

# Bishop election, faith stories highlight Synod Assembly

by Marcia Hahn

The election of the Bishop and faith stories based on the theme “Strengthened for Witness and Service” highlighted the 2014 Northeastern Iowa Synod Assembly in June. Some 416 voting members and guests attended the assembly at Wartburg College in Waverly.

Voting members re-elected Bishop Steven Ullestad to a fifth term with 75 percent of the vote. Ullestad thanked the assembly for this call, which he said is not about what has been accomplished in the past, but about what is yet to be done.

“This call is not about what we have done together for the past 22 years.” Ullestad said. “It is about what God will be doing in and through us for the next six years. Thank you for extending this new call. I will give you all that I have.”

Voting members adopted seven resolutions and one memorial, including:

- Support the intention of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and encourage ways to make congregations and communities safe places;
- Support faith formation by advocating for communities to preserve designated days for church time and encourage congregations to engage in cross-generational ministry and use faith formation resources;
- Encourage congregations to support organ donations.

Keynote speaker for the Assembly was Minna Quint, a recent graduate of Wartburg Theological Seminary



Minna Quint

who grew up as a member of Peace Lutheran, Ryan. Quint shared about the importance of being part of a community where relationships are interwoven and a support system is in place. She shared about her service experiences at a large hospital in Miami, at the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, and in Haiti, where she said she was bombarded with love and made to feel welcome.

“Our call is to be a community together in one world,” she said. “No matter where you go you can expect to encounter Christ in every single person you meet.”

The Rev. Dr. M. Wyvetta Bullock, assistant to the Presiding Bishop/ Executive for

Administration, brought greetings from Churchwide, oversaw the election for Bishop, and shared how the Northeastern Iowa Synod and Churchwide work together as a church to serve in Christ’s name in Northeastern Iowa and around the world.

Bullock shared that 94.2 percent of mission support is used to fund congregations’ local ministries, three percent supports ministries through synods, and 2.8 percent supports churchwide ministries. She reported that in 2013, the Northeastern Iowa Synod shared \$601,910 in mission support, more than \$355,000 in gifts to ELCA World Hunger, and more than \$133,000 to ELCA Disaster Response. In addition, 93 congregations and ministries of this synod, plus 155 individuals hold more than

## NORTHEASTERN IOWA SYNOD

**Bishop** Rev. Dr. Steven L. Ullestad – [ullestads@neiasynod.org](mailto:ullestads@neiasynod.org)  
**Assistants to the Bishop**

Rev. Mark A. Anderson – [andersonm@neiasynod.org](mailto:andersonm@neiasynod.org)

Rev. Darrel W. Gerriets – [gerrietsd@neiasynod.org](mailto:gerrietsd@neiasynod.org)

Linda J. Hudgins – [hudginsl@neiasynod.org](mailto:hudginsl@neiasynod.org)

**ELCA Director for Evangelical Mission**

Rev. Joelle Colville-Hanson – [colville-hansonj@neiasynod.org](mailto:colville-hansonj@neiasynod.org)

**Star Editor**

Marcia Hahn – [hahn@neiasynod.org](mailto:hahn@neiasynod.org)

The *Star* is published 11 times a year by the Northeastern Iowa Synod, 201 20th Street SW, PO Box 804, Waverly, IA 50677-0804; [www.neiasynod.org](http://www.neiasynod.org), phone 319-352-1414, FAX 319-352-1416.

Send news for the September issue to Marcia Hahn by Aug. 11. We welcome story ideas related to the 2014 theme, “Strengthened for Witness and Service.”

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. To receive an electronic version of the *Star*, rather than paper, send your request to [hahn@neiasynod.org](mailto:hahn@neiasynod.org).



[www.neiasynod.org](http://www.neiasynod.org)

\$9 million in Mission Investment Fund investments and \$7.3 million in loans.

Pastor Mark Anderson, assistant to the Bishop, gave a final report on the synod's contributions to the ELCA Malaria Campaign. Virtually every congregation in the synod raised funds for the campaign, along with the colleges, outdoor ministries, individuals, youth groups, women's groups, a nursing home, an elementary school, and numerous individuals from across the synod. As of June 13, 2014, the synod's campaign had raised \$441,249.99 in contributions, far exceeding the goal set at the 2011 Synod Assembly to raise \$250,000 in three years.

Allison Northrop, Hunger Network facilitator, joined Anderson to remind the assembly about opportunities to continue to fight poverty through ELCA Hunger's God' Barnyard. "As long as there is poverty, there is going to be hunger," Northrop said. "Keep working, keep pushing, keep fighting hunger, because we're called to do it."

Other presentations at the Assembly included information about the St. John Bible display at Wartburg College and an update on the Mission Possible building project at Wartburg Theological Seminary. Individuals also had the opportunity to come to the microphone to share about the witness and service they, someone they know, or their congregations have experienced in the last year. (See page 6.)

Bishop Ullestad's report to the Assembly included videos and recognition of ministries, projects and service in the synod:

- Expanded support for the Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM) and companion relationship with the church in Hungary.
- Generosity shown toward the ELCA Malaria Campaign and ELCA World Hunger, and general mission support of the larger mission of the church.
- Growth in evangelical outreach to all generations through social media
- Comprehensive approaches to youth ministry in the church, such as the Home Life Network, middle school ministry, LYO, WILYDE and the young adult ministry house at the UNI Student Center.
- New partnerships and shared ministries that are revitalizing congregations, such as the Cross Roads Parish
- New ideas for service, such as the Mission Possible project at Wartburg Theological Seminary.
- Special thanks to Mary Jo Rathe



Bishop Steven Ullestad

for the service she completed as vice president of the Synod Council.

- Gratitude to all in the synod for their work as partners in ministry.

"As we look to a future together of seeking to faithfully follow Jesus, we will continue to listen to God, listen to the cries of those in need, connect people and resources with mission, and give thanks for all that God is doing in and through the Northeastern Iowa Synod," Ullestad said.



The Synod Assembly Choir performs at the Sunday morning worship service to close the 2014 Northeastern Iowa Synod Assembly.

# Faith Stories from the 2014 Synod Assembly

Synod Assembly participants had an opportunity to share about themselves, their congregations or people they knew who had been strengthened for witness and service in the past year. Eighteen people stepped up to the microphone to share their stories during the Sunday morning plenary session. Some excerpts are below. A video of this session can be viewed at [www.neiasynod.org/synod-assembly](http://www.neiasynod.org/synod-assembly).

- **Al Schulz, interim pastor at Trinity, Belmond**, shared that Trinity's growing small group ministry serves as a way for adult faith formation, service projects, fellowship and pastoral care. He invited other congregations with small group ministries to contact him to share ideas.
- **Nancy Larson, interim pastor at Zion, West Union**, shared about the ways that Zion's confirmation ministry is centered on helping young people in the congregation know they are loved, welcomed, supported, and surrounded by others.
- **Randy Baldwin, pastor at One in Christ Lutheran Parish, Lake Mills area**, shared about the excitement of this year's vacation Bible school, which served 92 children from seven churches with the theme, "You can count on God because God is our creator, our protector, our savior and our king."
- **Lisa Nelson of Bethlehem, Cedar Falls**, shared that lay ministers have become a natural part of the Sunday morning worship services and she encouraged other congregations to try it as a way to welcome lay leadership.
- **Jim Hughes of Immanuel, Cresco**, told how the wind blowing open the church's front door led to a facility consultation, which led to the realization that it was more important to look at the ministry first and the facility second. Four new task forces have changed how the congregation approaches worship, education, faith life, and outreach.
- **Les Petersen of Bethany, Elkader**, shared his perceptions of growing up in the church and the blessing of having been a member of two charter churches that were excited to spread the word. He expressed his hope for other churches to experience that same kind of excitement.
- **Dave Sorenson, pastor at Decorah Lutheran, Decorah**, shared that a synod article inspired the congregation to organize to develop a purpose statement and core values. One result has been to break people into small groups at church council meetings so more people are inclined to speak up and share ideas.
- **Kristin Johnson, AIM at St. Petri, Story City**, shared about the youth and family ministry collaboration with Bergen, Roland, to focus on faith formation. St. Petri formed a cross-generational Sunday school for parents to attend with their children to learn scripture and sing.
- **Adam Starrett, pastor at Bergen, Roland**, followed up about the congregations' partnership in confirmation for faith formation. Parents and youth color quilt blocks, and the women's group stitches them together to present quilts to high school graduates.
- **Pat Shaw, retired pastor**, shared her appreciation for how welcoming congregations of this synod are to supply pastors and others through their hospitality.
- **Dave Efflandt, a California native and intern at Holy Trinity, Dubuque**, thanked the synod, the Wartburg Theological Seminary president and faculty, and the congregations of Peace, Ryan, and Holy Trinity for the hospitality and support extended to him and his family during his internship and his time at seminary.

---

He gave thanks to God and to the people for inviting him to the church and for welcoming him.

---

- **Mark Kvale, pastor at Washington-Prairie, Decorah**, shared about a project his confirmation class thought of to make the newly baptized feel welcome. The students design a sheet of paper with a personalized version of "Borning Cry" on it, pass it around for the congregation to sign, and give it to the newly baptized to let them know who was there that day.
- **Russ Baldner of Calmar Lutheran, Calmar**, shared about a once-a-month meal the congregation hosts in coordination with others from the community. Some 150 attended in the second month, which brought people of different faiths together for a meal and conversation.
- **Rhea Evanson, St. Peter, Rockwell, and St. Paul, Thornton**, told about the small group outreach and evangelism projects the congregations have completed, including an emergency food shelf, a farewell dinner for foreign students, and monthly LYO suppers with the pastor.
- **Dave Werges, pastor at Cross Roads Lutheran Parish in the Osage area**, shared how the four congregations of his geo parish are growing together through a parish choir, joint Lenten ser-

vices and confirmation, and the “God’s Work. Our Hands” service day.

- **Matt Schilling of St. John, Nashua**, thanked his congregation for letting him serve as a synod assembly youth delegate the last three years. He thanked the Bishop for personally welcoming him, and thanked Allison Northrop for organizing fun youth activities.
- **Ruefn Sleh of Zion, Waterloo**, told how he moved from West Africa to Iowa when he was five with his twin sister and father and how he is so grateful to be living in a loving foster home. Sleh shared that he has so much love he doesn’t know what to do with it any more. He has known what it is to be hungry for more than one day, and now he has so much food he shares it. He gave thanks to God and to the people for inviting him to the church and for welcoming him.
- **Barbara Kramer of St. Timothy, Hudson**, thanked the synod for their support when St. Timothy lost one-third of the congregation and donations due to the sexuality issue. The synod stepped up and sent three interim pastors who helped heal the congregation, which is full of love and energy today.

## Join a network at the Fall Leadership Event

**Saturday, Sept. 13, 2014**  
Redeemer Lutheran, Waverly

Lay and rostered members who would like to get more involved in synod ministries are invited to attend the Fall Leadership Event set for Saturday, Sept. 13, 8:30 a.m. - 1 p.m., at Redeemer Lutheran, Waverly.

The synod’s nine networks focus on a variety of issues — such as building faith at home, environmental stewardship, and global mission — so everyone is likely to find an area of interest to join. Most of the networks meet through online conferences or teleconferences, so attending meetings can be convenient for all members.

The Fall Leadership Event is an opportunity for network members and guests to meet in person, get acquainted, welcome new members, review accomplishments, set goals, schedule meetings, confirm network facilitators, and learn about synod ministries and priorities for the coming year.

Synod council liaisons will report about the networks to the synod council following the event.

The Northeastern Iowa Synod began the network system after the 2011 Synod Assembly adopted a resolution that allowed the creation of networks. Current networks are:

- Care of Creation
- Companion Synod-Hungary
- Companion Synod-Namibia
- Disaster Response
- Global Mission
- Home Life
- Hunger
- LYO
- Stewardship

Also meeting at the event will be the Compensation Committee, S.A.F.E. Ministry Team, and the Life-Long Learning for Lutherans.

There is no cost to attend the Sept. 13 event. Lunch will be included. To register, call the synod office, **319-352-1414**, by Sept. 4, or send an email to [boltec@neiasynod.org](mailto:boltec@neiasynod.org).

## Thank You for Gifts to Assembly Offering

Thank you to the individuals and congregations that have contributed to the 2014 Synod Assembly offerings. As of the end of June, the offerings have brought in \$7,282 to support two designated projects:

- Northeastern Iowa Synod Fund for Leaders — to help relieve the

costs of seminary education.

- Young Adults in Global Mission— to support YAGM volunteers serving in Hungary and around the world.

Gifts are still being accepted. Checks may be made out to the Northeastern Iowa Synod.

## Still time to take the health assessment

ELCA-primary health plan members and spouses who have not taken the Mayo Clinic Health Assessment can still do so by Sept. 30 and earn \$150 for personal out-of-pocket medical expenses. Follow-up activities must be completed by Nov. 30 to earn an additional \$350 in wellness credit. Visit [www.myPortico.PorticoBenefits.org](http://www.myPortico.PorticoBenefits.org).