

# Alaska



est peak, you'll get to see it only 20 percent of the time.

From an airplane you can see the peak below and off in the distance. Even looking across from it and down, you know you're seeing an amazing site. But up close, your view will almost always be obscured.

We often get a clearer perspective on things from a distance. Jesus' resurrection took awhile for people to understand. We make use of what we know and feel to sift through experiences. The Romans would often display a crucified body as a warning to not repeat the criminal's mistake. It is understandable that Mary assumed

Jesus' body had been stolen. It makes perfect sense that she thought she was speaking with a gardener. She reached to hold the truth when that truth addressed her by name.

Another Mary had pondered things about Jesus in her heart. When she held him for the first time, she, too, was blending experience with a sense that God was at work in what she held.

There's plenty of life lived in the early morning mist when it's too dark to see. We, too, make use of what we know and experience to make sense of what is at hand. But we also have the witness of other followers of Jesus in Scripture, theology and art. Their reflection and experience is a resource. Science and technology are also the gift of God-given intellect and creativity. Like anyone who wants to see Denali, we'd do well to allow ourselves to step back and every once in awhile, look for it from afar. The Creator of the universe is not threatened by wonder and awe.

In this green, spiritual growth season of Pentecost, the Sunday lessons focus on Jesus' teaching and healing. These stories were remembered because they presented a deeper, broader, even more scandalous/wondrous understanding of what God intends.

Take the time to step back and ponder. What have you learned in hindsight? Where is your imagination drawing you? Who listens and speaks truth to you? With whom can you share your questions?

Blessed people, God is still at work shaping us as God's people for the sake of what God is up to in this world. Ponder anew. □

## Ponder anew

By Bishop Shelley Wickstrom



**Shelley Wickstrom**, bishop of the Alaska Synod.

**P**eople come from all over the world expecting to see it. Massive, majestic, awe-inspiring are common words used to describe it—when you can see it.

If you've taken the bunnumbing eight-hour bus ride into Denali National Park and Preserve, you've seen bears, caribou, wolves, moose, fox and eagles—but not necessarily Mount McKinley. Alaskans call the mountain "Denali,"

which is the Athabaskan word for "The great one."

Ironically, getting closer to the 20,320-foot high mountain makes it statistically less likely that you'll see the peak. Cloud cover often obscures the view from below. From 240 miles south in Anchorage or from 120 miles north in Fairbanks, you'll have a better chance of seeing the peak. You can often see Denali along the Parks Highway. It's absolutely amazing. But if you're at the base of North America's high-

# A year later

By Bishop Brian Kirby Unti

July marks the end of my first year serving as bishop of the Northwest Washington Synod. My days in this office have been both rich and full. I have had the opportunity to be present at many of our ministry sites, to meet the members of the roster and greet the laity who so faithfully serve this church.

I work with a gifted and dedicated team who serve the Office of Bishop. It's the kind of work environment where I look forward daily to coming to work. I've even learned how to enjoy my commute from Renton to Phinney Avenue. Your synod office team, while lean in number, is committed to serving. We have tried to create a place of hospitality that can function as a communications hub to exchange valuable information on what is happening on the territory of our synod. Our aim has been to be aware of who we are called to serve and be responsive to this calling.

## Gathering for conversations

Adding a great measure of blessing to this call has been the opportunity to gather with the Conference of Bishops. There is a strong bond that forms with those of us who share this calling. Given the diverse points of view that are represented among the bishops makes this bond all the more delightful.

This calling has placed me at a big table for conversations with Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, Berkeley, Calif; Pacific Lutheran University, Tacoma, Wash.; Seattle School of Theology and Ministry; Lutheran Community Services of Northwest Washington; Compass Housing Alliance; Bethany of the Northwest; Faith Action Network; Open Door Ministries; Camp Lutherwood; Mission to Seafarers; the Church Council of Greater Seattle; and Lutheran Counseling Network. Literally thousands of lives are being impacted by these ministries.

My world has also received grace upon grace from the opportunity to gather with our ecumenical partners. This has allowed me to witness the added strength that comes in proclaiming the gospel when we do so beyond the limi-

tations of our individual denominations.

Another joy of this office is being invited into friendship by our interfaith sisters and brothers. Our common desire to seek justice binds us together. It is deeply meaningful to me when we celebrate what it means that we are all children of God.

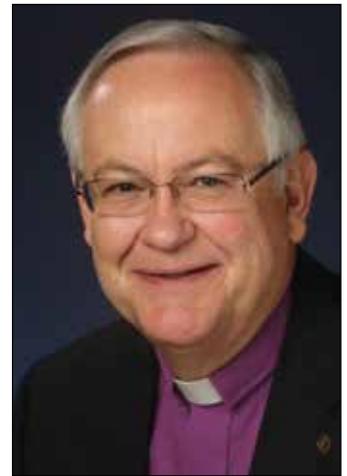
My greatest joy has been the life and vitality I see throughout this church. Size is not the only predictor of vitality. Wonderful vitality is present in congregations that worship with as few as a dozen people. Though small in number, the people are drawn together in worship and find significant ways to serve their neighbors. Another great source of life is what is happening in our ethnic and new start congregations.

Seeing life in so many places brings hope to members of congregations who are intentional about redeveloping their mission.

If there is a common denominator among our many expressions of the church in the Northwest, it is the growing commitment to reaching out locally and around the world.

I know these are challenging times for the church, with many of us wrestling with issues of sustainability. We have to begin to imagine what it means to be the church beyond our buildings as we find more genuinely collaborative ways to join God in what God is up to in the community and around the world.

I thank you for your prayers, your words of encouragement and the partnership that we have shared this past year in dishing up God's grace together. □



**Brian Kirby Unti**, bishop of the Northwest Washington Synod.

# Northwest Washington



Participants of Lutheran Volunteer Corps work at an urban farm.

## LVC volunteers serve in the synod

This year 20 Lutheran Volunteer Corps (LVC) participants are hard at work, serving 15 organizations in the Northwest Washington Synod.

LVC is a community of faith, uniting people to work for peace with justice. The yearlong service program matches about 145 volunteers with full-time positions in social justice organizations in 14 cities nationwide.

In our synod the volunteers serve in direct service and behind-the-scenes work with Lutheran-affiliated and secular programs on topics ranging from housing and homelessness, to youth empowerment, to the environment and immigrant concerns. Over the last two years there has been a great demand for volunteers by old and new organizational partners in the Puget Sound region. Some of the new placements include the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project, Hepatitis Education Project, Sound Alliance, Jewish Family Services, and Gethsemane Lutheran Church. These new partners allow volunteers more opportunities to serve in areas they care about, while impacting a wider variety of local programs and services.

In addition to the core social justice work, these

dynamic young adults live out the spiritual practice of “intentional communities.” In the NW WA Synod there are four communities of four to six individuals where volunteers build relationships and are supported in their spiritual and vocational journey by alumni mentors, host congregations and LVC staff member Monica Fisk.

Volunteers also were able to go to Holden Village on their midyear retreat. Near Chelan, the village was a wonderful place to rest, restore and renew for the rest of the service year.

LVC is blessed to have a strong network of Lutheran support in the NW WA Synod, which is integral to its presence and impact. The “host congregations” in Seattle—Ballard First, Columbia City Church of Hope, Gethsemane, Central and Queen Anne—extend hospitality to the volunteers through open doors, rides to and from the airport, warm meals, spiritual guidance and even housing. In addition, several other congregations and the synod office support LVC through designated offerings, financial gifts, material donations and outreach efforts. This community makes LVC thrive.

Another exciting event for LVC in the region was climbing Mount Rainier, which at 14,411 feet is the highest glaciated peak in the Lower 48. The 2013 Climb for Peace with Justice brought together nine alumni climbers who raised funds to take on this challenge, then were trained in technical mountaineering skills before making an attempt at the summit.

The 2014 climb will take place over Labor Day weekend, and LVC is recruiting climbers/fundraisers from across the country. Interested? Read more at our website ([www.lutheranvolunteercorps.org](http://www.lutheranvolunteercorps.org)).

After their year of service, volunteers go on to attend seminary or graduate school, continue their work in the non-profit sector or take on other jobs. While each volunteer’s future path will be different, 90 percent of LVC alumni continue to be involved in the movement for justice, putting their faith and spirituality into

action for a better world. The current cohort will find creative ways to turn his or her year of service into a lifetime of commitment.

LVC relies on your continued prayers, contributions and help in spreading the word as we move forward. □



LVC young adults at Holden Village, a retreat center near Chelan.

## Maritime Ministry

# Global mission at home

By the Rev. Sue Wanwig



We don't think about them because we don't see them. But look around your house and think of all the products (or raw materials) that come from far away. Now think of all the crops and goods from the U.S. that are destined for faraway places. Who makes all this possible? Thousands of hardworking seafarers on commercial ships. Our economy and lifestyle depend on them. One in three businesses is dependent in some way on the activity at seaports.

But we never see most of the people who make it all work, and so we don't think about them.

Seafaring is dangerous, physically exhausting and lonely. The U.S. Coast Guard estimates that 60 percent of sailors are at sea for eight months at a time. Voyages are slower now than 10 years ago because it's cheaper to save fuel and pay crews for more days at sea. Seafarers are far from home at births, deaths, graduations. They come into port craving fresh vegetables and news from home.

Many Northwest Lutherans can recall a Scandinavian grandparent who went to sea. Today most sailors come from the Philippines, Indonesia, China, Sri Lanka and Eastern Europe—places where it's hard to find family wage jobs. They are the working poor. Many don't know Christ; others try to sustain their faith while far from worship and fellowship opportunities.

Most of the 1,300 to 1,400 who enter the Port of Seattle every year are here for a day while containers are off-loaded and loaded. Rarely is a ship here for more than a couple of days. Due to heightened port security, workload and the lack

of a visa, many seafarers can't leave the ship.

But they aren't forgotten by Jesus, nor by some of his friends. In 1889 the Lutheran church began a ministry to seafarers. Each day Lutheran, Episcopal and Roman Catholic lay chaplains and pastors visit the ships in port. They bring pastoral care and a listening ear. ELCA chaplain Paul Tan speaks Mandarin and Hokkien Chinese and Tagalog.

This ministry also offer low-cost international phone cards and portable Wi-Fi stations so sailors can contact loved ones by email or Skype. For those able to get off the ships, the chaplain will take them to one of Seattle's two seamen centers or on a shopping trip. They may shop for medicine; gifts for their families; electronic gear; or other supplies.

Maritime ministry takes its commission from Paul's shipwreck experience: "After we had reached safety, we then learned that the island was called Malta. The natives showed us unusual kindness. Since it had begun to rain and was cold, they kindled a fire and welcomed all of us round it" (Acts 28:1-2).

Maritime ministry is global mission in our region. Please consider celebrating 125 years of Lutheran mission to seafarers by lifting up this ministry in your prayers. Help ensure that our chaplains can continue their shipboard visits by adding the ministry to the church budget. Encourage your congregational small groups to extend Christian fellowship by making and filling ditty bags with small gifts. Drivers are also welcome to transport cruise ship crews by van to the downtown area in the summer.

Make your gift to "Northwest Washington Synod Maritime Ministry," 5519 Phinney Ave. N., Seattle, WA 98103-5299. Contact me, the Rev. Sue Wanwig, about creating ditty bags or volunteering to drive crew members (206-232-3270). □



### Author bio:

Wanwig is associate pastor of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Mercer Island.