

May 11, 2009

Dear Friends in Christ:

One of the highlights of our upcoming synod assembly is the installation of our new staff during the Festival Eucharist on Friday night. I look forward to seeing many of you there as well as during the assembly itself. While the announcement came out some time ago, I thought it worthwhile to give a bit more of an introduction to these people and invite you to greet them personally at synod assembly.

Early in 2009, **Ms. Sarah Gioe** became our Director of Communication and Interpretation. Sarah has been on the staff, working in the area of mission interpretation, but this newly-created position blends that role and the communications role previously outsourced into a full-time position on the staff. Sarah has already proven a great asset in helping to improve communication, updating our website, and bringing me technologically into the 21st century.

In early January, we welcomed **Ms. Kathleen Schmidt** to the new position of Assistant to the Bishop for Finance and Administration. Kathy has been instrumental in helping to make our financial situation transparent, working closely with our treasurer and our Financial Management Committee. In addition to supervising the yearly audit, Kathy has worked hard in preparing our budgets and overseeing the daily operations of the office. Her mantra is: "If the bishop can understand this, anybody can."

At the most recent Synod Council meeting, we elected to call **Pr. Kathleen Koran**, currently serving Trinity, Brewster, to be Assistant to the Bishop for Congregations. Pr. Koran has been involved in a great variety of ministry settings as a layperson, an associate in ministry (AiM), and a pastor. She has been part of our synod's Bridgebuilders program and will help us focus on developing healthy congregations. In collaboration with our conference deans, Pr. Koran will facilitate the mobility processes for our rostered leaders.

Many of you know **Pr. Gary Mills** who moves into a newly-created position as Assistant to the Bishop for Global and Multicultural Mission. Pr. Mills has been very active in our international work, including our companion synod programs and our ministry with international churches on the territory of our synod. He will bring together "tables" of rostered and lay leaders from our various ethnic ministry groups to help us better serve and, more importantly, learn from the richly diverse people of this synod. In addition we will be exploring involvement on behalf of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America with international agencies.

Our Synod Council also extended a call to **Pr. Jonathan Linman** to be Assistant to the Bishop for Formation, a position which is, as far as I know, unique to our synod. Pr. Linman has been Director of the Center for Christian Spirituality and Associate Professor of Ascetical Theology at The General Theological Seminary of the Episcopal Church here in New York City. He has also served the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in a variety of positions, including membership on the candidacy committee of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod and the ELCA Church Council. "Formation" is an old word which many are trying to re-capture, recognizing that growth in faith is much larger than education. In this ministry Pr. Linman will be working with people of every age, including the Children, Youth and Family Committee and candidates for rostered ministry. He will also facilitate spiritual direction for those desiring it, help provide continuing education opportunities, and serve as the staff's theologian-in-residence.

The ELCA's Division for Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission now headed by former bishop, Stephen Bouman, has extended a call to **Pr. Jack Horner**. Pr. Horner will serve as Assistant to the Bishop for Evangelical Mission, primarily responsible for outreach and stewardship in its various forms on the territory of the synod. He will work with those congregations receiving financial support from the ELCA and from our own synod. Pr. Horner is very involved as a leader in our Mission Think Tank process. He has been serving at Resurrection, Mt. Kisco for 10 years.

I rejoice in the many gifts these servants bring to our work together and I look forward to serving with them. But I must also say I am sorry that the multicultural character of this synod is not adequately reflected in our executive staff. The simple fact is, though I specifically invited many people to apply for these positions, only three of the 28 applications received from around the country and even overseas

were from people of color or people whose primary language is other than English. This is troubling, to say the least. So I have asked our staff to give attention to the need for leadership development among *all* our people.

As mentioned above, Ms. Gioe and Ms. Schmidt have already begun serving and likewise Pr. Mills has simply continued from his interim position on staff. Pr. Horner will begin serving on June 16, "hitting the ground running" at an orientation meeting at the ELCA churchwide offices. Pr. Koran and Pr. Linman will begin officially on July 1, 2009. And there will be great rejoicing!

I have heard significant affirmation from many members of this synod at these choices. I hope you will express that affirmation to these servants of the church when we gather in assembly. Again, I look forward to being with you soon and sharing your enthusiasm for doing God's work with our hands!

Sincerely in Christ,

The Reverend Robert Alan Rimbo
Bishop