

## NEW JERSEY SYNOD – A VISION FOR MISSION

We are in a very important time in our life and ministry together. The Lutheran Church on this territory has been in membership decline for over three decades. Many of our congregations have been aging in place with little serious attention to evangelical outreach. Over the solid foundation of the Gospel and its imperative to go into the world and preach, teach, and baptize, we seem to have created an infrastructure of constitutions and committees, buildings and endowments, traditionalism and traditions, and a lamenting-memory of what-didn't-work-when.

Christian witness in a Lutheran key has settled into an institutional complacency that has become all too comfortable and hardly missionary in its life. For this to change, we must change. This church must change. The world is constantly changing and at increasing speed. The church, like the mission of God, is for the sake of the world. The biggest single deterrent to our participation in God's mission (and consequently the biggest single contributor to this church's membership decline) is, I believe, our turning inward to preserve ourselves, instead of being turned outward to change and save lives.

When our Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson preached at the beginning of the Churchwide Assembly in Chicago, he called us to decide "whether we were going to be a *settled church* or a *sent church*;" a church lodged in its own stuff or a church leaping off of its gospel-foundation into the world. I think we know what it is that we want and need to be and do. When we see examples of the church leaping off its gospel foundation into mission in the world, the adrenaline begins to flow and the music of mission begins to sing in our hearts and minds and souls!

New Synod mission initiatives among Latinos, West Africans, and South Asians bring new excitement. New and emerging congregations in Flemington, Camden, Jackson Township, and along the Jersey City Waterfront bring new hope for growing the church. Long established churches engaged in servant trips and vital mission partnerships, youth and young adults engaged in serving and outreach, advocacy that makes a difference in the lives of those living in poverty, new immigrants and marginalized – our journey in God's mission is filled with grace upon grace!

We know what it is that we want and need to be and do! We can point to the evidence: the mission moment here, a renewed vision there, a few points of light everywhere hoping not to be quenched by rising fuel costs in the winter ... but then our *stuff* encroaches upon our best laid plans. But, God's light shines in darkness and the darkness has not overcome that light. We are the light, Christ's light for the sake of the world, called to change and save lives in the power of the Gospel. Can there be a more challenging or more fulfilling purpose to which to give our lives?

The challenge that we have before us is bigger than any program could solve. Our challenge is to change the culture of the church on this territory from settled to sent, from pre-disposed existence to reengaged missionary journey. Our aim is to strengthen the places where mission is truly engaged and to orient outward the places where we are struggling to be the church for the sake of the world.

Martin Marty once wrote that *culture is created by what leaders pay attention to*. If that is true, then together we can have some serious impact on our own church culture by paying attention to whether this church is settled or sent and by committing ourselves to a more intentional engagement in building this church. God's mission in New Jersey is on the move. To this end,

***We will challenge the imagination and strengthen the missionary behaviors of every congregation and ministry on the New Jersey Synod, stimulating the generous sharing of resources to expand mission engagement on this territory and to transform the mission culture of this church from settled to sent.***

+ Bishop E. Roy Riley, 2008