

## Taking Time for Silence and Listening for God

"Silence for reflection." Recognize that phrase? It is usually printed in red and shows up at opportune times in the Lutheran Book of Worship. I am not sure many of us pay attention to that rubric. So often silence in worship is viewed as a distraction, or worse, a waste of valuable time.

We don't do well with silence. I think the disregard it receives in worship is a symptom of a more general discomfort with silence in our lives. Quiet is equated with emptiness, something to be filled. So we talk more, turn up the volume...find something to do.

And because there is little silence, there is little reflection. We keep busy. Oh how we keep busy. But what of serious thought?

Who is asking the important questions? In one conversation after another, I hear laments over lack of prayer and devotional time. So when do we listen for God?

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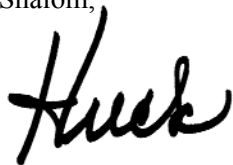
**What of serious thought? Who is asking the important questions?**

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I spend considerable time in the car. It is there I have discovered the gift of "silence for reflection." I want to hear the news...I enjoy music. But I have also learned the value of turning the radio off. It is an opportunity to reflect on where I have been, and where I am going. It offers me preparation for the experiences that lie ahead. I consider questions like "why" and "how." I ask God for guidance and discernment. I pray for those sisters and brothers I will join with during the day. It is amazing how valuable that time has become...and how quickly that time passes.

You know the story from I Kings...with Elijah lodging in the cave, the Lord passed by. How the Lord was not in the wind...nor in the earthquake...nor in the fire...but in the still small voice. How easy it is to miss. And that is where those red letters come in..."silence for reflection."

Shalom,



Harold Usgaard  
Bishop



## Communications Workshops Planned

### Synod Strategic Plan Highlights, July 2004

"Called into God's marvelous light...to be joyful witnesses, to be Christ-centered disciples, to be strong leaders." These are the visions for our synod strategic plan, which was unanimously approved by voters at the 2004 Synod Assembly. This column, which will appear in each issue of River Crossings, will alert you to the progress of the strategic plan from now through 2007.

One of the goals woven through the three visions of the strategic plan is to focus on networking and communication between churches. "Church Communications Made Easier," a workshop for church communications personnel (staff and volunteers who work on the church newsletter, bulletin, and web site), will be held in each conference in July (for dates and places, see [www.semnsynod.org/events.html](http://www.semnsynod.org/events.html)).

Led by Shirley Gangstad, synod vice president, and Annie Lynsen, synod communications director, this free workshop aims to inform congregational communicators of the vast amount of ready-made content from the ELCA and the synod; to offer resources to help in publicizing congregational events; to develop connections between congregational communicators; and to solicit input for a synod-wide bulletin insert, to debut this fall. Participants will each receive a free copy of *How Shall They Hear? A Handbook for Religion Communicators*.

Other current highlights include:

- The Congregational Renewal Team has begun planning for 2005's emphasis, "A synod joined in prayer."
- Congregations are being identified to participate in Natural Church Development, an ELCA pilot project taking place in three Minnesota synods that aims to revitalize congregations.
- The 2006 Theological Conference will focus on health for rostered leaders.
- The Recruitment Task Force has created monthly bulletin inserts aimed at raising up future leaders.

For more information on the synod's strategic plan, visit [www.semnsynod.org](http://www.semnsynod.org) and click "Strategic Plan."



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To Be Christ-Centered Disciples  
To Be Strong Leaders**