



Oregon Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Reformation Day - October 31, 2011

The resurrection of Jesus is the ultimate energizing for the new future . . . There is no way to explain the resurrection out of the previously existing reality. The resurrection can only be received, affirmed and celebrated as the new action of God whose province it is to create new futures for people, and to let them be amazed in the midst of despair . . .

Walter Brueggemann, [The Prophetic Imagination](#)

*The people who put their energy into getting back to how things were are lost.
The people who look to the future to see what might be possible are the people
to whom the future belongs.*

Tom Gillespy, State Demographer of Minnesota

Dear Oregon Synod Friends and Family,

I write to share my work plan, as bishop of the Oregon Synod, for the coming year. Doing so is important to me for several reasons. First of all, if there is no plan or vision for one's work there will be no progress. Our 2011 Churchwide Assembly, by adopting the **LIFT** report, (referenced below) is encouraging all congregations of this church to be intentional and collaborative about planning. I would not ask you to address what I myself am unwilling to do.

Secondly, I believe firmly that we as bishop and congregations are mutually accountable to one another. As your bishop my accountability is both to you in the synod and to the church as a whole. It rests on me to be clear about how I serve and what I am doing. Your feedback, encouragement, prayers, corrections and partnership are important to me.

Last year the staff and I did a series of retreats in 12 of our 13 clusters. All of your synod Program Staff were involved as well over 200 of you. Trends, feedback, hopes and concerns were clear. Pastors report they don't feel prepared for much of the work they are now called on to do. Congregations see declining numbers and aging members. Wonderful work is being done in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, but members wonder about the future of their community. Change is afoot and we do not know what the future of American Christianity is going to look like. The same might be said for our world economically, socially and politically. The difference is that in the Church we live intentionally in the reality of Christ's death and resurrection. There is nothing happy about the cross. Yet, we know the path from here to there is often times wholly discontinuous. As Walter Brueggemann says above, *"There is no way to explain the resurrection out of the previously existing reality."* The life of the Church lives in this pattern. We do not know what tomorrow will look like. All we know is that our tomorrow is already Christ's today.

LIFT

Our ELCA Churchwide Assembly this last August adopted what is called the LIFT report. (LIFT - Living Into the Future Together) LIFT has been a work in progress for several years. It focuses on the question of how we as a church can best position and configure ourselves for vital ministry. You can find the entire document at <http://www.elca.org/lift> if you wish, but let me simply underscore three points here:

- The ELCA has affirmed a strong commitment to supporting and empowering congregational ministry. As a church we function on many levels, but we know strong congregational ministries are foundational.
- As part of this congregational focus, synods are called to encourage congregational planning processes. This has already been on my agenda, and the staff and I will be looking to encourage planning in ways that are specific, collaborative and respectful.
- As part of a churchwide, institutional, redesign LIFT calls for the elimination of a variety of churchwide programming committees, more integration of church council with the council of bishops and a three year, rather than a two year, cycle for churchwide assemblies. In this way LIFT seeks to make room for grass roots innovation. That is to say, the opportunity is there for grass roots activity if we wish to step up to the plate. We do!

I begin this letter with a reference to LIFT because it sets the stage for changes I am making in my personal priorities and planning as your bishop. Limited resources and staff, for all of us, dictate that my first responsibility is to work with you towards strong and vital local ministries. Planning is key. Here is how your synod staff and I will be proceeding.

THE BASICS

Budget and staff reductions require rethinking the basics of my office. More than this, the changing landscape of faith and life beg the same question. I would wager this is the same for you. The following work is currently in progress and should be near completion by the middle of 2012. You will receive a report at our April Synod Assembly. Hold me feet to the fire.

Communications: As you and I do our work effective communication is crucial. The synod needs a communications strategy overhaul. I am currently pulling together communications and marketing people to work on this. Your input here is welcome. What information needs to flow between congregations and the synod office, how often, and through what means? We have already been moving significantly to electronic communication over paper. This is largely a financial consideration and not without its own set of tradeoffs. We know this. However, the question remains as to what is helpful to communicate and to whom.

Mission Interpreters: The Mission Interpreters group we used to have was a wonderful asset with dedicated volunteers. Their primary focus was on communicating the work of the larger church, of which we are all a part. It is time to rebuild and redirect this ministry in light of new needs and goals. Our current need is for a fluid group of face to face ministry advocates. They will be knowledgeable in both churchwide and synodical ministries, prepared to listen, share and help make connections. Please keep your eyes open for mature, vital, caring individuals

who might be called to such work. We want local people who know your congregation and those of your cluster.

Data Management: Just so you know, for years we have kept the synod's basic congregational/personnel data base in-house using MS Access on office computers. We have been very conscientious about privacy, security and accuracy. We are now in the process of moving our records into the cloud with a service called Salesforce. Why?

Salesforce is a global corporation and a leader in the field of "Customer Relations Management." This is a whole conversation in itself, but the bottom line is that they offer online services to strengthen and enable relationship between businesses (the synod) and clients (congregations or individual members.)

- Salesforce offers us safe, secure, always backed up data management.
- In addition they allow us to track contacts, our work with congregations, and information that will help us as we refocus synod work around congregational needs and processes.
- Salesforce is accessible on the road, so staff will have the information they need wherever they are.
- Salesforce is also easily adaptable to fund raising and charity work. This will help us integrate work with Believe and the Endowment Committee.
- Salesforce has as part of their business mission model a built in level of financial, consultative and product gifting to non-profit organizations. This is an expensive service. We are getting it for free. The price and purpose are right.

Lots of things happen behind the scenes in the synod office that nobody ever sees. We're working hard here to get the office into the 21st century. Effective ministry requires a high degree of professionalism and accountability. This is true financially, legally (as in up to date constitutions, policies and procedures) and with respect to our relationships with our called leaders and employees. Our collaborative conversations about church planning and purpose is well served by including these considerations.

Staff and Synod Council: By design or happenstance synod staff now looks much different than it used to. We have fewer staff members with redefined responsibilities. We also have new Synod Council leadership and are shaping fresh patterns for the work before us. Suffice it to say here that this redefinition and redirecting of our mutual work is all focused on creating vital, local ministries. We do not have the personnel, time or resources to work with everybody. We will, however, always be glad to share with you who we are working with, how and why. We will be where the work and will is present to be fully Christ's Church.

LIVING INTO . . .

Our commitment to be *Living Into the Future Together* is simply referred to as "living into" around the synod office. We as your synod staff are living into new patterns and new priorities. Your members and congregation, like the synod, are living into some sense of a "new normal." We are all living into new expressions of "church" for the sake of the Gospel. As we your staff

redirect and refocus our work some will be pleased with new levels of personal involvement and care. Others may be distressed by our absence in places you want, or have been used to seeing us. I own that we will all be making on conscious decisions based on our priorities and sense of call. We choose to do what we feel is most central as best we can. This means some things will not get done, or not get done in the way we are used to.

Project Believe

Believe is a very fluid effort, unlike any work I have ever done before. Laid at the feet of our Project Believe team is visioning and prayer around the new tomorrow, as well as some very specific efforts at fund raising for new and exciting ministry opportunities. We constantly wrestle with our self-understanding and opportunities, and we wish to do so with you.

Some \$40,000+ has been given to date as we work towards a fundraising goal of \$250,000. This is a relatively small amount of money and I consider it an investment if 'Research and Development.' This year we will be seeking to bring the Believe vision and gifting opportunity beyond Portland with focused events in the Salem, Eugene or Bend areas. Pr. Glenn Chase is overseeing this work, which could easily be full time employment in and of itself, along with his other responsibilities as a half time staff member. Thank you, thank you, thank you, Pr. Chase! As Pr. Michael Keys comes on board he will also be working with the Believe Team, not so much with fundraising as with visioning.

Believe is integral to all we do out of the synod office.

Soul Café

Soul Café is the firstborn child of the new hopes and dreams of Project Believe. Soul Café is an online, internet community designed for the work of our pastors, members and congregations. It is also designed to be 'sacred space' for individuals not associate with our church, but wishing information, relationship or contact with Lutheran Christians.

Soul Café's primary purpose is to allow for broad based, collaborative, prayer, conversation and sharing around the challenges and opportunities before the church today. It is a ministry of Region 1 of the ELCA given birth and direction by the Oregon Synod. For us in Oregon it will be enlisted to support and augment our face to face ministry. Council presidents will be able to be in conversation with dozens of other council presidents in similar ministries. Stewardship, worship, professional support people, Stephen's ministers and more will likewise be able to tap into experience, best practices on consultation for the work before them. Part of the 'new normal' I envision for the synod is such person to person support and care. This is not the wave of the future. It is simply the now.

YOU MATTER

I thank you as a pastor, congregational leader or interested member for taking time to read this letter. It is long, but I feel the information is important for you to have.

We have new Synod Council leadership ready for new challenges. The **LIFT** report is encouraging synods and congregations to “just do it” and this is exactly my intent. The synod office has a new staff configuration in place and we are prayerfully living into a fresh future with you.

Financial realities are difficult – for all of us. We are on target with our reduced 2011 synod budget, however, and I thank you for your faithfulness. Giving patterns suggest to me that congregations are giving intentionally and thoughtfully. There are few high and low swings this year. Monthly giving is relatively consistent. We’re all working a program here.

If I have one primary thought to share with you here it is that you matter! You matter to God, who walked with us as Jesus Christ our Lord and died for the healing of all creation. You matter to me, to your synod staff and the other leaders of our synod. And I know you matter to each other, not only to those in your worshipping community alone, but to all of us who seek to be God’s people here in Oregon together.

Part of our mutual care and “mattering” to each other is the willingness to listen, learn, sacrifice and celebrate as one. We in the synod office are listening. We are changing. We are praying, and we are risking. We do this together with you, confident in Christ, and in the knowledge that the Spirit is alive and leading “out there.” See you on the road.

Yoked in service,

Bishop Dave Brauer-Rieke
Oregon Synod - ELCA