

April 28, 2008

Dear friends in Christ:

It seems like the state of our economy is declining on a daily basis. The price of gas today is \$3.79 per gallon, with the promise that it will be more tomorrow. Energy costs are rising. Groceries cost a little more each time I go to the store. Many of us are already feeling the pinch. For this reason, government issued economic stimulus rebates begin going out today.

I have heard that some people are going to head to the store to buy a flat screen TV. Others figure that they will need the money to fuel the SUV. A few weeks ago, Paulette (my wife) and I decided to accept the Conference of Bishops' challenge to tithe our economic stimulus rebate check. We liked the idea of sharing the money with congregations or programs that are working with people living in poverty. We have not quite decided where to share those funds. There are so many congregations and agencies from which to choose. As we began to discuss some of the needs, the one thing we did conclude is that we must at least double tithe what we receive.

I have the joy of spending time with many congregations across our synod. The community outreach in some congregations is amazing. I see food pantries that are being used by increasing numbers of people. I see outreach into neighborhoods in which the working poor are sending substantial portions of their income to help support family living in other countries. Other congregations are making significant efforts to raise money for the ELCA World Hunger. I see congregations assembling school kits, health kits and quilts for Lutheran World Relief. All of this gives me hope.

The church has important work to do. As Bishop Mark Hanson has coined it, "God's work. Our hands." Your mission support dollars make an impact in lots of ways, including our common work among the poor of our country and our world. Thank you for your support of our ministry together. The Northern Illinois Synod has pledged to be a good steward of your funds. I thank you on behalf of the whole church.

In gratitude,

The Rev. Jeffrey Clements
Assistant to the Bishop/Stewardship Specialist