

## Bishop's Message for November 2010

"The immaculate lawns and beautiful homes are a sort of facade that covers a growing loss of certainty in the future...." This was a comment made by Robin Boyle, a professor of urban planning at Wayne State University, speaking to *Time* magazine about the real situation in Grosse Pointe, Michigan – a suburb of Detroit, the quickly emptying “Motor City”. “A façade covering a growing loss of certainty in the future” speaks to a great many challenges we face in this second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: the economic “recovery”, rural depopulation, the global phenomenon of declining birth-rates, and – dare we not say it? – the financial and numerical decline of the Churches in the western hemisphere, and their diminished public voice to speak to society. The churches I visit in the Synod fit Robin Boyle’s comment: carefully groomed church yards, modernized facilities, and yet a stiff upper lip in the face of aging members and declining attendances. Many of our congregations are asking the formerly unthinkable question: “Can we keep this going?”

As the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, we are living through a period of uncertainty about our future, as is evidenced by the restructuring, the down-sizing, the rationalizing efforts going on in each of the three expressions of the church: congregation, synod and national church.

In the midst of all this comes a refreshing breeze (or chilling gust – it depends on your perspective). As one of the ideas generated by the Possibility Thinkers’ Group which I have convened in our Synod, the Lutheran Church of our Saviour in Calgary is hosting a day-long event called the “WHAT IF... Conversation”. Innovative thinkers from across denominational lines will challenge attendees and participants to grasp the new and emerging paradigms for being church and doing ministry in this quickly evolving context of discontinuous change in which we find ourselves. Frankly, we are desperate for a new, more excellent way. My prayer is that the Holy Spirit, Who is the Breath of God, will blow with Pentecost force on this WHAT IF ...Conversation. The date is November 6<sup>th</sup>, and the place is the Lutheran Church of our Saviour – Calgary.

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