

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ,
AMEN.

Some of you know I was an Ordinary Seaman in the Merchant Marine for five summers during college and graduate school. I sailed on the MV Tustumena, the Alaska State ferry that shipped between Seward, Kodiak Island, and Homer, Alaska. It was a great job for a student and I learned a great deal from the grizzled crew.

Memories of one particular night outside the mouth of Cook Inlet come to mind these days. I was the most junior member of the deck crew and had the 12-4am wheel watch (steering the ship) supervised by the most junior officer, the Third Mate. It was our misfortune that the wind was very strong that night (up to 80 knots) and our course took us through the Barren Islands, a place where the tide exchanged from five different directions. By the time we entered the Islands we were in 40 foot seas and waves were breaking across the wheelhouse. Because of the islands and tides, the sea ceased running in a predictable direction and became what sailors call a “broken sea.” Under such conditions it becomes very difficult to steer—especially a narrow course through islands—and our 300 ft. ship began to pitch and yaw in an alarming way, rolling over so hard at one point that the captain was bounced from his berth and I ended up hanging from the wheel to the port side.

We face just such a broken sea as the Church. We have a destination and a course set, but the culture, the economy, and church decisions have stirred the water and wind into something of a gale. Steering has become challenging in a new way and “all hands” are needed on deck in order to fulfill our purpose as a church.

Of course, we’ve been here before, not just as the ELCA of the 21st century, but as “the church of Christ in every age” that “must claim and test its heritage” not just to “keep rising from the dead” (ELW 729) but in order to be faith-full to the Great Commission we’ve been given. We are steering by a call from God to love, serve, and bless the world God created. Jesus is in the boat with us, and I imagine he is asking again why we are so afraid (Mark 4:35ff). But this sailing is hard! The old sailors on the Tustumena would say that when the ship lurches in broken sea everyone is sick. I wonder how Jesus slept through the fourth watch and the storm on the Sea of Galilee with young sailors at the helm. I wonder if we can hear that Jesus is in charge of the chaos while sailing to the other side, the unknown territory. His words are these: “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?”

I call on us to claim this faith and the third Guiding Principle of the Synod: “No Fear! Transformation!” The future is always unknown, but for those of us who cling to “Jesus first, last, and always,” it is Jesus’ future! “Amen, Come Lord Jesus!” We have commended all of time to this Lord of time who promises to be with us to and through the end to the “always” of all time! (Matthew 28:20) His resurrected life and his risen body are ours as the Body of Christ. But this is a hard day. If Jesus is leading us to the dying and rising of a seed that is planted, then this is the transformation—the metamorphosis—that is fundamental to Jesus’ life for ours and the very purpose of our

lives. It is the deepest privilege we have, this dying and rising, for it is the work God has first accomplished through Jesus Christ and given us as the fundamental rhythm of the church. I suspect we will know the dying more intimately for awhile but this very dying is still purposeful and powerful.

We have a purpose as the synodical church, as congregations each gifted in unique ways, and as a national and international church. Today we gather as the synodical church to do that work which is best suited to regional influence and congregational partnership. Our purpose is outlined in +S6.01 to +S6.03, available at Appendix 1 of the on-line version of this report. See http://www.ewaidsynod.org/images/SYNOD_CONSTITUTION_8-2009.pdf.

+6.03 calls for our work to be done “in a partnership relationship” with the Churchwide expression of the ELCA. This is where we have hit something of a crisis point in our responsibilities. Part of the broken sea that we are traversing has to do with the financial health of the whole church. In the last year our Churchwide partner has taken 17% out of its budget because of Mission Support shortfalls. I wouldn’t be surprised if they aren’t required to take out another 10% this year.

When our synod finance committee and the Synod Council met last winter they had to take 19% out of the synod budget for the current year. Even with this reduction, synod staff have taken salary cuts and benevolences are challenged. The prospect for 2011 (our FY 2012 budget included in your agenda) is just as tight.

Part of this loss of income is due to the economy and part of it is due to congregational withholding of Mission Support. In addition, five congregations have left our synod and the ELCA (Richland Lutheran; Zion in Deary, Id; Faith in Pierce, ID; Christ, Odessa; and Emmanuel, Walla Walla). This is a permanent loss of about \$60,000/year in Mission Support. Other congregations are in various stages of their discernment. Their Mission Support represents another \$45,000/yr. All told, we believe we need to reduce the synod budget by 15% or raise a similar amount to compensate. Based on the total regular giving to the congregations of the Synod (16 million), if we could achieve an average 8% gift to Mission Support, we would have very adequate funding for both the Synod and Churchwide expressions of our church.

The overall effect of these losses is that our synod violated our constitutional expectations by unilaterally cutting our Churchwide Mission Support percentage from just under 40% to 30% as proposed for the current year and next year. I think this is unacceptable. We have made promises to partners in ministry. At the very least we need to restore the percentage goal of our mission support in order to do what we’ve always said we do as a church, rise and fall together based on the generosity and capacity of our members. I’ll be working with our synod finance committee and Synod Council to propose a path forward for synod ministries but it may take some radical restructuring.

And therein lays another challenge: We have been blessed for several years by the superb Synod Council leadership of Vice President Susan Berg. Susan was part of the core leadership that rose to the challenge of reawakening a missional imperative for the Synod under Guiding Principles. She has been wise, steady, buoyant and dependable for many, many years. Now Susan and her husband, Pastor Tor Berg, have accepted a new

call to ministry in Bothell, WA. Part of this calling is to honor aging parents. I hope each of you will take time during the Assembly to thank Susan for her leadership. She has been a great gift among us! We will miss Susan's wise leadership as we face the questions before us.

Beyond these challenges it has been a good and productive year. In September the Synod Council set explicit goals under each of the Guiding Principles of the Synod.

Under "Jesus: First, Last, and Always" and "Amen, Come Lord Jesus" we set a goal of an excellent speaker at Synod Assembly who could speak to the ministry of Jesus and our wager that Jesus is still the "way" forward for a missional church. We were delighted to be able to secure Mark Allan Powell to speak to his book, "Loving Jesus" and we look forward to his addresses and workshops.

Under "Gratitude, Gratitude" we set the goal of launching new ministry in the Tri-Cities area under the wonderful and generous legacy of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church. Lutheran Church of the Master in Pasco has submitted and had approved a winsome new missional (grant) initiative to begin a children's choir for Tri-City youth. We hope this is the beginning of an outreach that "loves the children" through encouragement through music. In the next few months we'll issue another "Call for Proposals" to encourage new and innovative ministry ideas and expand the Lutheran presence in the Tri-Cities area.

Under our "No Fear! Transformation!" Guiding Principle we have encountered a faithful and holy failure. Despite the best efforts of Synod Council members, Beacon Board members, and our partner Ecumen, we were not able to begin the new Great Commandment ministry of housing care for the elderly in Meridian, ID. This idea was sunk when bond financing for senior housing evaporated in the Great Recession of 2008. Along with the financing opportunities, changes to the market meant we would not be able to finance this project because seniors are finding other ways to account for their housing needs during the economic storm. I am deeply grateful to and thankful for all who participated in this bold venture! Despite the failure of the project we learned to risk ourselves for mission in ways much of the church has forgotten. We learned a great deal through our mistakes and I believe we are ready to try again, even if only to make better mistakes! Luther Place senior housing, a ministry of First Lutheran, Sandpoint, stands as the model and a persistent beacon for all who would take risk to enlarge ministry. The other legacy of this failure is a renewed missional conversation in and among the congregations of the Treasure Valley. (The closing report from Pastor Dave Olson, including a financial accounting for the Beacon project, is available as an appendix to this report online at www.ewaidsynod.org.)

To partner with the Treasure Valley congregations, and all the congregations of the Synod, we achieved the other goal we had set for ourselves under this Guiding Principle: The calling of a new Churchwide funded position for a Director of Evangelical Mission (DEM). Pastor Helga Jansons has joined the synod staff and we are very grateful for her presence and passion for mission. We will have a chance to hear Pastor Jansons preach at the opening worship of the Assembly and will install her to this new ministry. Please feel free to contact Helga for assistance that renews the ministry of your congregation. (helgajansons@verizon.net).

When Helga is not at work for you, her first priority is a goal we set under the Guiding Principle, “Yes! Everybody Come.” This goal is to pursue, with the generous leadership of Terrace Heights Lutheran Church, a brand new ministry (Tree of Life) for our Hispanic neighbors in the upper Yakima Valley. We hope to introduce you to Abiut and Dora Fajardo, the proposed mission developers, during the course of the Assembly. Their son, Misael, is a new student at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary and we are proud to support him with the partnership of synod congregations who have agreed to become Mission Partners in this Yakima Valley Hispanic Ministry. We’ll also support Ms Carmanita Pimms and the ministry of Campbell Farm (Wapato) through this fund. We are always looking for additional Mission Partners to support this new ministry!

Finally, under our Guiding Principle, “Miracles of Hope” we will support a Campus Ministry Consultation in September, hoping to enlarge our campus ministry outreach to Boise State University in partnership with Immanuel Lutheran, Boise. If we can stretch this far it will be a true miracle because our other three campus ministry sites are always working at the edge of viability! As you think about the issues of funding synodical ministry please don’t forget that crucial ministries to our campuses, and through Lutheran Community Services, are at stake in this conversation.

Finally, this has been a difficult year in ministry for many of you. The economic recession, pain among parishioners, challenges associated with the Human Sexuality decisions, have all created the broken sea that is ours to navigate. The barren and rocky islands on either side of our course are threatening. This is a narrow place and many of us live with the constricted breath of fear. But this is the place and time in which we are called to minister. Our destination is still set by the One Jesus who has inaugurated the Kingdom of God. Our mission is not so much to do something as it is to be something, the church which is defined at its core by the mission of Jesus, to love and bless and serve this dying world. Against the world’s hatreds, in the face of anger and entitlement, countering the paralyzing fear, resisting the sense of futility, there is One who declares the world precious and every soul worth dying for. We are his Body and we are being used up. I pray we can face this future with urgency of purpose and ready to commend Christ to any in need. He is in the boat with us and has power over this broken sea.

On a personal note: Thank you for the privilege of serving among you for another year! I continue to love being a pastor/bishop and I am stimulated and eager for the challenges ahead. I am deeply honored to serve among a very faithful and competent Synod staff. Please extend your thanks to Mark Nelson, Cathy Steiner, Laurel Eschenbacher, and Helga Jansons.

This will be a big year for our family as transitions are in the works. This fall our daughter Mary Emily will begin PhD studies at the University of Chicago. She and Jason have had a rich year in Cochabamba, Bolivia, among the Maryknoll Brothers. Magdalena will finish her two-year Teach For America position and make her next move among friends in Minneapolis. Susan’s position with the Valparaiso Project comes to an end December 31 after a very good year in which three pieces of writing made it to press. As we each listen for God’s call we covet your prayers.

Pastor Martin Wells, Bishop