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*Every person a missionary...  
Every rostered leader a mission director...  
Every ministry site a mission center...*

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Looking back over the last year I am overwhelmed with a sense of gratitude to God and to the people with whom I am privileged to share this amazing journey toward our shared missional vision.

I give thanks for the fifteen members of the synod's Candidacy Committee, and its chair, Pastor Steve Wood, who give extraordinary amounts of time to interviews with and meetings on behalf of folks discerning calls to public ministry in the ELCA. God continues to raise up people to lead the church as commissioned, consecrated and ordained ministers – applications to candidacy steadily increased through the year. I am grateful for folks with the gift of discernment who accompany these applicants and candidates on the journey toward providing the church with faithful, wise, and courageous missional leadership for these challenging and exciting times.

Over the last couple of years the synod's Campus Ministry Committee has had to make some very difficult decisions in support of the five full-time campus ministries for which this synod has responsibility. Pastor Mitch Phillips, the chair, and representatives from each of the campus ministries as well as at-large committee members have engaged various challenges humbly, energetically, and prayerfully. I am grateful that they have found ways to not only sustain these crucial ministries, but to encourage their continued growth and vitality as mission centers. One example is the new covenant this synod has entered into with the Episcopal Diocese of Indianapolis to redefine the campus ministries at Butler/IUPUI and Ball State as shared Lutheran-Episcopal ministries in creative ways.

During this Assembly you will see Jan Philpy, chair of the Synod Assembly Planning Team, as well as the half dozen other members of that team scurrying about to make sure everything goes well during our time together. Much of their hard work is behind the scenes, but I am grateful that what they do makes the Synod Assembly, year after year, a powerful experience of being the people of God gathered and sent as missionaries.

About a dozen people, led by chair Jean Eisen, steward our companionship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile and District V of the Huria Kristen Batak Protestan Church in Indonesia. Thanks to their deep commitment to accompanying these global churches, we are able to both bless and be blessed by sisters and brothers in two very different parts of the world who, like us, seek to be faithful missionaries in their contexts.

Working with the ELCA's stated priority to step forward as a public church, our synod's Church in Society Committee, led by its chair, Pastor Cindy Geisen, has worked to find ways empower congregations and their members to engage social concerns around the country and in our own communities in the name of the crucified and risen Christ. I

am grateful for the amazing energy, careful listening and clear focus that lead this committee to empower, equip, and encourage congregations to be involved in community organizing and related justice-seeking activities in their locales. I am also grateful for the hard work that Walda Helvie, chair of the synod's World Hunger Team, and the members of that team give to lifting up the ELCA's World Hunger Appeal in ways that encourage us all to walk the world with compassion and mercy.

Day after day, month after month, I give also thanks for the many other folks, lay and rostered, that I run into around the synod and with whom I walk toward the light of our shared vision. I am also grateful for my colleagues on synod staff, especially my amazingly able administrative assistant, April Lynch, and for churchwide staff like Marilyn Smith (Region 6 deployed staff) and Marcus Pera (Campus Ministry deployed staff), who make the journey toward the vision fun, meaningful and fruitful.

For the first time in my life, including more than twenty years of ministry as a pastor of the church, I embarked on a sabbatical leave for the third quarter of 2008. I am grateful to the leadership and members of this synod for giving me this opportunity. I am also deeply grateful to the many folks (including those mentioned above) who kept various aspects of the synod's ministry with which I am involved running smoothly and moving forward while I was out of the saddle.

I didn't do any exotic travel during the sabbatical leave. I didn't spend endless hours in libraries doing research or writing articles or books. I did not even participate in any formal continuing education or work on specific skills that are used in synodical ministry. I produced almost nothing.

— Mostly, I rested. I read a bunch of books on a variety of topics and in various genres. I sat in my big red comfy chair and prayed. I spent precious time with my family, immediate and extended. I played guitar and ukulele. I slept. I started a blog, joined Facebook, and did some writing.

In other words, I kept Sabbath, an extended Sabbath. In doing so, I realized how absent intentional Sabbath-keeping – the regular rhythm of hard work and deep rest, giving and receiving, grabbing hold and letting go – has been in my own personal and professional life. I also began to see how sustaining and empowering Sabbath-keeping has been at crucial times in the history of the people of God, how it can be so for me, and how unfortunately counter-cultural Sabbath-keeping is in our life together as church.

Some significant challenges face us on road ahead. The economy raises questions about funding the ministries of every expression of the church, including your congregation and this synod. The ways we handle various disagreements about what it means to participate in God's mission as the body of Christ threaten to undo us. Confusion about how to be church in a changing world just about paralyzes us.

As we move together toward deeper embodiment of the vision we share, may God grant that we will do so in ways that deepen our relationship with God, with each other, and with all creation. May we help each other to find the holy rhythm of hard work and deep rest, giving and receiving, grabbing hold and letting go, being gathered and being sent, that will move us to deep gratitude and bring us ever closer to every person a missionary, every rostered leader a mission director and every ministry site a mission center.

Thanks be to God!

*Pastor Bill Gafkjen, Assistant to the Bishop*