

A faithful departure

Summer is a magical time in Seward, Alaska. The mountain views are stunning, the ocean teems with salmon, the opportunities for outdoor recreation are endless, and the long daylight hours make anything seem possible.

The 4,000 hardy year-round residents of the Seward area are joined by a bevy of seasonal workers as the town plays host to thousands of tourists throughout the summer months.

It's a busy time for Resurrection Lutheran Church, a time when outreach opportunities abound, out-of-town visitors fill the pews, and the year's most important fundraiser must be organized in preparation for Seward's Fourth of July celebration. But summer is also the busiest time in the personal and professional lives of the congregation's members.

For six years the Rev. Ron Nitz has faithfully led this congregation through its sleepy winters and busy summers. With retirement looming, he knew that timing would be crucial when it came to making a faithful departure.

"Although I could have left at the end of May [when I turned 66]," he wrote, "I was also aware that the month of July in this congregation was one of the busiest of the year for them, so I elected to stay through the month of July because it would be difficult for a new pastor or an interim to step in and know what was going on."

Preparing an exit strategy

With his retirement date now fixed and the church council notified more than a year in advance, Nitz began making preparations for his exit strategy.

"Simply forging ahead as if nothing was happening would leave the congregation no better prepared for my departure than if I had told them nothing until the day before I left," Nitz wrote. "One of the first things I did was to involve the synod bishop, the Rev. Shelley Wickstrom, in the discussion and process. She set a date about eight months in advance to meet with the congregation leadership about this.

"I began to compile a list of all the things I did on a daily, weekly, monthly and yearly basis—a job description based on my experience here. I also tried to indicate which things I thought were the most important, and which things could probably be skipped during a vacancy or interim."

The advance notice has allowed the congregation to get the ball rolling on the call process. Brooke Andrews, a member of the call committee, expressed gratitude for Nitz's thoughtfulness: "From the time we welcomed Pastor Ron into our congregation, he has cared for our church family with the greatest amount of love and respect. Even in his departure he has tai-

lored his retirement date to a time frame that will help us the most. We truly appreciate Pastor Ron giving us this time line so we can start the call process as efficiently as possible."

Nitz hopes his timing and preparations will leave his current congregation in the best possible position to continue their ministry and make a smooth transition to a new pastor.

"Why devote all this effort to helping the congregation when I am going to be leaving them anyway?" Nitz asks. "Because it's not about me, it's about the ministry. ... The ministry at Resurrection, Seward, will continue with or without me. How much better for it to continue in a healthy and effective manner because of what I did, than to struggle because of what I did not do. For me, this is about being faithful to my calling as a pastor in my departure, as well as in my years of service." □

Jessica Bamford and the Rev. Ron Nitz from Resurrection Lutheran Church, Seward, Alaska, contributed to this report.



Members of Resurrection Lutheran Church, Seward, Alaska, participated in the annual CROP Walk last September to raise money to fight hunger. Front row, from left: Josie Andrews and Nora Andrews. Back row: Brooke Andrews, Kathy Fredrickson, Lori Draper, Rae Elde, the Rev. Ron Nitz, Jackie Nitz and Tom Irvin.



Fireweed blooms in the Seward Small Boat Harbor in late July, with Mount Alice in the background.

Focus on where God is at work

By Bishop Kirby Unti

One of the great joys of serving in the Office of Bishop is the opportunity to see the many places across the territory of our Northwest Washington Synod where ministry is happening. I rejoice in the life that I witness and the amazing dedication of God's faithful people. I hear unending stories of how excited people are to be able to serve and the added purpose it brings to their lives.

I'm also more keenly aware of how the discipline of worship and Bible study shapes our lives into being people of the cross. Almost every word we speak and hear together runs counter to what the culture proclaims.

My wife, Kim, and I continually are inspired by what we experience as we travel throughout the synod. Our experience has caused me to realize that we need to develop new metrics by which we measure the vitality of the church. We have been so focused on attendance and giving, allowing these two measurements to serve as the only signs of church vitality.

While I continue to believe that attendance and giving are important measurements, overfocusing on them may be contributing to their decline. The mission of the church can't be reduced to head counts and dollar signs.

The question I've been asking as I visit congregations and specialized ministry sites is: "Where is there life and laughter happening in this place?"

I hear all kinds of stories about pea patches, backpack programs, community meals, children's choirs, liturgical art, tutoring programs, Bible studies, sheltering, counseling, Stephen Ministers, and the list goes on. In one congregation, a man told me how meaningful it has been in his life to be part of a team that cleans the building. He said, "This is my special time with God."

My point is that we would all be better off focusing on and celebrating where we see God at work in our congregations, in specialized ministries and in our communities.

Talk to just about any of our rostered leaders serving in specialized ministries and they will tell you that they are seeing significant growth in the number of people who are being cared for. They also will talk of the joy they encounter in seeing someone experience grace for the first time.

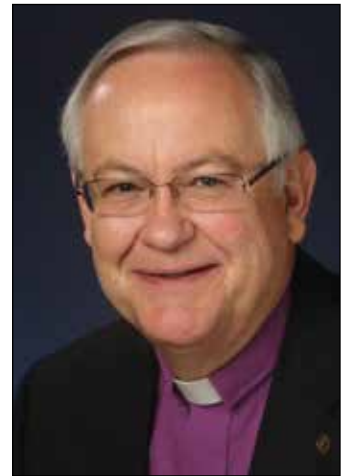
Talk to our young adults who have been serving around the world through the ELCA's Young Adults in Global Mission program or to our young people who have spent a year

servicing with Lutheran Volunteer Corps and you will hear robust stories of how they have seen God in action.

Talk to our seminary students who are learning how to engage the culture with the gospel, and they will speak of the hope they have for the church.

Friends, the kingdom of God continues to break into our world. My invitation is that we place new stock in Jesus' teaching about what it means to have eyes that see and ears that hear.

I have long believed that we become what we focus on. If we only focus on declining numbers in our pews and offering plates, indeed they will continue to decline. But if we focus on the life-giving, laughter-filled, abundant ways in which God shows up in the many expressions of the church, we may very well experience a renewal of vitality. □



Kirby Unti, bishop of the Northwest Washington Synod.

Synod assembly

The Northwest Washington Synod Assembly will be held May 15-16 at the Lynwood Convention Center. Online registration opens April 1. Registration, general information and materials may be found at www.lutheransnw.org/2015-Synod-Assembly.

In addition to worship, breakout sessions, displays and business items, we will be welcoming three wonderful presenters. We look forward to hearing from the Rev. Mark Branson from The Missional Network and Fuller Seminary, Pasadena, Calif.; Dr. Cynthia Moe-Lobeda from Seattle University; and our ELCA church-wide representative, Christina Jackson-Skelton, executive director for Mission Advancement.

Columbia Lutheran Home's remodel offers more choices and a new view

By Beth Hartman

In 1920 Columbia Lutheran Home (CLH) opened at its present location in Seattle. More than 94 years ago members of local Lutheran congregations, led by the Rev. C.R. Swanson of Gethsemane, started the compassionate care at CLH. The original brick building housed 12 residents. Over the years CLH has undergone many renovations to accommodate a growing number of residents. Today it has accommodations for 116 residents.

Our leadership team worked closely with the firm SAGE Architectural Alliance to explore site and dining options. The resulting expansion not only increases the seating but also provides an alternate venue to the larger, formal dining room. The two new dining areas each have a contemporary café atmosphere with large windows, lots of natural light and views to the beautiful courtyard.

While dining the residents can enjoy the courtyard and look beyond to the western views. At night they can enjoy the lights of the water feature. The granite water fountain and backdrop of green translucent plastic, which glows by the light of the setting sun, enhance the scene.

The theme of the courtyard's design is supported inside the dining rooms with large canvas images of beach and mountain scenery. Each of the two dining room entries is also accented by an illuminated seascape and mountain view. The main dishes are served from a steam table at the counter, giving residents more choice.

Once the expansion was completed, the architectural



team returned to interview residents and gather their comments about the results. Each of the eight residents interviewed loved the abundant light, large windows and contemporary atmosphere.

Three of the residents said they were legally blind, but they could see the illuminated panels. The abundant light was appreciated.

The design also helped some residents recall fond memories. One resident said the mountain images remind her of backpacking with her husband and give her a sense of freedom. Another resident said the spaces brought back memories of meeting friends in coffee shops. She appreciated that people cared enough about her and the other residents to make the spaces so nice.

The architects also interviewed family members and residents who were enjoying the courtyard one day. A daughter sitting at the fountain said she has to yell to be heard because her mother's hearing is diminished. She said the water fountain's sounds screen their voices and provide privacy as well as a beautiful feature. □



Editor's note: Columbia Lutheran Home is located at 4700 Phinney Ave. N. in Seattle; 206-632-7400; www.columbialutheranhome.com.

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On the road with copyright

By Rev Nancy Winder

When I was a kid in Seattle my family took lots of road trips near and far. One of the fun things my parents had me do was look at license plates.

Back then in Washington, license plates began with a letter that signified the county in which the car was registered: A for King, B for Pierce, C for Spokane, D for Snohomish, and so on, including the iconic SJ for San Juan! My dad had me memorize all of them, and we looked to see how many counties we'd find on one stretch of road.

When Washington went to three letters and three numbers (the first letter still being the county for a while) we played a game where we had to invent words from the letters on the plates of the passing cars. It made me look closely at these plates, not only for the Washington identifiers but for those from other states. It's an ingrained habit, and I still look at license plates as I pass by them today. The key thing here is that the license is visible and on the car. You can't be on the road in a vehicle that doesn't have a visible license.

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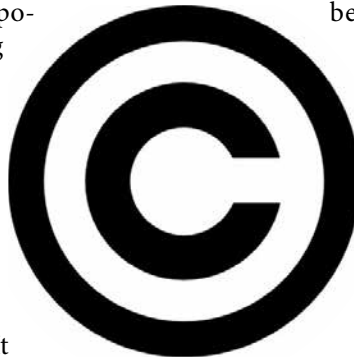
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- www.augsburgfortress.org/copyrights/guide. □



I am available to assist worship planners and office staff develop clear procedures for doing copyrights easily. You can contact me via email at nancylarry@comcast.net or by calling 206-383-5670.

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