



Report of the Secretary

Introduction

Perhaps the word “odyssey” best captures my multi-dimensional journeys in the past two years. From being a litigation lawyer in Seattle, to a part-time gift planner for the Foundation of the ELCA, to secretary of the ELCA, the odyssey certainly has been vocational. The move from Puget Sound to Chicago also has provided both geographical and climatological odysseys. And the death of my father, while my spouse Barbara and I were in transit to Chicago, has made the journey a psychological and generational odyssey, as well. As significant as all these journeys have been, however, none compares with the opportunities to witness to our common faith and to interact with members, congregations, synods, and leaders throughout this church. By the time the Churchwide Assembly convenes, I will have traveled in more than 20 states, as well as to Canada and the Holy Land, been on the territory of every region, consulted with leaders in almost every synod, and participated in 13 Synod Assemblies.

Wherever I travel and whenever I speak, I try to share a story of our common mission, of our interdependent ministries, of God’s work, our hands. This spring, during Synod Assembly season, I was reminded profoundly of the ways God works through the hands of many ELCA members. After the South Dakota Synod Assembly, Barbara and I traveled to Moorhead, Minn., to visit someone important in our lives, Faraja Kurubai. Faraja will soon be a senior at Concordia College.

We first learned about Faraja from ELCA missionaries in Tanzania, Jean Wahlstrom and Marvin Konanen. More than seven years ago, they shared with us Faraja’s story—her birth and childhood in a typical Maasai family. But instead of remaining in her village, she enrolled in the MaaSae Girls Lutheran Secondary School. Jean, Marvin, and other teachers worked with Faraja, teaching her both the foundations of faith and the skills that she would need in the 21st-century world. Guided by these mentors, Faraja not only graduated from the MaaSae Girls School, she passed her national examinations with flying colors, and was awarded a scholarship to attend Concordia College.

Now, four years later, fluent in English (as well as Swahili and Maasai), she is back in Tanzania on an internship to help prepare her for studies in accounting and business. Faraja’s goal is to complete her education and return to Tanzania to provide microfinancing to spur small businesses among Maasai women. She already has organized a project on campus to help women in a Maasai village sell their handmade jewelry. Her ability to achieve her goals is directly the result

of interdependent, ELCA-supported ministries. God’s work, many hands!

The responsibilities and activities of the Office of the Secretary are many and diverse. However, they all facilitate the mission of this wonderful church, in all its expressions and among all the partners in its interdependent ministries. Whenever I feel overwhelmed, I think of Faraja and others like her whose lives have been touched by the proclamation of the Gospel and the work of ELCA members. As you read about the work of the Office of the Secretary, as well as the reports of units of this church, put a human face on all that this church does in Christ’s name.

Responsibilities

The *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* delineate the duties of the secretary of this church. 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.

Although subsequent provisions describe in detail the specific duties of the secretary, the reference to Chapter 11 is profoundly important because it provides the superstructure and foundation within which the individual responsibilities arise. For example, the definition of the churchwide organization in constitutional provision 11.11. states:

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.

Thus, leadership in the churchwide organization necessarily begins with a commitment to proclaiming the Gospel and service to neighbors in collaboration with synods and congregations.

Subsequent provisions in Chapter 11 describe the specific purposes of the churchwide organization. These include to undergird the worship life of this church; provide resources for worship and service; coordinate this church's mission; foster interdependent relationships with congregations, synods, and other partners; establish and maintain ecumenical relationships; provide for a comprehensive financial support system for this church's mission; provide for the ordained ministry and other rosters; provide pension and other benefit programs; and many more! While these multiple and diverse responsibilities are allocated appropriately among officers and other churchwide staff, we are all cognizant of the fact that together they make up a complex ecosystem that requires comprehensive oversight and imaginative coordination. One of the joys and challenges of serving as secretary is learning about and participating in the leadership of the diverse elements of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America!

Before turning to the particular responsibilities of the secretary, I frequently remind myself that a specific constitutional mandate addresses the nature of leadership in the ELCA. 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.

With this broad context in mind, what are the specific responsibilities of the secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America? The majority are specified in bylaw 13.41.02. as follows:

The secretary shall:

- 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;
- Maintain the rosters of ordained ministers, all other rostered persons, congregations, and synods;
- 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;
- 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;
- Coordinate the use of legal services by the churchwide organization;
- Be responsible for the archives of this church;
- Implement and operate a records management system for the churchwide organization;

- Arrange for and manage meetings of the Churchwide Assembly and Church Council;
- Have custody of the seal, maintain a necrology, and attest documents; and
- 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 the 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 staff of knowledgeable and dedicated employees who faithfully serve the churchwide organization as well as provide service to synods and congregations. Collectively, they bring more than 200 years of experience and service. It is a joy to be able to thank them publicly for their dedication!

Executive for Administration: Pr. Ruth E. Hamilton

General Counsel: Mr. Philip H. Harris

Associate General Counsel: Mr. David A. Ullrich

Legal Assistant: Ms. Loraine Shields

Executive Administrative Assistant to the Secretary:

Ms. Marie Fellows

Director for Library and Records Management:

Ms. Claire H. Buettner

Director for Official Roster Records:

Ms. Deborah K. Myers

Executive for Meeting Management and Travel:

Ms. Mary Beth Nowak

Executive Assistant to the Secretary:

Pr. Karen G. Bockelman

Archivist for Collection Management and Development:

Ms. Catherine M. Lundeen

Archivist for Reference, Management and Technology:

Mr. Joel A. Thoreson

Archives Assistant: Ms. Lauren Gioe

Meeting Planner: Ms. Gail Schroeder

Registrar: Ms. JoAnne Brady

Managing Editor of the Yearbook and Rosters Assistant:

Mr. Thomas J. Ehlen

Risk Manager: Mr. Rob Thoma

In addition, in the course of the year, the Office of the Secretary has been assisted by a number of temporary or part-time persons. They have provided invaluable assistance at critical times, and their devotion, good humor, and hard work are greatly appreciated. They include Mr. Keith Fry, Mr. Luke Smetters, Mr. Andrew Walter, and Ms. Sonia Hayden.

We were saddened this spring to lose Mr. Russell S. Deloney, the long-time technician at the archives, who died after a brief battle with cancer. We grieve for Russ and his family, but the promise of the resurrection provides solace to all of us who miss him.

Priorities and Special Projects

The ongoing responsibilities of the Office of the Secretary, as described above, require clear vision and substantial effort by the secretary and staff. These responsibilities also ebb and flow depending on the work of others in the churchwide organization and the time of year (e.g., the proximity to the Churchwide Assembly!). Nonetheless, I want to describe briefly a number of special projects and priorities on which I have placed special emphases since my election in 2007.

Developing synergistic leadership

During the election process in 2007, I commented that the governing documents of this church authorize either a layperson or an ordained minister to serve as secretary. I indicated to the Churchwide Assembly that I believed that it would be important at some time to have a layperson as secretary. I also commented to the voting members of the assembly that it was their decision to determine if this was the time and if I was the person to serve the ELCA as its secretary.

I do feel called to serve this wonderful church, full of multi-talented and dedicated leaders, focused on the proclamation of the Gospel and service. I also believe that one of the keys to the long-term success (not just survival) of this church is the development of lay leadership. Indeed, it is the development of both laypersons and clergy who work collaboratively to create synergistic, forward-thinking, missional leadership that is a key ingredient to the long-range success of the mission and ministries of this church.

I believe that all of us who have been baptized are marked with the cross of Christ forever and are claimed, gathered, and sent for the sake of the world. As a layperson and lawyer, I also understand the law of nonprofit organizations and the polity of the ELCA. I believe that understanding the missional mandates of our governing documents and the application of fiduciary responsibilities can provide the foundation for effective governance and facilitate wise decision-making in synods and congregations. Consequently, one of my objectives in serving as secretary of this church is to meet with congregation and synod councils and other groups of leaders (such as synodical vice presidents and secretaries) to provide instruction and encouragement. My objective is to work with leaders to develop synergies among the lay and clergy leaders within each expression of this church.

Bringing forth a new generation of leaders

I took office after the churchwide organization had developed the Plan for Mission and its accompanying strategic directions. Given my personal priorities, I was delighted to see

that one of the strategic directions specifically addresses leadership development. Indeed, as many synods have learned, the fifth strategic directive has provided me a launching pad for addressing leadership issues in this church. That strategic direction states that the churchwide organization will:

Assist this church to bring forth and support faithful, wise, and courageous leaders whose vocations serve God's mission in a pluralistic world.

This direction focuses on our mutual responsibility to both identify and inspire for service ("bring forth") and to sustain in their ministries ("support") leaders who have specific attributes that are necessary to lead this church in the 21st century ("faithful, wise, and courageous"). Just as significantly, this strategic direction focuses on both clergy and laypersons ("vocations") and the setting for their leadership ("a pluralistic world").

In addition to holding up this strategic direction to synodical and congregational leaders, the Office of the Secretary is working to translate this objective into reality in a number of ways that warrant brief mention. First, this Churchwide Assembly will address proposed amendments to the governing documents of this church that make concrete commitments to increase the participation of youth and young adults in governance. These proposals were developed in collaboration with staff in the Vocation and Education unit, and they represent an affirmation of the commitment to raise up faithful, wise, courageous, and *young* leaders of this church for the 21st century.

In addition, an important responsibility of the Office of the Secretary is facilitating the work of the Nominating Committee. Raising up and supporting faithful, wise, and courageous leaders in congregations and synods is a challenging responsibility, but the tasks of identifying potential nominees for service on churchwide boards and committees, eliciting nominations, evaluating nominees, and coordinating the process in light of representational, geographical, and other constitutional and practical considerations are daunting. For many months, the Office of the Secretary has worked with program units of this church to spur a more deliberate and expansive effort to identify and recommend nominees for service on churchwide boards and committees. These efforts culminated in the meeting of the Nominating Committee in April. By the time of the meeting, an extensive pool of potential nominees had been developed, and the Nominating Committee itself accepted the challenge to become more proactive in the future in identifying and recruiting potential nominees for leadership positions in this church. While we want individuals who are committed to and knowledgeable about this church, we also want to raise up others who are inspired by the Gospel and called to service but who have faith journeys and experiences different from many of ours.

I want to take this occasion to thank and commend both the Nominating Committee, under the excellent leadership of Pr. Martin J. Russell, chair, as well as Prs. Karen Bockelman and Ruth Hamilton, Legal Assistant Loraine Shields, and staff member Andrew Walter, for exceptional work in this important priority.

Collaboration with synods

Both in the context of leadership development and in providing ongoing assistance, an important priority of the Office of the Secretary is facilitating the work of synods. In addition to this important responsibility, the Office of the Secretary has undertaken in collaboration with others at the churchwide organization a number of initiatives designed to facilitate the work of the synods.

In 2007 and 2008, the Office of the Secretary and the Synodical Relations section of the Office of the Presiding Bishop developed and updated comprehensive Guidelines for the Election of Synodical Bishops. The impetus for this document was the election of nine synodical bishops in 2007. The document became a template for discussion and collaboration in each of the synods holding elections in 2008 and in 2009. Based on experience in these years, the guidelines facilitated the work of synodical election committees and the nomination and election processes. In addition, work with these synods provided the opportunity to cooperate with Pr. Kathie Bender-Schwich and her successor Pr. Walter S. May in Synodical Relations (both of whom we are blessed to have as colleagues), as well as numerous synodical staff and leaders overseeing nominations and elections processes.

On a number of occasions, members of the Office of the Secretary have attended meetings of synodical officers or staff to provide information and to answer questions. In March 2009, Pr. Ruth Hamilton and I attended the biennial gathering of assistants to the bishops. Our presentation and the opportunity to meet with staff and to answer questions underscored our commitment to collaboration and mutual problem-solving. Thanks to Pr. Hamilton for being a wonderful colleague in the work of the Office of the Secretary and for her invaluable assistance as I transitioned into this call.

In addition to work on elections, the Office of the Secretary has updated information and recommendations for synods on subjects ranging from background checks, to records management, to archives, to preparation for the Churchwide Assembly. Dave Ullrich and others also have provided important legal and practical information in an electronic newsletter (see the newsletter *Administration Matters* on the ELCA Web site), and Claire Buettner is working constantly on updating and refreshing the Web site of the Office of the Secretary. In the pipeline for 2010 is a set of model rules for synod assemblies and a review of the process of nomination and elections of synodical officers. On the more distant horizon is a manual for synod secretaries. If your synods have identified areas in which the Office of the Secretary could provide assistance, please let us know.

Finally, one of the unique aspects of serving as secretary of this church as a layperson is sitting in the Conference of Bishops. Although I approached this responsibility with some trepidation, I have found this aspect of my work among the most rewarding, both as a leader of this church and on a personal level. I have been greeted and treated as a colleague

in ministry and have developed relationships of friendship and mutual respect with many, many bishops. I want to take this opportunity to thank all the synodical bishops for their gracious acceptance of me and for the opportunity to collaborate in their important work in this church.

Congregational reports

One of the responsibilities of the Office of the Secretary is facilitating the collection of data from congregations. For the most part, this means dissemination, review, and evaluation of the congregational reports, which are sometimes called parochial reports. This is a recurring challenge for leaders in all expressions of the ELCA, but the data collected is very important for this church.

In working with the Conference of Bishops and colleagues at the churchwide organization, we have discussed ways to increase the response rate for congregations and to simplify the report to provide more accurate and useful information. With the encouragement of bishops, a task force was formed in the churchwide organization to work on the congregational report forms. It is in the final stages of development, and I anticipate that it will be rolled out to congregations later this year for reporting on 2009. With the assistance of a number of units, and especially the Research and Evaluation section of the Office of the Presiding Bishop, and with the able supervision of Ms. Deborah Myers, we hope to both ease the burden on those responding in congregations and to provide improved data for synods and the churchwide organization. A sample of the new Form A is attached to this report as Appendix A.

In the meantime, I urge congregations and synods to recommit themselves to providing the congregational report information, which the ELCA uses to plan for the future. Good plans require good data. Congregational leaders, please complete the forms (and call the Office of the Secretary if you need assistance). Bishops, please appoint a synod statistician in accordance with †S8.12.i.12., to help improve your response rates.

Greening of the Office of the Secretary and the Churchwide Assembly

The Office of the Secretary is committed to being better stewards of God's creation. For any unit of a large organization, this is a complex task. However, we have pledged to take small steps forward, reminding one another of the three "Rs" of environmental stewardship: reduce, reuse, recycle.

Some may have noticed already that the process of preparing for the Churchwide Assembly was different this year. Registration for participants was carried out almost completely online. The *2009 Pre-Assembly Report* is being posted on the Churchwide Assembly Web site as it becomes available, with one mailing of the contents scheduled for mid-July, rather than being sent in multiple mailings as in previous years. The updated voting member orientation video has been posted online, as has a new video on parliamentary procedure

for the Churchwide Assembly. These steps provide the opportunity for voting members to prepare further in advance of the assembly and to review material in smaller amounts. These steps also make important materials available to a wider audience, and they save many, many trees.

There also will be a greater emphasis on recycling at this assembly. The *Pre-Assembly Report* binder is made of recycled materials, and it will be recycled at the end of the assembly. Coffee mugs and water bottles will be distributed to decrease use of paper and Styrofoam cups. In addition, preliminary and final minutes will be posted electronically, with hard copies available by request. If you have suggestions on ways to enhance the “greening” of the Churchwide Assembly, please let us know!

An oral history project: “Voices of Vision—The ELCA at 25”

One other aspect of the work of the Office of the Secretary warrants mention, in part because it is not readily apparent from the governing documents and because it provides a unique opportunity to prepare to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the ELCA in 2013. It is the oral history project, “Voice of Vision—the ELCA at 25.”

Funded by a generous grant from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans and overseen by the staff at the archives and an advisory committee of historians, theologians, and other scholars, this project involves taking oral histories from leaders throughout the ELCA, focusing principally on the early years of this church. Already the former presiding bishops and several others have been interviewed, and a number of other interviews with leaders in all expressions of this church have been scheduled. It is our hope that these interviews can be synthesized and expanded into a 25th-anniversary gift to this church.

One important aspect of the oral history project can involve *you* as members of the Churchwide Assembly! Modeled on the “Story Corps” used by National Public Radio, “I Love To Tell the Story: My ELCA” will offer assembly participants an opportunity to give a recorded oral interview and provide reflections on your experiences and views as members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. We invite everyone to take the opportunity to be part of the history of this church in this unique way.

Risk management

Risk management and insurance issues are important aspects of the “business” of congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization. Looking at risk management issues tends to occur only sporadically or when problems arise.

Partly because of my background and experience as a lawyer and partly because of the study concerning insurance alternatives that was underway when I came to office, risk management has been one of the important issues over the past two years in the Office of the Secretary.

In early 2008, based upon the recommendation of the Insurance Alternatives Task Force, the decision was made to change the ELCA’s endorsed insurance program (which is called for in constitutional provision 10.74. and continuing resolution 13.41.A03.) to Church Mutual Insurance Company of Merrill, Wis. Church Mutual committed to work with the ELCA churchwide organization, synods, and congregations to put together an excellent insurance program as well as risk management services. The decision to move to Church Mutual also was based on the company’s history of providing insurance to religious institutions (already including thousands of ELCA congregations) and its excellent reputation in claims handling. Church Mutual also worked with staff in putting together an insurance program that included coverage for sexual misconduct. Thus far, despite challenges in the insurance industry and the broader economy, 42 synods and more than 3700 ELCA congregations are insured through Church Mutual.

One other aspect of risk management should be mentioned. For a number of years, the ELCA has had a part-time contract employee serve as risk manager. I am delighted to report that effective May 1, 2009, Mr. Rob Thoma has come to work as a full-time ELCA employee responsible for risk management issues. One of my priorities is to help synods and congregations take a more proactive role in risk management, and Rob—together with Church Mutual—can provide the expertise and materials to facilitate this important objective. When members of the Churchwide Assembly return to their home congregations, I urge them to check their congregation’s insurance programs and to confer with Rob and the local Church Mutual representative both about insurance needs and risk management.

Statistics

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 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). Appendix C is a summary and discussion of parochial statistics from congregational reports. During the oral report of the secretary to the assembly, I will comment upon this data.

Conclusion

The multi-dimensional odysseys that I have experienced since election as secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America frequently have buffeted me and sent me into unfamiliar territory. Oftentimes, I have felt like Sisyphus struggling on a daily basis to move a rock forward, only to be awakened the following morning to the same rock and a greater slope. During the difficult times (as well as the more often joyous ones!), three things have provided me with solace and strength.

First, I find incredible support in the knowledge that the staff of the Office of the Secretary and colleagues at the churchwide organization are devoted to providing assistance to me and to others throughout this church with whom we are in ministry together. I know that members of this church are holding Barbara and me and our ministries in their prayers. Words cannot adequately express our thanks for that support and those prayers.

Second, as I indicated to the assembly in 2007, I find both strength and comfort in Martin Luther's words that I frequently review before worship:

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 the one common, true faith.

Finally, when I get discouraged I reflect on Faraja Kurubai and others like her who are touched by the ministries of the ELCA.

Marked with the cross of Christ forever, we are truly claimed, gathered, and sent for the sake of the world. Strengthened by the incredible gifts of the Holy Spirit, we can do so much together to proclaim the Gospel and to serve our neighbors, near and far—much more than we could ever do as individuals, as separate congregations, as single synods. Truly, together, as interdependent partners, we can do God's work with our hands!

David D. Swartling, *secretary*