

## Mending the nets

**A**s many of you know, I am from Nome, Alaska. I was blessed to have been able to watch my grandfather Teddy (his Inupiat Eskimo name was difficult to say) commercial fish to supplement his income. He was in his 70s when we would go fishing together.

Now I know that when I say commercial fishing you may think of those big boats that you've seen on television. My grandfather's operation was much smaller. He had his Chevy truck and an 18-foot Lund boat with an outboard motor. We would drive 30 miles down the coast from Nome to check the nets and see how many fish we caught. We would load the nets and sell the fish at the docks downtown.

I was also blessed to have been able to watch my grandfather hang his nets. He would attach one end on his house and the other end on his shop, which was an old army Quonset hut. He would spend hours and

hours meticulously "mending" his nets. He had a spool of line that he used to patch holes so when the nets went back out, the fish wouldn't get away. This memory of my grandfather comes to mind in my role as the Alaska Synod's director for evangelical mission. Before we gear up to catch fish, or as Jesus said "men," we need to first mend our nets.

Does your church have a committee that looks at mission? Do you track visitors and, if so, what are your follow-up methods? Have you thought about creating teams to visit inactive members? Have you looked at your church's digital footprint (website, Facebook and Twitter)? How welcoming are you to the visitor? Try to look at your worship experience from the eyes of the first-time visitor, what do they see? Do you have a welcome brochure that tells your mission and story?

Other subsequent questions would be to think through how you



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engage the new person into your Christian family. If our invitation is "Go in peace and serve the Lord," what message does that convey to the visitor? Do they hear "go" instead of "stay"?

As we prepare to take steps of mission and ministry, let us first take a critical and intentional look at our nets and mend them. Then we will be ready to obey the command of our Lord to go and make disciples of all nations.

*The Rev. Mark Allred  
Mission developer*

### Out in front:

## Observations from your interim bishop

I write this at the end of November having been your interim bishop for about 20 days. Twenty days doesn't allow for any expert insights. But I do have some initial observations. I've noticed that in some areas this synod is trending out in front of the rest of the ELCA.

It seemed like a bold step when 40 years ago U.S. Lutherans ordained their first female pastor. Dreamers could see a day when women and men would be equally represented among our clergy. That day is very close here in Alaska.

As soon as the ELCA was formed 23 years ago, it made full commu-

nion the goal of dialogues with other church bodies. We said it was for the sake of the mission of Christ's church. In Alaska, PLUME (Presbyterian-Lutheran-United Methodist-Episcopalian) has emerged to begin a gospel outreach in the Mat Su Valley. The ELCA is in full communion with each of the other church bodies and the glue that joins them is this mission. I see a vision turning into reality.

This synod has always had a multicultural identity, aided by Native Lutheran communities of the Seward Peninsula. Now I notice other cross-cultural explorations

emerging. The *Mv Christian*, operating in the waters of southeast Alaska, is quietly and respectfully visiting native coastal communities, engaging elders and local church leaders. Recently congregational leaders of the synod's Southeastern Cluster decided to join the *Mv Christian* on such a visit this spring. Good things could follow.

So allow me to toot your horn a bit. I will continue to keep my eyes open and my prayers rising for God's work to continue through the hands of Lutheran people in Alaska.

*The Rev. Don Maier*