

- We put a moratorium on purchasing equipment, cutting that expense.
- We put off the purchase of a second car for staff use.
- Carpooling to meetings is standard procedure. To further cut travel expenses, we routinely evaluate the need for meetings and/or the necessity to travel to meetings.
- Thermostats in the office are turned down - heating will be closely monitored this winter.
- Purchase of office supplies is limited to direct conscientious need.
- One staff member reduced salary and hours by 20% for the last three months of the synod's fiscal year.

As your bishop, I am convening people from around the synod to examine our synod's budget, our staffing needs, our programming, etc., to determine ways we can be pro-active as we look ahead to 2010 and beyond.

***In closing, I commend you for your support thus far, but I boldly appeal to you as well.*** I ask you as individuals and as congregations, to faithfully find ways that make it possible to fully fund our Ministry Partners. Make every effort to reach your congregation's mission support commitment to our synod. For those who can, I ask you to give beyond your commitment - to go the extra mile. Sometimes those who can, make up for those who can't. This is what it means to be the body of Christ. I welcome your prayers, insights and actions for the sake of God's mission through our continued partnership.

### ***Encouragement to be generous***

*"We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints - and this, not merely as we expected; they gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us."*

St. Paul, 2 Corinthians 8: 1-5

Together in Christ,



† Bishop Thomas M. Aitken  
Northeastern Minnesota Synod, ELCA

a pastoral letter from

## **Bishop Thomas M. Aitken**

Northeastern Minnesota Synod, ELCA

1105 E. Superior Street, Duluth, MN 55802

November 2009



### ***Let me begin with thanks***

Thank you, Christian, for your partnership. Thank you for the financial support you provide to do shared ministry. Thank you for your prayers.

*"And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving except you only; for even in Thessalonica you sent me money for my needs once and again. ...I have received full payment, and more; I am filled, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen."*

St. Paul, Philippians 4:14ff

### ***The stark reality***

Congregational mission support to our synod is **\$173,451 behind** the intent amount (dollars pledged to the synod by congregations). For the first time in the history of our synod, payments to our Ministry Partners have been delayed due to a lack of funds. The difficult question, "Which commitments to our Ministry Partners must we reduce?" has entered our conversations. In the last *Synod Reflections*, I wrote about the national economic downturn and the impact it has had on many of us. I concluded that we can and should appeal to each other and hold fast to the power of the Risen Christ and the Holy Spirit to meet the challenges facing us. The reality of our current shortfall is that there may be a deep impact to real people who do ministry on our behalf. I've shared a few examples on the following page.

<u>Ministry Partner</u>	<u>Budgeted Commitment</u>	<u>Paid</u>	<u>Remaining Balance</u>
Luther Seminary	\$68,000	\$43,289	\$24,720
Lutheran Campus Ministry	\$60,000	\$38,200	\$21,800
MN Council of Churches	\$5,000	\$3,184	\$1,816
Twin Ports Ministry to Seafarers	\$6,000	\$3,820	\$2,180
Lutheran Coalition for Public Policy in MN	\$4,500	\$2,864	\$1,636

***I think of our Ministry Partners in very personal ways***

- Soon after moving to Duluth, I got a close look at what the **Twin Ports Ministry to Seafarers** is all about. I was moved by the Spirit's work to sailors through this ministry of food, shelter, clothing, transportation, assistance with communication, and of course, worship in the small, but beautiful chapel at the Seafarer's Center. I don't want this important ministry compromised due to lack of funding.
- I think of our Lutheran Campus Pastor at UMD, Doug Paulson, who also serves as Secretary of our synod. In my conversations with Doug, I've learned how the Holy Spirit is working through **Lutheran Campus Ministry**, not just at UMD, but on other campuses, to bring the gospel to students. Our support helps provide campus pastors who listen to problems, joys, concerns and fears in light of Jesus Christ, our Lord. I don't want this ministry to lose one cent! The impact Lutheran Campus Ministry makes on students eager to grow in faith is essential.
- I'm reminded of the visits I have with students studying at **Luther Seminary** in St. Paul. At the end of conversations, I have a renewed sense of Christ working in and through these people who believe they are following God's call to serve the church. I'm thankful our synod makes supporting Luther Seminary a top priority. I want to keep it that way.

- On September 26, our synod's Hunger, Justice, Rural Life Concerns Committee, together with the **Lutheran Coalition for Public Policy in MN (LCPPM)**, sponsored a well attended hunger educational event in Cloquet. That event opened the eyes of each participant to the needs of the poor around us. I want LCPPM to continue its courageous, Biblical work in Minnesota with the financial support we pledged.

***Our churchwide partnership***

I shudder to think that the good work of any one of our wider church ministries could be hampered, but the reality of less mission support from congregations may also mean a cut in our synod's giving to the ELCA.

For several years, 49% of congregational mission support has been shared with the churchwide expression of our church. Among so many things, our financial support helps fund 240 missionaries and new congregations like our synod's mission starts in Baxter, Rejoice Lutheran Church, and in Duluth, Waters of Life Lutheran Church. The churchwide expression responds to ministry opportunities here and around the world.

As I write this, the TV is blaring news of the shooting rampage at Fort Hood in TX, where my daughter lives with her husband, who just returned after serving in Iraq. With a potential decrease in funding, I wonder how the ELCA's chaplaincy ministry, which my son-in-law and many others have benefited from, will be affected.

The ELCA's long standing commitment to ending world hunger and eradicating HIV/AIDS demonstrates the love of Christ in down-to-earth, tangible ways. We all recognize the integrity of these ministries and I'm certain we don't want this work diminished.

***Together we do God's work in ways that no individual, congregation or synod can do alone.***

***Your synod staff, is taking the shortfall seriously and responsibly.***

Here are examples of what we're doing:

- The July issue of the bi-monthly *Synod Reflections* (newsletter) and the bi-monthly publication, *Between Reflections*, have been eliminated, cutting supply, printing, and postage expenses. The November issue of *Synod Reflections* was printed "in house" rather than sending it to a printer. We are increasing the use of online communication. The synod's web site is revamped; we encourage greater use of this communication tool.