



Introduction

Tumultuous times! There was political turmoil, economic turmoil, and turmoil in the church. The latter included profound debates on the interpretation of scripture, provocative challenges to the authority of church leadership, and pronounced threats to change denominations. Stop! It's not what you think! As I pointed out in my reports to Synod Assemblies, these characterizations applied to the Church of England in the early 17th century, as described in *God's Secretaries*, a book by Adam Nicholson about the translation of the King James Bible. Nicholson's thought-provoking book illustrates that issues that once appeared vitally important seem less so with the perspective of time. Perhaps more importantly, Nicholson's book reflects that such turmoil does not preclude ministry from taking place; instead, it may serve as a prelude to even more important ministry in the future. Indeed, the lessons of *God's Secretaries* convince me that expectant hope is a prelude to great things to come for the ELCA because we are freed in Christ to proclaim the Gospel and to serve the neighbor with imagination and compassion. While the ELCA remains grounded in the Gospel, this church also is ever-changing so that it can better address the issues of the 21st century.

In moving forward with expectant hope, I continue on the odyssey that brought the Swartling family to Chicago in 2007. It remains a challenging, multi-dimensional journey—spiritually, vocationally, geographically, climatologically. Sometimes, I refer to myself as the peripatetic secretary as these journeys have continued! But, more importantly, I continue to experience a profound sense of call – a call to work with the leadership of this church through the challenges of redesign, to continue to provide important services to synods and congregations, and to be a partner in ministry with colleagues throughout the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the many agencies and institutions that are part of the ecology of this church.

This ongoing sense of call and the dedication and collegiality of colleagues have provided solace and strength through a particularly challenging biennium. The sources of these challenges in the past two years have been both anticipated and unexpected. As I will discuss in more detail below, the Office of the Secretary has played an important role in implementing the actions of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly. This process has been complicated as some congregations have taken steps to disaffiliate with the ELCA. As a result, the Office of the Secretary frequently has been called upon to provide guidance to synods and congregations on the constitutional process for

leaving the denomination and to consult about the roster status of congregations and leaders.

This biennium also resulted in a significant redesign of the churchwide organization. The need to “right size” the churchwide organization in light of financial realities and missional priorities was important, but it also was enormously complicated from the perspective of structure and governance. This challenge has been made more complex by the need to translate the recommendations on structure and governance from the Living Into the Future Together: Renewing the Ecology of the ELCA (LIFT) Task Force into amendments to the governing documents of this church. As will be discussed in more detail below, this Churchwide Assembly will consider more amendments to the governing documents than any prior assembly (except the constituting convention), and they represent important steps in re-configuring this church for effective ministry and appropriate structure and governance as it approaches its 25th birthday.

The challenges in this biennium also have been intensely personal. The Office of the Secretary was affected by staff reductions resulting from implementing the redesign, just as were other units of the churchwide organization. But this biennium also brought us a profound loss on a personal level. In the fall of 2010, our colleague James Nelson, director for official records, departed for a hiking vacation in Colorado. He never returned; his body has not yet been found. The shock of this loss traumatized and continues to sadden us when we recall our beloved colleague. We continue to pray for James' family and friends as we cherish his memory.

Despite these challenges, the Office of the Secretary has continued to meet its constitutional responsibilities with professionalism and grace.

Responsibilities

The *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* are foundational documents of this church from a variety of perspectives. Undeniably, they are *legal* documents that describe the organization of this church and its ministry in each of its three expressions. As such, they delineate the polity, structure, and governance of this church, as well as the roles and responsibilities of its leaders. But they are much more! As the Executive for Administration, Wyvetta Bullock, correctly points out, they also are *planning* documents. By identifying responsibilities of various parts of this church and describing partners in ministry, they provide templates to facilitate both strategic and operational

planning. But they are much more than legal documents and planning documents. They are *missional* documents!

Background: Missional Imperatives in the ELCA Governing Documents

Before turning to the legal aspects of the *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, as they define the responsibilities and work of the Office of the Secretary, it is important to look at the missional imperatives embedded in them. As I travel throughout this church, I believe that it is important to sensitize and educate leaders regarding these elegantly drafted, missional governing documents.

The constitutions of congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization all contain parallel and substantively identical provisions that define who we are as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. One of the first chapters is the “Confession of Faith,” which states unequivocally the following: “This church confesses the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” (ELCA constitutional provision 2.01). The next chapter is titled “Nature of the Church” and begins: “All power in the Church belongs to our Lord Jesus Christ, its head. All actions of this church are to be carried out under his rule and authority” (ELCA 3.01). After the chapters on the “Confession of Faith” and the “Nature of the Church” is a chapter on the purpose of this church, i.e., the ELCA. It begins with this provision: “The Church is a people created by God in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, called and sent to bear witness to God’s creative, redeeming, and sanctifying activity in the world” (ELCA constitutional provision 4.01). The very next provision mandates that, in order to participate in God’s mission, this church shall:

- a. Proclaim God’s saving Gospel of justification by grace for Christ’s sake through faith alone, according to the apostolic witness in the Holy Scripture, preserving and transmitting the Gospel faithfully to future generations.
- b. Carry out Christ’s Great Commission by reaching out to all people to bring them to faith in Christ and by doing all ministry with global awareness consistent with the understanding of God as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier of all.
- c. Serve in response to God’s love to meet human needs, caring for the sick and the aged, advocating dignity and justice for all people, working for peace and reconciliation among the nations, and standing with the poor and powerless and committing itself to their needs.
- d. Worship God in proclamation of the Word and administration of the sacraments and through lives of prayer, praise, thanksgiving, witness, and service.
- e. Nurture its members in the Word of God so as to grow in faith and hope and love,

to see daily life as the primary setting for the exercise of their Christian calling, and to use the gifts of the Spirit for their life together and for their calling in the world.

- f. Manifest the unity given to the people of God by living together in the love of Christ and by joining with other Christians in prayer and action to express and preserve the unity which the Spirit gives.

In order to accomplish these purposes, the governing documents describe the polity of this church, its interrelationships, and the roles and responsibilities of leadership. Several provisions regarding polity are important to underscore. For example, the first sentence of provision 5.01 in the chapter titled “Principles of Organization” states: “The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America shall be one church.” Provision 8.11 in the chapter on “Relationships” describes the unique relationships among congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization as follows:

This church shall seek to function as people of God through congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization, all of which shall be interdependent. Each part, while fully the church, recognizes that it is not the whole church and therefore lives in a partnership relationship with the others.

It is in the context of these provisions that the work of the churchwide organization and the responsibilities of the officers and units are defined. The responsibilities of the churchwide organization and its relationship with other parts of the ELCA are contained in constitutional provision 11.11, as follows:

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America shall have a churchwide organization that shall function interdependently with the congregations and synods of this church. The churchwide organization shall serve on behalf of and in support of this church’s members, congregations, and synods in proclaiming the Gospel, reaching out in witness and service both globally and throughout the territory of the church, nurturing the members of this church in the daily life of faith, and manifesting the unity of this church with the whole Church of Jesus Christ.

Subsequent provisions in Chapter 11 describe the specific purposes of the churchwide organization. These include the following: to undergird the worship life of this church; to provide resources for worship, learning, and service; to coordinate this church’s mission; to foster interdependent relationships with congregations, synods, and other partners; to establish and maintain ecumenical relationships; to provide for a comprehensive financial support system for this church’s mission; to provide official rosters of ordained ministers and other leaders; and many more! These multiple and diverse responsibilities are allocated among offices and units of the churchwide organization, but it is increasingly important to recognize that they are a part of

a complex ecosystem that requires faithful oversight and imaginative coordination. One of the ongoing joys and challenges of serving as secretary is learning about and participating in the leadership of the diverse elements of this church!

Before turning to the particular responsibilities of the secretary, it is important to underscore one other constitutional mandate that addresses leaders in this church. That provision is found in Chapter 5, “Principles of Organization.” Constitutional provision 5.01.h. states:

Leaders in this church should demonstrate that they are servants by their words, life-style, and manner of leadership. Leaders in this church will recognize their accountability to the Triune God, to the whole Church, to each other, and to the organization of this church in which they have been asked to serve.

Responsibilities of the Office of the Secretary

With this background, what are the responsibilities of the secretary of the ELCA? Constitutional provision 13.41 establishes the overarching responsibility:

The secretary of this church shall serve under the presiding bishop of this church, providing leadership as specified in Chapter 11 of this church’s constitution, bylaws, and continuing resolutions, and shall fulfill the normal functions of the secretary of a corporation.

Under this broad mandate, the governing documents delineate the specific responsibilities in bylaw 13.41.02, as follows:

The secretary shall:

- a. Be responsible for the minutes and records of the Churchwide Assembly, Church Council, Executive Committee, Conference of Bishops, and Cabinet of Executives, and shall receive complete minutes for permanent record of all boards and committees of the churchwide organization.
- b. Maintain the rosters of ordained ministers, all other rostered persons, congregations, and synods.
- c. Provide for the publication of official documents and policies of this church, pre-assembly reports, assembly minutes, a directory of congregations, rostered persons, and entities of this church, and other informational and statistical material.
- d. Receive the annual report of the congregations in a form devised by the secretary, summarize the information, and make the summary available to this church.
- e. Coordinate the use of legal services by the churchwide organization.
- f. Be responsible for the archives of this church.
- g. Implement and operate a records management system for the churchwide organization.
- h. Arrange for and manage meetings of the Churchwide Assembly and Church Council.
- i. Have custody of the seal, maintain a necrology, and attest documents.

- j. Provide library and reference services for the churchwide office.

In addition, other provisions in Chapter 13 also allocate to the secretary responsibilities for preparation and amendment of this church’s governing documents (13.41.03), providing constitutional and bylaw interpretations (13.41.04), staffing the Nominating Committee and addressing vacancies on boards and committees (13.41.05), and overseeing risk management and insurance responsibilities of the churchwide organization (13.41.A03).

Staff of the Office of the Secretary

In fulfilling its multiple and diverse responsibilities, the Office of the Secretary is blessed to have a knowledgeable and dedicated staff, the members of which faithfully serve the churchwide organization as well as provide assistance to synods, congregations, and individuals. Each day brings new questions and new issues, and the individuals in the Office of the Secretary respond conscientiously, creatively, and graciously. It is a joy to be able to thank them publically for their work!

Assistant Secretary	Pr. Ruth E. Hamilton
General Counsel	Mr. Philip H. Harris
Assistant General Counsel	Mr. David A. Ullrich
Assistant General Counsel	Ms. Laura L. Knitt
Director for Meeting Management: . . .	Ms. Mary Beth Nowak
Archivist for Reference, Management and Technology	Mr. Joel A. Thoreson
Archivist for Collection Management and Development	Ms. M. Catherine Lundeen
Archives Assistant	Ms. Jill Hetland
Director for Official Documentation	Mr. Frank F. Imhoff
Director for Official Records	Ms. Lauren Gioe
Paralegal	Ms. Loraine Shields
Executive Administrative Assistant	Ms. Marie Fellows
Risk Manager	Mr. Rob Thoma
Managing Editor of the Yearbook and Rosters Assistant	Mr. Thomas J. Ehlen
Senior Meeting Planner	Ms. Gail Schroeder
Senior Meeting Planner	Ms. Emmalene Harbin
Meeting Planner	Ms. Rosa Perez
Churchwide Assembly Registrar	Ms. JoAnne Brady
Churchwide Assembly Assistant	Ms. Katherine English

In addition, in the course of this biennium, the Office of the Secretary was fortunate to have been assisted by a number of volunteers. In particular, I would like to thank Pr. Karen Bockelman for her work on behalf of the Nominating Committee.

Priorities and Special Projects

As I indicated in my Churchwide Assembly report in 2009, the responsibilities delineated in the governing documents of this church require clear vision and substantial effort on the part of the secretary and the staff. The challenges of this biennium reinforced the need for clarity of vision and considerable effort!

Implementing Churchwide Assembly Actions

The actions of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly regarding ministry policies necessitated revisions to the *Vision and Expectations* documents and *Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline*, as well as other policies. The Office of the Secretary provided staff support for each of these efforts that facilitated timely adoption of these documents by the Church Council. (These revised documents are available on the ELCA website.) In addition, the Churchwide Assembly decisions required careful review and amendment of other policy documents, including the *Manual of Policies and Procedures for Management of the Rosters* and the *Candidacy Manual*. Implementation of the actions of the Churchwide Assembly also required liaison with other units, such as the Board of Pensions, to ensure that related policy amendments were appropriately and timely drafted and adopted.

The complexity of implementing the decisions of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly was manifested in other ways. Congregations and synods struggled with the meaning of the action of the Churchwide Assembly to “make provision in its policies to recognize the conviction of members who believe that this church should not call or roster people in a publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship...” Translating this option into a policy that could be adopted by individual congregations, as requested by several synods, proved challenging, especially while recognizing at the same time that the ELCA “commit[s] itself to finding a way for people in such publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship to serve as rostered leaders of this church.” Of course, these issues have not been resolved, but the Lutheran church historically has demonstrated its ability to live with paradox and in dynamic tension. From my perspective, it appears that congregations and synods are realizing (as the Church of England realized in the early 17th century) that uncertainty and turmoil do not preclude effective mission and ministry. Indeed, my sense is that congregations and synods are looking forward with renewed energy and enthusiasm to engagement in mission and ministry.

A byproduct of the ministry policy decisions of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly was action taken by some congregations and individuals to terminate their relationship with the ELCA. This reality meant that the Office of the Secretary increasingly was called upon to provide advice and assistance to synods responding to actions by congregations to disaffiliate, as well as working with units of the churchwide organization to address related issues. (For example, some congregations seeking to disaffiliate had received grants and signed covenants to repay them if they disbanded or left the ELCA.) Fortunately, synodical bishops have provided exemplary consultation and pastoral assistance to congregations and individuals amid these disputes, and it appears that efforts at disaffiliation are waning. It is important to point out that some of the proposed constitutional amendments that have been prepared and recommended by the Church Council seek to clarify ambiguities in the disaffiliation process and to address abuses.

Supporting the Governance and Structure Proposals of the LIFT Task Force

At the same time as the Office of the Secretary worked to implement the ministry policy actions of the Churchwide Assembly, I participated in the work of the LIFT Task Force, which was broadly examining the ecology of the ELCA and its interrelationships. One working group of the LIFT Task Force considered structure and governance issues, and it made a number of recommendations to the Task Force as a whole. These were endorsed and presented to the Church Council for consideration. The Church Council now has approved these proposals and forwarded them for action at the 2011 Churchwide Assembly. In developing the LIFT recommendations, many options and suggestions were discussed and evaluated, and the underlying objective always remained how the governance and structure of the churchwide organization could most effectively lead this church into the future, recognizing the economic and societal realities confronting it as well as the foundational principles undergirding this church. Participating in this Work Group with Richard Torgerson, president of Luther College, and Robert Bacher, former executive for administration in the churchwide organization, was an honor and delight!

The proposed amendments to the ELCA governing documents from LIFT represent only a small portion of the LIFT proposals, but they provide an opportunity both to address economic realities and to improve structure and governance as this church moves forward. Indeed, the *raison d'être* of the LIFT structure and governance proposals is to better facilitate how this church will serve since we are freed in Christ.

The LIFT report and recommendations are located in Section V of the *Pre-Assembly Report*. Those that address governance and structure include the following: amending the cycle of the Churchwide Assembly; adjusting the size and composition of the Church Council; and eliminating program committees for units. These substantive recommendations are premised on an apparently small, but enormously important, recommendation. It is labeled, perhaps innocuously, as “networks and interrelationships.” However, its potential impact is much more significant. In terms of organization, much of the superstructure of the ELCA is premised on geographically based boards and committees. Early in its existence, the LIFT Task Force recognized that this approach lags technological advancement and fails to take advantage of and mobilize individuals through social media and other ways connections are made in the 21st century. These new tools provide opportunities both to obtain grass-roots input from constituencies and to disseminate information from the churchwide organization and other expressions of the ELCA. The LIFT report and its implementing resolutions challenge this whole church to think in new ways, including organizationally, about what God is calling this church to be and do in the 21st century. It is my hope that passage of the proposed LIFT amendments on governance and structure and the implementing resolutions will facilitate moving forward in new ways to answer these questions!

Implementing the Redesign of the Churchwide Organization

The complexity of translating the ministry policy actions of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly into policy documents and working with the LIFT Task Force on structure and governance issues was magnified by the need to “right size” the churchwide organization in order to address declining revenues and organizational imperatives.

Beginning in the early summer of 2010, a design team began the complex task of looking at the churchwide organization. The resultant recommendations sought to streamline the work of the churchwide organization into fewer units and to eliminate redundancies. Again, translating the conceptual ideas of the design team into amendments to the governing documents was a daunting task. This process also was complicated by the urgency of initiating the implementation process by the beginning of fiscal year 2011. This meant that some governing document amendments (i.e., those that could be made in continuing resolutions) were adopted by the Church Council in the fall of 2010, while proposed amendments to the constitution and bylaws of this church had to be drafted as proposals for action at the 2011 Churchwide Assembly. The process has been further complicated because of the need to integrate redesign proposals with proposed amendments coming from the LIFT Task Force and “regular” proposed amendments to the bylaws. I have sometimes described the challenge of addressing the proposed governing document amendments this year as analogous to three-dimensional chess!

While all the staff in the Office of the Secretary warrant expressions of thanks and appreciation for their dedication and exceptional work this biennium, the legal team that spent dozens of hours considering proposals, drafting language, and evaluating contingencies deserves special kudos for their exemplary work: Phil Harris, Dave Ullrich, Ruth Hamilton, and Laura Knitt! Thanks, too, for the “extra mile” of work required by the Legal and Constitutional Review Committee of the Church Council for shepherding these proposed amendments to the floor of the Church Council and Churchwide Assembly. I would like to express my special thanks to Mark Helmke for his leadership and collegiality in chairing this committee.

One aspect of the redesign of the churchwide organization has had a direct and immediate impact on the Office of the Secretary. The plan consolidated all meeting planning functions in this office. Under the leadership of Mary Beth Nowak, the meeting planning team has risen to the challenge; in addition to the complex task of planning and managing the logistics for the Churchwide Assembly, it has worked on meeting planning protocols and begun to coordinate most of the meeting activities within the churchwide organization. Thanks to Mary Beth Nowak, Gail Schroeder, Emmalene Harbin, Rosa Perez, and Katherine English for this work!

Other Proposed Amendments to the Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions

In addition to working with the LIFT Task Force and the team re-designing the churchwide organization, the Office of the Secretary continued its periodic review and update of the *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions*. This ongoing review has resulted in many proposed amendments. These have been vetted by the Legal and Constitutional Review Committee, and the Church Council has reviewed them and forwarded them to the Churchwide Assembly with the recommendation for approval. While some are technical in nature, a number are important and warrant brief mention.

- Provisions in Chapter 7 of the ELCA constitution regarding preparation and approval of rostered leaders have been made consistent and clarified.
- Bylaws under ELCA constitutional provision 8.72 would be amended to authorize ecumenical availability of rostered lay persons.
- Bylaws have been proposed under ELCA constitutional provision 8.74 providing criteria for local altar and pulpit fellowship.
- ELCA constitutional provision 9.62 (and corresponding provision *C6.05 in the Model Constitution for Congregations) providing the process for disaffiliation from the ELCA have been clarified to eliminate ambiguities.
- Synodical treasurers may be either elected or appointed (\$8.51).
- Provisions have been adopted to provide expressly for electronic meetings of the Church Council and Synod Councils (ELCA bylaw 14.12.01., and S10.07.01).

Work of the Archives

The Office of the Secretary includes the work of the archives, and important projects are underway.

Several years ago, thanks to a grant from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans, the archives began a project to capture oral histories from leaders in the ELCA. That project, titled “Voices and Visions,” now nears completion of its initial stage, which has involved recorded interviews with approximately 30 leaders of this church. In addition, more than 50 interviews took place at the 2009 Churchwide Assembly as part of “I Love to Tell the Story: My ELCA.” At the 2011 Churchwide Assembly, members and others also will be able to be interviewed and tell their ELCA stories! Following this assembly, these oral histories will become a 25th anniversary gift to this church. Stay tuned!

In addition, the staff of the archives has been working on a project to facilitate the publishing and storage of synod minutes. In the not-too-distant future, synods will be able to access a common portal for storing and accessing minutes from Synod Council, Synod Assembly, and other synodical meetings. The archives also have provided a site where all Church Council meeting documents are maintained in a single location, accessible to leaders of this church, to the academic community, and to anyone interested in the actions of the board of directors of the ELCA. (The minutes and exhibits can be accessed and downloaded from the archives catalogue at

www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/History/ELCA-Archives.aspx.)

Thanks to Joel Thoreson, Cathy Lundeen, and Jill Hetland for this important work and for reminding us of the historical importance of reports and records from congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization.

Other Work in the Office of the Secretary

Much of the work in the Office of the Secretary in this biennium cannot be characterized as “routine.” From records management, to roster maintenance, to risk management, to tracking disaffiliations, the redesign of the churchwide organization and the multiple conversions of systems have meant difficult and ongoing challenges. All of the members of the Office of the Secretary deserve thanks for their devotion and commitment! I would like to express special thanks and appreciation to Pr. Ruth Hamilton, who serves as assistant secretary, for the expertise that she brings to the Office of the Secretary, for her organizational skills, for the way that she practices interdependence in working with others in this church, and for her ongoing collegiality and support.

Collaboration with Synods

A pivotal aspect of the work of the Office of the Secretary involves collaboration with synod bishops and their staffs regarding issues of mutual concern and interest. Facilitating such collaboration represents interdependence in action. A number of examples illustrate the importance of this work.

The Office of the Secretary has worked closely with bishops and Synod Councils to assist in their preparation for Synod Assemblies. This collaboration has occurred in a number of ways. Each winter, the Office of the Secretary prepares and disseminates to synods a memorandum on submission of memorials and resolutions to the churchwide organization. This document is intended to assist synods in preparing for their Synod Assemblies and to provide instructions and tips on processing requested actions at them. In addition, in the past few years, we have worked more proactively with synods to assist in addressing proposed memorials, resolutions, and other actions. For example, in collaboration with the Executive for the Conference of Bishops in the Office of the Presiding Bishop, we convene telephone conferences of synod bishops and vice presidents to share ideas and to learn about issues of mutual importance. In a number of instances, these conferences have resulted in conferring about and addressing common resolutions and memorials in consistent ways.

As in past years, the Office of the Presiding Bishop and Office of the Secretary also have worked closely with synods in which there is a bishop’s election. *Guidelines for Synod Bishop Elections* were updated and distributed to synod leaders, and telephone conferences were held with every synod in which an election would take place. In addition, the Office of the Secretary undertook an analysis of synod bishop election procedures and prepared a memorandum addressing issues arising in various processes, including the ecclesiastical ballot. Given the number of synod bishop elections in 2012 and 2013, this work provides

a foundation for synods to engage in a focused and meaningful discussion of this important election and call process in the life of the synod.

As the peripatetic secretary, I continue to travel throughout this church to confer with synods and other groups on matters of polity, structure, governance, administration, and legal issues. Among the most noteworthy recent journeys was participation in the Assistants to the Bishops gathering in January 2011. My colleague Ruth Hamilton and I attended the meeting in Tampa, made a presentation on issues of mutual interest and importance, and answered many questions. Such meetings with synodical leaders provide opportunities to establish important working relationships, to open lines of communication, and to exchange information that mutually enhances ministry.

This review fails to reflect adequately the close collaboration between the Office of the Secretary and synods. It would not be surprising for a visitor to the Office of the Secretary to find three or four staff on the telephone or in email communication with different synods on different issues. We understand what it means to provide such service in a collegial and gracious manner since we are all part of the ELCA!

Preparation for the Churchwide Assembly

Each biennium one of the daunting tasks of the Office of the Secretary is preparation for the Churchwide Assembly. “Daunting” does not adequately capture the complexity and logistical challenges of bringing together more than 1,000 people for a week of worship, legislation, learning, and fellowship. Fortunately, this process is guided by a talented and committed Churchwide Assembly Planning Committee, which exemplifies collegiality, cooperation, and imagination both in strategizing and in implementation. We also are blessed by the knowledge and ability of Mary Beth Nowak, executive for meeting management, and her staff.

Having now experienced one Churchwide Assembly as secretary, there are a number of important successes and lessons learned that are being implemented on a wider scale in 2011. First, technology provides both a better tool for communication with voting members and the opportunity to move forward on our commitment to work pro-actively to implement the care for creation priority of the Office of the Secretary and the churchwide organization. This year communication with almost all voting members has taken place by email, and almost the entire registration and air travel arrangement processes have been done electronically. In addition, the Churchwide Assembly website went live earlier this year than in the past, and portions of the *Pre-Assembly Report* were posted as they became available, allowing voting members (and others) to review materials and prepare for the assembly at a more reasonable pace. Once again, an orientation video and a video on parliamentary procedures were posted online to facilitate the preparation of voting members. In addition, a pilot project is being undertaken in 2011 in which a number of synods will not use a written *Pre-Assembly Report* but will use iPads to access documents at the assembly.

This is the first step in moving to a “paperless assembly” in the future!

The feedback from the 2009 Churchwide Assembly also informed preparation for this assembly. The evaluations from 2009 provided important information regarding the manner that issues were presented, discussed, and actions voted on. For example, an overwhelming 97 percent of those that responded on the evaluation form indicated that they understood the procedures for debate on issues, and they understood what they were voting on at the time of the vote. More than 90 percent of respondents rated the way in which debate/discussion was facilitated at the assembly in one of the highest two categories on the evaluation form. As I indicated to the Church Council, these results both affirm the planning and organization of the assembly as well as the leadership of Presiding Bishop Hanson as chair.

Other factors have influenced the evolution of the Churchwide Assembly in ways that will be apparent in 2011. As the result of the positive response to live streaming of the plenary sessions, both plenary sessions and worship will be available on the ELCA website in 2011. Also, for the first time, voting members will be allowed to bring their computers and phones into the assembly hall, although wireless access will be limited and receiving or making telephone calls will be prohibited. In addition to technological changes, the way that decisions are made at the churchwide assembly continues to be analyzed. For example, the Communal Discernment Task Force has been considering and will continue to evaluate how this church addresses important issues in both legislative and non-legislative settings, especially where there is not a consensus. Several of this task force’s recommendations have informed the processes and approaches to discussion at the 2011 Churchwide Assembly.

One of the ongoing issues of importance remains the commitment of this church to inclusivity and diversity. In 2009, the Churchwide Assembly adopted continuing resolution 6.02.A09, establishing a goal that ten percent of the voting members of the Churchwide Assembly (as well as other parts of the churchwide organization) by youth and young adults. We have taken that goal seriously and worked proactively to accomplish that goal, and this Churchwide Assembly will have the highest percentage of persons under 30 in the history of the ELCA.

Congregational Reports and Statistical Analysis

As indicated above, the responsibilities of the Office of the Secretary include maintaining the rosters of this church as well as compiling and reporting congregational statistics.

Appendix A to this report is the current form of the congregational report, Form A. In 2009, for the first time in several years, this form was revised, following extensive conversation and vetting with the Research and Evaluation section of the Office of the Presiding Bishop, representatives from the former Vocation and Education unit, and others. The underlying reasons for the revisions were multiple, including simplifying the form from the user’s perspective and providing

more useful information for analysis. Appendix C is a summary of parochial report statistics for 2009 and 2010.

The response rates by congregations for 2009 and 2010 have been disappointing, so we will work on a strategy for 2011 to increase the percentage of congregations responding. Ironically, congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization almost always express thanks and gratitude for the important information provided by the data from congregational reports. An increased response rate will improve the data accordingly and enhance the ability of the churchwide organization to provide meaningful analysis to stakeholders.

Appendix B to this report is a summary of roster statistics. This includes data on the roster of congregations, the roster of ordained ministers, and the roster of laypersons (including associates in ministry, deaconesses, and diaconal ministers.)

During my oral report, I will comment on this data.

Looking for Signs

The sign above the desk in my office was a gift from a Chinese pastor when I completed my term as the chair of the Region 1 governing council. It contains the Chinese characters for “crisis.”



The two characters are “danger” and “opportunity.” Each day I look at that calligraphy and ask God to help me focus on opportunities.

The calligraphy, along with a suggestion from a colleague bishop, has inspired me to look for signs all the time. In my oral report, I will address some of the signs that I have encountered in my travels since the last Churchwide Assembly.

Conclusion

As my multi-dimensional odyssey continues—an odyssey that brought me from a longtime legal practice in Seattle to the Office of the Secretary in the ELCA in Chicago—I daily give thanks to God for the opportunity to serve his Church in this church, to be freed in Christ to serve, to work closely with dedicated servants of the Gospel, and to live out in such a remarkable way my baptismal vocation.

As has always been the case, when I get discouraged I remember three things. First, this is not my church, or our

church, or the churchwide organization's church. It is God's Church. We truly are doing God's work with our hands. And, those hands are not mine alone; they are all of ours, working interdependently to accomplish mission and ministry in ways that no individual, congregation, or synod could on its own.

Second, in very discouraging times, I continue to find solace in Martin Luther's words explaining the third article of the Apostle's Creed:

I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in one common, true faith.

I believe that this is most certainly true!

Finally, when I'm most discouraged, I look around at all the work that this church is performing in Christ's name. I observe congregations proclaiming the Gospel and serving their neighbors; I see schools and seminaries teaching students and training future leaders; I watch children receiving food and medical attention—both in this country and around the world; I read "Stories of Faith in Action." I hear accounts of disaster response by this church in New Orleans, in Haiti, in Japan, in Joplin, Missouri; I attend Synod Assemblies and experience the impact of interdependence locally and globally; I worship at my home congregation and at chapel at the Lutheran Center; I find solace and inspiration from colleagues at the Lutheran Center. How blessed I am to not just see, but to experience daily, the joy of knowing that we are freed in Christ to serve in this world. Thanks be to God for this opportunity!

Mr. David D. Swartling, *secretary*