



# The Spirit

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News for the congregations of the Northwest Washington Synod of the  
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## God In Our Lives

by The Rev. Wm Chris Boerger, Bishop



To this day I remember being at the bedside of an elderly gentleman who was reciting Luther's Small Catechism meaning of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed in Norwegian as he died. While our education system places little

value on memorization I decided that the one part of the catechism I would require confirmation students to memorize was the explanation of the Third Article.

As we have been focused on the church as an institution with all of the corporate trimmings that come with constitutions, bylaws and procedures, we need to be reminded that the church is the work of the Holy Spirit. In the Augsburg Confession the church is defined as being "the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel."<sup>1</sup> In Luther's explanation of the Third Article he says "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."<sup>2</sup> Luther and the reformers are saying that my being a member of the Body of Christ is the result of the Holy Spirit's work.

We live in a world that sees voluntary choice as the driving force in all action. We are less and

less satisfied with representative democracy because the individual does not get the final say. Yet we confess that we did not choose God. God has chosen us. It is the Holy Spirit that calls, gathers and enlightens. I may want credit for my good work or my role in being a part of the church. It is in fact the Holy Spirit who works the gift of faith in you and in me. We come because the Spirit of God is at work in our lives interceding for us and working through the word and the sacraments.

We come to a community of faith where the word is proclaimed and the sacraments are received. Life together in the church is about God's work, past, present and future. It appears to me that we have become more focused on the individual's or the community's wants or desires. It is really about the ministry that God has called and gifted us to accomplish in the name of our Risen Christ.

As we prepare to hear the story of Pentecost again, listen for who is acting in the story. Left to their own devices the early disciples looked like drunks. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, they spoke and three thousand people were added to the church. This is a miracle story. The miracle continues in your faith and in mine. The fact that we confess Jesus as Lord is not our own doing. It is another sign of the work of God in our lives.

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<sup>1</sup> Kolb, R. 2000. Augsburg Confession, Article VII, The Book of Concord: The confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Fortress Press: Minneapolis, Page 42.

<sup>2</sup> Kolb, R. 2000. The Small Catechism, The Third Article, The Book of Concord: The confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Fortress Press: Minneapolis, Page 355.

## *“Love Fearlessly, Do Justice”*

Dr Kurt Ver Beek addressed advocacy work in Honduras to a gathering at Holy Spirit Lutheran in Kirkland in mid-March. Seventy people from the Kirkland community heard Dr Ver Beek describe the justice efforts of AJS, Association for a More Just Society, which he co-founded. He spoke to students at Pacific Lutheran University earlier in the day.

Citing 1 John 4:18, Dr Ver Beek urged his audience to be passionate and also be fearless in doing justice. He and his family have lived in Honduras since 1988. He opened a view that went beyond the statistics, giving examples of three Hondurans whom AJS has helped:

One was an abused boy, who was distraught and likely headed for a life on the streets. Caring intervention healed and built him up and also achieved conviction of the abuser, resetting his future. Karla, his case worker, said, “If God has called us to help the people who most need it, then where they live is where I need to be.”

An old woman did not have any ownership papers for her very modest home. The courts had stonewalled the cases of her entire community for 25 years. AJS attorneys won the case and she had her papers. In fact, in four years they have obtained 40,000 titles for poor people.

A pregnant woman working as a security guard worked 72 hours and more per week and

was paid for 44 hours. Providing counseling and legal help, AJS advocated for her and corrected this injustice. The Association has educated over 7,000 workers about labor rights. One attorney fighting for workers rights was killed by assassins.

The work is dangerous, Dr Ver Beek acknowledged, but we should not have fear. “God loves justice,” he said, “He has shown his passion for protecting the weak.” He cited in the three examples, that we need to view them as “my” son, “my” mother, “my” sister.

We cannot all go to Honduras, but Dr Ver Beek challenged Christians to act locally and love globally. Act locally by choosing a justice cause for which you care. Love globally by speaking out for people whose rights are abused. He suggested that when a U.S. Senator phones the President of Honduras, he answers the phone.

Holy Spirit Lutheran has been closely involved in supporting a home for abandoned children in Honduras. Since 2004 more than 100 volunteers have visited the children there. Two years ago the congregation raised funds for a water treatment facility to give the children clean drinking water and proper sanitation.

For more information: [www.ajshonduras.org](http://www.ajshonduras.org).

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## 2010 Synod Assembly

The 2010 Northwest Washington Synod Assembly will take place May 14 and 15 at the Comcast Arena at Everett Events Center in Everett.

Our keynote speaker is Dr. Amy Oden. Oden is Dean and Professor of History of Christianity at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington DC. In pursuing her interests in the history of Christianity and hospitality, she has recently finished a book called *God's Welcome: Hospitality for a Gospel-Hungry World*.

For more information about this year's assembly please visit [www.lutheransnw.org](http://www.lutheransnw.org).

**The Spirit**, a publication of the Northwest Washington Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), is intended for members, leaders, and clergy of synod congregations and organizations.

Congregations are encouraged to copy **The Spirit** and include it in their own newsletters. **The Spirit** can be downloaded from the Synod website.

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