

## Bishop's Message for September 2009

I have had to deal with an interesting dilemma. My car is a mainstay of my work as bishop. Because I am so dependent on it, I make sure it receives the preferred maintenance schedule. My thinking is that if they can keep the space shuttle fleet fully functional for twenty years, I should be able to maintain my vehicle for eight years. (That's a wishful prayer more than a realistic expectation, but one can live in hope!)

So here is the dilemma. A few months ago my ignition began occasionally locking up. The key would go into the ignition, but it would not turn. After fiercely rotating the steering wheel, I could coax the key to work. But that occasional ignition lock-up became a regular nuisance, and finally a daily occurrence. My car is in the shop as I write, receiving a new ignition cylinder and new keys. A well-maintained, cleaned, detailed, and fuelled vehicle with no ignition is simply a fancy occupier-of-space: it looks good, but no go.

This has me thinking. September is the month when the congregations and institutional ministries of the ABT Synod roll out their programs: Sunday School, Confirmation, learning events for all ages, new initiatives, and the list goes on. Bright and shiny, eager and ready --- but what if there is no ignition? What if you don't have what it takes to get it running? No spark, not igniting, no flame. Of course, I am speaking now of the flame of the Holy Spirit – the driving force of our individual faiths and of our communal life as congregation, Synod and Church. The old praise song says: “It only takes a spark to get a fire going...” We can expect great things from God, and attempt great things for God – but neither of these happens apart from the fire of God's Holy Spirit. Do we have ignition lock-up in our Church?

I gathered in mid-August with a number of our Synod's possibility thinkers and germinators to spend a day together as a “think tank”. We reflected on questions like: Where is God at work in our Church?... In our world? What are the good things that are happening? What are the seemingly not-so-good things? Where is God working behind the scenes? We charted assets and liabilities. We spoke of future directions. There was a joint recognition that what is needed – first and foremost – is a renewal in the Spirit. A spark. Some ignition please. It will start inwardly, as we devote ourselves with renewed vigor, to Word and Sacrament, prayer and fellowship, conversation and consolation. It will move outward: one to one, one by one. [Keep your eyes open for WHAT IF...? Ordinary People Seeking God's Transforming Presence.] And by the grace of God, this renewal will soon be a tangible Force in our midst. “We have ignition, we have lift off...”

+Ronald B. Mayan, Bishop  
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