulness.

### NEW DIRECTIONS

#### **Companion Synod Relationship, Arcot Lutheran Church, India**

This January, representatives from the Northern Illinois Synod went on an amazing pilgrimage to India. John and Esther Prabhakar and their families lovingly led and hosted us. John Califf labored tirelessly to plan and administer the journey. Art Milton and members of our Global Mission Sub-Committee worked with their counterparts in India to develop the specifics of the Covenant agreement (included in the Assembly packet). Bishop Gideon Devanesan and the Arcot Lutheran Church overwhelmed us with their gracious hospitality. And each participant in our group contributed significantly to the success of the trip including: Bill Bartlett, John Califf, Jeanna Fors, Pastor Bob Hansen, Ron and Pat Henning, Pastor Roger Hurlbut, Carla Jones, Pastor Kim Lee-Brown, David Lonsway, Pastor Rick and Helen Meier, Art Milton, Randy Mullin, Pastor Chuck Olson, Pastor Leo and Linda Patterson, Pastor Jay Quinn, Kevin Rogers, George Sanchez, Chuck and Stella Schroeder, Lee and Pat Stocking, Pastor Bill and Isabelle Wittig, and Polly Wollersheim.

We are beginning our companionship with three pilot congregation-to-congregation relationships in India: Christ Lutheran Church, Belvidere, will partner with Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Melpattambakkam; Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Rockford, will partner with Carmel Lutheran in Tiruvannamalai; and Alpine Lutheran Academy, Rockford, will partner with Kattumailur School. After we have gained some experience from these first relationships, we will encourage other congregations to participate. Pastor Gary Erickson has been appointed by our Synod Council to be Companion Parish Coordinator for both the Arcot Lutheran Church in India and the Arusha Diocese in Tanzania.

We thank God for the blessings we have already received through this new Companion relationship.

#### **Lutheran Campus Ministry (LCM) at Northern Illinois University (NIU)**

Our Lutheran Campus Ministry at Northern Illinois University has been changed forever because of the tragic shootings on February 14, 2008. Due to the outstanding ministry provided by Pastor Diane and Estuardo Dardón, the Peer Ministers, and volunteers from across the synod, a powerful message of hope was shared with the community along with a sense of God's very real presence. While we have done good work through LCM in the past, this incident has demonstrated the critical need for a full-time pastor at Lutheran Campus Ministry at NIU. The Northern Illinois Synod Council, in response to a request from the Lutheran Campus Ministry Board, has set a goal to establish full-time Lutheran Campus Ministry at NIU and has initiated a campaign to accomplish this. Most people do not realize and will be surprised to learn that currently Pastor Dardón's position at Lutheran Campus Ministry is only part-time! With such a large campus to serve and such tremendous needs and opportunities for ministry, this part-time position needs to become full-time.

Specifically the campaign for full-time Lutheran Campus Ministry at NIU will have three components:

- First, each congregation of the Northern Illinois Synod will be encouraged to give a special gift of \$600, which is the extra amount needed per week to increase the position from part-time to full-time ministry at NIU. Some congregations will be able to give more, for example, two weeks would be \$1,200, one month would be \$2,400, etc. The receiving of these gifts will begin with the offering at the Synod Assembly on Friday evening, June 13. Offerings for full-time Ministry at NIU may also be sent to the Synod office at any time; please indicate for “NIU.”
- Second, individual donors will have the opportunity to contribute to the fund for full-time Lutheran Campus Ministry at NIU.
- Third, congregations in the Northern Illinois Synod with endowment funds will be asked to consider donating to Lutheran Campus Ministry at NIU.

### **Wellness**

This past year we initiated a Wellness emphasis in the Synod including spiritual, physical, emotional, social, intellectual and vocational well-being. We are first concentrating on wellness for rostered leaders and then will move to a focus on the wellness of congregation members. Pastor Troy Hedrick and Minnette Scott are co-chairs of the task force which includes: Deaconess Cheryl Erdmann, Pastor Bob Hansen, Pastor Laura Koppenhoefer, Helen Meier, Randy Mullin, Pastor Joe Robb, and Sarah Wilson.

At this year’s Synod Assembly you will see some visible signs of the task force’s work. Soon we hope to announce a pilot program involving a local hospital, which will provide significant support to one of the conferences in our Synod concerning wellness.

### **Green**

A “Going Green” emphasis in the Northern Illinois Synod was initiated on February 16, 2008, at the place where the care of God’s creation is stressed everyday, Lutheran Outdoor Ministries Center (LOMC) in Oregon, Illinois. This all-day workshop was attended by over 100 participants from across the Synod. We are thankful for the leadership of LOMC Executive Director Russ Senti, the Green Task Force, and task force co-chairs Pastor Don Knowles and Pastor Henrietta (Hank) Milner. The Mission Gatherings this fall will focus on “Going Green.”

### **Rostered Leaders Educational Debt Reduction**

The average seminary debt of recent graduates is \$38,000. This is an overwhelming burden for rostered leaders who may be modestly compensated during their first years of ministry. In response to this need our synod initiated the Rostered Leaders Educational Debt Reduction program last year to provide assistance to rostered leaders with educational debt in the Northern Illinois Synod. Twenty-eight persons, with educational debts ranging from about \$6,000 to over \$100,000 applied for grants. Proportionate grants were made with those having the greatest need given the most, with everyone receiving something between \$128 and \$2,462. Grants were paid directly to the lending institutions which held the loans; money came from the interest from the Synod Endowment Fund. Just recently our Synod Council voted to distribute the interest earned from our Endowment Fund to this program once again this year. We also expect to continue this program in the future.

## *CONTINUED FAITHFULNESS*

### **Rostered Leaders and Congregations**

Being faithful to God’s call and doing God’s work is more challenging today than ever before. And yet, I see our leaders and congregations witnessing powerfully to Christ in words and in deeds. There are so many ways that this is happening across our Synod, and here are three examples. First, we have many congregations in the Northern Illinois Synod who continue the practice of making calls in their community for the purpose of inviting people to attend worship or other activities at church. The more invitations we make, the more people will come. Second, several Northern Illinois Synod congregations have made the decision to give at least 10% of offerings to the Synod and ELCA for Mission Support, and then give to local needs on top of this. We have congregations in the Synod who give over 20% of their offerings for Mission Support. Finally, there are congregations who are engaged in justice issues locally and globally. Some of these congregations are providing

anti-racism training, others are doing advocacy work such as participating in Lutheran Day at the State Capitol, and still others have adopted an important local ministry such as a homeless shelter or food pantry.

### **World Hunger Appeal**

At last year's Synod Assembly, our World Hunger Sub-Committee challenged the Northern Illinois Synod to contribute at least \$5.00 per baptized member for a total of about \$500,000 to the ELCA World Hunger Appeal. Thanks to the leadership of the World Hunger Sub-Committee, the work of congregations and individuals through the Foods Resource Bank program, and a very generous bequest received from a family of the Synod--we gave over one million dollars or about \$13.50 per baptized member! This makes the Northern Illinois Synod the largest contributor to the World Hunger Appeal of any synod in the ELCA. I thank God for this outstanding effort for the sake of eliminating hunger in the world.

### **Synod Council**

The Northern Illinois Synod is blessed to have an excellent Synod Council. I feel wonderfully supported by their prayers, wisdom, counsel, and advocacy. Members of the Synod Council include: Esther Prabhakar, Vice President; Pastor Gary Erickson, Secretary; Michael "Mic" Brooks, Treasurer; Bill Bartlett; DiAnne Beynon; Beth Nelson Chase; Jim Hankins; Pastor Bob Hansen; Pastor Don Knowles; Pastor Kim Lee-Brown; Pastor Mark Luepke; Pastor Rick Meier; Randy Mullin; Kevin Rogers (Youth Representative); George Sanchez; and Jerilyn Strohecker.

### **Synod Staff**

I thank God for our Synod Staff. Their work is difficult but they face the many challenges with faithfulness and hope. It is a joy and privilege for me to be associated with such dedicated servants of Christ and Christ's Church. Please find opportunities to thank them for their ministry and also please remember them regularly in your prayers.

**Full-time Assistants to the Bishop:** Pastor Jeffrey Clements and Ms. Sandra Musch

**Part-time Conference Assistants to the Bishop:** Pastor Michel Clark, Deaconess Cheryl Erdmann, Pastor Carol Gates, Pastor Kurt Hansen, Pastor Tim Kenyon, Pastor Tom Larsen, Pastor Jay Quinn, and Pastor Christine Stienstra.

**Part-time Mission Consultants:** Pastor Denver Bitner, Pastor Jonathan Black, Pastor Brent Dahlseng, Pastor Dennis Heaney, and Pastor Ron Voss.

**Part-time Assistant to the Bishop for Candidacy:** Pastor Barb Rapp

**Part-time Communication Director:** Associate in Ministry Karin Graddy

**Part-time Youth Ministry Coordinator:** Diaconal Minister Mary Lasits

**Support Staff:** Ms. June Cain, Ms. Nancy Corey, Ms. Judi Fields, and Ms. Julie Lewis.

I give God thanks for the many blessings which I have received in serving this very faithful synod as your pastor. Everywhere I go I am received with gracious hospitality and inspired by your dedicated ministry. I am indeed blessed.

Finally, I am grateful for the partnership of my wife Polly. I could not do this work without her support and love.

Praise God from whom all blessing flow!

In Christ,  
Bishop Gary Wollersheim

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