

A GREAT COMMISSION SYNOD



BECOMING A GREAT COMMISSION SYNOD

**Reports, Sermons, and Prayers from
the 2004 Synod Assembly of
the Metropolitan New York Synod of
the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

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Ecstasy on the Roof: Bishop's Report I
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1. Up On The Roof

All evangelism begins in ecstasy.

*Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a **trance**. He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. Then he heard a voice saying, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat." But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean." The voice said to him again, a second time, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane."...Then Peter began to speak (to Cornelius), "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him is acceptable to him...." (Acts 10:10-16,34)*

Long before The Drifters sang about it, people have been going up on the roof for rest, refreshment and escape. Peter was in the home of Simon the Tanner in the city of Joppa in the early Pentecost days of the Church. He goes up on the roof to wait for lunch. He goes into a trance.

Up the coast in Caesarea Cornelius, a Roman general and a Gentile, is also hungry. He is seeking God. He sends for Peter, whose fame as a spiritual leader is growing rapidly. Will Peter, a Jew, come to see this Gentile spiritual seeker? Cornelius wants to know if the God of Peter and Abraham and Sarah and Isaac also loves Gentiles.

In his trance Peter sees all kinds of food descend on a tablecloth. He is hungry, but the food is not kosher. He would dishonor God by eating what is ritually unclean. God speaks. "If I make something clean, it is truly clean." "Bon appétit." Strangers knock on the door. Peter comes out of his trance. Messengers from Gentile Cornelius want Peter to come with them and teach them about the true God. Peter goes. In the living room of a Gentile in Caesarea the first words out of Peter's mouth are these: "God doesn't play favorites. Everyone is acceptable to God."

This remarkable story of God's grace going across boundaries turns on the trance of Peter the daydreamer on the roof.

Jesus takes His disciples to Bethany. It is their final meeting. He takes them to the great place of resurrection. This is a beautiful moment in the Gospel of Luke, the climax to the whole wonderful story of Jesus' birth, life and death. Jesus lifts up His hands, now marked with the imprints of the nails, and blesses them.

We have received a lot of blessings during the two days we have been here together, and we leave here with God's blessings for always. Let us leave here today with vigor and rejuvenation to tell the Good News; let us go teach and baptize, go and serve God with all that we have... even if we have to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro and shout to the world about the Good News, then let it be. And in so doing, let His name be glorified in all we do.

Amen

Jesus is sending us into this same world to go and preach in every language to every ethnic group, in every corner of the world; He tells us to go and tell the good news of the Gospel to every creature, every tribe, every race, every tongue and every nation. We are to be busy preaching the word of life to everyone, we are to keep on being involved with the Great Commission all the time. We are not to think of this as a sidelight whenever we hold our synod assemblies—Christ’s commission has to expand every day and everywhere. We are sent to go and sow and grow; God has called us to do a great work, and we must be radical about it, doing it as the first group He sent out. “Be assured,” He says, “I am with you always.”

He is assuring us of His favor, affirmation and His blessings. He is with us in happy and sad times, He is with us when there is birth and when there is death, He is with us when we are healthy or sick, He is with us when we are liked and when we are despised or misunderstood. Jesus is with us when we are young and old, in sunny and cloudy days; He constantly provides us with encouragement, consolation, fellowship with the Holy Spirit, affection and compassion.

As we go to tell the good news, He will lead us; He protects, propels and empowers us; His presence will go with us and continue to give us rest, assurance and confidence. Therefore, Jesus says, go and use your natural and spiritual gifts to serve others in ways that will help them come to maturity in Christ. Go preach and teach people of God so that they will learn to do the full will of God with their hearts, minds, emotions, relationships, activities and ministries.

The promise of the Holy Spirit is one of the greatest provisions of God for us. With it, we are assured of His presence in our lives. Because of it, we can have power to be witnesses. The Ascension of our Lord signals the readiness of God to bless His people with wonderful, Spirit-filled life.

The English word *trance* is inadequate, suggesting a kind of woozy reverie. The Greek word for *trance* is *ek-stasis*, a dynamic word from which we get the word ‘ecstasy.’ *Ekstasis* means, literally, “to step forth.” It’s an “out of the box” word. It is the shift in consciousness of Peter hungry on a rooftop, who in a moment of *ekstasis* was made vulnerable to the imagery of the sheet full of animals, unclean as well as clean. The insight about God’s inclusion of the Gentiles, which had been repressed and resisted by his everyday consciousness and worldview, overwhelmed him in the state of openness and receptivity that is *ecstasy, ekstasis*. For Luke *ecstasy* is the business of the Holy Spirit.

Last year our synod declared itself a Great Commission Synod. We voted to establish a Commission for Evangelical Outreach. But no program or process will get us anywhere if we ourselves aren’t moved to *ecstasy* by the urgency of the Good Shepherd seeking the lost sheep. Evangelism begins with the hunger for *ecstasy*, for the kind of experience that is open to the urgent interior word of the living Christ who dwells in each of us. Life in Christ asks us to step out continually into wider worlds, deeper spiritual insights, passionate engagement with the calling each of us has from God. What will it take to get us thinking and acting outside of ourselves, our undercrofts, our worldviews, our narrow spiritual horizons?

We live in a culture of too many trances and reveries that are only celebrations of the self or of a received tradition. We are Balkanized, walled off from one another. A Great Commission Synod must be a synod up on the many rooftops of our villages, towns, city neighborhoods, suburbs, open to *ecstasy* and God’s passion for the lost.

What do you see when you look out the window or down from the roof? In her poem “Mirrors”, the poet Nikki Giovanni writes:

*The face in the window ... is not the face in the mirror.
Mirrors aren't for windows ... they would block the light.
Mirrors are for bedroom walls ... or closet doors.*

*Windows show who we hope to be.
Mirrors reflect who we are.
Mirrors ... like religious fervors ... are private ...
And actually uninteresting to those not involved.
Windows open up ... bring a fresh view ...
Windows make us vulnerable.*

(In *Those Who Ride the Night Winds*, copyright 1983 by
Nikki Giovanni)

True evangelism is controversial, because ecstasy means leaving the usual behind. After baptizing the Gentile Cornelius and his household Peter had some explaining to do back at the bishop's office at synod headquarters in Jerusalem. We heard the story in the lessons for this Easter season. If the conversion of Cornelius was also the conversion of Peter to evangelism, then Peter's report enabled the conversion of the young church and its leadership—the conversion of a synod—as well. After Peter's report their reaction is recorded in Acts 11:18: “when they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, “Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life.”

Yet the Ascension is admittedly a struggle for me in times of trouble, and I know it must be a struggle for the Sudanese Christian mothers whose sons are abducted and forced to fight, it must be a struggle for the orphans, it must be a struggle for the parents whose children are dying in wars everywhere, it must be a struggle for the battered women all over the world, it must be a struggle for abused children, it must be a struggle for all with addiction of any kind, it must be a struggle for world leaders who are trying to find peace in this world of turmoil. The Ascension of our Lord is a struggle for us all in times of trouble...

On September 11 we looked up into the sky, partly out of fear that more attacks might come, and partly wondering why God wasn't responding. Like the disciples, we looked into an empty sky only to hear God's silence. It didn't seem like God was in heaven that day. We asked ourselves where God was; He felt absent, and our faith was sorely tested. We sometimes feel that, had Jesus remained on earth, He'd be around to answer our questions and resolve our nagging doubts. Yet part of the Ascension means that Jesus is still ruling, and September 11 reminds us that we struggle in a fallen, imperfect world that has been polluted with evil and is desperately in need of God.

One of the hardest things a commander can do is to send soldiers into battle, knowing that the war is rough; it is like ordering the destruction of the thing you love the most. In essence, Jesus did just that on His day of Ascension—He sent His disciples to bring the Good News to a hostile world. When we take a look at any newspaper now or watch TV news, what we see sums up what kind of world we live in... suicide bombers, child abuse, old scores settled, 17 million babies die every year from poverty-induced diseases while the arms trade thrives. It is definitely not a kind world, but Jesus says this is where He wants us to go and tell the Good News; Jesus wants us all, His followers, to engage in teaching, making disciples.

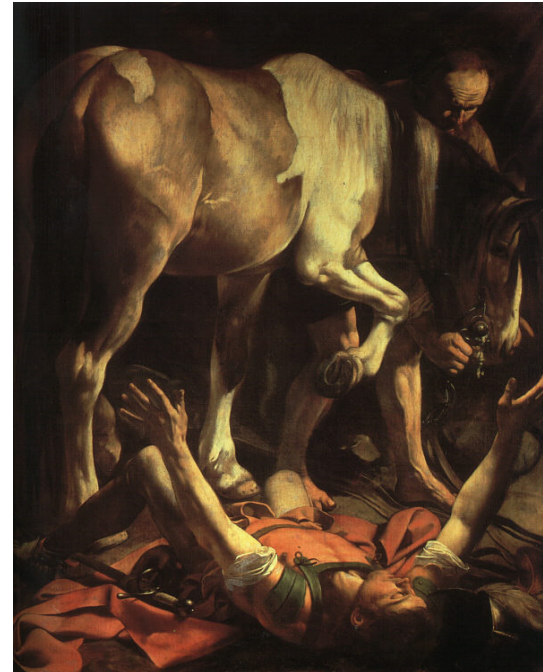
Jerusalem with great joy.” This is the joy that true worship of God produces even at trying or difficult moments in our lives. The disciples knew that this was not the end of their relationship with Jesus but a beginning of another relationship with him... and the joy they had was a mark of the transformation.

Luke’s account of the Ascension of our Lord places us in the shoes of the disciples. Their eyes were lifted, gazing into heaven as He went, and all too soon the ascending Saviour disappeared from their sight. As the conqueror neared the celestial city, the heavenly heralds cried out in preparation for His arrival, “Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.” He had finished the work of redemption that the Father had given Him to do.

The Ascension testifies to the fact of our Lord’s return; it gives assurance that God is working His purposes out for His whole creation and that when He is ready, our Lord will return just as surely as He ascended; at the ascension, Jesus left the Here for the Everywhere. Our Lord’s ascent celebrates His victory over evil and assures us that we, too, can overcome evil. In the meantime, we are waiting, and often experiencing pain and hardship, and we seek what God wants us to have—hope.

The Ascension proved to be a blessing as it prepared for the coming of Jesus’ spiritual presence, no longer confined to the limitations of time and of physical body. St. Augustine reflects this benefit to us in a prayer, “You ascended from before our eyes, and we turned back, grieving, only to find You in our hearts.”

But sometimes I find the Ascension representing my greatest struggle of faith—not *whether* it happened but *why*. By ascending, Jesus took the risk of being forgotten. Like the disciples, I do not want to see Jesus going; I feel like they felt—detached from Him, I am looking up into the blank sky, wishing Jesus was closer to me, although He assures me that He will never leave or forsake me!



2. Blinded by the Light

“While I was on my way and approaching Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone about me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me.’...since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, those who were with me took my hand and led me to Damascus. (Acts 22:6,7, 11)

From the roof to the dusty road. We will not become a Great Commission Synod until we are stunned once again by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Our synod’s call to evangelism, like Paul’s, comes from the Risen and living Christ.

Being a Great Commission Synod is not merely a matter of human organization but rises from Christ's own seizure of those he chooses; through the call to Evangelism the risen Christ wrestles with, humbles, transfigures and embraces those whom he chooses to endow and send.

Paul makes clear throughout his ministry that his mission is born on Easter. He never got over that resurrection appearance on the road to Damascus. He experienced it as both conversion and commissioning as an apostle.

I have been reflecting recently on Caravaggio's painting of the scene. Paul is flat on his back. Legs outstretched, arms raised up to heaven as he falls, his eyes shut since he has been blinded by the resurrection light. The central figure in the painting is the horse, which is shown sensitively lifting its hoof so as not to tread on the poor creature sprawled beneath its belly in the dust. The encounter with the risen Lord is a devastating encounter that lays Paul to the ground in absolute vulnerability.

Unless that is our synod-and every pastor and baptized missionary-lying there in the dust, blinded by the light, we will never recover the Great Commission. Paul knew that to be an apostle was to be utterly dependent on grace, always ready to be broken again by encounter with the truth, unprotected, needy.

Reclaiming the Great Commission is to be again stunned by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, to reclaim our utter dependence and vulnerability on the Risen Lord. It means to live where contradiction and controversy cross and clash, it means being opposed as well as loved, it is to be cruelly confronted by grotesque unfaithfulness in the church as well as wonders of love and creativity. It means enduring crucifying obscurity in the struggle to know what the Spirit is doing in and to the churches as old ways and forms are dying. To be a bishop, a pastor, a baptized

For the last two days here, we have been busy—busy listening, busy talking in the corridors, having coffee or tea together... we have been busy encouraging each other. I have also listened, for the last two days, to the struggle about the vote on the first resolution. I hear the sounds of struggle, hurt and pain. It is a struggle, and our world is full of all kinds of struggle. If it were not for Ascension Day, our Lord would be here with us and we would not be voting but listening to him.

Sudanese mothers have a different struggle; their sons are abducted every day and forced to fight for causes they do not understand. We struggle with what is before us here, and we know there are orphans who have no one in their lives who can show them or give them love; we struggle with our issues here, and we know there are people in the world now who are not sure whether they will have something to eat tonight. We struggle because we find it hard to understand what Jesus would have said about this or that if he were still here with us—I mean physically!

We have all been sent by our Lord with plain instructions to “Go and tell the story, go and preach about repentance and forgiveness, do not be shy about it, go proclaim the Word of God in every corner of the world, in every language, in every street, in every country—go tell the good news...tell it without fear... do not be intimidated because I am with you.”

So I have seen us busy in the corridors, encouraging each other, holding each others' hands saying, “You might be going through a rough time in your parish... you are not alone... in our resolutions we vote together because our mission is the same; we have all been sent by the same and one Lord.”

Normally, when we say farewell to someone we love, our experience is always of grief and sadness; farewells are usually moments of anxiety and distress. But in our Gospel we see Jesus' disciples with joy... “They worshipped him and returned to

Transformative education for all would increase our intimacy with the risen Lord, build us up as Christ's body, energize our sense of mission despite all that dispirits us, and show us how to be an unfolding of God's purposes for the poor, the marginalized and prisoner. Imagine Church as a habitation, training not in self-help but in how to respond to Christ and others and their response to us. As part of our commissioning we learn to be rooted in the Last Supper command "Do this". Repetition after repetition of hearing scripture and its interpretation, of repentance, of intercession, the sharing of peace, of communion, of praising and thanking slowly makes us God's outgoing people. Who can tell what kind of person is being shaped year-by-year as Christian practices are interwoven thoughtfully with the whole of life?

The mandates of baptism and teaching are key to the practice of community. Churches called to be disruptive examples of how power operates when rooted in the dynamic interpersonal energetic mystery we call the Trinity find their life in the practice of community.

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SERMON BY PASTOR PERUCY BUTIKU

May 22, 2004

Luke 24: 44 – 53

I am honored and truly humbled to stand before you, my brothers and sisters in Christ, to share the word of God... The reading (Luke 24: 44 – 53) is the reason people like me do what we do. Ascension Day is when our Lord Jesus Christ said for all the world to hear that, in His name, "Go tell the message about repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations and in all languages.... in towns, in villages, in cities, everywhere, go tell the good news." And I stand here today to remind all of us, His disciples, to go and do just that.

Christian, a synod, a congregation is to be on a road where you will be thrown down into the dust again and again by the Christ who has seized hold of you.

See Paul helpless on the road, blinded by the light. See unseen hands reach out to him to lead him in the right direction. See him led to community in Antioch and catechesis with Ananias. The call to evangelism is the call to community, the call to discipleship and teaching of scripture. Can Reclaiming the Great Commission be an opportunity for us in the Metropolitan New York Synod to reclaim our solidarity, our community, our mutual dependence on one another and the Risen Christ?

3. Bursting the Prisons and Enclaves

"while I was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance and saw Jesus saying to me, 'Hurry and get out of Jerusalem quickly...Then he said to me, 'Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'" (Acts 22:17,21)

When the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in 70AD some despaired, wondering whether God's promises had failed. But two forms of Israel's faith survived, disbursed in the empire. The Pharisaic school which had been forged in the synagogues following the first destruction became the Rabbinic Judaism of the 2nd century. The followers of Messiah Jesus became the Christian movement, dominantly Gentile by mid-second century. Both traditions embodied the scriptures. To contrast the ecstatic outreach to the Gentiles of Peter and Paul with the life and message of the Risen Christ, listen to the Avoth in the rabbinic Mishnah. Remember the Mishnah is more that a century later than Acts, but it claims authoritative interpretation straight from Moses.

"Moses received the Law from Sinai and handed it down to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders and the elders to the prophets, and the prophets handed it down to the men of the Great Assembly. They said three things: Be deliberate in judgment, raise up many disciples, and make a fence around the Torah."

How will Israel be faithful when the world comes apart? The rabbis had an enclave strategy, conserving diaspora communities for centuries. Be deliberate in judgment. The community must be preserved and protected from ecstasy. “Raise up many disciples.” Israel’s enclave faith is more a matter of teaching and learning than acting and telling and reaching out. “Make a fence around the Torah.” Israel’s faith and practice must be purified and protected from contamination. If all Israel were to keep Torah for one day, Messiah will come. Israel is God’s enclave of holiness on earth.

The story of the book of Acts is how the messianic message of Israel’s faith in the crucified and risen Lord burst the enclave. The Apostles of Jesus fanned out to the network of synagogues throughout Asia Minor, Greece, North Africa, Italy. The news could not stay inside the synagogues. Luke lays claim to Israel’s prophetic hope from the time of the first exile. When Isaiah was called to gather Israel to return to God, God gave a yet more profound commission, a Great Commission: “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel: (restoration is good, but not enough!) I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” (Isaiah 49:6). Luke-Acts is the story of how God turned Israel outside of preserving itself into an instrument of God’s saving light for the nations of the world.

In Acts 22, after Paul recounted the story of how he was stunned by the resurrection, blinded by the light, Paul takes his hearers with him to the temple in Jerusalem. He is frightened, clinging to the enclave. His mission is going badly. There is opposition. His is the first “congregation at risk.” And there is that word “ecstasy” again. “While I was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance (*ek-stasis*).” So Paul in the temple experiences that shift in awareness away from the normal condition of anxiety and preoccupation into that openness in which he becomes aware of Jesus as dynamic presence and word. “I saw him saying to me, ‘Hurry, and get out of Jerusalem quickly...Go,go,go for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’”

B. TEACHING

Which brings us to the second part of Matthew’s Commission, Teaching. We shall not reform the church or fulfil our commission by reports, committees and structural change. In the stories of the desert fathers a young man enquires of one of the wise ones how to serve God with more intensity. After a long wait the answer comes, “Why not let yourself be turned into a pillar of fire?” Without burning faith and conviction we cannot venture to represent to others the pain-love of the triune God.

In business terms the Learning Company describes itself as facilitating the learning of all its members to serve its context and in the process consciously transforming itself. Church need to be communities of learning but that is not the same as a few people going on courses or being trained for tasks. Our teaching ministry is in order to be formed in Christ – which is the lifetimes calling of us all. Local churches as companions to every disciple must develop many ways of personal and corporate ways of praying.

Following our Risen Lord we are drawn into the life of the Trinity. Churches are places where we learn how to be loved, toughly loved, by God. Rembrandt’s portrait of the conversion experience at the Jabbock shows the angel holding Jacob in an arm-lock, gently but firmly insisting he turn his face to his. The facing of God and the facing of humanity, all those whom the world writes off as different. This is our learning. Jesus embodies and shows us how to worship God. In Jesus we learn how to face others and ourselves, within God’s life. The scriptural notion of wisdom reminds us that prayerful thought is for everyone. Theology is not to be used as professional territory marker or as a badge of self-importance. Instead of a few certificated courses for the minority lets open up patterns of doing transformative in small groups locally. In this way we could learn how to grow together in the four dimensions of baptism in order to serve the neighbourhood and to show the world its true life.

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finding its true self. Its not like a ship ploughing though the ocean, buffeted by storms but somehow staying in tact. Rather, it has no permanency and is constantly called to die to old forms and miraculously be born again through the Spirit. Each local church – in connection with all others both in history and across the globe – is called together (ekklesia) to worship God, to be built up in Christ and to go out, dispersed but still united to be and tell Christ to others. The church exists in the shared life of all its people. It is to be a deliberate reading of the gospel; the embodied practice of all that Jesus was in his earthly ministry; embracing all and excluding no one.

God the Trinity is a community of difference, where each person finds their distinctive identity in and through the other and in reaching out into all the world. Echoing this life the church that deliberately sets out to show the world its true life will move only in the power it knows in God. It cannot therefore be coercive, imperialistic, dominating, or divisive. It will not accept the world's setting of people into polar or adversarial opposites.

The Love that is God, the gift of the Holy Spirit to us speaks of courtesy, dialogue, friendship and connectedness. In the church as in the Kingdom it proclaims there can be no more or less important people. Differences of scope and responsibility there will be, inequality in commissioning, no. This is demonstrated across the world in new patterns of ministry exploring new partnerships between laity and clergy. So how do those of us who are ordained begin to rethink ourselves as resourcing and leading without taking over? The church as a body is called to be united in holiness (God's life) and in mutuality in to carry out the apostolic commission. If the church exists in the occasional gathering but more frequent spreading out of its people in the world, we could think of the clergy as a vital source of energy, along with Word and Sacrament, Prayerful thought (theology) and Education and Spirituality.

Jesus burst death's three day prison. The Great Commission bursts the enclave. The Great Commission transforms congregations at risk to congregations risking mission. I believe that every ministry is a ministry "at risk" if it is not on the roof with Peter stepping out into wider worlds, in the dust stunned by the resurrection with Paul. Where mission is a matter of technique, assembly resolutions, denominational "flavor of the month club," or a way to preserve the enclave, it ends up in barrenness and frustration. The Great Commission depends on prayer. Its real leaders are women and men who experience inner movement, ek stasis, away from the defended, anxious state, into a place where they see Christ speaking to them saying, "Go, go, go.." What do you see when you are up on the roof? Whose hand lifts you up from the dust when you are blinded by resurrection light? What pulls you forward at the intersection of enclave and mission?



4. The Conversion of a Pastor

John Westerhoff has said that if you want to release the power of the laity in mission, the church must attend to the leaders. The pastor is the local missionary leader.

A MISSION SHAPED CHURCH

The Rev. Canon Dr. Robin Greenwood

How do we make the transition to becoming a church that exists fully in all its participants to serve God's mission? How do we re-engage with the Great Commission? The kind of church God calls us to be depends on what we mean by Christian Faith. As we joyfully celebrate the Ascension of Christ the gospel reading – read in the light of the whole of Luke's Gospel – shows how the character and task of the church emerges when we focus on God and God's dynamic life in the world and all its people.

To explore what being empowered and blessed by God for the Great Commission might be now, we need to include from Matthew's account, the specific commands of Jesus to the disciples: to baptize and to teach.

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A. Four interlocking themes of BAPTISM reveal its potency.

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1. Baptism brings each one into intimate connection with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

2. Baptism incorporates us into the triune life of God and into the community of Christian faith

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3. Baptism is the acceptance of our equal commissioning in company with our brothers and sisters of the faith

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4. Baptism is the beginning of the end; we have accepted the invitation to be agents of God's final Hope for the world.

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Let's reflect for a moment on what this means. The church in every new generation and situation has continually to go on

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We pray in the Lord - Lord, hear our prayer

We recall with gratitude our mothers and fathers in the faith who are now at rest, especially today Ludwig Nommensen

We pray in the Lord - Lord, hear our prayer

THE PRESIDENT CONCLUDES:

So we give thanks that you are the God

Who yearns and waits for us,

And that our connection to you is always from your initiative

And that it is because of your goodness

That neither life nor death

Nor angels nor principalities nor heights nor depths

Nor anything in all creation

Can separate us from you

We give thanks for your faithfulness

So much more durable than ours. AMEN

On the night of my installation as pastor of Atonement Lutheran Church in Jackson Heights, Queens the stones started flying and most of the stained glass windows were shattered. Vandalism continued through the fall as I began ministry with a “congregation at risk” in a neighborhood undergoing massive ethnic and economic change. Worship was about thirty on a Sunday and the little congregation was struggling faithfully to find vision for the future. On the afternoon of Christmas Eve two boys started a fire at the church door, were taking a swing at the secretary as she was trying to get them to stop when I appeared, grabbed both of them and deposited them into a pew in the sanctuary. Thus began my conversion as a pastor. I joined Peter on the roof.

The story of the conversion of Cornelius in Acts 10 as reported in Acts 11 is also the story of the conversion of Peter and the conversion of the Church. My conversion began as I took the young boys to the altar, talked to them about the crèche and the animals and the people around the manger. We walked around the repaired and cracked stained glass windows, each depicting events in the life of Jesus. “Ask questions,” I said. They did. They were immigrants from Nicaragua, living with an uncle. I called the uncle and told him what happened and that I would be having supper with the boys. I invited them to come back for the Christmas Eve service. One did. He eventually became an acolyte in our church.

But in that sanctuary my conversion began. I learned that central to my ministry is this: ***Tell the Story!***. As one person in our synod put it last year: “Do we love to tell the story or do we just love the story?” Do we just love the story or do we love to tell the story? Both Peter and Paul had to tell the story of their ecstatic experiences of Christ. Peter told the Gospel to Cornelius. And then in the first synod assembly “mission moment” he told the evangelism story to the leaders in Jerusalem. A Great Commission Synod is awash in stories, testimony, witness to the resurrection of Jesus, mission moments.

Over the years we joined Peter in the roof and God sent Cornelius to us. The congregation developed ministry in Spanish and Korean and grew in size, representing over twenty nationalities. We had to open up. We had been a locked enclave for many years. Our church and parking lot, locked and fenced to the community became open and filled with programs and people. The community and congregation shared valuable insights for my ongoing conversion as a pastor and evangelist.

“At that very moment three men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were. The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us...If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?” (Acts 11:11-12, 17)

We had to burst the ethnic and cultural enclave. Atonement, like most Lutheran churches, was formed as an immigrant enclave (in this case Germans from Missouri Synod background). Our neighborhood was changing, as neighborhoods are every day even now. We are surrounded by not only immigrant cultures, but also secular and post modern cultures to which our spiritual enclave no longer relates. One Easter Sunday I baptized four Korean families. After the liturgy I was asked “to make “*simbang*” for the Hyun family. “Simbang” is a communal pastoral visit (we made “simbang” to a family’s apartment, for example, when a father died in Korea or someone lost their job).

The Lee family worked in a clothing store in the Bronx and were unable to receive their Easter communion. So we went in a trail of cars to the store in the Bronx with bread and wine from the liturgy. We went up and down the street inviting others who might not have been able to worship on Easter. We celebrated the resurrection of Jesus with incredible joy in a clothing store in the Bronx, being led in this Word and Sacrament evangelism by newly baptized Korean members.

William Garcia taught me that we must always be listening because the stranger we welcome in the name of Jesus comes bearing gifts. Jackson Heights was the center of a wave of

We give thanks for Ludwig Nommensen, Missionary to Sumatra who died 23rd May 1918. We recall his work in the Batak Christian Community and pray now for those who are persecuted and imprisoned for their faith. We pray that we may recommit ourselves body, mind and soul to the ministry of Evangelism. Give us courage, patience, and above all, that sense of your presence that will help us overcome all obstacles that may appear in our path.

We pray in the lord – Lord, hear our prayer

As we return to our local churches

We pray that we may prepare for Pentecost so that

Empowered we will dare to walk into God’s future

We pray in the Lord - Lord, hear our prayer

That we will refuse to give in to hopelessness or be defeated by despair

We pray in the Lord - Lord, hear our prayer

That we dare to embrace one another and grow together in love and collaboration

We pray in the Lord - Lord, hear our prayer

That we dare to share our riches and resources in common

And minister to each other’s need

We pray in the Lord - Lord, hear our prayer

That we dare to pray for one another each day

Until our hearts beat with your own longings

We pray in the Lord - Lord, hear our prayer

That we dare to carry the light of Christ into the world’s darkest places

We pray in the Lord - Lord, hear our prayer

So in silence or aloud let us pray for a few moments for all those in sickness, need, anxiety, or danger (SILENCE)

INTERCESSIONS FOR THE EUCHARIST ON SATURDAY

Heavenly Father,

At Easter we celebrated the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ

Over the powers of sin and death,

And with Pentecost dawns the age of the Spirit.

Like the first Apostles after Ascension we pray in expectation

For renewal and for direction

Wherever you may lead.

We pray in the Lord - Lord, hear our prayer

The flame of heaven rests on every believer.

Strong and weak, women and men tell out your Word;

The young receive visions, the old receive dreams.

With the new wine of the Spirit they proclaim your amnesty of love.

Amid the birth-pangs of the new creation

The way of light is made known.

Source of freedom, giver of life,

Blessed are you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We pray in the Lord - Lord, hear our prayer

Risen Jesus, we thank you for your greeting, "Peace be with you":

the *Shalom* of God, both wild hope and deep lasting calm,

the demand for us to change

and the inner calm that keeps us steady in the storm

to proclaim the gospel with courage

and joy.

We pray in the Lord - Lord, hear our prayer

Spanish speaking immigrants coming to New York. I took two months of "Spanglish" lessons at Berlitz. We decided to do some one on one conversations with new Spanish speaking members who were bilingual to get their insight and direction. William Garcia was the sexton. He was a nice high school kid who sat near the back every Sunday and whom I greeted every day for over a year without knowing much about him. Then, in our one on one I listened and learned. William was one of the most talented violinists in the city and played in the youth orchestra. He was also a poet. His home life was troubled. He spoke about what life is like for immigrants on the streets of Queens New York. When we started our Spanish liturgy William accompanied on his violin. He wrote the prayers every week with poetic beauty. The bilingual members studied the pericopes with me and helped write the sermons in Spanish. How many of us know whether the sexton is a poet, or what gifts lie just outside the doors of our church, waiting for them to open?

The first and best of our resources must be dedicated to the training of leaders for evangelism. Diakonia grew out of this pastor's conversion to evangelism. After participating with a team of leaders from Atonement with teams of two other congregations and teams from Auburn and Union seminaries about parish needs in theological education, Auburn gave us a grant to start a "seminary of the streets." In twenty-five years over 700 have graduated from the two year program. Many have become pastors. Others have become deacons. Others have used the experience as extended catechesis. Graduates of the Spanish language track of the program are central to our Latino evangelism strategy, planting ministries across the territory of our synod. In the first class was Jose Padilla, an Ecuadorian immigrant and leader of our Latino outreach. Since then Diakonia graduates have started our Swahili ministry, our storefront ministry to people in poverty, and many other new missions. Synodical deacons are bursting the enclave, representing Servant Jesus in nursing homes, prisons, hospices, places of hurt and hope throughout our synod. We are now preparing to begin a track of Diakonia in Mandarin.

It is my conviction that until the pastor is converted to evangelism the great energy and passion of the people of God to live and tell the story will wait for summonses never received, violins never played, lights hidden under a bushel. My ministry in Queens began as a companion with Peter on the roof in Joppa, my disturbing ecstatic vision stones hurled through windows, my visitors from Caesarea young boys lighting fires and entranced by a manger scene.

Pastors, for the sake of the Great Commission and the potential evangelical power of every Baptized Christian in our congregations will you join me on the roof? The Commission for Evangelical Outreach is planning renewal days for pastors. I plan to make our annual spiritual retreat the “bishop’s retreat.” I will give a retreat which will continue this conversation about reclaiming the great commission. I will be in prayer and scripture as I prepare. When we are vulnerable together, stunned by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, praying together for ecstatic vision, sharing mission moments and vulnerability, we may rediscover the excitement of mission. You who bear the apostolic office in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, when the Spirit sends you to Cornelius, do not make a distinction between them and us, lest you withstand God. Let us recover the Great Commission together. Evangelism today will convert the church.

The Spirit of Jesus still gets into people!

Jesus is calling you and me – Jesus is calling the Church – to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name to all nations. But it has to begin in Jerusalem. It’s at Ground Zero in the city that we receive the power from on high to fulfill this mission. There at Ground Zero we know that the cross of Jesus Christ is planted in every place in this world that God loves.

You and I are witnesses of these things. Jesus – the crucified, risen and ascended Lord – is with us in everything. When our illusions are exposed, when our hopes die, when it seems there is no future, we go to Ground Zero. There we remember that Jesus was crucified on a cross outside the city. Jesus does not stand apart from us shouting encouraging words to us from a safe distance. He is with us in every ending to make a new beginning.

Christ has died. Christ is Risen. Christ will come again.

You and I have tasted and experienced what Bradbury was telling us in his haunting story. Now you and I will taste and see that the Lord is good. We will eat the bread and drink the wine – the body and blood of Christ – for you and me – for this whole church – and for the life of the world.

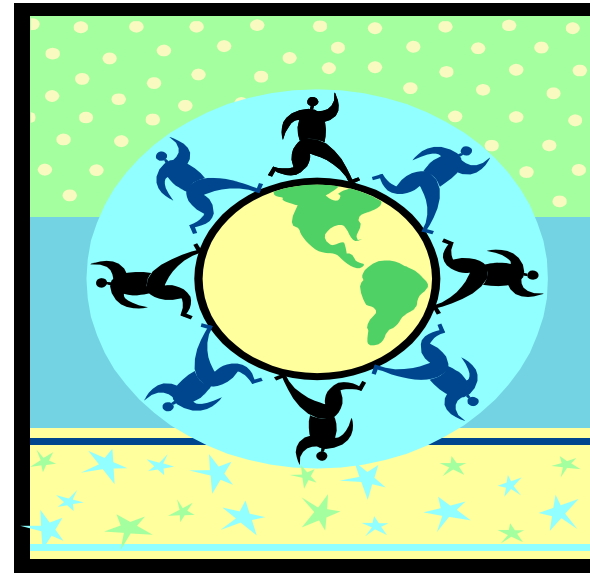
In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

The Spirit of Jesus still gets into people!

Lesslie Newbigin was a bishop of the Church of South India. In his little book Mission in Christ's Way, he relates the following:

"I remember very specially one occasion when I was taking a confirmation in one of the industrial areas in Madras. As I talked with those to be confirmed, I found that more than half of them had only been baptized in the past few weeks. I learned from the pastor that (in this area of heavy industry) there had been forty adult baptisms in the past eighteen months. I asked him to invite these forty people to give me an account of how each of them had been brought to Christ. In due course I was able to read their stories. What struck me was not only that each story was different, but also that within each story there were many different experiences spread over many years. It could be a talk with a workmate on the factory floor, a visit from a Christian friend during illness, the reading of a tract or a gospel portion, some quiet act of kindness in a time of trouble, a sermon, a prayer answered, or—very often—a dream or a vision. (Perhaps, the vision or dream was a trance on the rooftop. Or someone was knocked off one's horse into the dust.) No one could have "programmed" all this. The strategy (if that is the right word) was not in any human hands.

"But one factor was common to all: it was the presence of a believing, worshipping, celebrating congregation of people deeply involved in the ordinary life of the neighbourhood. There were many different happenings had their centre there, and drew those whose lives had been touched in so many different ways to ask what was the source from which all this radiated. This was no humanly devised programme for mission. It was the work of the Spirit, present in the life of the congregation, flowing out into the community through the faithful words and deeds of its members." (p. 19f.)



The Conversion of a Synod: Bishop's Report 2 **Metropolitan New York Synod 2004** **Rye, New York**

The Conversion of a Synod: Together on the Road

(Peter) "Now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? On the contrary we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus just as they will..." (Acts 15:10,11)

(James) "Therefore I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God..." (Acts 15:19)

The conversion of the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 is a model for the conversion of a synod. This council responded to Peter's outreach to Cornelius and Paul's mission to the Gentiles. It was a confirmation of the Messianic interpretation of Israel's faith to burst the enclave as a "light to the nations." The council of Jerusalem joined Peter on the roof and Paul in the dust blinded by resurrection light. It was the church's amen to the Great Commission. It wasn't easy, and as Paul's rant in the book of Galatians reminds us, the lure of the enclave remained strong.

The conversion of the Church to outreach in our neighborhoods and this new wave of immigration among us is the point of the Commission for Evangelical Outreach, which our synod assembly enabled last spring. It is based on Bishop Payne's model described in his book, *"Reclaiming the Great Commission."*

When we declared ourselves a Great Commission Synod it was not just adding another program, slogan or the latest version of "the bishop's agenda" to our life. It is a commitment to reorient the entire life of our synod and every one of its ministries and ministers toward the Great Commission: to make disciples, to baptize, to go engage the world, to teach all nations. It is our way of being in the world, joining together evangelism and outreach, ministry in the breach and catechesis. It moves away from the idolatry of maintaining the status quo enclave in our churches and toward a radically public connection with our communities.

Christendom is over. We are in a missionary moment in a new apostolic age. It is the posture of the church of the Bible set loose in a pagan world as witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus. As our highest biblical priority it is also something around which we can all unite. There are issues which divide us. They must not have a higher priority than the Great Commission. When we are united in devotion to the Great Commission, every other cause, conflict, resentment or agenda will fall into place or fall away. As I said last year: **WE ARE A MINORITY ON A MISSION WITH A MESSAGE FROM THE MASTER.**

things they had never seen anyone do before but Jesus. They told the story of Jesus – crucified, risen, and ascended – to the world. (cf. Barbara Brown Taylor, *Gospel Medicine*. Boston: Cowley Publications, pages 77-78.) They told the story of Jesus to the world!

The Spirit of Jesus still gets into people. People still experience the cross of Christ planted in their lives and in their world, and they go from their own Ground Zeros to the places the Spirit of God leads them and empowers them.

Today we commemorate John Eliot, Missionary to the American Indians. Eliot left a comfortable life in England to come to New England in 1631. He learned the dialects of their language with the assistance of a young Indian whom he received into his home. With the aid of this young man, he translated the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer and began to preach to the Indians in their own language in 1646. In 1663 the first Bible printed in America was in the Algonquin Indian language. John Eliot did this 120 years before the first English Bible was printed in America.

In 1801 Moravian Missionaries moved in to live and serve among the Cherokee people in Georgia. In 1836 these Moravian Missionaries walked along with the Cherokee on their forced march from Georgia to the Indian Territory that became Oklahoma. That journey is known as the "Trail of Tears." So many people died along the way. In 1902 the Moravians handed this ministry to the Danish Lutherans.

In 1926 the Lutheran Pastor Vammen opened the door of his house in the little town of Oaks, OK, and six Cherokee children were looking up to him. They needed a place to live. Pastor Vammen welcomed them into his home. Word spread and more children showed up. Oaks became a haven for children in need. Oaks Indian Mission and EbenEzer Lutheran Church, located in the heart of the Cherokee Nation, continue this vital ministry of childcare and Word and Sacrament that was begun over 200 years ago by Moravian missionaries.

these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

The Evangelist Luke has a fixation for Jerusalem. The Third Gospel begins with Zechariah praying in the temple in Jerusalem. It ends with the followers of Jesus returning to Jerusalem, and “...they were continually in the temple blessing God.” Shortly after his Transfiguration, “When the days drew near for him to be taken up, (Jesus) set his face to go to Jerusalem.” (Luke 9:51)

Now Jesus is telling his followers “to stay here in the city – stay here in Jerusalem – until you have been clothed with power from on high.” “Repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed...to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”

Jesus had fulfilled his mission, and he was passing the baton of his mission on to his followers and to you and to me. Their call to be witnesses was to begin in Jerusalem. It was to begin in that place where Jesus had wept over the city, that place where he had been denied, betrayed and crucified. The missionary enterprise of Jesus’ followers was to begin in Jerusalem, that place where the last flicker of hope in Jesus had gone out, that place where his disciples had forsaken him and fled. That city in which the great temple was destroyed. That city where everything had come to an end – that Ground Zero – was to be the place of new beginnings for all people. That’s where you will receive the power from on high to share with the world what the world really needs.

Nothing was ever the same for those followers of Jesus again. With nothing in their hands but a promise of power and a prayer, those apostles became the church of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Those followers became leaders. Those listeners became preachers. Those converts became missionaries. Those healed became healers. The disciples became apostles, sent into the world – beginning from Ground Zero in Jerusalem to be witnesses in the whole world. Surprising things began to happen. They began to say things that sounded like Jesus. They began to do

Let me remind you once again of the marks of a Great Commission Synod:

❖ **Every Parish is a Missionary Center:** “Go Congregations” is a new resource being developed by the “Mission Center” task force of the Commission For Evangelical Outreach. It will help walk congregations through the “Natural Church Development” tool for mission.

❖ **The Synod is One Parish:** We are unified and accountable to one another, every congregation, school, institution, ministry linked in the Great Commission. We move from autonomy to solidarity in mission.

❖ **We expect miracles and transformation from God:** Ecstasy will be routine among us. The Prayer task force is gathering frequently not only to pray, but to help us pray and expect what God wants to send us.

❖ **The Great Commission expects shared, participatory ministry:** Our guest, Canon Robin Greenwood, has been a leader in thinking about “total ministry,” the diverse forms of ministry and collaborations necessary for local ministry to make disciples and reach out in evangelism.

❖ **A Great Commission Synod is public church:** We will continue as a synod to “go into the world, lifting up issues of housing, immigration, hunger, poverty, as witness to the presence of Jesus in the world.

The conversion to evangelical outreach is ongoing in our synod. It is bringing us new life and vitality, and is reshaping our life and mission. Many congregations are taking already strong ministries to the next level. Ascension in Deer Park remembers beginning in a VFW hall and cleaning up the beer cans and

cigarettes on Sunday mornings. Their ministry is adding programs for the community all the time, and on their 50th anniversary I saw evidence of many new members and renewed commitment to outreach. Many parishes are building and renovating as a sign of their commitment to continued growth in ministry. Grace in Yorktown Heights dedicated a new facility centered in the presence of the Baptismal Font. King of Kings, New Windsor and New Hope in Jamaica are in the midst of building as their ministries grow. Throughout our synod congregations in every setting are faithfully reaching out, bursting the enclave.

In the context of a recovery of the Great Commission throughout our synod let me highlight the more than sixty ministries coming out of our ethnic strategies, emerging immigrant outreach, and ministry to people in poverty. I am highlighting these because they are “the road not taken” by most of Nordic Lutheranism, many of them are our shared responsibility (with partners throughout the synod), and they are bringing great gifts to all of us. They help make us a Great Commission Synod “in the breach.” (Isaiah 58: “you shall be called the healer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.”)

Black Strategy:

- ❖ There are 29 congregations with over 50% Black membership.
- ❖ These churches have a membership of 7398 and an average attendance of 2841.
- ❖ The Black Strategy is coordinated and planned by the Black Pastors Group (which includes White pastors of Black churches and lay leadership) convened by Tony Aguilar. Key to the strategy is to invest in existing ministries rather than start new ministries. Several of these strongest ministries are now resources for the entire synod, sharing leadership, the fruits of new mission initiatives and

Because of back-up batteries, these gadgets were still working, even after the nuclear disaster. But there were no human voices. They had been silenced. There was only one reminder that human beings had ever lived there. Their silhouettes were on the outside of the house. The face of the house was all black except for the outline of five people, who had been outside in the yard when the explosion came.

What was Bradbury trying to tell us? Was he saying that our technology is so advanced that it may even survive human life on this planet? Was he saying that our technology may survive us but it will certainly not save us? That, in fact, it may destroy us? Was he saying that the imagination and ingenuity of humankind has created a world in which all the little issues and problems are solved but none of the big ones?

You and I have tasted and experienced some of what Bradbury is telling us. Today, however, it is not only technology that kills. “RELIGION KILLS!” Douglas John Hall wrote that those words of graffiti were scrawled on the outer wall of the Presbyterian College of Montreal in the days immediately following the shattering events of September 11, 2001. (*The Cross in Our Context*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003, p. 1) We – all of us – are being challenged today to examine ourselves to ascertain what it is that we are contributing to the violence of our age and what we can do to change the situation. What is it that humankind needs to hear and experience today? What does the world really need from us?

On the evening of Easter Jesus stood among his followers and said to them, “Peace be with you....These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you – that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of

**May 21, 2004 – Metropolitan New York Synod Assembly
Ascension of Our Lord - Commemoration of John Eliot,
missionary to American Indians**

Luke 24:44-53

The Rev. Floyd M. Schoenhals, Bishop
Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Let us pray: Come, Holy Spirit. Stir up in us the words and deeds of your reign, so that all will know Christ's love. Amen

Grace to you and peace from God our Creator and from Jesus Christ our crucified, risen and ascended Lord in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen

In 1950 science fiction writer Ray Bradbury wrote a provocative and haunting six-page short story entitled *There Will Come Soft Rains*. (21 *Great Stories*, edited by Abraham H. Lass and Norma L. Tasman. New York: New American Library, 1969, pages 25-31.) The setting of the story is 1985, 35 years into the future.

On the day following a nuclear disaster, there are no people left. The story is about a house – one of the only ones left standing after the explosion and the fires and the fallout. The house is filled with all the conveniences one could imagine. Stoves are programmed to prepare food and put it on the table. Little robots scurry around at designated times to clean the house, wash the dishes, and put them away. Recorded voices are heard coming from speakers in the walls announcing the time of day and what it is time to do. Bathtubs automatically fill with water at the appropriate time. At 9:00 PM a voice comes from a speaker above the crackling fireplace: “Mrs. McClellan, what poem would you like to hear this evening?”

strong internal growth with the entire synod. The Black Strategy received significant funding from Thrivent for the training of lay mission leadership through an annual Leadership Institute.

❖ Five of our Black congregations receive partnership funding (national Division for Outreach or synod) and four were Jubilee congregations receiving \$1,250,000 in debt relief raised by our synod and some of it matched by the Mission Investment Fund of the ELCA.

Latino Strategy:

There are 15 Latino ministries in our synod, from Kingston in the north through the five boroughs to Amagansett in the east end of Long Island. This strategy is directed by Pastor David Anglada, who meets regularly with those serving these ministries.

❖ These ministries are being served by 7 deacons (graduates of the Spanish Diakonia program), 3 White pastors, 2 Latino ordained pastors from other traditions (Reformed and Pentecostal, both in candidacy process), 2 Latino candidates approved for ordination (one a Diakonia graduate) and 2 ordained Lutheran pastors (a Diakonia graduate). Again, we are growing our own leaders.

❖ These ministries have an average of 650 at worship. There are about 2000 Latino members of the MNYS.

❖ There are currently 8 TEEM candidates, 16 graduates of Diakonia, and 12 in the candidacy process. There are 13 current students in the Brooklyn track of Diakonia, and 11 students in the Hempstead track.

❖ Some of these ministries are growing rapidly. The emerging ministry at St. Luke's, Woodhaven has had as many as 250 at worship (they began about three months ago); the ministry at St. Peter's, Manhattan often has more than 150 at worship.

❖ Most of these ministries serve a predominantly undocumented population. 80% of those at Cristo, Freeport are undocumented, and almost 100% in Hempstead.

❖ We have a goal of starting two new ministries per year.

❖ It costs about \$25,000 a year to support a deacon serving as a mission developer.

Asian Strategy:

There are 9 Asian ministries in our synod. Eight are Word and Sacrament ministries and 1 is an outreach to Fujianese immigrants in Chinatown through Lutheran Social Services (LSS) and Lutheran Disaster Response of New York (LDRNY), with Word and Sacrament in the planning stages. Lily Wu relates to these ministries and Pastor Abraham Lu has been a long time leader.

❖ These ministries worship about 635 people weekly. There are about 1800 Asian people in the congregations of our synod.

❖ A key element in drawing these ministries together was a synod wide youth retreat held recently at Koinonia. It was very well attended.

servant slave of all God's beloved children. Here let us give thanks with all who are marking anniversaries:

Lord in your mercy – hear our prayer

In a time of open prayer we offer to God everyone in need, all peacemakers and healers, in this country and throughout the world.

SILENCE

Lord in your mercy – hear our prayer

And now we recall with thankfulness all members of synod who have died in the past year..... we join them with all who have gone before us.... Moses, Miriam, Abraham, Deborah, Sarah, the prophets, John the Baptizer, the apostles, evangelists, fathers, doctors, reformers..... Francis, Clare, Luther, Calvin, Cranmer, Dunstan, Julian of Norwich, Teresa of Avila, John Eliot, all who in centuries past and recently have been our mentors and pastors and teachers of the faith.....

Above all thanking the Father for Jesus who has gone before us to Heaven. May the souls of all the faithful through your mercy rest in peace and rise in glory.

Lord in your mercy – hear our prayer

FINAL PRAYER BY PRESIDENT

FINAL PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Father, we thank you for the mothers and fathers of faith who have gone before us

Who have sung your life deep and true;

We thank you for the good company of artists, poets, preachers, evangelists, and musicians who sing your gospel now

We are witnesses to your mercy and splendour;

We will not keep silent... Ever again. Amen.

for their supervisors and all those whom they serve. May they grow in a spirit of mutuality.

We pray for a church that lives in the world asking the right questions; Holding law and grace, freedom and authority, faith and works together in tension by the Holy Spirit, pointing to the glorious mystery who is God.

A church so rooted in gospel and tradition that like a living tree it can swing in the wind and continually surprise us with new blossoms.

Lord in your mercy – **hear our prayer.**

We pray for a radically renewed concept and practice of ministry and a primitive understanding of the ordained offices

Where there is no clerical status and no classes of Christians,

But all together know themselves to be part of the *laos* – the holy people of God.

A ministering community rather than a community gathered around a minister. We include with great warmth all those who minister among those on military service, asking for special grace to bear the great commission in places of fear, fragile relationships and inexperience.

Lord in your mercy – **hear our prayer.**

Let us give thanks and pray for the Redeemer Korean Lutheran Church – all her members and Pastor Jonathan Shin – that we may all grow in unity, in Christ through the Spirit. We pray again for every church represented here, for a greater ecumenical co-operation locally, to be unafraid of change, affirm the beauty of diversity and recognize God’s hand in times of crisis.

Lord in your mercy – **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those who have been approved for ordination and ask that increasingly pastors re-vision themselves as agents of learning, as catalysts for the growth of all, where bishops are signs and animators of the entire church’s servanthood as body of Christ, the

❖ Our most recent Asian ministries are Kalam Taiwanese (received into membership at our last Synod assembly), and Ashirwad South Asian ministry. Reformation Korean will be received at this assembly.

❖ Recently Gary Mills met in Beijing with leaders of the Batak national church in Sumatra to identify our next pastor and work through other agreements.

❖ We have submitted a ministry profile to the Division for Outreach for funding a new English ministry for second generation Chinese at Grace.

Companion Synod, Immigrant and Rural Ministries:

Pastor Gary Mills works with our international ministries and our Companion Synod relationship. Tony Aguilar works with the Committee for Ministry among Guyanese.

❖ Our synod supports two ministries in the more rural part of our territory at Ellenville and Jeffersonville. These are small, but vibrant ministries which are supported by all of us in our synod funding partnership.

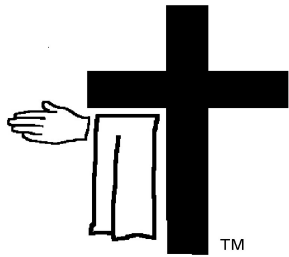
❖ We have developed “church to church” agreements with the churches in Finland, The EKD in Germany, Sweden, and Norway. Our agreement with EKD includes synodical involvement with St. Paul’s in Manhattan, and the sending of interns and pastors to serve in our synod from Germany. Finland has sent much support and resources for our synod’s outreach to immigrant and expatriate Finns.

❖ Outreach among Liberian refugees on Staten Island has local sponsorship.

❖ Our Savior, Jamaica incubated our Swahili ministry, and now hosts worship for the Tamil community. Salaam Arabic continues to be a vital ministry for interfaith relations in our synod.

❖ New immigration ministries being considered include Russian (Washington Heights or Brooklyn), French\Creole, and German (Westchester County).

❖ The Ministry among Guyanese had over eight hundred attend their two annual worship services. This is a pan Lutheran ministry which maintains close spiritual and ministry support ties with the Lutheran Church in Guyana.



INTERCESSIONS AT SYNOD ASSEMBLY FESTIVAL EUCCHARIST

Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus, And for all people according to their needs.

And it shall come to pass afterward,
That I will pour out my spirit on all flesh;
Your daughters and sons shall prophesy,
Your old ones shall dream dreams,
Ad your young ones shall see visions.
In those days, I will pour out my spirit.

Lord we pray for a church in which

Worship is lively and fun as well as reverent and holy;
And we might be moved to dance and laugh;
To be solemn, cry or beat the breast.

In which people know how to pray and enjoy it –
Frequently and regularly, privately and corporately, in silence and in word and song.

Lord in your mercy – **hear our prayer.**

We commemorate Pastor John Eliot, giving thanks for his passion for you, passion for your mission and passion for your Native American people

We pray that we may echo his ministry in our own love for you, or own passion for your work in the world and our love for knowing those who are different – in speech, language, and culture. We pray that our churches may grow in ethnic diversity, in a mixture of age groups, in knowing the pains and joys of their locality; give us imagination to develop forms of worship and learning that include rather than exclude.

Lord in your mercy – hear our prayer

Let us pray for diaconal ministries, locally authorized to serve God's mission in many languages, witnessing with the bishop, and

Gracing the church with a kaleidoscope of gifts and constant renewal for all. Amen.



New Ministries:

Twenty-three new ministry starts (or re-starts) have been initiated since I was elected bishop in 1996. This impetus for mission planting builds on the extensive work done in previous years. They include nine Latino ministries, and six Asian ministries. Some are the merging of existing ministries: Cristo/Christ in Freeport; Grace Chinese/Bethany Elmhurst/second generation outreach. Some are local parish initiatives: Tamil at Our Savior. Most were initiated by synod and local partnerships. Two Latino ministries were initiated which were not able to be sustained. Four congregations have closed.

Congregations at Risk, Congregations Renewed:

Most of these new ministries have started in existing congregations. Of the twenty congregations who are partners or hosts of these ministries, fifteen are congregations at risk. Several are working on a model of Salem Danish becoming Salaam Arabic (but still caring for the needs of the English speaking members).

I believe that these congregations, both strong and “at risk” who are sponsoring, initiating or hosting the shared ministries described here offer an incredible bank of experience and opportunity to a synod seeking to live into the Great Commission. It suggests that outreach to new neighbors can be a means for parish growth and vitality. These ministries are providing leaders, experience, insights for all of our congregations to serve their increasingly global and multi-cultural communities.

One Parish:

One wonderful sign of our unity in mission will be on October 17, at 4pm. at the Interchurch Center when the organizing service of the alliance of the ten social ministry organizations on our territory will take place, “Lutheran Services-New York Alliance” (LS-NYA) so that as one unified body they can work together and with our congregations in ministry.

Lutheran Ministries in Higher Education/NYC is going through a review of its ministry. Lutheran Schools Association continues to grow in its ability to help sustain and initiate education ministries. We have the opportunity to organize the fabric of our life together so that congregations can grow through shared outreach ministries; programs of social ministry (Sion and Transfiguration in Harlem are looking at the possibility of partnerships with LSS); campus ministry; and schools and early childhood ministries.

Full Communion and Ecumenical Partnerships:

Thirteen of these ministries are full communion partnerships or involve pastors from full communion judicatories. Example: Episcopal partners from Trinity, Wall Street and St. Paul’s Chapel with Hope mission at Ground Zero.

A Synod in the Breach:

When we initiate and support these ministries we also embrace the worlds and issues from which they come. Over 75% of those served in our Latino ministries are undocumented people. Many embraced by these ministries are living in poverty. Economic migration, immigration and refugee issues will be at the center of our concern and public conversation. Four members of our Batak Indonesian ministry have been in INS detention for a year. Three have been released and granted asylum. One remains.

to our language and patterns of operating. A collaborative church can be achieved only through collaborative process.

A mission-shaped church will be flexible and alert to the spiritual pathways of many different kinds of people. In Wales we have problems when we define our church over against other denominations. We limit our outreach when we insist on worship that is properly Anglican and what we’ve always done. We even make clergy at induction services swear to use only official liturgical texts. What we need is the love and imagination to develop apt liturgies that reach out in spirituality to all the people in our neighbourhood. In all their difference, God is already in them, so lets have forms of worship that make true connections. Unless there is depth in our worship, we shall have no prophetic imagination or release of God’s power.

In conclusion, what I want to communicate at the beginning of this assembly is that the God of impossibilities is our God. Do you really believe that the God we worship works impossibilities – in our church? God blesses us and is our shepherd so we can become the church that God now requires?

You will not be surprised if I say “The Church of God does not have a mission” because the deeper truth is that “the God of mission has a church”. So as we move into the ideas, relationships and practicalities of this synod let’s imagine a church:

In which all its members know surely and simply God’s great love, and each is certain that in the divine heart we are all known by name.

In which Jesus is the very Word, our window into the Father’s heart; the sign of God’s hope and design for all humankind.

In which the Spirit is not a party symbol, but wind and fire in everyone;

Let's begin to imagine what this means:

- Jesus helps us reconceive who is God. Jesus Shows God as closer than our own breath, as a King who is careless of status and wealth but who cherishes each one and a Father who looks for and embraces the rebel. We fail to see it when there is domination or when the language of personal possession prevails. You know, when clergy speak of "my" organist, "my" people or "my" churchwarden. In God's Kingdom subordination and control are excluded. Radically we are sisters and brothers in Christ, different and equal. We are called to show the world true humanity.
- Jesus shows us who we are as human persons. Rather than living to ourselves, Jesus draws us into hospitable community; he shows us how tirelessly to be available when nourished by the Father's presence and the Spirit's leading. He shows us how to be lovingly open to others as God is to us. He shows us how every person, however flagging in faith, however despised by others, is included as part of God's Kingdom life. Jesus shows us how to be alive with the life and glory of God and to recognize his own life in others.
- Jesus shows us how God works. Jesus invites us to become communities of joyful responsibility that seek those on the edge and turn the other cheek. In his baptism Jesus is shown to be close to the father. Jesus is Spirit-filled, has visions and assumes the authority given him by God heals and shows signs of the Kingdom. Jesus redefines power not as coercion but as mutuality, dialogue, friendship, and cooperative relation. Energy levels are sapped when bishops drive towards noble visions without looking to see how their behaviour affects everyone else. A Trinitarian shaped church can only happen when we all pay attention

Our synod must participate in these issues and the ecumenical and interfaith conversations which will allow theology to shape public life. Support for congregations involved in church based community organizing is another important way for a synod to be "healers of the breach, restorers of streets to live in." (Isaiah 58)

I believe that our synod could be a leader in immigration\refugee\economic migration conversation. It is a spiritual conversation because we have a theology which asks about who "we" are and what "we are becoming" as well as who the immigrants, migrants and refugees are. What manner of community is emerging from the changed landscape post 9-11? A haven for every refuge, a job for every migrant, a home for every immigrant, these are deeply Biblical dreams.

I believe that the Center for Public Theology could be at the heart of this, gathering the "dangling conversations" pushing new questions, but always bringing to the table those of us "on the ground" who are the immigrants and migrants of our ministries. We need to feel with the heart; think with the head; help with the hand. So far the level of thinking on these things has not been up to the opportunity. The tension between security and immigration policy has only hardened. Western Europe is imploding over this (with politicians like La Pen in France tapping into the public fear). This issue is local and global; ecumenical and interfaith; policy and practice. It is the "big conversation" in the next century. And Lutherans have a theology, constituency, institutions and relationships around the word and around the block which can serve as a leaven and a light.

Leadership, Canon 9 and Total Ministry:

Most of these ministries are "the road not taken" by most seminarians and pastors. Yet God has provided wonderful grass roots leadership. The leadership for these ministries comes from

pastors ordained in other traditions, deacons and synodically authorized ministers raised up by local communities of faith, and Metropolitan New York Synod pastors. Our Latino deacons come from three congregations which are producing wonderful leaders for the entire synod (Cristo, Freeport; Trinity, Sunset Park; Resurreccion, Hempstead).

Here are some emerging mission leaders:

❖ Jorge Ospina is a carpenter from Colombia who has served us in Poughkeepsie and now is starting the ministry at St. Luke's in Woodhaven. Most of those he serves are undocumented and from South America. He has been approved for ordination. Pastor Barry Lawless and his wife teach first communion classes to the children. Begun several months ago, the ministry averages more than fifty at worship and has had as many as 250 in attendance. Jorge carves small crosses, hands them out at the local Laundromat, prays with the people and invites them to the ministry.

❖ Andrena Ingram is a TEEM candidate nearing ordination. She is a member of Transfiguration, and has experienced transformation and healing from addiction.. She shared her story with the Conference of Bishop's at a retreat on poverty. She already has a vibrant ministry to inner city people living in poverty, and living one day at a time.

❖ Pastor Perucy Butiku began the Swahili ministry with a Bible study for East African women, many of them in neglected or abusive situations. She began the Swahili worship as a deacon and was recently ordained (attended by Anna Mkapa, the first lady of Tanzania). Recently she brought the Tanzanian ambassador to the U.N. to our office

This is the meaning of mission. Worship lies at the heart of the transformation of ourselves and of the everyday life of our world. The Feast of the Ascension marks the in between time when we celebrate the lord death until he comes. Where in your church is there the need to know that Christian faith is the practice of hope. Where things seem impossible, yet the lord is here. His Spirit is with us!

3. in Christ we have a pattern of the glorified humanity which awaits us.

When churches are in trouble we all know the strategies. We can freeze in denial; we can get into hyperactivity; we select the latest idea off the bandwagon, the miracle solution; or we can dare to expect God to show us something entirely unexpected. Dare we allow God to turn us into a pillar of fire? Dare we allow ourselves to be miraculously transformed into a people full of God's life. In my work as Provincial Officer for ministry in Wales I frequently drive through high mountain passes, in the winter often snow covered. As I see clouds boiling and swirling around the crags I'm reminded of Moses whose face shone through being with YHWH.

Mission is the overflowing energy of God we receive in worship.

Worship is the heart of mission. In worshipping we are filled with God's blessing. Here we come face to face with Jesus. The disciples knew Jesus as one who faced God in prayer and faced others in teaching, healing, and eating and drinking; they knew him in crucifixion and Resurrection. The pattern of his life, now taken up into God's life must be the pattern of our mission.

genuine listening, dialogue, courtesy. Such churches can't help but grow; they are attractive and open and intend to be a practical expression of the Gospel. Jesus gives his disciples life in all its fullness. "Then he took them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them he withdrew from them and was carried up to heaven". Jesus is not sending them good wishes; otherwise they would have felt as lost as after his crucifixion. The blessing was transference of energy to them from God, the distribution of life to his people to do God's work. This was the reason for their joy. Now they knew themselves full of the same life they had recognized in Jesus. Now they could do the same works as him and even greater. God is; God is as God is in Jesus; so there is Hope.

They were transformed and empowered and this led them to worship and give thanks. And in worshipping and giving thanks they experienced a recapitulation of blessing. At Pentecost they realized this blessing was not just for themselves but was an explosion to make the astonishing life that is God in the world known to all. And so in giving the life they had received to others, they found they received even more. Jesus in whose Risen life they now shared is with them again and again and again, a never exhausted love. Never more so than when they broke bread and shared wine.

There could be no fulfilling of the Great Commission without direct contact with the livingness of God experienced in the Eucharist. As Christians have gathered, welcomed and included, attended to the Word, to one another, and to the world's needs; have distributed tasks, honoured young and old, and developed language, signs and music; given thanks, shared the cup, and dismissed one another to their daily responsibilities, they have been drawn into knowing the presence of Christ everywhere. Down the centuries in myriads of ways Christians have known Christ among them and in society and learned how to respond.

for a meeting on coordinating support for President Bush's Millennium Challenge Fund and funding for HIV/AIDS outreach in Africa.

Each of these leaders and many more are Diakonia graduates. The need for local leadership is acute in many of our parishes which cannot find or afford full time pastoral ministry. Several mission-driven avenues are being explored.

- a) The Conference of Bishops has been studying synodically authorized ministries and has concluded that we should seriously study the possibility of local ordination similar to Canon 9 of the Episcopal Church. (Actually, Canon 9 has been folded into a more comprehensive canon for ordination which allows for this local possibility.) My position is that the Bishop is the mission director and Word and Sacrament leader in the synod. He or she should have the discretion to ordain missionary leaders needed for Word and Sacrament ministry in these mission situations.

I believe that these local ordained leaders should be ordained in and for the whole church and rostered to place. The "place" of this local rostering could be an ethnic community, a conference, several yoked parishes, a synod. Mentoring, supervision and vocational formation would be ongoing. At some point when candidacy requirements are completed the missionary pastor would be rostered in the whole church. The March meeting of the Conference of Bishops authorized proposals for us to consider to move this forward.

- b) Total Ministry is the term used to describe the team of ministers in a congregation, or cluster of congregations. The Northeast Queens cluster is looking at a Total Ministry model which will have several pastors, a youth and family director, an older adult director and others on a team to serve all the conference congregations as well as the

missionary efforts in the neighborhoods. The role of the conference as a platform for mission planning and accountability will be critical to the ministries described in this report.

OUR PRESENT AND FUTURE CHALLENGE:

We treasure and will continue to maintain our strong partnership with the ELCA's Division for Outreach. Yet it is also clear that in the future we are going to have to take primary responsibility for maintaining these ministries and starting new ones. Five years ago we received about \$750,000 from the Division for Outreach (including mission pastor salaries). This year we will receive about \$250k in program support as well as \$75k in support for our South Asian missionary. That is half of what we received five years ago. We are one of the only synods which includes these shared ministries in our own synod budget. Five years ago it was about \$65k. This year it will be over \$250k and it will continue to grow.

The handwriting is on the wall. For these ministries to continue, to flourish, for us to continue to plant new mission seeds, it's going to increasingly be up to us. One reason that these ethnic strategies are thriving is that each one of them has someone on our staff collective who is from those communities, whose face and experience reflects them, includes them, provides leadership for them. When we place this present and future mission challenge against our continuing decline in congregational mission support to the wider church, and continued budget and spending deficits, it can make us, in Bonhoeffer's words, "cringe before the fact."

But a Great Commission Synod doesn't cringe. It is on the roof, waiting for Cornelius with ecstatic, miraculous expectation.

A Great Commission Synod, like the Council of Jerusalem, plans and authorizes mission outreach together. We must think about the support of our shared missions ten, twenty years from

With the Risen Christ among them they could return to Jerusalem, the centre of their world. They waited together in prayer and companionship until at Pentecost they found their many different voices so that all could be included. The Lord was with them and they were able to show others in how many ways the Lord can be seen and known. Jesus was not only no longer dead but somehow even more alive than ever and filling every disciple with amazing liveliness. So communities of Jesus formed that were characterized by their energetic coming together and going out. In many different places, with different structures of authority and different names for their leaders. Above all they had "seen the Lord" and wanted everyone else to see him and know him. Churches are companies of those who have "seen the Lord."

Churches calcify when they become trapped in a small orthodoxy – of certain patterns of ministry, of over dependency on paid clergy, on authority structures more to do with medieval hierarchy than Trinitarian relations. We try to preserve what we have at all costs rather than daring to look for radical solutions and to expect God to do new things. Sometimes Bishop's and their senior staff act more like 12th century courts. They ignore completely the rank and file of the laity until there's need for more cash to pay for the bishop's next project.

Let's be expecting the God we worship to work the impossible on our hearts and in our Hope for the future. We know the earliest followers of Jesus gave up on grief, anxiety and depression. They were full of life, unstoppable, turning the world upside down in joyful responsibility and hilarity; they experienced and shared a previously unknown concentration of zest. How could all our worship and meetings be better recognized as a wild improvisation on Pentecost?

This coming of God among people in a new quality of being together Paul calls being "in Christ". To obey the great commission is to see evidence of churches moving towards the practice of the *koinonia* that typifies God's mission when there is

requires of them that they see their sharing of the life of the streets and shops, of wrestling with issues of land, feeding, housing, business, and unemployment, and issues about race, justice, drug abuse, sexuality and so on, as their Christian ministry, will they begin to be effective. For then through the Holy Spirit they will bring consciously bring blessing, forgiveness and the sacrifice of Christ for the world. Our task now is let go of old securities and work for an identity that will, like Jesus, comfort and heal the needs and conflicts around us. Or else our hope will appear impotent and as a Church we shall deserve to die.

This is an awesome challenge to become the God-centred identity and mission of Christ. But no less awesome is the blessing-filled, overwhelming vitality we receive in worship. Because God acts in us we can face God and face others in the transformative overflowing of life we call the Holy Spirit.

2. therefore the Lord is everywhere accessible;

Ascension Day can be confusing if we become preoccupied with imagining the mechanics of what happened. The meaning is in the stories. Above all, the stories show how a beleaguered and frightened group of disciples became courageous, articulate and encouraged. After the crucifixion they had been desperately frightened and grief stricken. The disciples were hugely changed by the ascension of Jesus and even more at Pentecost. Luke describes how the disciples after the Ascension returned to Jerusalem, full of joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

We are given illustrations of how after the Resurrection many individuals and groups saw the Lord in a new way. He came among them in very different ways that were recognizable because they were a reminder of how they had known him in his ministry – walking and talking, breaking bread and sharing. Now they knew that Jesus was always with them. They were his witnesses, but never alone.

now as we think and pray about our stewardship of the legacies of congregations which have closed. Stewardship of mission ten, twenty years from now animates the renewal of our conferences, the ministry of deans, the emerging Commission for Evangelical Outreach.

A Great Commission Synod does not make budget and mission support decisions in the walled off enclave. The Holy Spirit will give you the gift of ecstasy, a stepping out of yourselves, so that when you decide how you share the gifts God has given you the faces of Percy Butiku, Jorje Ospina, Barry Lawless, Daniel Peter, and the faces of Reformation Korean we have received into our synod at this assembly will be in front of you as you grow in mission support of your synod and wider church. God will continue to send Cornelius to us and allow us to see him. God will allow you to see the “congregation at risk” around the corner as you make decisions about the gifts God has given you. God will gift you with a vision of Tanzanian children, some of them aids orphans, whose lives are given hope and meaning as they meet Jesus at KEMPS school in our companion diocese.

A Great Commission Synod does not put its outreach ministries at risk. I and my staff will be asked to prepare plans which address less our chronic deficits with decreased spending and increased revenue. That must happen. But I pledge to you that I will support no plan which retreats from the mission to which God has called us.

A Great Commission Synod is comprised of congregations like St. Michael’s in Amagansett. They know that they are a “congregation at risk.” But when I met with them there was such a spirit and excitement about mission, such miraculous expectation, that it took my breath away. Basically their leaders told me, “if we’re going to go down, we will go down serving.” They are raising the money to call a pastor who speaks English and Spanish.

They are stretching beyond where they have ever gone before and they are a joyful community of Jesus.

Brothers and sisters, you have it in your power to join them on the roof. And we all want to be on your roof too. For we have all been stunned by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and understand that we were born to share it.

Stephen Paul Bouman
Ascension 2004

On the basis of common baptism, all have become priests, and all realize this priesthood in their own way on the basis of their respective charismata. Hence all members of the Church, both office holders and ‘laypersons’, are fundamentally equal. Across the world, ecumenically, books, journals, conferences and official texts explore how the ministry and mission of the Church belongs to the whole Christian community and not just to the few who are ordained. The Second Vatican Council rediscovered *koinonia* as a primary building block for understanding what it is to be Church – communion, community, and communication. In the World Council of Churches Lima Texts, Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry and the 1991 Canberra Assembly Declaration, and more recently the Porvoo and other reports of ecumenical dialogue, *koinonia* is developed as a basic ecclesiological category. Unity through difference replaces consensus, which eliminates diversity.

Four interlocking themes of baptism draw out its significance for this discussion: Baptism brings the one being baptized into intimate connection with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; grants incorporation in the triune life of God and the Christian community; is a commissioning, in company with all other baptized people, for working for the fulfillment of God’s mission; is inaugurated eschatology. In that through accepting both Resurrection faith and the challenge to wrestle with all that brings down people and creation, we are agents and signs already of what God will have in the End. The challenge is that as a baptized Christian, I am already commissioned as part of Christ’s own ministry. Whether I am ordained or not is immaterial. No matter how I react, the statement remains true. I may be surprised, alarmed, pleased, antagonized, suspicious, acquiescent, scornful or enraged. Nevertheless by baptism I share in the ministry of Christ.

This demands the developing of Churches in which we find new language that goes beyond the “clerical”- “lay” divide. And to reach that point all Christian people will need to be better nurtured in taking hold of their ministerial responsibility both for doing their Christian living in the networks of the everyday and to take part in re-developing the Church in mission. And only when their Church

extravagance of Jesus' suffering. Rather, we choose to be loved by the one who transforms our knowledge of what love can be.

We bear on our foreheads the mark of the cross; our hearts are filled with the shining face of Christ; we carry in us the death that Jesus died; we know, but rarely live out, the truth that power is mostly seen in weakness. Jesus' distinctive way of living before God as a human being is now affirmed and drawn into the mystery we call God.

One diocese in Britain recently consulted a business consultant to help them find a focus for their mission. "What's unique", he made them ask, "about your sales pitch?" Not love, not self-development, not even community work. Many others are in those fields. What the church alone offers is Hope. There is a sense in which we may summarize our faith in three short lines: God is; God is as God in Jesus; so there is Hope. This sermon isn't the occasion for advocating particular practical plans for mission and ministry but to stress that the church needs to be as open to every aspect of its context as it is to God. Julian of Norwich in her anchorite cell with two windows. The one looked to the altar and enabled her mystical connection to Christ; the other looked into the street. People would come to ask practical guidance and she helped them to see God at work in every detail of human living.

For Christians today the Rublev Icon is increasingly seen as a vital key to mission. The implications of the angelic hospitality of Mamre have hardly yet been glimpsed. Beyond our understanding we are drawn into the dynamic and interpersonal life of the Trinity, in all the brokenness of our lives. To be drawn into the Trinity is to become associated with the cross-shaped work of God, the open heart of love at the centre of the world. It's the end of hierarchy and the beginning of communities of difference, intimate relationship and that openness to all creation that lies at the heart of the triune God. Baptism is the sign of our common call to share in God's Mission.

**ELCA NEW YORK SYNOD ASSEMBLY SERMON
ASCENSION DAY 2004
The Rev. Canon Dr. Robin Greenwood**

May my speaking and your hearing be in the name of the living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I bring you greetings from my fellow Anglicans in the Church in Wales. Like you we are searching to know how best to communicate the gospel in today's world. Thank you for the invitation to take part in this significant assembly. I have already made visits to local churches and had conversations with groups and individuals on how God is leading us all, clergy and laity, into new partnerships to fulfil the Great Commission.

My task now is to help us all explore how our missionary energy, thinking and passion is opened up by the celebration of Christ's Ascension. A bishop in England speaking to children in the cathedral asked the question, "What *is* the Church?" An eight year old put up her hand and said, "The gang of people Jesus left behind to continue his work". Afterwards the bishop expressed his irritation that she had said in a sentence what he'd planned to take twenty minutes to explain. If I had to put the message in this sermon in one sentence it would be this. Empowered by the Risen Christ, who has taken all of humanity into the life of God, there is nothing we cannot face or do.

One of the aims of Luke in his final chapter is to emphasize the command of the risen Christ that his disciples continue his mission through the generosity of God's blessing. With the new evidence, since Jesus' execution, that God has raised him from death, Luke invites the world now to change its verdict. The Disciples, as advocates are to press for the decision among the nations that Jesus really is Lord.

Jesus does not just issue his command and leave the disciples to it. He invites us to work in close relationship to himself. So he gives to his witnesses two gifts. The first is the

clothing with power from on high, the empowering of the Holy Spirit that makes everyone of us a leader in different situations. There can be no evangelistic outreach that is not filled with the Holy Spirit. The second gift is the assurance of the protective shepherding of God. As he leaves them, Jesus makes the priestly sign of a hand raised in blessing.

This is especially important because it reminds us that it's safe to struggle and to take risks. We are enfolded in God's protection.

I imagine each one of us here has at some time faced huge problems or grief. All of us have pastoral memories of those who have faced great pain or tragedy. Sometimes we hang on to faith by our fingernails. The God who works wonders brings us through. We come through the valley of the shadow of death through prayer, scripture, Eucharist and the love of others.

In the life of the church in Wales I am aware of many clergy who are stressed and anxious about their futures. We are facing the erosion of the church's influence, a sharp decline in numbers of worshippers, congregations on the edge of survival, too many ancient buildings in the wrong places, shortages of clergy, the urgent need to reshape ministry for mission, concerns about finance and pensions. How can those who were called to one form of ministry now respond in entirely new ways?

It's easy to despair or to blame others. But Ascension tide is a time for growing up. Jesus has gone from us in one sense but as Lord of all has returned, inviting us to do even greater works in his name. Now is the beginning of the End, a turning point. The Kingdom has already come among us but has still to be worked for. We are committed to being an advance sign of God's Final Hope. Are we up for it? This is the moment of decision. Like the first disciples we need to grieve our loss. We can mourn the passing of the old church. Some would say Anglicans are too good at being gloomy and rejoicing in past glories. There a joke that asks "How many Anglicans does it take to change a light bulb"?

"It takes five. One to install a new bulb and four to admire the old one".

Lament over the old church mustn't last too long. The Risen Lord is with us inviting us to share in his work in the world. The people in our society are so desperately in need of the Good News. They need a church that knows it, lives it and shares it with everyone. Now is the beginning of a new mission era.

To share in Christ's work we have to become one with him and therefore with the Father and the Holy Spirit. On Ascension Day we celebrate this in three ways. Firstly, all that Jesus was and all that is symbolized by his wounds is taken up into the life of the Trinitarian God; therefore secondly, the Lord is everywhere accessible; and thirdly, in Christ we have a pattern of the glorified humanity which awaits us.

What do these three aspects of Ascension have to say concerning our responsibility for taking on the great Commission?

1. All that Jesus was and all that is symbolized by his wounds, is taken up into the life of the Trinitarian God;

Jesus is not dead and gone but at God's right hand. The letter to the Hebrews speaks strongly of Jesus the pioneer of our faith exalted to the heavens. In the glorification of the one who was crucified we see hope for our world and ourselves. In worship we stand before the face of Jesus who was crucified. The one who had lived for God had become an image of utter powerlessness. He was a disappointment, a cause of grief, the sign of the triumph of lies and violence. The Resurrection was God's "Yes" to all that we value in the life of Jesus; God's "No" to all that continues to bring Jesus to the cross. Jesus is the way of service, humility and persuasion, not force, the patient but persistent search for justice for the poorest, shocking hospitality for everyone. Today we celebrate that his Lordship continues to have within it the torture and bloody dying. Not as though we are to made be made to feel guilty by the sheer