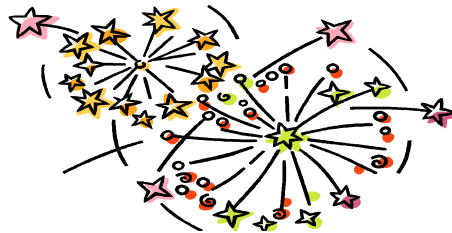




New Jersey Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

STEWARDSHIP SPARKLERS

SPRING 2009



STEWARDSHIP

- Strengthens Faith
- Enacts Justice
- Sustains the Planet

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Van-guard (văn'gärd), *noun*:

"The foremost or leading position in a trend or movement."

"Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you." (1 Peter 3:15). These are the words of encouragement shared by the Apostle Peter with the saints in exile. These words called early Christians away from fear and to claiming the faith-filled life that God had chosen for them. God continues to call us to life in the Spirit that changes fear into boldness, makes our slow responses nimble, and transforms us from distracted to a people who are purposeful in action and attitude. God's work. Our hands. The church vanguard responds to the missional challenges to do more with less in our homes, our congregations, our Synod by becoming: Bold ~ Nimble ~ Purposeful.

BOLD

There is great momentum in the New Jersey Synod and in our Congregations right now. New people are arriving at the doors of this church every week. Thousands of families have been served by our ministries of service, education, worship, and witness. We work so that our children thrive, our maturing saints live in dignity and justice prevails in our community. The gospel is preached. Lives are being saved. God is moving. Momentum for mission grows.

However, there is not momentum in the American economy. Jobs are being lost. Stocks are going down. Some who want to give more cannot because they have nothing to give. But some of us haven't lost our jobs. Some of us have limited our giving because of fear. This is not who God created us to be. Because of our faith in an abundant and loving God, we will be BOLD. A benchmark of this Church boldly believes that God has provided us with the resources needed to care for our household, neighbor, congregation, Synod, and Churchwide expression of this Church.

NIMBLE

The culture of fear will cause us to slow down even to the point of paralysis. The specter of scarcity, if not diffused by God's vision of abundance, will make us sluggish in ministry. Once we believed the large and affluent congregation was best equipped to passionately embrace mission challenges. But, like it or not, we are in the early stages of powerful, deep running and pervasive changes that will transform economics, culture and people's understanding of who they are and what they stand for. Rapidly decreasing costs of technology enable small congregations to operate as efficiently as larger ones. New models of staffing congregations are being explored, ministry models are diversifying. Nimble congregations are discovering new life as mission outposts in their neighborhood. Nimble congregations embrace change, develop passionate leaders, boundless generosity and engage their neighbor through witness to Jesus Christ and grace filled service.

PURPOSEFUL

Hard times challenge our values. Without thinking we allow ourselves to feel threatened and imagine the imminent demise of our home, church, world as we know it. We are knocked off balance, become disoriented and increasingly inwardly focused. We when this happens we guard our resources and relationships. We forget that God is on a loving mission to bless, save, reconcile, heal, and set the whole world free! God calls us to participate in that mission. You know...God's work. Our hands. This is the apostolic purpose of the Christian life. We are saved by grace and set free from all that would pull the life from us. Jesus gives our life purpose and meaning. Jesus calls us to witness in word and in service in the places where we live, shop, work, in our neighborhood, classroom, face book pages, stock portfolios and bank accounts.

We are grateful to you when you demonstrate and witness to these critical characteristics of a vanguard church: Bold, nimble, purposeful. The New Jersey Synod is strengthened when we journey together during this time of unprecedented challenge and opportunity.

LET'S DO IT! LET'S TRY IT! LET'S RISK IT!

In the exciting and challenging context of 2009, let's be the vanguard. God's living mission is to change and save lives – whatever it takes. We call upon one another to strengthen our faith, express our solidarity by committing to sharing 100% of your 2009 mission support intent. Review these questions with your Council:

- How is our common life is different because faith in Jesus is the foremost or leading position in a trend or movement in your life?
- What would be different in our lives if God's claim to be bold, nimble, and purposeful shined through our actions and attitudes?
- Review the mission support intent that your congregation shared for 2009. Is this a realistic goal? Is this a responsible goal? Will your congregation fulfill this intent by the end of 2009?
- Does your congregation have the volition to grow your giving and claim a larger mission support intent in 2009?
- In response to the mission challenge presented to our church, how might you allocate resources differently?

We are confident that together we can walk as partners in a vanguard church that is bold, nimble, and purposeful. Let's share a full or expanded portion of our mission support in 2009. Let's do it! Let's try it! Let's risk it!

Ensuring Uninterrupted Ministry Support In Your Congregation and Community

Use the following suggestions to open conversation about how your congregation can explore, identify and share a full or expanded mission support gift that will provide unrestricted operating funds to sustain our important work with congregations and communities in the territory of the New Jersey Synod and beyond. We believe God has provided resources needed to sustain the work of the New Jersey Synod when help is needed most.

1. Sharing is Proportional. Does your congregation share proportionately from your resources to support the mission tasks of the Synod and ELCA Churchwide Units? What percentage of your total unrestricted income did you share last year? What percentage did you share 5 years ago?
2. 10% is the base level of Mission Support Sharing in New Jersey. Most congregations made decisions about 2009 sharing when anxiety about the economy was just peaking. Revisit your commitment with an eye toward growth.
3. Mission Support Sharing is a First Fruits gift. Congregations are encouraged to make decisions about mission sharing first, before other decisions are made and as a matter of priority. Remember we share out of solidarity, not out of what is left over. Send your gifts for Mission Support and designated benevolences on a monthly basis.
4. New Jersey Congregations tithe unrestricted bequests. If your congregation has received or is receiving an unrestricted bequest, give 10% of that gift as a special gift for the New Jersey Synod. This level of giving is a continuing example of first fruits, proportionate sharing.
5. New Jersey Congregations tithe unrestricted endowment income. Congregations offer at least a tithe (10%) of all unrestricted income from endowment and memorial funds to the Synod and other wider ministries of the ELCA.
6. Congregations are asked to generously share 100% or more of their mission support intent in 2009. Share your amended mission support letter of intent (**100% Mission**) on line, or use the special envelope and that will be mailed to your Pastor May 15, 2009, or bring your congregation's commitments to the New Jersey Synod Assembly (June 5 and 6) and use the special Assembly envelope to share your expanded intent or gift.
7. Join in intercessory prayer for our Bishop, Pastors, rostered leaders, congregations and members of this Synod.

Resources and Accompaniment

Ample resources are available to you and the members of your congregation to interpret the mission of this church and to engage in faith conversations about how to be a steward in difficult economic times. [Visit the stewardship page on the New Jersey Synod web site](#) to find these resources and more:

www.njsynod.org

**Go to the [STEWARDSHIP](#) page
And the [100% MISSION](#) tab**

- Mission Support Conversation Starter Questions
- Bible Study Resources for Home and Congregational Use
- Links to Sermon Starters for the Season of Easter
- 100% Mission response forms
- Bulletin Inserts telling the stories of what we do together

If you are looking for additional assistance in building strong relationships with the New Jersey Synod Staff, don't hesitate to invite one of the Assistants to the Bishop or Mission Staff to preach or lead a Bible Study or forum for your congregation.

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A visitation team from the New Jersey Synod Council is also available to meet with your council. Contact the Administrative Assistant for Mission and Ministry to coordinate your request:

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