



Northeastern Iowa

## Synod supplement

# Accepting the call

## The Word of Life is everywhere

By Bishop Steven Ullestad

The newly elected bishop was feeling overwhelmed. Geographically, he had been called to serve a sprawling synod. Theologically, the people he served were among the most liberal and the most conservative in the church. Add to that the unique character of the office with its responsibilities and schedules. The new bishop wondered if he was up to the call.

He stopped at a gas station to fill up his car. He went inside and handed the clerk, a young man, his credit card in payment. The teenager looked at the name on the card and processed the payment. As he handed the card back to the bishop, the clerk asked, "Are you the one we pray for each week?"

It is by the grace of God and the prayer support of this synod that I accept the call to continue to serve as the bishop of this synod

### Learn more

To learn more about the response to the three disasters in our area, please go to the synod Web site at [www.neiasynod.org](http://www.neiasynod.org)

- **About floods:** Recovery resources for children, FEMA information, worship resources, inspirational writings and reflections.
- **About the tornado:** Updates, bulletin inserts, information for volunteers, photos.
- **About the immigration raid:** Statement from the bishop, food shelf and volunteer needs, updates.

that we love. As I indicated in my speech to the assembly, I see three particular areas of focus for our work together over the next six years.

We need to deepen our commitment to the study of Scripture and its use for our daily devotional life. The churchwide Book of Faith initiative will assist us in this work.

We will continue to find ways to invite people into a life of generosity, the life that is life indeed (1 Timothy 6:19). Our fall Mission Support visits are coupled with a Stewardship Resource Fair that highlights the stewardship ministries of the church.

We will seek to be God's voice in the calling of women and men to serve as pastors, diaconal ministers and associates in ministry. Please encourage those who have the gifts and graces for these ministries to consider God's call and the church's need for servant leaders.

Added to these challenges is the ongoing response to the disasters in northeast Iowa. Lutheran Disaster Response and Lutheran Services in Iowa have a commitment to work with us for at least the next three years in this response. We are adjusting position descriptions for our synod staff in order to keep our commitment to work with pastors and other congregational leaders in the long and difficult work ahead. In the midst of this work, we will see God and hear God's voice in those with whom we work and those whom we serve.

God's Word keeps showing up ... in gas station clerks ... strangers ... neighbors and friends. It is the Word of Life. □



**Even in times of the worst disasters, God's Word will appear.**

# Northeastern Iowa

## Floods invade much of Northeastern Iowa

Articles by the Rev. Mark A. Anderson and Karris Golden

**D**uring the first week of June, floodwaters engulfed many communities served by the Northeastern Iowa Synod.

Hundreds of homes and businesses were damaged, along with many churches. Families also were displaced. Initial estimates for cleanup efforts are in the hundreds of millions.

One of the hardest hit was St. Paul's Lutheran School in Waverly, a preschool through sixth-grade parochial institution.

Most parts of the school sustained significant damage. However, it was open for the start of school on Thursday, Aug. 21, said Principal Christi Lines.

A "wish list" of needed items for the school is available at [www.stpaulswaverly.org/school.html](http://www.stpaulswaverly.org/school.html).

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**St. Paul's Lutheran Church and School in Waverly sustained major damage. Your many prayers, hours of volunteer time and generous financial gifts helped with the recovery. Students were able to return at the start of school on Aug. 21.**

[stpaulswaverly.org/school.html](http://www.stpaulswaverly.org/school.html).

### **Congregations respond swiftly, prayerfully**

In flooded communities, congregations responded by organizing members to assist those who needed help restoring their homes.

At least one church established its own "assessment team" of lay volunteers, which visits every flood victim in the congregation to offer encouragement, support and concern. If the team learns there is unfinished recovery work in the home, more volunteers are recruited to give that family assistance.

Pastors and lay people canvassed their members and communities to find those in need of physical, financial and spiritual aid. Congregations throughout the synod offered their buildings as places of relief.

For all this meant offering God's word and sacraments as a source of comfort and reassurance of God's abiding presence. In addition, some congregations offered a cool place to get a meal.

Such was the case with St. John Lutheran Church in Charles City, which served 2,000 visitors as the community's American Red Cross evacuation center.

Meanwhile, Redeemer Lutheran Church in Waverly offered free child care for parents cleaning up their homes.

Congregations that escaped flooding stepped in to organize service project teams in affected communities. Congregations from across the synod and nation began sending youth and adult groups to northeastern Iowa to aid in the

cleanup. Congregations from Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, Ohio and North Carolina are among those making plans to complete service trips here.

Many congregations also collected special offerings and hosted fundraising events. For example, the Lutheran churches in Mason City sponsored a fundraiser from noon to 5 p.m. on Aug. 24 at St. James Lutheran Church.

Other ministries played an equally important role in recovery efforts.

Wartburg College in Waverly served as an American Red Cross Center and provided short- and long-term housing for displaced families. In addition, the college's Center for Community Engagement continues to serve as a clearinghouse that matches volunteers with specific needs. To volunteer to help with a variety of tasks for any amount of time, call 319-352-8701.

The Lutheran Campus Center at the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls is offering housing to volunteers who come to the area to do service work. For more information, call 319-266-1653.

### **Severe weather in Iowa elicits churchwide reaction**

The response from congregations across the country was immediate and global.

Lutheran Disaster Response sent an appeal for financial contributions to every congregation in the ELCA and Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Lutheran Services in Iowa also made an appeal to donors across

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Iowa and beyond. Funds raised will be used to provide financial assistance to those whose needs are not met by insurance or the efforts of other agencies. The funds will be distributed through local disaster recovery committees.

The larger church also uses its vast communication network to ask for specific assistance. A request was sent to ELCA schools and preschools asking for gifts of educational materials for St. Paul's School in Waverly.

Churchwide bodies have also relayed messages from Christians from across the world, offering prayers and sympathy from Europe, Africa and the Americas.

### Synod responds to disaster

The first and most critical response of the Northeastern Iowa Synod office is to disseminate clear, accurate and timely information via e-mail and the synod Web site.

Many people who seek volunteer opportunities or who wish to donate

financial resources first call the synod office. As a result, the synod staff connects congregations, agencies and individuals with aid to those in need.

During disaster recovery, congregational leaders are often busy and exhausted, so the synod distributes litanies, hymns, inspirational messages, reflections and devotional resources.

The synod also gathers and distributes financial gifts through Lutheran Disaster Response ([www.lidr.org](http://www.lidr.org)). □

## Tornado begins spate of weather-related devastation

**A**n EF-5 tornado touched down in Parkersburg May 25 and continued on through New Hartford, Dunkerton and other communities and rural areas.

The tornado was sometimes nearly 2 miles wide and brought with it high winds that caused significant property damage throughout Iowa's Cedar Valley region. Losses include eight lives, 240 totally destroyed homes and damage to 400 more homes.

In addition to the tornado's personal impact on members, congregations of the synod also experienced severe damage. Congregations from throughout the synod rushed to the aid of Bethel Lutheran Church in Parkersburg and its members.

"For starters ... the kids wanted to put together boxes of basic needs, so we did that," said Maggie Atkinson of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Independence.

The group helped a family from Stanley who lost their farm and most of their belongings.

Immanuel's group put together additional boxes, and with the

aid of the hospital in the town, used semitrucks to pick up care boxes. "They're being delivered to Hazleton, Lamont and Stanley," Atkinson said. "The next effort is raising money in the congregation."

St. Paul's (Waverly), St. Paul (Hampton) and Bethany (Iowa Falls) Lutheran churches attended worship at Bethel in Parkersburg and provided lunch for the congregation. Meanwhile, St. John Lutheran Church in Nashua organized a drive for hygiene products. Youth from that congregation will also collect stuffed animals, markers and drawing pads for Bethel's children.

St. Paul-Hampton collected and delivered water, food and other items to the congregation, and Nazareth Lutheran in Cedar Falls organized and dispatched work crews on a regular basis.

In June, Bethany Lutheran Church in Elkader collected a special disaster offering for Bethel-Parkersburg and St. Paul Lutheran Church

in Postville, dividing it between the two.

EWALU Lutheran Bible Camp and Retreat Center utilized Lutheran Disaster Response to train camp staff to work with disaster victims.

In the tornado's aftermath, Lutheran Disaster Response, ELCA Disaster Response and Lutheran Services in Iowa were active in communicating the needs of the victims in Parkersburg to the whole church as well as providing direct services.

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## Postville's ecumenical partners aid in immigration raid's aftermath

The churches of Postville rallied to offer refuge and aid in the aftermath of the largest-ever single-site immigration raid in the U.S.

On May 12, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, a division of Homeland Security, carried out a raid in the community of 2,300. The primary target was Agriprocessors, a kosher meatpacking plant and Postville's largest employer.

During the raid, 389 undocumented workers were apprehended. Hundreds of Mexican and Guatemalan workers took refuge in St. Bridget's Roman Catholic Parish, where meals, clothing and legal assistance were provided.

At this time, Lutheran and Roman Catholic resources and agencies are ministering to detainees' families.

St. Paul Lutheran Church in Postville has been working closely with St. Bridget's to provide food and housing for women and children who can neither work nor leave Postville. A Wednesday evening meal is also offered to the community for both nutrition and fellowship.

Congregations of the Northeastern

Iowa Synod and beyond have kept the local food pantry well stocked. In addition, many congregation members have volunteered to help with translation, transportation, organization and child care.

Volunteers from Luther College in Decorah also have provided vital services, including translation and technical support.

The Northeastern Iowa Synod provided congregations, the U.S. government and media outlets with a clear, comprehensive evaluation of the struggles of both the Latino families and the greater Postville community. It has also appealed to congregations for volunteers and gifts and has posted regular updates on the situation.

Finally, the synod has generated opportunities for the Rev. Stephen Brackett of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Postville to speak to groups about



THE REV. MARK ANDERSON

the ministry opportunities in his community.

ELCA Domestic Disaster Response designated Postville as a "human-caused disaster" and collected mission funds to distribute via St. Bridget's. Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service also has provided technical assistance. Community development specialists from the ELCA are planning ministry activities in Postville. □

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The synod served as a communication clearinghouse during the tornado recovery and worked to match gifts and volunteers with needs.

In addition, the synod office provided pastoral services during the vacancy in Bethel's pulpit and to foster connections between the congregation, Lutheran Disaster Response and the ecumenical community. □

## Northeastern Iowa Synod events

**Nov. 8:** Synod Council

**Nov. 13:** Pre-retirement Seminar

**Nov. 15:** Lutheran Youth Organization Board

**Nov. 18:** Youth Ministry Network

**Nov. 20:** Conference Deans

**Nov. 27-28:** Synod office closed

**Dec. 5-6:** Candidacy Committee

**Dec. 16:** Youth Ministry Network

**Dec. 20:** Lutheran Youth Organization Board

**Dec. 25-26:** Synod office closed

**Jan. 1:** Synod office closed

**Jan. 16-17:** Celebrate Life

**Jan. 17:** Lutheran Youth Organization Board

**Jan. 20:** Youth Ministry Network

**Jan. 31:** Synod Council

**Feb. 13-14:** Candidacy Committee Retreat

**Feb. 17:** Youth Ministry Network

**Feb. 19:** Endowment Fund Investment Committee

**Feb. 21:** Lutheran Youth Organization Board