



**Gail Olson**

## Report of the Vice President

One of Garrison Keillor's Lake Wobegon stories tells of a surprise encounter between Pastor Inqvist and the local Lutheran bishop. As the story goes, the bishop is surprised to find a Lutheran church and pastor in Lake Wobegon and ponders how it could be that there had been no contact with the church in thirty years. Pastor Inqvist, startled, said he just figured that it meant they hadn't done anything to get in trouble.

Well, no one was "in trouble" last fall when the Saint Paul Area Synod initiated every-congregation visits across the synod, something that occurs every few years. The visits were one of the highlights of this past year for the synod. With planning by assistant to the bishop Susan Miller, congregational visits were made by dozens of synod representatives, including synod staff, synod council members, Churchwide Assembly voting members, and a variety of other volunteers. Congregations in our synod aren't just aware of each other; in many cases you are working together to do mission and worship. Congregational stories included celebrations of creative, wonderful mission both at home and far away. We also heard about the impact of the economy and the response to last August's Churchwide Assembly votes on ordination. As in any large family, there are stories of joy and of challenge, yet the visits told again that all our hands are continuing to do God's work.

Similar to congregation councils, the synod council plays a key part in maintaining infrastructure to support the work of the synod. Through the synod, your contributions help support key local partner ministries and the churchwide efforts of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. As with many congregations, the synod council this past year had to adjust the projected budget to reflect decreased income. The synod managed to balance its budget through strategic staffing reduction, very careful stewardship by Bishop Rogness and the synod staff, and a stronger finish in giving for the year. We are grateful for the work of the synod council finance committee, headed by treasurer Carol Hood, in guiding us through these decisions.

Through the excellent work of assistant to the bishop Beth Helgen and Bishop Rogness and insightful direction from David Swartling, Secretary of the ELCA, the council also trudged its way through proposed bylaw and constitutional amendments (up for consideration at this assembly) to bring them up to date with the model synod constitution and actual practice. At the same time, the council integrated its governance policies into those documents as continuing resolutions. We expect the result to be more usable and coherent governing documents, while remaining true to the principles in the Carver-type policies adopted in the late 90s.

In March, the synod council approved establishment of three endowment funds which will assist in continuing several key synod emphases, including the Iringa Endowment Fund to support the work of the synod and its congregations in the Iringa Diocese, Tanzania; the Lowell Erdahl Endowment Fund to support the development of new congregations; and the Seminarian Assistance Endowment Fund to support seminarians from the Saint Paul Area Synod. Your gifts will ensure that support in these areas will continue to grow.

To paraphrase Mr. Keillor, we are blessed to be in a synod where "all of our congregations are above average." God's work, our hands.