

## **2013 BISHOP'S REPORT**

### **Northeastern Iowa Synod Assembly**

*“The Northeastern Iowa Synod makes Christ known by strengthening the witness and service of the whole church. Synod ministries support and develop leaders, focus on mission and network the effective ministries of our congregations.”*

On the hill overlooking the capital city of Prague in the Czech Republic, is a giant metronome. A metronome, as you know, helps musicians keep time. Why a metronome? It sits on the site of what once was a giant statue of Joseph Stalin. Stalin's statue came down with the end of communism and up went the metronome, as proud and tall as Stalin's monument. What does it stand for?

There is a new time in the Czech Republic...a time of freedom and democracy.

It is an amazingly powerful public symbol of the new day that the Czech Republic is living into.

I have been thinking of the powerful, public symbols of our synod and church.

Since we last gathered, I have hosted nine conversations throughout the synod that we called “Walking Together.” We met for bible study, small group conversations and asked the questions, “What is your congregation doing well in ministry and mission?” “What are the challenges that you face?” “Are there ways that you can strengthen ministry networks or create new networks for the sake of the mission of the church?” The people of God gathering around scripture, sharing challenges and opportunities, is powerful, public symbol of our synod.

We continue to celebrate vital congregational ministries as symbols of our shared witness. St. John in Dubuque made the decision to start a new ministry for homeless men to fill up the empty Sunday school rooms rather than lament that the rooms stood empty. Bethany in Iowa Falls and St. Paul, Postville continue to create opportunities for people to lift themselves out of poverty through the Barnabas Uplift ministry. Peace Lutheran in Ryan has a history of supporting the overall mission of the church through generous mission support and special gifts for specific projects. They also continue to give the church pastors. Recently ordained, Pastor Liz Retz is serving at St. Timothy Lutheran Church in Midland, Michigan and Minna Quint is currently on internship in Owatonna, MN. Peace also provides support for seminarian, David Efflandt who will be interning at Holy Trinity in Dubuque. Peace also is committed to the ecumenical ministries of the church. As a new bishop, I continued my predecessor's decision to oppose the ecumenical agreements. I made my presentation at a meeting at Peace about 20 years ago. At the conclusion of my remarks, a member firmly but respectfully said, "Bishop, I think that you need to stay in the pulpit. You know what you are talking about there. We want these agreements." That was the turning point in my education and understanding of the agreements. Their commitment continues with the Seeds of Hope food resource bank with St. Patrick's Catholic Church. Vital congregational ministries are powerful, public symbols of our synod.

Two years ago we established a three year goal of raising \$250,000 for the Malaria Campaign. That goal was exceeded in 18 months. We have now crossed the \$300,000 threshold. Our younger members have responded with generosity and enthusiasm. You see a picture of Rebecca from St. Petri in Story City and Noah and his friend from Buck Creek who found unique ways of raising money for this

special appeal. Our members committed to eliminating malaria for others halfway around the world are powerful, public symbols of our synod.

The request came out to assist those affected by Super Storm Sandy by sending “Flood Buckets.” These buckets contain supplies to help with the clean up following the flood waters. Pictured here are Pastor Joelle Colville-Hansen and members of the Ridgeway parish as they delivered buckets of supplies to Bethlehem in Cedar Falls which were then transported to those in need on the east coast. Our members providing buckets filled with cleaning supplies are powerful, public symbols of our synod.

We have established a new companion synod with the Lutheran Church in Hungary. Tanner has shared with you a bit about our recent visit. Workshops were offered yesterday providing more information about this new partnership. One of the powerful experiences was to meet with the Roma people who are hearing the Good News of Jesus Christ for the first time because of the Hungarian’s partnership with the ELCA’s global mission with a particular emphasis on the YAGM ministry of the church. YAGMs are powerful, public symbols of our church.

Each year Trinity Lutheran Church in Waterloo distributes the earnings from its endowment to various ministries. This year, they decided that a gift sent to the synod will benefit hundreds of ministries around the world. Their gift was shared with churchwide ministries in the same percentage as our synodical budget. Missionaries were supported, new congregations started, youth ministries undergirded and much, much more because of their generosity. Generous, mission minded congregations are powerful, public symbols of our synod.

These are the symbols of our time...the synod that we are today. They are pictures of people with whom we are in relationship in order to Make Christ Known. And so I offer one more picture, one more powerful, public symbol of our synod. It is you.

Synod ministries assist you in accomplishing your baptismal purpose on earth. We make Christ known by strengthening the witness and service of the whole church.

I could not ask for better partners in these ministries and in this mission than you. Thank you for this gift.