

# Keeping perspective

By the Rev. Brian Kirby Unti, bishop

All eyes on July 6 were on San Francisco and Asiana Flight 214, which crash landed injuring 180 of the 307 passengers and killing two. (Recently we learned that a third person has died.)

Speculations began immediately as to what went wrong with this flight. Commentators have covered all possible explanations from mechanical failure to pilot error. No doubt when the investigation is completed it will be clear that there were a number of errors that aligned to create the tragedy.

What I found very revealing was the commentator who said, “How come we are not talking about what went right?” — 305 of the 307 passengers and crew survived the crash in spite of everything that went wrong, including the delay in the deployment of the emergency evacuation slides. Looking at the burned-out carcass on the runway, it approaches miraculous that there

were not more fatalities.

Clearly the flight attendants were true heroes, seeing to it that the passengers were able to evacuate the plane in spite of their injuries. The first responders also deserve praise for their ability to triage the scene and transport multiple patients to area trauma centers. It was a massive and, in large part, extremely effective response.

I could not help but think of the ELCA, which is going through its own trying times.

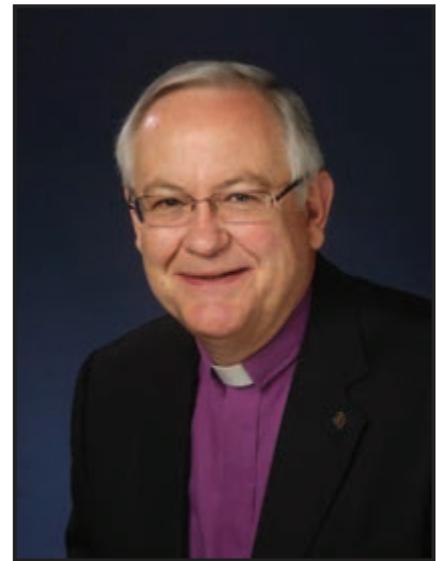
We have spent the better part of a decade now calling attention to everything that seems to be wrong about the church — running the gamut from the ELCA position on social statements to the release of yet another hymnal.

Suffice it to say it is easy to point out what is wrong with any institution, let alone a church body.

The more important question to ask is: “Why aren’t we talking about everything that is right about the ELCA?”

**We are a church** that has leaned in the direction of being radically accepting of others who are often rejected or condemned by others. History will show that the ELCA is often out ahead of the public in acceptance of issues of justice.

**We are a church** that continues to provide an extensive network



**Bishop Kirby Unti**

of social services ranging from immigration assistance to the finest in health care.

**We are a church** whose members are the first to help and the last to leave when natural disasters happen.

**We are a church** whose global arm is making a major impact upon the fight against malaria, offering hope to people who have suffered beyond imagination.

**We are a church** where every congregation can call attention to how they are living out the gospel in their neighborhood.

Yes, we have had our fair share of hard landings and we have suffered some significant losses, but let’s not forget to celebrate how God’s grace continues to abound in and through the ministries of the ELCA. □



**The Rev. Kathryn Buffum was installed as a new assistant to the bishop of the Northwest Washington Synod in mid-August. She previously served St. Matthew Lutheran Church, Renton.**

## Who is the synod?

Every day members of congregations in the Northwest Washington Synod are living out the good news. In far reaches of the globe, and right here in our communities, we join with our neighbors for the sake of abundant life.

Locally our members help the homeless and hungry by offering lunch and dinner, donating to food banks, hosting Tent City, and by providing transitional housing and personalized support.

The Synod Hunger Team also encourages congregations to support ELCA World Hunger ([www.elca.org/hunger](http://www.elca.org/hunger)). In 2012 you gave \$297,631 to the program, which translates to \$7.06 per baptized member.

Globally we walk with our friends in Russia and Tanzania (Masai Girls School). We also support the ELCA's vision to end malaria through its Malaria Campaign ([www.elca.org/malaria](http://www.elca.org/malaria)), raising \$150,000 in one year, as well as Lutheran Disaster Response ([www.elca.org/disaster](http://www.elca.org/disaster)) and the Strategy on HIV/AIDS ([www.elca.org/aids](http://www.elca.org/aids)).

### What is a synod?

The word "synod" comes from two Greek words, *syn* plus *hodos*, that mean "together road." A synod is the people of the congregations and other ministries traveling the way of faith together.

Within the ELCA, a synod is also an administrative and missional geographic region. Overseen by a bishop and a synod council, the synod provides vision, support



**Dianne Johnson (right), associate in ministry at Lord of Life Lutheran Church in Renton, visits with the Rev. Anna Makyao of Ngaruma Lutheran Parish in Marangu, Tanzania. They had just finished a presentation about malaria. Johnson has a passion to "end malaria."**

and resources so congregations and other ministries can carry out their mission. (The Rev. Brian Kirby Unti was elected bishop in May 2013.) Synods vary greatly in size, geography, membership, staffing and program. There are 65 synods in the ELCA that are grouped into nine regions.

In 2013 the ELCA had 4,059,785 members and 9,638 congregations. The churchwide offices are located in Chicago ([www.elca.org](http://www.elca.org)).

The offerings given by congregations support all three expressions of this church (congregations, synods and churchwide).

### How does this work?

In your congregation your offerings support the ministry of your congregation and outreach in your community. The portion of congregational giving called mission support funds the work of the Northwest Washington Synod and churchwide.

The Northwest Washington Synod assists congregations and rostered leaders as they work in their communities and throughout the world. Churchwide is able to work every day to address inequities in political, economic and social systems and to work with partners to end conflict and violence all over the world.

Some mission support funds may return to your congregation in the form of grants, services, programs and resources.

### What is the Northwest Washington Synod?

Geographically the Northwest Washington Synod includes the area from Kent/Des Moines to the Canadian



**Nathanael Washam blesses Charis Weathers on behalf of Church of the Beloved in Edmonds, where she was a member prior to moving to Bellingham. Weathers is the mission developer at the synod's newest start, Echoes, in Bellingham.**



**Liz Rossing was the intern at Christ the Servant Lutheran Church, Bellingham, in 2012-13. Congregational internships are just one way the people of our synod prepare future rostered leaders for the ELCA. Rossing is a student at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn. Our synod has more than 40 candidates for all four rosters.**

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# Congregation's closing helps birth mission start in Kirkland

Trinity Lutheran Church has served Kirkland's Rose Hill neighborhood since 1944. During the last few years Trinity has explored what direction its future might take.

A courageous proposal came forward: Trinity would vote to close and give its property to Holy Spirit Lutheran in Kirkland if that congregation would agree to use the property for some kind of mission outreach.

Holy Spirit is a congregation with growing pains, including a shortage of parking for the three worship services it holds each Sunday morning. So the leadership of Holy Spirit grabbed hold of this proposal and the congregation was invited to suggest possible uses for Trinity's site in Rose Hill. Activity buzzed as Holy Spirit explored options and helped its membership process this new opportunity.

In the end many great ideas were explored. The one chosen was to initiate a mission start focused on 21- to 35-year-olds across the Eastside of the Seattle metro area.

The proposal put forward was to

begin with the mission start as the hub, and then to add other ministries as future spokes around the hub.

Holy Spirit voted overwhelmingly to move forward with this new mission start, responding to the courage of Trinity's members by a show of their own courage in the face of many unknowns.

Unknowns on the one hand, but full of possibility on the other. The Eastside of King County has thousands of young adults. Some are students at area schools, including Bellevue College, the University of Washington Bothell campus, and the Lake Washington Institute of Technology. Many more are employed by companies like Microsoft, Google, Expedia, T-Mobile, AT&T Wireless, Nintendo, Sony Entertainment, Amgen and Merck.

In cooperation with churchwide and the Northwest Washington Synod, Holy Spirit will add a mission developer to its staff. The congregations will also provide other staff support and volunteers

for the Rose Hill site.

Young adults from Holy Spirit are forming a leadership team in anticipation of the mission developer beginning this fall.

This new ministry addresses three of the seven mission approaches of the Northwest Washington Synod:

- Intentional outreach to those 35 years old and under.
- Fewer mission starts but with more staff using existing congregations to sponsor and to share staff as modern day missionaries.
- Fostering a climate of hospitality that expresses the radical nature of gospel welcome. (This approach is expressed in Holy Spirit Lutheran's mission statement: *Called by the Holy Spirit to proclaim and embody the compassionate, challenging, inclusive love of God revealed in Jesus Christ.*)

If you know young adults living on the Eastside, especially young people who have felt distanced from the church, please tell them about this new mission start. Holy Spirit's website is [www.hslekkirkland.org](http://www.hslekkirkland.org). □

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border, as well as the San Juan Islands. There are 105 congregations in the synod and around 42,180 baptized members. In addition to congregations the synod has 19 mission starts located in Bellevue, Bellingham, Bothell, Burlington, Edmonds, Everett, Mukilteo, Renton, Sammamish and Seattle, and two campus ministries located in Bellingham and Seattle.

The Northwest Washington Synod Assembly is the highest legislative authority in the synod and meets annually to conduct business. Between meetings of the assembly, the Synod Council serves as the board of directors and the interim legislative authority. The synod office is located at St. John United Lutheran Church in Seattle; [www.lutheransnw.org](http://www.lutheransnw.org).

## Remember the poor

By the Rev. Randy Young

A picture hangs on my desktop of a young Alaskan laughing. It's titled "Good Clean Fun" (available from the University of Alaska Photo Archives). The laughter and joy that is captured in the photo almost hides the poverty that surrounds this child.

His laughing face reminds me of another boy who, after seeing and hearing a hungry crowd, ran and got all that he had. With hopeful delight he showed his bounty to Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

Andrew said to Jesus: "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" (John 6:9)?

Jesus procured the boy's gifts, gave thanks and thousands were fed. After all had eaten 12 baskets of food were gathered.

I hope you can recall that story. I have a theory about what happened to those remaining baskets.

My theory is that those scraps and pieces continued to be added to and often multiplied among the people of God. My theory goes: from those baskets communities fed those in need, from those feedings congregations grew, and in a few thousand years you and I are gathering around the table where we eat and drink and grow together as active participants in the kingdom of God. We are part of the gospel story where all were fed. God's abundant grace is freely offered, blessed, shared and sent for the sake of the world.

Because we are part of the good news story we must address the hunger and poverty crisis facing our communities, country and the world.

Kristi Johnson of St. Mark Lutheran Church in Anchorage and I attended the ELCA World Hunger Leadership Gathering, where we saw and heard how hunger is a reality for many in our own communities. We learned

that by 2050 9.6 billion people will need to be fed. We also shared in conversation, collaboration and made commitments to fight hunger, and poverty in our communities, country and the world.

I have another photo pinned to my desktop. It shows a single individual whose efforts are credited with saving a billion lives. Norman Borlaug was a friend of my father (I just dated his sister). Borlaug fathered the Green Revolution, earning a Nobel Peace Prize.

Borlaug rolled up his sleeves and fought world hunger. While he was out in the field increasing

crop production, fighting hunger and caring for the next generation, I mowed his sister's yard and on Sunday mornings we gathered at the table at St. John's Lutheran Church in Cedar Falls, Iowa.

Palma Behrens (Norm's sister) encouraged the next generation as well. Her routine generosity along with the faithful givers of St. John's plowed my financial burden at seminary — and of others. They shared what they had and it made a difference. Baskets that keep giving!

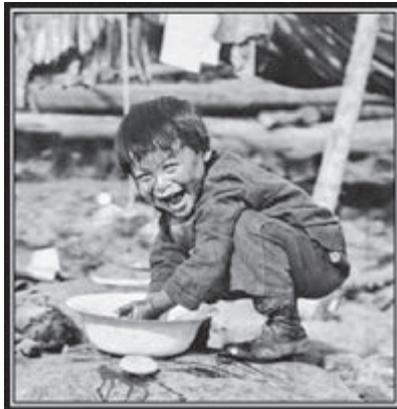
The Alaska Synod has made a commitment to share *A Place at the Table*, a great DVD resource to build awareness and activate congregations for action. The synod's Hunger Team has committed to producing a regular newsletter to keep us united and growing in our efforts to fight hunger and poverty in our communities, state, nation and world.

The ELCA is a leader in this cause and the next picture and story I would like to see on my desktop is yours.

If you or your hunger team would like to amplify your voices, please contact the Alaska Synod hunger team at [elcaalaska@gmail.com](mailto:elcaalaska@gmail.com). By adding and multiplying our ideas and gifts we can make a difference!

Remember the poor! ☐

*Young is pastor of Christ Lutheran Church, Fairbanks, and a member of the Alaska Synod Hunger Team.*



"Good Clean Fun"



**Norman Borlaug who fathered the Green Revolution and earned a Nobel Peace Prize.**