

# Central States Synod - ELCA

## Tri-State Area Ministry Newsletter

February 2012

### BISHOP TO VISIT

Central States Synod Bishop Gerald Mansholt and Bishop's Associate Pr. Janice Kibler will be out to AM1 on Sunday, February 12, for a 3 p.m. CT AM1 Gathering of congregational members and lay leaders, PMA's and Clergy. This event will take place at Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Brewster. It will be a time of sharing and updates on the Synod and the ELCA, Bible study, prayer and worship. This is a time of conversation together. We will conclude our time together with a light meal.

On Sunday morning, Bishop Mansholt will be at Bethesda / Page City to preach and celebrate the Eucharist; Pr. Janice will preach at Faith / Oberlin.

### BISHOP ANNOUNCES PMC

I am pleased to announce the formation of the next Partnership for Missional Church (PMC) cluster in our synod. The first cluster meeting is scheduled for May 4-5, so responses to this invitation are needed immediately and will be limited. Pastor Len Dale and others are ready to answer questions, and meet with congregational leaders as needed.

Our experience over the past six years with 26 congregations in two PMC Clusters has proved invaluable. PMC is not simply another program or strategic mission planning event. Pastors and lay leaders soon realize the three-year PMC process is complicated and challenging work that guides congregations with the help of various spiritual disciplines to make adaptive missional changes in their ever changing context.

PMC cluster events are structured to provide time for pastors on Friday, congregational sharing on Friday evening, teaching on Saturday morning and planning on Saturday after lunch.

Year One is about learning to listen—to God, to one another, to the people in the community around the congregation. Year Two is about inventing and taking risks through missional experiments. It is about experimenting with new approaches to reach others with the Good News of Jesus. Year Three is about focusing and organizing around what has been learned. It is about putting into the congregational system the things that have been learned through the PMC process.

The outcomes are exciting, unpredictable, rewarding, frustrating, and discouraging all at the same time. As congregations take risks, learn from others, dwell in the Word, and process what is happening, the Spirit of God does wonderful things. Congregations that stick to the disciplines of the process soon find themselves energized spiritually and thinking more deeply about God's call to us through the Good News of Jesus Christ.

You are invited to consider becoming a part of the next cluster. The *Changed by Love, Sent in Love to Serve – Shaping the Church for God's Mission Fund Appeal* is providing funds for the cost to synod for Partnership for Missional Church. We are also able to provide partial scholarships to congregations who cannot afford the costs. We truly do not want any congregation to decline this invitation because of costs. We will work individually with congregations to negotiate their costs. This is a partnership.

### BETHANY HOUSE OF STUDIES

Spring Event 2012

Saturday, March 3, 2012

Assaria Lutheran Church

121 W. First Street

Assaria, KS 67416

Lay Leadership

"Moving From Life-Draining to Life-Giving"

Pastor Roger Gustafson, Presenter

Additional information and registration form coming soon.

### SOUPER BOWL OF CARING

More than 20 years ago, the Souper Bowl of Caring began with a simple prayer from a single youth group: "Lord, as we enjoy the Super Bowl football game, help us to be mindful of those without even a bowl of soup to eat."

Since that day, more than \$81 million has been raised for local charities across the country through Souper Bowl of Caring. It has become a powerful movement that is transforming the time around Super Bowl weekend into the nation's largest celebration of giving and serving.

Through this mission, young people learn what it's like to make a positive difference in the world – as they collect food, raise money and volunteer to work in charities that provide shelter to the homeless, food to the hungry and compassion to those in need.

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## **WARTBURG THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**

Phil and Sharron Knox hosted a visit from Wartburg Seminary President Rev. Stanley N. Olson, Sunday January 22. Rev. Olson presented the mission and needs of the rural, plains oriented seminary to a small group of congregational leaders of Area 1 Ministry. There was much discussion about the changing landscape and pastoral needs of small congregations, before, during and after an enjoyable meal.

### **THE PUBLIC NATURE OF THE CHURCH: A VIEW**

I wonder how many of us consider the issue that our gathering together on Sunday morning at the customary location to hear God's Gospel and receive the sacraments happens in a public space. By public space, I mean that no one person owns the place and if ownership is a case in terms of whether the previous wider church body was either LCA or ALC (before the current ELCA) then the issue has to do with either the synod along with the congregation or with the congregation alone. Yes, there are those special folks who do donate towards the financial aspect so that the public can hear the Gospel at that location. But in the case of public space these folks who donate and steward their gifts toward making it possible for the public to have a space at which the Gospel can be heard, do not have a monopoly on what type of message is heard within the building's walls. There is no ownership of the Gospel. But there are people who have been trained in the ancient biblical languages, endowed with tools to think critically and to express the precious distinctions that need to be made between God's law and God's Gospel in the Bible. These folk who have been trained, certified by synod and ordained for the public task of teaching and preaching of the Gospel are called by the Church to "pipeline" the biblical message not within a "family setting" but to those who are gathered at a particular location which is also a public space.

There is a deep difference between expressing one's political opinion from the proclamation of the Gospel in that public space. If that difference and distinction are not clear there can be dissension among people. Congregations who partner together to call a pastor to provide his/her service in terms of the preaching and teaching of the Gospel, take on the responsibility that they will not only provide financial upkeep for the time that the pastor is engaged in his/her vocation at that location but also will themselves make the important

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effort to separate out their own political opinion from that of the Gospel.

It is important to remember that we within the ELCA are first of all grounded people in terms of the way we interpret Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. We are not a church founded by Martin Luther as much as we are people who share a history with those who subscribe to both Scripture and the Augsburg Confession; and that is how we interpret the Gospel accordingly so.

The diverse opinion within the ELCA is a mark that we can exist as a people under a big tent because we understand that our confessional documents have priority over our politically propelled governing documents. It is apparent when we see how both our wider ELCA constitution is designed as well as each individual congregation's constitution which reflects that as well.

The ELCA is a public church and when we gather to hear the Gospel on Sunday morning it is in a public building open to anyone and everyone. If we make an attempt to try and preserve an atmosphere in which political or even theological opinion takes precedence over the Gospel, it will split groups and cause others to be wary of one another. It also will reflect on whether we are welcoming or not.

I continue to try and make this important distinction in my own ministry. Sometimes I fail. But I ask that others along with me keep attempting to make the important distinctions that we must make in our modern world, a world that ascribes much weight to how we express ourselves publicly.

At the present time, the important message that God in Christ has already reconciled the world to himself through his Son's death and resurrection, should be high on our radars. And certainly much of our repentance should be about leaving our political and theological opinion at the door to the entrance of the public location where we not only confess our sin but receive God's forgiveness.

May all of us come to a deeper understanding to the purpose of the church as a public space and may we continue to practice repentance within our own hearts as we hear God's forgiveness in Jesus Christ all of which is for you.

The Rev. George T. Rahn, pastor/evangelist  
Lutheran Parish of Western Kansas

As some of you know I participate with a group of

fellow alumni and faculty of the former Christ Seminary-Seminex, St. Louis called Crossings. I participate because I believe this group is at the cutting edge in terms of how God's mission can be furthered in not only our local contexts but in the wider context of the United States. The Crossings community is devoted to sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ within various venues. In fact, one of its main concerns is appropriately regarding the context that one participates so that a fresh preaching of the Good News can be heard. To know the context and to be able to state it well is 50% of the job. The other half has to do with actually preaching the saving message. St. Paul is our mentor in this as we see him at work particularly in Acts 17:16-34.

Many if not most of our contexts in which this Good News enters are situations of conflict, indifference or unbelief. The Gospel indeed says that God has already reconciled the world and that reconciliation needs to come before folks' consciences daily indeed perhaps hourly. Unfortunately, that is too much to ask for in our busy and time-consuming world. That is why the Church is there to make time and place so that people can gather to hear the Gospel and receive the sacraments, if they so choose.

The Rev. John Roth, a fellow member of the Crossings community, was just elected bishop of our neighboring synod, the Central/Southern Illinois Synod (ELCA). Many of us over time have discovered that the Church indeed our little section of the Church, that of the ELCA, has entered a period in which public discussion of some hot-button issues have polarized people within these groups. Bp. Roth gives us some pointers on how to go about respectful discussion around potentially divisive agenda. I think the attached (next page) is fruitful for our eyes and hearts as we ponder what it means to be an institution with varying social and political agenda but also at the same time confess one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism ala Ephesians 4:5.

For more information see [www.crossings.org](http://www.crossings.org).

God's blessings to you this new year! Pr Tim

## **Thursday Theology #708**

**January 5, 2012**

**Topic: How to Disagree Well**

Colleagues,

Christians are a contentious lot. They always have been. Flip open the New Testament to just about Area One Contacts:

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anywhere, then ask yourself whether the passage you're staring at would have been written had the people it was addressed to not been at each other's throats over some kind of issue, whether great or small. Chances are very good that your answer would be "no."

That's my theory, at any rate. Were I to look for a colleague to discuss it with, I can't think of a better partner for that conversation than the Rev. Dr. S. John Roth, a New Testament PhD who has been an active participant in the Crossings Community for the past several years. A few of you who are reading this attended Christ Seminary-Seminex with him in the late 1970s. More of you will remember his father, Pr. Sam Roth of Zion Lutheran Church, Ferguson, Missouri, who, in that same stretch of years, was the president and key spokesman for the protest movement of Missouri Synod moderates known as Evangelical Lutherans in Mission, or ELIM for short. Still others of you may have met John at one of the recent Crossings conferences, and if that meeting included a conversation of any substance at all, you'll have walked away from it edified and refreshed.

Late last spring John was elected bishop of the ELCA's Central/Southern Illinois Synod. The key reason for that, I'm guessing, is the informal leadership he had exhibited as a rostered pastor of the synod (Faith, Jacksonville, IL) in addressing the ELCA's great contention of the past decade, namely the question of whether it's fitting and appropriate for the Church to sanction life-long same-sex unions and to receive persons so partnered into the Church's official ministries. Anyone involved in that knows how easily contenders have lapsed into the age-old sinners' habit of using arguments like trenching tools to establish fixed positions from which epithets get hurled at the incorrigibles on the other side to the edification of no one and the dismay of many, not least of whom will be Christ our Lord. From some email swaps around the time of the 2001 Minneapolis assembly I gathered that John was trying to tackle that habit in his local conference and wherever else people might lend him an ear. When he was kind enough to send me a copy of the speech he gave in the course of last year's election, I saw that he tackled the habit there too-and I wasn't surprised that the saints chose him as their bishop.

I asked John if we could share that little speech with our Thursday Theology readers, folks who think hard and well and clearly, and, like any group of thinkers, will arrive at an assortment of conclusions on hot-button issues. He said yes, so here it is. A caveat as you read. In

keeping with standard operating procedure at ELCA elections for bishop, John was given five minutes to speak, not a second more. Five minutes is enough to make a point. It's by no means enough to elucidate it to the satisfaction of the thoughtful. But if the point itself deserves hearing-the Church's entire history suggests that it does-then let the thoughtful hear and receive with thanksgiving, as I pray all of you will do. It would be nice indeed were John able and willing at some point to write more for us on this topic. We'll ask. In the meantime Steve Albertin of our editorial team is putting together some further thoughts of his own on the same matter. Look for them in about a month or so.

A reminder to all, by the way, that we welcome responses to this or any other item in Thursday Theology, always hoping that what you read here will foment a conversation.

Peace and Joy,  
Jerry Burce, for the editorial team.

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I grew up in the St. Louis area. My home church was Zion, Ferguson. (Ferguson is a near north-side suburb.) My father was the pastor at Zion all through my growing-up years. I grew up determined not to be a pastor, and started college as a math and business major. But it didn't turn out that way. I changed colleges, and went to seminary. One of earliest and best lessons I learned about ministry was taught to me by my home congregation. I was ordained at my home church, and right after the service ended I was standing in the fairly large entry room just off the sanctuary. Willard Hammerson, one of the many adults of the congregation who in a sense helped raise me, came bounding out of the sanctuary and over to me, he was smiling from ear to ear and his face was beaming, and he said, "Well, John, we did it." "We did it," he said. Mr. Hammerson was right-absolutely right. It wasn't my day; it was the whole congregation's day. It hit me like a ton of bricks that it wasn't me that got me to that point; it was everybody that got me to that point, and going forward it would not be "my" ministry; it would be "our" ministry.

My home church and I were among those who left the LCMS and joined the AELC in the 1970s (the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches). As right about the gospel as I believe we were back then, I have to say that neither we who left the LCMS nor those who stayed in the LCMS learned how to disagree well. And the fracturing continues. That experience substantially shapes my perspective on church conflict now.

We all came together into the ELCA for good reason: we were joyfully united by our trust that we sinners are reconciled to God and to one another by God's grace through Christ Jesus-a gift, purely a gift.

What will our synod look like 5 or 10 years from now? I don't know. But my experience suggests that the look of our future hinges greatly on the extent to which we are able to disagree well. It seems to me that disagreeing well has at least three characteristics.

1) Fairness. I am disagreeing well when I can state the position of the person I am disputing with accurately enough that that other person recognizes that position as genuinely his/her position.

2) Intellectual integrity. I am disagreeing well when I can state the strongest, most compelling argument against my position. In other words, I am disagreeing well when I can recognize and acknowledge where my own position is most vulnerable and where a contrasting position makes valid points.

3) Honest humility. I am disagreeing well when, after thinking through my position and expressing it with true conviction, I acknowledge that as a fallen, flawed human being I myself may be wrong.

Potentially divisive issues will always come up in the church. Unless we learn how to disagree well, we will all end up losing-we who stay in the ELCA and those who leave to LCMC or NALC or wherever. And I think this holds true not only for synods and church bodies, but also within congregations.

My goal always is that we be, as the apostle Paul said, "of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind" (Philippians 2:2). But I would contend that, as sinners dependent upon God's grace, we enjoy this full accord where, among other things, we are skilled in the art of disagreeing well.

Hope is strong. God has reconciled us-all of us-to God's self through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:19)-not my ministry of reconciliation, our ministry of reconciliation.

If you call me, I would do everything I can to equip the saints for the work of this ministry-our ministry-for the building up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:12).

<http://www.crossings.org/thursday/2012/thur010512.shtml>

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