

**Report of the Bishop
to the
Twenty-First Annual Synod Assembly
March 2008**

In mid-January my wife, Terry, and I attended a Broadway Production of “Lion King” at the Benedum Theater in Pittsburgh, PA. In this synod, we have a pastor who “just had to miss the winter Continuing Education Event” because she had been asked to do a wedding in Orlando, Florida, and she and her family would just have to go to Disney World. Another pastor vacations at Disney at least three times a year. And still another pastor, who has recently moved, had the preacher of her wedding tie in the titles of at least ten Disney songs within the sermon for her wedding. When I think of Disney, I find myself whistling the tune “It’s a Small World.”

My thoughts are drifting to smallness for several reasons. First, we are a small synod. When the Commission for a New Lutheran Church was going about its work to form this church, they envisioned synods that had 100 congregations to 150 congregations. We have grown in size to that of 65 congregations and one mission start. Second, we are a synod that has many small membership congregations. These are congregations that worship less than 50 or 60 on a Sunday morning. The “average ELCA congregation now worships 90. Third, I wish I had a nickel for every time that a council member has said to me, **“we can’t hope to do anything new, because we are so small.”** Or, “we don’t have enough people to do evangelism or stewardship or youth ministry or...” Fourth, I attended one event in January and a second in February that I hope will form me for a very long time.

In early January, I was invited to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America headquarters on West Higgins Road along with Pastor Ron Schlak, Pastor David and Connie Twedt and Pastor Fred and Sarah Soltow. Our invitation was to have a luncheon meeting with the members of the World Hunger Team, the staff of Church in Society and with folks from the Communications Department. Later that same afternoon and into the next day, we would visit with many of these same people individually. The purpose of these visits was to talk about the **“Tour de Revs, 100 Days for Hunger and Wellness.”** Pastors Twedt, Soltow and Schlak shared their vision of this opportunity to ride some 13,000 miles as well as to teach of poverty, hunger and wellness. When it came my turn to speak, I found myself saying words that I had not planned to speak. I found myself speaking **positively of a small synod and the power of one.** I spoke of my frustration of those who complain, “What can I do, I am but one person.” I noted that in my 2007 Synod Assembly sermon my call for those who work in soup kitchens or food pantries to assist one person to get a job. It was my contention then as it is now, that it only takes one person to assist another to get a job.

The second event that touched me was **the award ceremony for Pastor William Carlson**, held at St. Paul Lutheran Church, Accident, MD. Pastor Carlson was awarded the Gettysburg Lutheran Theological Seminary Alumni Award for Parish Ministry. Within this ceremony, President Michael Cooper-White spoke of Pastor Carlson as one who lacked sight, but had great vision. Some of you know that Pastor Carlson has had eye problems ever since he left the military at the conclusion of World War II. As one of the longest serving pastors in Garrett County, Pastor Carlson was one whose vision saw needs that others never noticed. For thirty years he chaired the Accident Municipal Planning Commission; was the founding member of the Accident Community Health Board and Community Housing Corporation; Chaplain for Accident’s Crime Watch and advisor to the committee for establishing Garrett Community College; he served on the board for Lutheran Campus Ministry with special interest at WVU; out of all this service came the creation of community housing, a community college, a clinic and a hospital and a chaplaincy ministry at West Virginia University. **The power of One.**

Scripture is filled with examples of God calling an individual or couples like David, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Esther, Sarah and Abraham, Moses and Miriam to take on roles of leadership. Yes, from time to time we hear them complain that they are but a youth or cannot speak or even question “why me?” The power of One or the power of one connected to the call of God to do the seemingly impossible. In the middle of the month of May, we will once again hear Peter’s sermon on Pentecost where the power of individuals and the Holy Spirit cause

3,000 people to become followers of Jesus. Have we ever stopped to think that maybe God prefers to work through individuals? That smallness has no barriers with God? Mary, the mother of our Lord, was not only one, but she was a peasant girl of the young age of 13. She was not royalty, she was young and she was one. You will often hear me speaking very positively of a **“small synod and small congregations.”**

The power of One struck this synod in 2001 when First English Lutheran, Wheeling, WV contributed the first gift and from that the idea to create the **Rostered Leaders Debt Reduction Fund**. From 2001 through 2007, the congregations of this synod have raised \$100,000 for debt relief. All \$100,000 has been paid out to the lending institutions that hold the debt of our Rostered Leaders. From 2001 until the present, we have assisted two pastors to become debt free and reduced others from years of debt and interest payments. In 2001, the average debt of graduating seminarians was \$30,000. Today, the average debt has risen nearly 35% and is \$40,000. **A small synod can** make an impact upon the lives of those who dedicate their lives to ministry.

In 2002, we created our own Social Ministry Organization, now known as **Community Lutheran Partners, Inc**. We affectionately know this organization as CLP. In the last year, CLP has held at least three **“Just Neighbors”** workshops to assist us to better know the situation of those living in poverty. Servant events continued to be sponsored in Logan County, WV and in Biloxi, Mississippi for disaster relief assistance. Please read the full CLP report that you will find in this bulletin of reports written by their very faithful director, Sarah Soltow. There you will see the full range of ministry that CLP does on our behalf and on behalf of the whole church. Compared to the wide array of Social Ministry Organizations that the ELCA has to offer, CLP is on the “small side.” **Small, but mighty!**

Within this Assembly we will celebrate the 101st year of Campus Ministry in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Leading us in the celebration is Chaplain Matthew Riegel and many of the students from our Chapel that is on the campus of West Virginia University. Pastor Brian Bennett, who is the chair of the Campus Ministry Board at WVU, will also serve as the co-chaplain of this event. On February 16, Chaplain Riegel and 11 young adults (six young men and five young women), who are a part of the Disaster Response team at the Chapel, traveled to Fairmont, WV to assist Maureen Corrigan and myself in moving the Synod Office furniture, cabinets, files, desks and so much more from suite 100 to the second floor. We moved from downstairs to an upstairs suite. I am grateful that no one counted the number of stairs that we climbed each time we made the trip. In less than four hours, these wonderful young adults had us moved. In a weeks time, Maureen had the outer office in great shape, and a week after that, I had the chance to put my office in order. Synod Council has requested that we secure a ten year lease on our new office space. That process was in place and may have been accomplished by the time of the April 26 Synod Council meeting. Most of this churches’ campus ministries work with a small number of youth. The group from WVU may have been **small in number, but they were mighty in strength.**

During our 19th Annual Synod Assembly, our Voting Members voted for a three year trial period making use of the Lombard Mennonite’s Mediation Process anytime a conflict occurred within one of our congregations. From that time until now, I have made use of the Mediation Team in two very different situations. In both settings, the Mediation Team was very effective in teaching about conflict, providing councils with new tools for use in ministry, as well as teaching young pastors ways to strengthen their calls. In these two settings, calls continue and ministry is renewed. So far we have used two of our mediators.

Nearly a year ago The Episcopal Diocese of West Virginia, the United Methodist Church of West Virginia and this synod created a planning team for the purpose of celebrating the shared Interim Agreements we hold together. This festive Eucharistic Worship Service was held at Wesley Chapel at Wesleyan College, Buckhannon, WV on Saturday, January 19, 2008. This was a historic day seeing Episcopalians, United Methodists and Lutherans sharing in the Sacrament of Holy Communion and worshipping together. The planning team has agreed to continue to work together to see if there are other ministries that we can **share**. Serving on this planning team are our own Pastor Brian Bennett and this synods Ecumenical Officer, Pastor Jerry Kliner.

Annually I provide for you a summary of our **giving to Mission Support**. 2007 was a year in which we knew entering into it that giving from our congregations was going to be flat compared to that of 2006. The reality is that we declined in giving from 2006 to 2007 by \$3,892. Synod Council and I discussed the fact that

we might fall short of our pledge to the ELCA. I stated to Synod Council that my leadership says that we will use savings to make sure we meet our pledge to the ELCA in full. We needed roughly \$1,500 from savings to meet our pledge in full. For 2008, we have pledged that we would grow in our giving to our church by a full percent, moving from a 50-50 sharing to that or 51% for the ELCA and 49% for this synod. The goal of our Budget and Finance Committee will be that of growing by ½% per year until we can re-attain the goals of 55% for the ELCA and 45% for this synod. For 2008, our congregations have pledged themselves to giving nearly \$20,000 more than in 2007. I cannot help but to emphasize that your gifts of Mission Support are so very valuable to this entire church. During this year's assembly, we will be lifting up and celebrating Campus Ministry. Without your gifts to Mission Support, there would be no ministry to our college students. The ministry we operate at West Virginia University is a direct result of your gifts and those of two other synods! Again, I have to pause and **give thanks to God for a small synod** that continues to amaze me with their faithful giving to Mission Support.

Earlier in this report, I mentioned a meeting in Chicago with our Tour de Revs. Just the other day, March 26, 2008, I was in Chicago for a meeting when Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson asked me about the Tour de Revs, as he had seen their video that I had shown during the spring Conference of Bishops meeting, and because they had invited him to preach in one of their congregations in 2009. You will hear more from our three pastors during this Assembly as they will ride for and teach for the ELCA World Hunger Appeal and for the Board of Pensions Wellness program in 2009.

By now you can sense that I speak positively and faithfully about the Power of One. That the word small or the phrase small synod or small in number or small congregations are all connected to the power of God working within and through us to be the people of God. It is my privilege to serve this “**small**” family known as the West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod.

Yours in our Lord's service,

+ Ralph W. Dunkin, Bishop

Changes in Rostered Leaders: April 20, 2007 – March 28, 2008

The Rev. Jaclin Ryan-Bussey, from “On-Leave-from-Call” to receiving a call from Trinity, Weirton, WV effective May 1, 2007; installed May 6, 2007; transferred from the Northeastern Ohio Synod to the West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod.

The Rev. Louise Knotts, Retired and requested that her synod membership be transferred from the Upper Susquehanna Synod to the West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod, effective May 15, 2007.

The Rev. Donald R. Thomas, Retired, received and accepted a two-year term call for part-time ministry to serve as pastor of Shepherd of the Hills Mission Development, effective October 1, 2007; installed November 11, 2007.

The Rev. Richard Moll, “On-Leave-from-Call,” requested that his synod membership be transferred to the Virginia Synod. This request was accepted by both synods and the Secretary of the ELCA, effective January 22, 2008.

The Rev. Sarah Lee-Faulkner, resigned as pastor of the Church of the Covenant, Grafton, WV in order to accept the Call of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod to serve as Assistant to the Bishop, effective May 1, 2008.

Anniversaries of Ordination

60 years

R. Russell Riethmiller

40 years

Richard G. Mahan

Paul J. Kane

35 years

R. Alvin Schafer

25 years

Theodore I. Bessey

20 years

Mark Vitalis-Hoffman

10 years

Judith K. Marlow

5 years

Gail C. Bauzenberger

Brian O. Bennett

Elizabeth A. Westphal

Significant Anniversaries Among Our Congregations

240 years – Holy Trinity Memorial, Sharpsburg, MD

165 years – Fairview, Gore, VA

160 years – St. Peter, Wardensville, WV

130 years – St. John, Swanton, MD

115 years – First, Parkersburg, WV

St. John, Davis, WV

110 years – Grace, Friendsville, MD

95 years – Edgwood, Wheeling, WV

50 years – Good Shepherd, New Martinsville, WV

45 years – Messiah, Moundsville, WV

Synod automobile miles driven in synod ministry by Bishop Dunkin from September 1, 1997 – March 28, 2008 – 348,370 miles