

Our life together

By the Rev. Wm Chris Boerger, bishop



I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in

the desert (Isaiah 43:19).

These words of the prophet Isaiah speak directly to us today. In Isaiah's time the people of God were captive in Babylon. It was beyond hope to expect that they might have a future in the land from which their ancestors had been taken. It was a hopeless time for the people of Judah. So God says, "Pay attention. There is something new happening."

When we look at the number of congregations that are facing uncertain futures, we, too, could move in the direction of hopelessness. We,

too, need to hear the word of God saying: "Pay attention. Don't you see the new things that are happening around you?" Moving post-Easter we might say, "Don't you see the resurrection in the world even as we face sin and death?"

One of the dangers of this type of article is that I, too, miss the new things that are happening. But I still want to mention a few things.

I want to raise up the exciting things happening at Gethsemane Lutheran in Seattle, a congregation offering housing and hope in the middle of the city (see page C). This is a new thing. This is a sign of the power of the resurrection among us.

The congregation's new facility gives witness to those who have planned and sacrificed to extend the ministry of God's people to those who live on the streets of downtown Seattle.

Gethsemane is not the only sign of this newness. Immanuel Lutheran and the Church of Steadfast Love,

both in Seattle, bring additional outreach to those in need in the downtown area. The fact is that this sign of God's new thing is real and should be apparent to us all.

Our Redeemer Lutheran in Seattle, St. Luke's Lutheran and St. Andrew's Lutheran, both in Bellevue, are each taking new and continued responses to the homeless in their communities.

The act of providing hospitality to the stranger is as old as the scriptural story we read regularly. It is taking new forms in these and many other congregations throughout the synod. It may, in fact, be so much a part of who we are that we fail to see that God is at work at this *new thing*.

Resurrection is about new life to dead people. Many of our dreams and hopes have died in this time of recession and change. It is important for us to hear the Easter proclamation today. We are the people in whom God is doing a new thing. Don't you see it? □

2012 Northwest Washington Synod Assembly

The 2012 Northwest Washington Synod Assembly will take place May 18-19 (Friday and Saturday) at the Edward D. Hansen Conference Center, Comcast Arena at Everett.

The theme for this year's assembly is "The Word of God is Source and Seed."

Our keynote speaker will be Mark Allan Pow-

ell, the Robert and Phyllis Leatherman Professor of New Testament at Trinity Lutheran Seminary, Columbus, Ohio. He is the author of numerous articles and books.

As material becomes available, information will be added to the assembly page on the synod's website (www.lutheransnw.org/assembly/2012).

Northwest Washington



Listening carefully ... to faith and life journeys

By the Rev. Nancy Winder

When we talk about the candidacy process, we think first of the women and men called by God and the church to become rostered leaders in the ELCA. Although they are the focus, the heart and soul of the process are the volunteers and staff that make up the candidacy committee.

Our Northwest Washington Synod Candidacy Committee has people from all over the synod, from islands and small towns, cities and suburbs. Due to the large number of applicants and candidates (as of this writing, the fourth largest number of the ELCA's 65 synods), our committee meets every month, usually all day, to do the work of this ministry.

Besides negotiating the ins and outs of the process—including finding their way through the 118-page candidacy manual—each committee member relates specifically to about six applicants and candidates. They

stay in contact with these people, answer their questions or direct them to a place where they might find an answer, and get to know them in a very special way during this journey.

The real privilege of being on the committee is sitting together as we hear from people in the interviews at the three stages of the process: entrance, endorsement and approval.

Our committee listens carefully to faith and life journeys and, in the power of the Spirit, does its best to discern whether a person is indeed a gifted person for public ministry. This is not an easy task. Sometimes difficult decisions have to be made, and it can be heart-wrenching to help a brother or sister in Christ find other directions for the gifts God has given them. But it is more often a joyful experience.

The committee gets to follow the formation of a candidate during a four- to six-year period. Watching

The Northwest Washington Synod Candidacy Committee includes Faye Bone (seated); front row: the Rev. Shelley Wickstrom, Region 1; the Rev. Kathryn Buffum; Rachel Schoeld; Georganne Robertson; the Rev. Linda Larson; the Rev. Nancy Winder, assistant to the bishop for candidacy; back row: the Rev. Paul Hoffman, chair; Bishop Chris Boerger; Dr. Terry Fretheim, seminary representative; Trygve Anderson, the Rev. Erik Kindem; Malcolm McCallum. Not pictured: Dave Rice.

each person grow in their theological abilities, confidence and joy in proclaiming the gospel is real treat.

This past December we interviewed six candidates for approval, the last step before ordination, commissioning or consecration. Although it might have been more expedient to split the committee up to do these interviews, they instead decided to meet for two days. Everyone wants to hear the end of the story!

Remember the faithful servants on our synod candidacy committee in your prayers. They are helping shape the future of the church. □

Winder is assistant to the bishop for candidacy.

Resurrection hope in downtown Seattle

Through the prophet Isaiah, God’s promise long ago proclaimed “a new thing” that God was doing, something already begun even when not yet seen. Israel would be released from Babylon and her ruins would be rebuilt. It seemed impossible, yet this song of hope rang out brightly in a time of despair.

The prophet called people to trust in God’s care no matter what circumstances seemed to say about their lives. Most of us can relate. Deep in our bones we know how hard it is to trust during challenging times.

For the people of Gethsemane Lutheran in downtown Seattle, the continuing call to trust God despite an unseen future has helped write a new chapter in the storybook of the congregation’s life.

Established in 1885, Gethsemane has undertaken plenty of change over the years. But its recent construction project redevelops far more than the land on the corner of Ninth

and Stewart. Indeed, the “new thing” currently unfolding challenges parishioners to open themselves to what Doris Matthews, a longtime Gethsemane member, calls “a whole new way of being church.”

As do many others, Matthews exudes joy when she imagines the possibilities opened by the construction project.

The new building’s lower level houses community services organized as the “Hope Center,” a newly formed nonprofit collaborative of the congregation’s outreach programs (begun in the 1950s) and Mary’s Place (a day shelter for women and children).

Street level (one floor above) will house church offices, hospitality spaces, a garden, meeting rooms and a new chapel.

The top five floors and roof deck are Compass Housing Alliance’s Dekko Place. These floors provide 50 income-qualified housing units plus community gathering spaces

and amenities.

As the facilities open this spring and the construction “punch list” is completed, we will be tempted to think that renovations are done. What we could not see one year ago will be gloriously visible—new and renewed spaces for worship, study and service.

But still unfolding will be the community that Gethsemane is still becoming: a people and place marked by radical welcome. As people joined in baptism to Christ’s death and resurrection, we imagine no better resurrection hope than what is ours in this community of Gethsemane: *In Christ ... In the City*. □

The Rev. Joanne Elise Engquist
Engquist is pastor of Gethsemane Lutheran Church, Seattle.

Celebrate with Compass Housing Alliance and Gethsemane at a dedication event at 3:30 p.m., April 25. Details at www.urbanfaith.org.

Mine cleanup to begin at Holden Village and surrounding area

When the Howe Sound Holden Mine closed in 1957 it left behind contaminants on more than 120 acres, largely across Railroad Creek from Holden Village. The U.S. Forest Service has identified several potential threats to the aquatic health of the creek and the environment that emanate from the mine area. The agency has given the authorization to move ahead with the mine remediation.

Preliminary work was done last summer and will continue in 2012

in preparation for a major cleanup in 2013 and 2014. This will include a large amount of earth-moving. Construction will aim to capture the water that comes in contact with the contaminated areas.

Holden anticipates housing and feeding 200 or more construction workers in 2013 and 2014.

During this time, Holden might not be able to accommodate guests as usual but plans to offer work project opportunities for volunteers.

Some of the items that will be

done by the village include repair of buried water lines, installation of a water line dedicated to fire protection of the buildings, major work on the buildings (including new roofing on some of the lodges) and much more.

When everything is complete, the hope is that Holden Village and the area around it will be even more beautiful than before.

For more information about this project, see www.holdenvillage.org. □

Making disciples

Confessions of a fumbling missionary

When I was ordained in 1962, my first assignment as a missionary in West Africa was clear. I was to gather a community of people around the word of God and the sacraments, and nurture them to be a community of believers in Kumasi, Ghana.

I was a foreign mission developer. I walked the streets of an urban housing development where there were no churches, engaged people in conversation, taught Bible studies, held worship services and nurtured faith. I founded two congregations: one thrived (and is still thriving), and the other failed.

In 1970, I moved to a congregation on the eastern edge of Portland, Ore. St. Timothy Lutheran Church was already well established. But it could grow and it did.

As pastor I followed up with visitors and other contacts. I also taught a class for newcomers.

Twice a year during worship a group of people publicly affirmed a new or renewed faith. Seldom was there an adult baptism because it seemed that everyone had been baptized at least once. Every time a group appeared, some members in the congregation would ask, "Where did they come from?" But they knew that I was doing "the pastor's work."

Even through the turbulent '70s, the congregation thrived.

In 1988, as the ELCA was coming into being, I was called to be a pastor of a larger congregation in North Seattle. Phinney Ridge Lutheran Church had grown very large in the '50s and '60s and was

now in a slow decline. It had grown large, first by receiving Norwegian immigrants and their families, and then by receiving Lutheran transfers from the Midwest. The congregation spawned several new churches on the outskirts of the city.

When the flow of immigrants and emigrants slowed, and members grew old, the congregation declined.

It was clear to this missionary that we needed to reach out to the diverse and secular people who were moving into the older houses near the church. We formed an evangelism committee and tried some of the gimmicks proposed by the church growth movement. It wasn't working.

The question changed from "How can we bring people in and preserve our church?" to "What do we need to do to help a secular unchurched person become part of this faithful community?"

We framed our answer into a series of steps:

- Identify.
- Invite.
- Instruct.
- Initiate.
- Integrate.

It was then that this old missionary saw an invitation in a synod newsletter for a weekend workshop to reintroduce a practice from the early history of the church, *The Adult Catechumenate*. It takes a weekend to describe this marvelous way of growing the church.

Were you to visit Phinney Ridge Lutheran you would likely hear something about the Sunday evening

gatherings of *The Way* (a term much easier to handle than *catechumenate*). Were you to participate in the gatherings, you would first sit down to a meal and become part of a conversation about life, work or family. You would likely hear a set of terms: *candidate*, *sponsor* and *catechist*.

You would then become part of a small group of three or four newcomers (*candidates*). Each candidate would be accompanied by a member of the congregation (*sponsor*), committed to accompanying the candidate through the process.

The group would be led by a practiced facilitator (*catechist*). They would reflect on the Gospel lesson read during morning worship to discover what the text was saying to them for their lives in the upcoming week.

During the concluding large-group prayer, the pastor would speak of a "*liturgy*" scheduled for the upcoming Sunday.

On that Sunday the candidates, accompanied by their sponsors and catechists, would be invited in front of the congregation during the liturgy. Sponsors would lay their hands on their candidate and everyone in the congregation would raise their hands as a blessing is prayed over the group. This would all culminate on the Eve of Easter with a great celebration of baptism.

The catechumenate: the most satisfying movement in which this fumbling missionary has been involved. □

Maier is interim bishop of the Alaska Synod.