

Strengthening Mission

Congregations Can Broaden Their Missions Through Global Ministries

By Marcia Hahn

After serving 26 years as a missionary in Papua New Guinea, Else Schardt is on a new mission to build awareness in the Northeastern Iowa Synod about ministry opportunities in global mission.

“We learn so much from people overseas,” says Schardt, who serves as chair of the Northeastern Iowa Synod’s Global Mission Work Group. “Building relationships with sisters and brothers overseas helps us to understand some of the special spiritual needs that people in other countries have. Their faith walks, testimonies, and witness to the gospel are so vibrant and so meaningful in their full lives.”

Schardt describes her family’s mission experience as one of accompaniment, in which she and her husband, the Rev. Ronald Schardt, walked along side the people of Papua New Guinea sharing experiences together. “It’s not something to do overseas only,” she says. “We need to learn to accompany people in more meaningful ways in our own communities.”

That idea will be the focus of an ELCA Glocal Mission Gathering planned for this summer in Decorah with the theme, “Immigration and Migration.” The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America sponsors Glocal Mission events each year in different parts of the country. This summer’s

gathering is the first to be hosted by the Northeastern Iowa Synod. The gathering’s workshops will train people how to engage in mission in both global and local settings.

According to Lanny Westphal, director of Global Formation-Relationships for the ELCA, the workshops will help people become more aware of the need to relate to immigrants living in their communities. “Many congregations take mission trips to Mexico or Central America to learn how to relate to people in those countries,” Westphal says. “The same dynamics and skills used there are also needed to engage in ministry with people living in our own communities.”

Pastor Mark Anderson, assistant to the Bishop, says the Glocal gatherings offer a perspective that reinforces that we are a part of a global church.

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Else and Ron Schardt visit friends in Papua New Guinea in 2009 when they returned to volunteer teach for a semester. The Schardts served as missionaries in Papua New Guinea for 26 years before returning to the Northeastern Iowa Synod.

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“People leave these events more aware of how connected and interdependent the whole Christian church is and how large our mission is” he says.

Missionary Service

“One of the best ways that congregations can get involved in global mission is through support of missionaries like the Scharchts,” Anderson says. “We have a long rich history of sending missionaries from this synod to around the world, and we have a great treasure trove of

Celebrate 125 Years of Lutheran Mission in Papua New Guinea

The public is invited to celebrate 125 years of Lutheran mission in Papua New Guinea March 31-April 1 at Wartburg Seminary, Dubuque.

The event will be an opportunity to meet former missionaries, welcome a pastor from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea, visit the Papua New Guinea Museum, and learn how Wartburg Seminary is forming leaders for mission in the 21st century.

The Rev. Ronald and Else Scharcht, who served as missionaries in Papua New Guinea for 26 years, will also participate in the program. They have written two books: “Mission in Motion: Walking Together with God’s People in Papua New Guinea,” about accompaniment in mission; and “Surprises at the Table,” about hospitality in cross-cultural situations.

To learn more about the celebration and to register, visit www.neiasynod.org/events.

missionaries who have returned home to our synod.”

Some 50 congregations in the Northeastern Iowa Synod currently support nine ELCA missionaries in seven countries, and an additional six congregations give to general missionary sponsorship. “Through sponsorship, congregations can put a face on global mission work and learn about a particular country through the eyes, feet, hands and work of one mission family,” Westphal says.

For those who want to serve as missionaries, Westphal points to more than 60 different types of short- and long-term opportunities that are available in 48 countries through the ELCA. Assignments can range from a few months to more than eight years for people with a range of skills. The Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM) program offers one-year international service opportunities for those ages 19-29. YAGM participants are asked to raise \$4,000 through sponsors, with the remaining expenses funded through ELCA churchwide.

“Their work is related to the requests of the church in that country to work in settings such as schools or social ministries, with the elderly or those with HIV/AIDS. Their work often involves accompanying marginalized people,” Westphal says.

Unlike old stereotypes, the modern missionary is not necessarily a pastor or a pioneer evangelist. Overall interest in ELCA mission service is growing with three notable trends: fewer clergy and more lay people, shorter terms of service, and more funding by local resources rather than ELCA Global Mission.

“There aren’t as many long-term pastors serving in other countries because more churches have their own leadership now. That’s been a

long-time goal,” Westphal says.

Companion Ministries

The Northeastern Iowa Synod has built a successful relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Churches of Namibia through the ELCA Companion Synod Program. With support from congregations and the synod’s Global Mission Work Group, the companion relationship has included groups traveling to Namibia, sponsorship of Namibian students at Wartburg Seminary, and churches hosting clergy from Namibia.

The churchwide Companion Synod Program has grown from 65 synods in 65 relationships to 70 synods (including the five synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada) in 128 relationships. Westphal credits much of that growth to the real, tangible relationships the program brings to the average person.

“A companion relationship makes personal connections between Lutherans within a synod and those in another country to put a face on mission and on the communion of faith,” Westphal says. “It’s a way for thousands of members to have a direct and hands-on experience with the global world. That’s particularly important now in a world that is increasingly global, to have a faith experience that is global as well, especially for youth to have a faith experience beyond the parish.”

Anderson envisions the synod youth to have an integral role in



Lanny Westphal,
director of
Global Formation-
Relationships
for the ELCA

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A Simple Prayer

“Thou hast remembered us again, oh Lord, and we would not forget thee. Bless this food we pray. And help us to serve thee well.”

– Children’s Table Prayer

From childhood until her dying days, Ruth’s Mother prayed this table prayer three times each day. There is much to be learned from this. We can give thanks for the power of ritual that disciplines us to give thanks even in meager times. We are grateful for the persistent witness that comes when families gather repeatedly each day to give thanks for all that God has done for us.

Today, I can not help but appreciate the gift of proclamation of the faith that comes with this simple prayer.

Meal after meal, day after day, the entire family recognizes what it means for God to remember us and for us to remember God’s goodness. We pray for blessings but also ask that we may respond in lives of faithful service. There are few prayers that summarize, in the most simple and powerful ways, the fullness of the Christian life.

What if the families of this synod prayed together this prayer each and every day? Would this not bring renewal to the church in the deepest and most profound ways? What if we remembered repeatedly each day how God has remembered us and how we remember what God has done for us. Even as we ask for blessings on the basics of life we would then offer

a prayer to serve Christ well. Would this not transform the church and the world in remarkable ways?



I invite you to join in the prayer of my mother-in-law. It is a simple prayer, a childlike prayer. Of course, Jesus had it right. It is the simple and childlike that lead us.

– Steven L. Ullestad
Bishop, Northeastern Iowa Synod

LYO Assembly is March 5-6

Lutheran youth from the Northeastern Iowa Synod are invited to attend the 18th Annual LYO Assembly set for March 5-6 at the Clarion Inn in Mason City. The event will feature fellowship, activities, worship, devotions, music, food and fun, including the CSI improvisational comedy troupe from Riverside Bible Camp. Worship will be led by Pastor Dan Gerrietts and Pastor Darrel Gerrietts, assistant to the Bishop.

The theme, “Living Into the Future Together,” will be addressed in three sessions led by Erik Ullestad, director of Youth & Family Ministries at Windsor Heights Lutheran Church in Des Moines and member of the ELCA’s Living Into the Future Together (LIFT) Task Force. Youth will have an opportunity to learn about, dream about, and

communicate to church leadership about the church of the future.

Cost is \$60 per participant and includes all meals. Congregations can register by submitting the LYO Assembly Congregation Registration Form and payment to the synod office. Congregations should make their own hotel reservations by calling Mellisa Leach at the Clarion Inn, 641-423-1640, ext. 330.

To learn more or to download a registration form, visit www.neiasynod.org/youth or call 319-352-1414.



Family Activities for Lent

Lent is a natural time for people to return to spiritual practices centered on God, and church activities can help families do just that. Lisa Kammerer, associate in ministry at First Lutheran, Cresco, suggests a number of activities that can teach children the story of Lent at church and at home.

“Instead of baking cookies, families can bake pretzels together and talk about how the pretzel symbolizes the way Christians used to pray with their arms crossed,” Kammerer says. “Families can even choose to pray this way during Lent.”

Families can recommit to daily devotions, family prayer time, or attend Wednesday Lenten services together. They can make a Lenten candle cross of logs and light a candle each week during Lent, in the same way an Advent wreath is used. The home can be decorated in purple, the color of Lent, with the cross as the central symbol. On Easter Sunday, decorate the house with butterflies to represent new life.

For church activities, Kammerer suggests hosting a Lenten Fair on an early Sunday during Lent. Set up different stations where the children can bake hot cross buns or pretzels, play guessing games, listen to stories about Lent, and make crosses and resurrection eggs that share the story of Easter.

Sunday school students can learn about the events of Holy Week with a rotation format in which the classes take turns attending a different themed classroom each week. Children can learn about Palm Sunday through drama and music, Maundy Thursday with a mission emphasis on feet washing and the disciples, the Last Supper through cooking, and Good Friday with an art project.

“The teachers give the same lesson for four weeks to students who rotate through their rooms,” Kammerer explains. “A similar rotation can work for Christmas.”

Kammerer shared some of these ideas and more with families of First Lutheran through a series of newsletter inserts during Lent. She also included basic information about what Lent is and why it is such an important time of year for Christians. “I never assume people know a lot about Lent, so we use Lent as an opportunity to educate the whole congregation,” she says.

For more Lenten activities ideas, visit the Youth and Family Ministry Resources page on the Northeastern Iowa Synod website. www.neiasynod.org/synod_resources/YouthFamilyResources.asp



Children learn about Christian traditions by making pretzels during a Lenten Fair at First Lutheran, Cresco. The pretzels symbolize the way some early Christians used to pray, with hands crossed across their chests and touching shoulders.

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Send news for the April issue to Marcia Hahn by March 2.

We welcome story ideas related to the 2011 theme, *Strengthening Mission*.

Articles in this newsletter may be duplicated for use in synod congregations and organizations, with credit to the *Star* newsletter.

Please notify the synod office with name and address changes.

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the Northeastern Iowa Synod's new companion relationship set to begin with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hungary. Anderson sees the relationship as an exchange of ideas and resources that will utilize Internet tools such as Skype for group video calling. More congregations can use technology to begin partnerships with churches in Hungary, and youth groups can share text studies online and talk to new pen pals.

"It's so important to teach children and youth that there is a mission beyond their lives here," Anderson says. "With the Internet, youth don't have the sense of borders that adults have been used to. They have a very global perspective with friends from all over the world. We want to tap into that so they will get excited to study and participate in mission around the world."

Online Resources

Schardt and the Global Mission Work Group encourage congregations

and members to explore the many ways they can engage in the global mission of the church. In addition to helping fund mission trips and scholarships for international seminary students, the synod Global Mission Work Group offers scholarships for congregation members to attend regional and churchwide global mission events, such as the annual churchwide Global Mission Event that features three days of presentations, workshops, and cultural experiences with former missionaries.

"It's like going around the world for three days," Schardt says. "There is stimulating music from all around the world, sessions on any kind of mission-related event or concern, and very inspiring workshops. It's a great time for people to get involved."

Congregations of the Northeastern Iowa Synod have supported ELCA Global Mission in a variety of ways—Sunday school collections for special projects, quilting projects, prayers, mission

Sponsor a Global Missionary

Congregations can sponsor ELCA missionaries through prayer, financial support and communication. The following missionaries have a connection to the Northeastern Iowa Synod and are in need of sponsors. To learn more about how congregations and individuals can support ELCA missionaries, email globalm-issionsupport@elca.org or call 1-800-638-3522, ext. 2657.

- **Pastor Fred & Gloria Strickert**, serving long-term in Jerusalem. Their home base is the Northeastern Iowa Synod.
- **Pastor Dirk & Sarah Stadlander**, serving long-term in Senegal. Both graduated from Luther College in Decorah and graduate schools in Dubuque.
- **Pastor Bradn Buerkle**, serving long-term in Russia. His brother's home is in Waterloo.
- **Christine Eige**, serving in Japan through 2013. Her home base is the Northeastern Iowa Synod.
- **Mary Beth and Bayo Oyebade**, serving long-term in Nigeria. Mary Beth's home base is Iowa Falls.
- **Pastor Philip Knutson**, ELCA Regional Representative for southern Africa, which includes Namibia, the Northeastern Iowa Synod's Companion Synod.

Walk in Jerusalem with the Strickerts

Follow the Rev. Dr. Fred Strickert and Diaconal Minister Gloria Strickert in their ministry as ELCA Global Mission personnel in Jerusalem through their "Walk in Jerusalem" blog. Fred serves as pastor of the English-speaking congregation at the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in the heart of the Old City and as special assistant to Bishop Munib Younan of the ELCJHL. Gloria serves as the associate to the pastor/special assistant. Fred had served on the faculty of Wartburg College and Gloria was chaplain at Allen Hospital in Waterloo. <http://walkinjerusalem.blogspot.com>.



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trips, hosting visitors, special events, and more. Numerous online resources are available to help churches plan special events or worship services with a global mission theme.

The ELCA website lists global service opportunities around the world, cultural information about companion countries with tools to teach about them in Sunday school, and guidelines for planning a short mission trip. International students from seminaries are available to preach at worship services or be involved in congregational projects.

Westphal recommends that congregation members subscribe to two on-line publications: *Global Links*—a monthly e-newsletter that highlights ELCA engagement with the global church; and *Hand-in-Hand*—a quarterly e-newsletter and blog that highlights missionary stories.

Global Mission Links

Visit the Global Mission Work Group page at www.neiasynod.org/synod_resources for links to many of the online ELCA Global Mission resources, including:

- Engage in Global Mission
- Congregational Resources
- Mission Service Opportunities
- Sponsor an ELCA Missionary
- Newsletters
- Global Events

Safeguarding God's Children

Two sessions of the "Safeguarding God's Children" workshop will be offered Sunday, March 6. They will take place from 2-5 p.m. at St. Paul, Monona, and St. James, Mason City. Contact the host church to register.

Life-Long Learning For Lutherans

Healthy Congregations Workshop

Sunday, Feb. 20

Zion Lutheran, Oelwein, 2 p.m.



Congregational leaders are invited to this two-hour introductory workshop to better understand what makes congregations tick, why congregations act and react the way they do, how to lead when confronted with crisis and conflict, and how to build a stronger foundation in ministry. Pastor Scot McClusky, Healthy Congregations Workshop facilitator, will lead the session. The event is hosted by the Prairie Grace Conference and sponsored by Life-Long learning for Lutherans.

Registration is due Sunday, Feb. 13. Cost is \$10 per person or \$25 for a congregation team of three or more people. More information and the registration form can be found at the Northeastern Iowa Synod website, www.neiasynod.org/events, or contact Susan Friedrich, registrar, at 563-422-6242 or friedrichsusan@gmail.com.

Genetics: A Matter of Faith Thursday, March 17

St. Paul Lutheran, Postville

Bishop Steven Ullestad, member of the ELCA Genetics Task Force, will give two presentations about the Social Statement on Genetics that will be considered at the 2011 ELCA Churchwide Assembly in August.

9 a.m.-2 p.m.

The Turkey River Forum will sponsor the first program beginning at 9 a.m. with refreshments and fellowship, followed by Bishop Ullestad's presentation from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Lunch and informal conversation will follow. Cost is \$25 for rostered leaders, which includes lunch. There is no charge for lay members or interns. To pre-register, contact Susan Friedrich at friedrichsusan@gmail.com or 563-422-6242.

7-8:30 p.m.

Lay members and rostered leaders are invited to hear Bishop Ullestad speak on genetics from 7-8:30 p.m. as part of the Life-Long Learning for Lutherans series. The evening event is free and open to the public.

Learn more about the "Genetics: A Matter of Faith" presentations at www.neiasynod.org/events.



Day of Renewal is March 31

All rostered members are invited to a "Day of Renewal" Thursday, March 31, 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m., at Nazareth Lutheran, Cedar Falls. The theme will be "Medium, Media and Message," a look at how rapid changes in society impact ministries. The event is free and includes lunch. To register by March 21, call the synod office at **319-352-1414** or email hamiltonl@neiasynod.org.