

January 8, 2010

TO: Commissioners, Youth Advisory Delegates, Corresponding Members and
Friends of the Synod of Lakes and Prairies

FROM: Phil Brown
Synod Executive

SUBJECT: The Meeting of the Synod Assembly
January 17 - 19, 2010

Journey of the Magi (Benjamin Britten)

*'A cold coming we had of it, just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey: the ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter.' And the camels galled, sore-footed, refractory,
Lying down in the melting snow.*

*There were times we regretted the summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,
And the silken girls bringing sherbet. Then the camel men cursing and grumbling
And running away, and wanting their liquor and women,
And the night-fires going out, and the lack of shelters,
And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly and the villages dirty
And charging high prices: A hard time we had of it.
At the end we preferred to travel all night, sleeping in snatches,
With voices singing in our ears, saying that this was all folly.*

*Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley, wet, below the snow line,
Smelling of vegetation, with a running stream and a water-mill beating the darkness,
And three trees on the low sky.*

*And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow.
Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel,
Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver,
And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.
But there was no information, and so we continued
And arrived at evening, not a moment too soon
Finding the place; it was (you may say) satisfactory.*

*All this was a long time ago, I remember, and I would do it again, but set down
This set down this: were we led all that way for Birth or Death? There was a Birth,
Certainly, we had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,
But had thought they were different; this Birth was hard and bitter agony for us,
like Death, our death. We returned to our places, these Kingdoms, But no longer at ease
here, in the old dispensation, with an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death.*

(T.S. Eliot, 1888–1965)

Beholding the star, Wise Men came with great joy, and entering into the house they offered gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

(Matthew 2:10 – 11)

Possibly for you, an all-too-lengthy poem by Eliot. Matthew seemed to say it in two lines...much more glowing terms in words more familiar to us through the Christmas Season. The words of Eliot and Matthew were the focus of meditation and music Faith and I experienced this past Epiphany Sunday—wonderfully thoughtful and disturbing. Both the preacher and Eliot (put to music by Britten) suggested the poem is closer to reality than the brief words of Matthew...a reality we often fail to take into account. Bottom line – for those who caught so much as a glimpse of the Christ child, life would never be the same. Joyful yes! But no longer at ease with the world as it is...its old ways...its old relationships...its false gods.

As we enter into this New Year, I encourage each of us to consider the glimpse we have had of the Babe in Bethlehem. Do we need a fresh glimpse? Seems to me such a glimpse does not need the help of experts—consultants—coaches—professionals – wherever else we are turning these days for outside help to re-vitalize the church. Consider the implications of a ‘glimpse.’ How are they visible in your life?

And so for the meeting of the synod assembly...to each of you, those new as synod commissioners and youth advisory delegates, and to those returning, our time together in 2010 will call on us to seek a fresh glimpse for ourselves. How will we know? Sounds like the glimpse will cause us to go home via a different route...and never be the same.

Thanks be to God!

This is the second mailing for the winter meeting of the Synod of Lakes and Prairies. The **first** was sent back in November and included basic information about the meeting...registration form, housing, travel, etc. Also, the agenda for our meeting was included, a copy of the “Norms and policies...for Synod Meetings, maps and a glossary of acronyms frequently tossed about during our discussions. The Synod Primer was included for first-time commissioners and Youth Advisory Delegates (YADs). If you are missing materials from the first mailing, please contact Mary Kes so she can have copies available for you at the meeting.

When you check in at the Youngdahl Lodge, you will pick up your room keys and name badges. **New commissioners and YADs** will receive synod notebooks at that point as well. As usual, everyone will have personal mail boxes at the rear of the chapel for distribution of papers throughout the meeting, along with attendance cards, name tents and travel vouchers.

First-time commissioners and YADs please note the orientation at 4:00 p.m. Sunday—see the Proposed Agenda (a beige colored sheet in the first mailing.) We recommend this overview for all those new to the synod assembly. Please gather with others in the lower level of the Ruth Youngdahl Lodge. Bring your Synod Primer and new notebook along with you...and your sense of humor!

The Minutes of the September 2009 Meeting have been sent electronically to returning commissioners and YADs. Prior to the meeting, hard copies will be distributed in mail boxes to everyone.

Regarding your appointment to a particular committee, the Steering Committee seeks to balance your stated preferences with the needs of the Standing Committees. It is not unusual, therefore, that you are appointed to a different committee than indicated by your preferences. We request that you experience your assignment for at least one full meeting. If you conclude it unsatisfactory at that point, please contact the moderator about a new assignment.

INCLUDED IN THIS MAILING FOR EVERYONE is AGENDA ITEM 6, regarding the Synod and its relationship to the Presbytery of Dakota. Please read that carefully. For those who would like a copy of the full report adopted by the synod in the fall of 2008, it can be found at <http://www.lakesandprairies.org/PDFFiles/DAKOTA-ADMIN-TF-FINAL-9-08.pdf>.

During the meeting we will hear a progress report from the Administrative Review Task Force studying the future viability of the Synod of Lakes and Prairies.

Prior to the January meeting, check out the synod's Web site, www.lakesandprairies.org. I encourage you to explore this site, even if you are not a new commissioner or Youth Advisory Delegate. The site is undergoing several updates now as we move into 2010 and it is a helpful refresher for everyone. It is important for you to learn what you can about the synod, its ministry and mission in order to serve as a helpful interpreter to your presbytery.

In addition, the synod is represented on Facebook (www.facebook.com) and the synod group holds potential for sharing information about the activities of the synod. If you are a Facebook user, you can find the group by signing in to Facebook and searching for "synod of lakes and prairies" (hint: it's the one with the logo). If you are not using Facebook, you will have to join first. As of today, there are 161 members. There is also a great Synod School Facebook group: Synod School – "Is this Heaven? No, it's Iowa!"

Also, it's important for us to have your accurate and current e-mail address so you can receive the synod's newsletter, ***Keeping in Touch***. If you are not receiving the newsletter, which is published every two weeks, please let Mary Kes know.