

NOTES & QUOTES

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JANUARY 2007

JOY!

Bishop Thomas A. Skrenes

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It was a tough meeting in a drafty basement. After driving two hours in a snowstorm, I was listening to a litany of struggles, problems and issues. Some of the problems included: "There was not enough money. The congregational president was bad-mouthing the congregation in public. Nobody is willing to maintain the parsonage. The pastor was never in the office. The Sunday School teachers were never in worship. The young parents were not leaders. The committees never met." And so it went for ninety minutes. Lots of moans and groans!

And then, in the quiet of my mind, God asked me a question. "What brings you joy?" So I shared this "word of the Lord" with the fourteen folks gathered around the basement tables. "What brings you joy?" Silence. I asked the question again. "What brings you joy?" One lady said, "Oh that is easy, my grandchildren when they come to my house after school." The congregational president laughed by saying "the end of my term as president at the annual meeting." No one laughed. Another man said, "Time with my son-in-law." The youngest woman in the room commented, "I am joyful when our pastor preaches a good sermon." The treasurer said, "Oh, the music in church. That is joy! Wasn't it wonderful on Christmas Eve? And the offering that night was pretty good, too." Now everyone did laugh.

For the next fifteen minutes we shared our joys. And then I drove home. Yes, this congregation council and I will meet again. The issues of participation and finances and leadership will all be there on the table when we gather in January or February. We will have our disagreements. Struggles and anxiety will abound. Yet, even in rough spots or in difficult moments, we dare not lose sight of the reason that we gather in church buildings. We care about our parishes and each other. We love God and God's people. We are the body of Christ and individually members of it. There is joy deep down in our bones. The Word has become flesh and God dwells among us. The light of Jesus shines in the darkness.

What brings you joy?



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THOMAS A. SKRENES, BISHOP (CONTINUED)

500 PEOPLE ATTEND NEW HYMNAL WORKSHOPS



We had full churches as 500 synod members spent a day hearing the hymns and the liturgy in the new hymnal *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. And the singing was terrific! Thank you people of Mission United in Pelkie, Bethany in Escanaba, Messiah in Marquette, and Pioneer Lake in Conover for your hospitality and for providing lunch. Thanks also to our training leaders: Judy Mattson, Pastor Peter Vorhes, Kathy Strazzinski, Dave Dagenais, Melissa Williams, and Pastor Katherine Finegan.

These were positive, excellent events with all participants going home with a new hymnal and new melodies on their lips! We understand that several dozen of our congregations have already placed their parish orders for hymnals. Bethany in Ishpeming is the first congregation in the synod with the new *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* in the pew racks.

FINANCIALLY SPEAKING

***“This is
the time to
expand our
ministries
and not to
cut back.”***

A strong January will be needed by your synod to attain our agreed upon budget. The synod’s fiscal year ends in January, and we have a history in this synod of strongly supporting our churchwide work and in maintaining our partnership with the seminaries, campus ministry and other important programs. As you can see from the information detailed below, we have had “flat” income years recently.

Unrestricted Income received Year Ending January 31	
	2002 - \$1,028,060
	2003 - \$1,026,399
	2004 - \$1,055,127
	2005 - \$1,012,008
	2006 - \$1,023,347
	2007 - ?

This is the time to expand our ministries and not to cut back. With normal inflation, we are squeezed seriously if income does not rise 3% a year. New efforts cannot begin without increased funding. What can you do in your congregation to make the work of the synod and the Churchwide ELCA a priority?

THOMAS A. SKRENES, BISHOP (CONTINUED)

STEWARDSHIP OF LIFE

FROM “*WE THANK GOD REFLECTION*” by Wendy Black, our Synod Youth Coordinator. Wendy and her spouse, Butch, are members of Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church in Rhinelander, Wisconsin.

“Read I Thessalonians 1:1-10

When Paul visited the city of Thessalonica (in Macedonia, which is now northern Greece), many people became Christians. There was lots of excitement and enthusiasm, but then Paul had to leave, and the new Christians were left without their leader in their city that was hostile to Christians. Could they stick to their new faith? Would their faith keep growing?

Take some time to discuss the following questions (for whole group, small groups, or one-on-one).

- Have you ever had a time when you felt really close to God? Maybe it was at Bible camp, at a retreat, or a youth event. What happened after you came home? Was it hard to stay as excited about God after awhile?
- What things can we do because of our faith? What work can we do because of our love? These things that we can do are ways we can thank God for loving us and saving us, and because we love Him, too.

Make a list of all the things you like to do. Then think about ways that you can serve God by doing those things, and think seriously about how you could make those things happen. Some ideas might be big plans (like holding a “game-a-thon” in your community by playing video games for pledges for world hunger, etc.). Some might be smaller plans like sending a card/letter/art work to someone, or teaching someone how to snowboard or skateboard. Don’t be afraid to ask for help from your pastor, your teacher, your youth director or your parents. Maybe your group would like to work together on a project. Get busy serving God!”

TRANSITIONS

+**Pastor Wally Leno** (Retired) had recent surgery in Marquette, and is now recovering at home. **Pastor David Jensen (Ascension, Minocqua)** was hospitalized in Marshfield for surgery, and has returned to his home for healing. God is the great healer!

+Our Christian sympathy to **Pastor Nancy Amacher (Messiah, Marquette)** on the death of her mother, Elsie Potocnik, in Withee, Wisconsin. We have also received word that a former pastor in our synod area, and a former President of Finlandia University (Suomi College), **Pastor Bernhard Hillila**, died recently in Valparaiso, Indiana. May God bless these families as they remember these lives of service and faith.

+Congratulations to **Seminarian Daniel Durbin (First, Gladstone)** on receiving a scholarship from the ELCA Fund for Leaders. Seminarian Durbin is a first year student at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago.

+Our Christian sympathy to the family of **Robert L. Gordon**, a **retired pastor** from the Eastern Washington/Idaho

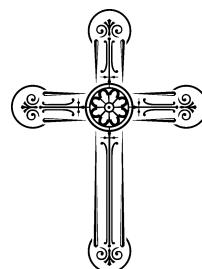
Synod who was buried from Prince of Peace in Harvey on Saturday, December 9. **Pastor Rell Spickerman** and **Bishop Skrenes** conducted the service.

+Congratulations to **Pastor Eric Ackerman (Fortune Lake Camp Director)** who has accepted a Call to become Pastor at Hope Lutheran Church in San Mateo, California. Pastor Ackerman has served as Fortune Lake's Executive Director since 1995. We give thanks to God for the excellent ministry that Pastor Eric has brought to camping and outdoor ministry in our Synod, and we wish him God's speed as he takes up new responsibilities in this parish in California.

+Our Christian sympathy to **Pastor Dorothy Lindstrom (Shepherd of the Lakes, Sayner)** on the death of her mother, Viola Schmidt. She lives in Christ!

Bishop Thomas A. Skrenes

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World Missionary Support

Trinity, Rhinelander
Bethel, Ishpeming
Trinity, Stambaugh

Tanzania

Trinity, Rhinelander
Faith, White Pine
SWO

Lutheran World Relief

Our Redeemer, Newberry
All Saints, Wakefield
Zion, Manistique
Calvary, Rapid River
First, Iron Mountain

ELCA Disaster Fund

Our Redeemer, Newberry
Bethany, Escanaba

Seminarian Support

Bethany, Escanaba
Calvary, Minocqua
First, Iron Mountain

Lutheran Campus Ministry

Trinity, Brevort
Bethany, Amasa
Grace, Gwinn
Emanuel, Skandia

Kisarawe

Trinity, Brevort

Tanzanian Choir

Trinity, Brevort
Holy Trinity, Chassell
Zion, St. Ignace

Lay School for Mission

Trinity, Rapid River

Endowment Fund

Rev. LaVonne & George Stephenson
Lowell Holmgren Estate
Peter & Trudy Johnson
Bishop & Luanne Skrenes
John & Pauline Kiltinen

+ From the Assistant to the Bishop +
Pastor Jennifer Johnson Wrege

Thou shalt not....

....is there any grace in the word "No"?

My grandsons would emphatically respond, "NO! There is nothing good about the word 'no!'" I suppose they hear "no" often and from the many folks who take care of them and shepherd them through any given day – their mom, teachers, aides, cub scout leaders, swimming lesson instructors, family, friends, and many others. I know they hear it from me. In fact, it feels like I have been saying "no" a lot more than usual, and not just to grandsons Blake and Brandon.

I said "no" to countless gift requests from kids and grandkids at Christmas. *(Some requests are just too expensive, extravagant, or may even be harmful.)*

I said "no" to many requests for a financial gift from non-profit agencies that arrived in the mail the weeks before Christmas. *(No deep pockets here, have to pick and choose.)*

I said "no" to several recent invitations to preach. *(prior commitments)*

I said "no" when the person who cut my hair last asked if I liked it. *(cringe)*

I said "no" when one of my adult special needs sons asked to come and visit for Christmas. *(Though it's tough, other responsibilities he had took priority. We came up with an alternative.)*

I said "no" when a recent conversation implied that I ought to compromise my values and beliefs. *(painful)*

I said "no" when a friend asked me to "stretch the truth" for her. *(I'm wondering if our friendship will survive.)*

I said "no" to pie and cake and Christmas cookies, Big Macs, candy, extra helpings of mashed potatoes, and many other culinary delights. *(It would be only fair if I lost a pound for every time I said "no" to something like these taste filled treats. It's not fair!)*

Saying "no," I've learned, can often be more work – especially the inner work involving my heart, mind and soul. I've been reading Exodus for my daily devotions and am reminded that seven of the Ten Commandments begin with the big NO of

Thou shalt not. That's "no" to having other things function as god in my life, "no" to adultery, "no" to stealing, "no" to lying, "no" to envy and jealousy. Back in my seminary classes on the confessions I learned that hidden and attached to the law and "no's" in the commandments were promises and God's grace. I have even seen and experienced this.

But, I am like my seven year old twin grandsons. I don't like to be told NO! I tend to respond much better to YES, even when like Blake insisting he can fix the computer, I don't have a clue of what I am talking about. Yet, I know that part of how God is at work in me is to say "no" sometimes. NO to my wandering away. NO to my crazy self-dependency that seeks to exclude God and the faith community. NO to my self-indulgent appetites. NO to being stuck in sin. NO to living in darkness. NO to being unforgiven. NO to being unknown and unloved.

*But you are a chosen race,
a royal priesthood, a holy nation,*

*God's own people, in order
that you may proclaim the mighty acts
of him who called you out
of darkness into his marvelous light.*

*Once you were not a people,
but now you are God's people; once you
had not received mercy,
but now you have received mercy.*

1 Peter 2:9-10

May the Epiphany light of Christ shine on every "yes" and "no" in you.



Blessings!

Pastoral Vacancies and Interim Pastors

Bethany, Escanaba - Pastor Peter Andersen

Grace, South Range - Pastor Jimalee Jones & Pastor Peter Gundersen

First, Dollar Bay - Pastor Jimalee Jones & Pastor Peter Gundersen

Trinity, Ishpeming - Pastor Warren Geier

Bethel, Ishpeming - Associate Pastor Vacancy

Prince of Peace, Marquette - Pastor Rell Spickerman

Trinity, Stambaugh & Bethany, Amasa - Pastor Doug Johnson

All Saints, Wakefield - Pastor John Kuziej

Central, Menominee - Pastor Ken Michaelis

Pioneer Lake, Conover - Pastor Dorothy Lindstrom

Bethany, Covington & Trinity, Trout Creek - Pastor Scott Williams

Holy Cross, Baraga & Zion, Skanee - Pastor Ted Koehl

Bethany, Norway

With one month remaining in the calendar year, we offer our deepest thanks to the many congregations who have so consistently and generously supported the mission of our synod through their benevolence gifts. November mission support giving was more than \$10,000 above November 2005, helping the synod to make up some ground in our calendar year totals. Yet, we remain 3.5% behind November last year's totals. As we remember God's greatest gift to us in this Advent Season, may we be moved to respond to such love with joy-filled and generous hearts.

Closing Dates

January 12 - Last day for checks to arrive in Synod Office so that 2006 benevolence gifts can be credited to Synod fiscal year.

February 14 - Last day for checks to arrive in Synod Office so that January 2007 giving can be credited to Synod fiscal year.

As of 11/30/06	2005	2006	\$ Change	% Change
Pledged Amount	1,059,791	1,033,577	-26,214	-2.5%
Amount Received	850,546	820,454	-30,092	-3.5%
Designated Gifts	212,216	149,863	-62,353	-29.4%



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ON-LINE DEVOTIONS FOR JANUARY 2007

www.prayfaithfully.org

Dec. 31-Jan. 6 / Pastor Jonathan Schmidt, First, Gladstone

Jan. 7-13 / Susan Anderson, Sharon, Bessemer

Jan. 14-20 / Pastor Barb Girod, Faith, Three Lakes

Jan. 21-27 / Connie Lorensen, First, Gladstone

Jan. 28-Feb. 3 / Pastor Jennifer Johnson Wrege, NGLS