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I-K Lutheran

Where mission meets the road



From Bishop Bill Gafkjen

Dear Companions in Mission,

The movie, "Groundhog Day" stars Bill Murray as an ill-tempered TV weatherman unhappy about having to cover, yet again, the annual emergence of the renowned groundhog, Punxatawney Phil from his den. While in Punxatawney, Murray's character (also named Phil) gets caught in a time loop in which he repeats February 2 over and over and over again. Every duplication of the day is announced by his alarm going off at 6:00 a.m. with Sonny and Cher singing "I Got You, Babe." Throughout the movie Phil travels from shock and dismay, into self-centered manipulation of the experience (and of others), through bored endurance, and, finally, into embrace of the transformation offered by seemingly endless reprisals of the day.



Bishop William O. Gafkjen

Sometimes moving through the church year (even weekly liturgies) over and over and over again can be something like Phil's experience with Groundhog Day: Shock and dismay...self-centered manipulation...bored endurance...

Yet again, the alarm plays "I Got You, Babe" and Ash Wednesday approaches with its annual ashen imposition of mortality's shadow. Yet again, we're invited to engage six weeks worth of Lenten discipline (how many times do I have to give up chocolate, anyway?). Over and over and over we sing those dreary hymns, wonder whether Sundays are included in the fast, hear the stories of suffering and loss, worry our congregation will do a foot washing...

It's pretty natural for repetition to trigger everything from dismay to self-centeredness to boredom, even with something like the church year. Yet, repetition also carries promise when it's rooted in the presence and promises of God. Hearing the stories again and again, engaging the ritualized behaviors over and over, walking the same path with Jesus and other members of his body time after time...all these and more can draw us through repetitious rehearsal into new life, transformation, and deeper engagement in God's mission of healing and hope in the world.

Wartburg Seminary professor Craig Nesson puts it this way: What we ritualize by means of the historic Christian liturgy is nothing other than the kingdom of God proclaimed and embodied in the person of Jesus...Worship affords the occasion to rehearse the role of one's true self, a citizen of God's kingdom [Beyond Maintenance to Mission, p. 37].

Blessed (and transforming) repetition be yours this holy season and always!

Bishop Bill Gafkjen

*Empowering, Equipping and Encouraging the
People of God to make Christ Known*

Around the I-K Synod: *Living into the Future Together*

As part of LIFT (Living into the Future Together), the 2011 Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA voted to “make support for the work of congregations one of the highest priorities of this church and requested congregations, in collaboration with synods, to begin, develop, review or redefine their unique mission plans by the end of 2012.”

Developing a plan for mission leads us to seek God’s will, helps us to define who we are and where we are going, and provides an occasion to consider these questions: *What is God up to? Where have we seen God at work in our congregation and community? What are we doing? Why are we doing it? What are we hoping to see?*

Review your current mission strategy: *Is your plan still appropriate for the current ministry? Are there changes to be made to include new ministries? What are current missional goals and are they reflected in the mission plan? How is this strategy leading your congregation into the future and challenging it to grow spiritually? Does this plan encourage your congregation to go beyond the walls of the church building in order to engage in ministry in its community context?*

Congregations within your conference who have already engaged in this process can be a resource. Although each congregation and its ministry setting is unique, one process can be tweaked to be useful in a different ministry context. Also, the Center for Congregations offers workshops for mission planning. Visit www.centerforcongregations.org to learn about these. The I-K Synod Web site will also include processes to help congregations develop mission plans and strategies.

If your congregation has recently engaged in a process to develop a congregational mission plan/strategy, please share it so that it can serve as a resource to others. 2012 holds opportunities for your congregation to deepen its relationship with God. As we embark on a new year, may we each capture a *New Vision for a New Day* as we listen deeply, think creatively, and act boldly. Share your thoughts and ideas with Pr. Nancy Nyland at nnyland@iksynod.org

About Your Synod: *Initiative Helps Decline in Malaria Deaths*

Baltimore, January 13, 2012 The World Health Organization recently released its World Malaria Report 2011, showing that the concerted global effort in recent years to combat malaria, including campaigns like the Lutheran Malaria Initiative (LMI), means that a third fewer people in Africa are dying of malaria now than in 2000.

“This is incredible progress,” said John Nunes, president and CEO of Lutheran World Relief. “When we started the LMI campaign, a child was dying of malaria every 30 seconds. Then we learned that rate had dropped to one child every 45 seconds. These new figures mean that a child in sub-Saharan Africa now dies every 60 seconds. That is still too many children dying from a disease that is completely preventable and treatable, but the remarkable progress in such a short period of time shows me that, working together, we really can end malaria deaths by 2015.”

From Pr. Paul Meier, Chair of the I-K Synod Malaria Campaign: ***Please encourage your individual churches to find individuals/youth groups to head up a fund raising campaign prior to the I-K Synod Assembly in June so we can share the positive results of energetic efforts to help our neighbors through this national campaign to eradicate malaria. Thanks!*** Contact Pr. Meier at lakepastor@gmail.com

2012 I-K Synod Events & Opportunities

Annual Report Cover Available

Bring a spiritual and missional message to your congregational annual meeting with the new 2012 Annual Report Cover

Order online at http://resources.elca.org/Congregational_Life-Annual_Report_Cover_2012.html

This resource comes bundled in packs of 50.
Price: \$ 5.50 / PKG/50; Handling Fee: \$ 1.00



Links to Bible Studies

On the Book of Faith Web site you can find list of 17 wonderful quick Bible studies you can use as meeting openers, small group openers, or for other activities in your home, church or community.

See the list at www.bookoffaith.org/bibleresources.html