

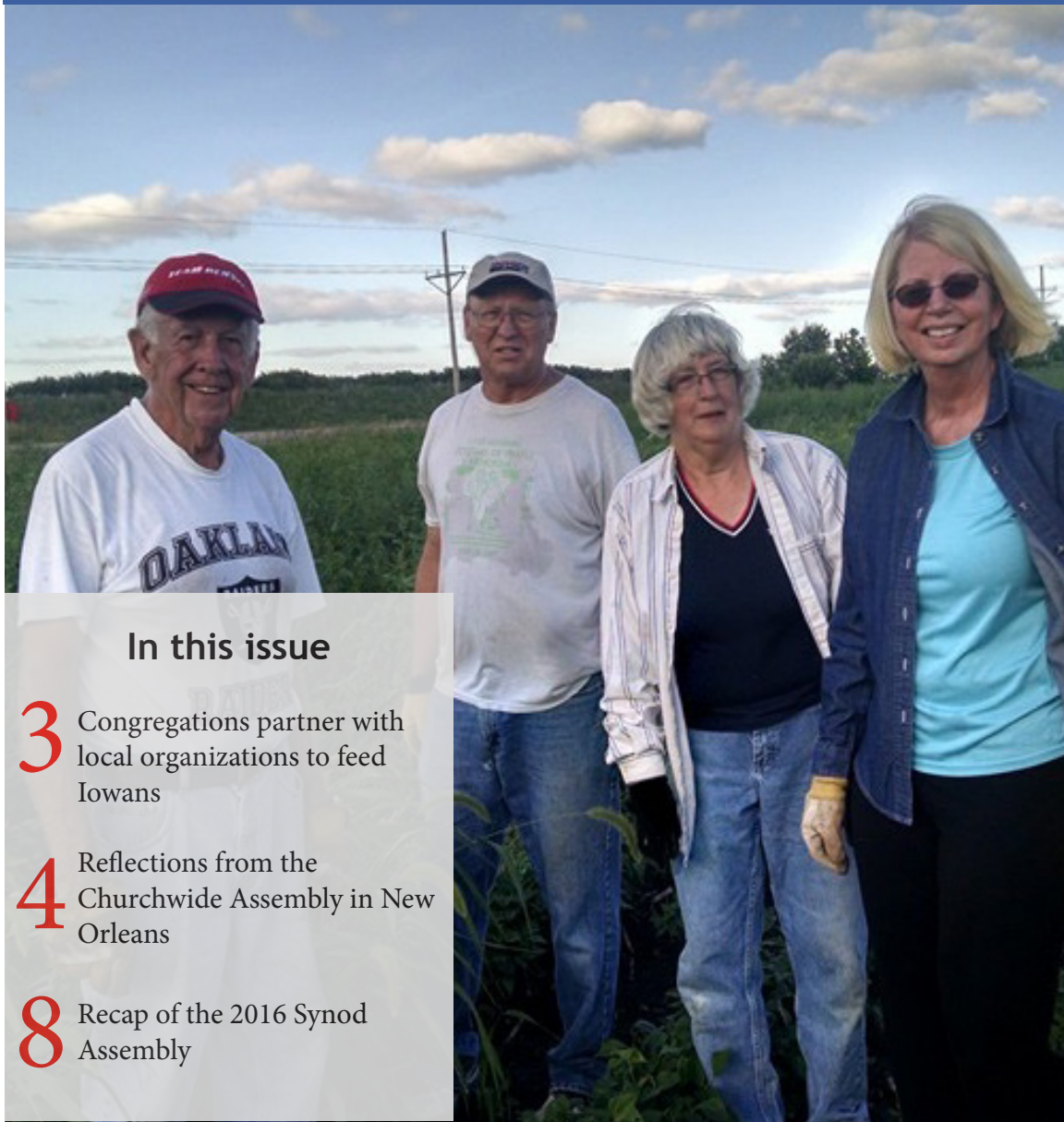
Drawn to the Light of God

Stories from the Southeastern Iowa Synod



Southeastern Iowa Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Volume 3 No. 1 | Fall 2016



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Southeastern Iowa Synod, ELCA

Office of the Bishop

Bishop, Pastor Michael Burk
Pastor Paul Ostrem
Pastor Eric Carlson
Pastor Erika Uthe
Kathy Smith
Lorraine Jordan
Valerie Harlynn

Newsletter editor: Valerie Harlynn

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About the Theme

This newsletter is entitled *Drawn to the Light of God*. This is part of our annual theme around which we focus ministry, prayers, and events in the Southeastern Iowa Synod. Bishop Burk talked about the theme and how it directs an eye toward how Christ, the Light, shines in our varied ministries and in every corner of our lives during the annual Synod Assembly in May 2016.



Southeastern Iowa Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

The Southeastern Iowa Synod is a network of congregations and ministry partners who are called to share God's love in Jesus Christ.

Connect with us online at www.seiasynod.org

Congregations partner with local food programs to feed Iowans

Congregations around our synod grow community gardens, donate food, hold noisy offerings, cook and serve community meals to serve their communities and feed their neighbors. 1 in 8 people in Iowa struggle with hunger.

Members at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Cedar Rapids gathered on a warm Friday summer night to pick and sort green beans. Their congregation recently lent a regional food program, Feed Iowa First, two acres to grow green beans. These beans were given away in Cedar Rapids to families struggling with food insecurity.



120 miles away members at Windsor Heights Lutheran Church were collecting crock-pots for a partnership with Iowa State Extension to help families find ways to make low cost healthy meals. The congregation's Global and Community Action Committee met with the Extension program director and decided to become more involved in the program by offering their building as the site for the classes for an 8-week program on preparing nutritious meals in a slow cooker.

In the spring of 2016, two classes were held at the church – one in Spanish and one in English. More classes will be offered this fall, two in Spanish and one in English. In addition to hosting the classes, committee members helped market the program to encourage participants to come.

We are part of an anti-hunger synod in Southeastern Iowa. Our “anti-hunger” approach to ministry begins with the assumption that the world is starving for a reason to hope. In the Good News of Jesus Christ, we have bread for the world, where hunger manifests itself in many forms. We are called to move persistently toward the most profound need, which is why we are committed to:



- Feeding hungry people
- Advocating for people living in poverty
- Raising up leaders of every age who are equipped to proclaim the same Good News with which we ourselves have been fed.

Is your congregation participating in feeding your neighbors? Do you have a ministry that partners with local organizations or other congregations? We'd love to hear more stories and see photos. Email staff@seiasynod.org and tell us your stories of God's work in your congregation. ■

Reflections from Churchwide Assembly

Members of the ELCA from across the nation met in New Orleans as a legislative body in August.

By Bishop Michael Burk

I served as a voting member to the 1997 Churchwide Assembly. Because of my work as ELCA Director for Worship, and since then, as bishop, I have attended all nine of the assemblies that followed. All of them had high points and low points. Some have been more contentious than others.

The 2016 gathering in New Orleans (August 8-13) was exceptional in that it seems to have left most, if not all participants filled with hope for the future of this church. This is no small thing, given the challenges facing churches these days, including the ELCA. But voting members and visitors alike seem to agree with Presiding Bishop Eaton when she insists that “the church is not dying...it’s changing,” and God is calling us forward together in Christ.

Of course, there were reminders throughout the assembly that we sometimes disagree with one another, and on occasion, voting members were frustrated or concerned. But unity was never threatened and the enthusiasm for who God is calling us to be together was widely shared.



You can check the web for a summary of the actions of the assembly (<http://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/7852>) and you can view lots of images and videos from the gathering if you didn't have a chance to join us via the live stream (<http://www.elca.org/cwalive>).

Comments from our own voting members, some of which appear on the next few pages, capture the sense of things and support my conviction that this is indeed a hope-filled time to be the church.

Voting members reflections from the Churchwide Assembly



“The Churchwide Assembly changed my life and has made me re-evaluate the definition of welcoming and what that looks like in today’s world and in small town Iowa.”

“The messages . . .bring me to the realization that the work we have at hand is no longer just for the Church or Bishop or Synod or Churchwide, but that I too have a part and cannot sit back anymore. As Bishop Eaton said, ‘There are no private Christians because we are all in this together.’”

“Our Bishop Eaton is so real and has a good sense of humor. She is bold and a great preacher/leader.”

“I was encouraged by the group from this synod by their whole-hearted participation, love for the Church, and awareness of the work we can do best together as Churchwide and Synod.”

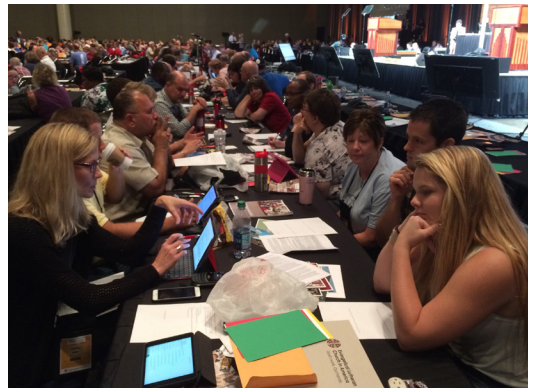
“Our Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton is an extraordinary blessing to our church. She is gracious, charming, warm-hearted and extraordinarily competent.”

“Hearing so many speakers from within the ELCA and other parts of the world is a wonderful reminder of the powerful ways God is active in the world bringing wholeness. The assembly highlighted how the ELCA is significantly involved in God’s work.”

“The experience was definitely eye opening as I learned of and about the greater ELCA church and experienced first hand how the ELCA church determines its leadership. The assembly brought forth a treasure of new relationships that were made during the event of ELCA members in our Southeastern Iowa Synod and the greater ELCA church as we broke bread, shared testimonies and laughter.”

“Leymah Gbowee’s message on Friday inspired me and I was reminded of God’s faithfulness despite our sin. I am hopeful that Leymah’s prophetic message and other prophetic voices like hers will continue to speak as we continue to do God’s work with our hands.”

“We had an awesome time attending the CWA in New Orleans last week. The worship, speakers, and interactive dialogue and decisions that lead this Church was inspiring.”



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Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton put it clear that “we have work to do. God will give us energy, the courage, and the will to do it. Let’s go Church.”

“Agenda items of significance were not rushed to a vote. I liked how topics were introduced and then a day later would proceed with the voting process. This gave time for reflection, prayer, and conversations with other attendees to get other perspectives.”

“One take away that had been important to me is WE are all part of the ELCA.”

“It was memorable to be part of the decision for Declaration on the Way and I look forward to following and praying for our continued ecumenical work.”

“Attending the Churchwide Assembly has been one of the most amazing experiences of my life. Being exposed to so many different preaching styles and worship with so many people who share the same faith was truly inspiring.”

“Having the opportunity to discuss hunger with the ELCA World Hunger team and participate in the Food Insecurity experiential learning was truly a highlight and I will be forever grateful for that opportunity.”

“Despite the darkness in our world, I’m proud to say this Church is a shining beacon of hope in Christ in so many ways and I look forward to seeking opportunities to serve.”

May God bless our church and the whole world. I am at that point of “WHAT CAN I DO FOR MY CHURCH?” We are the church for the sake of the world. ■



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News from Our Companions in Tanzania

This summer, steps were taken in a special assembly that effectively divided our companion synod, the Pare Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania into two dioceses. Our synod was aware that this extraordinary transition was being planned. Though significantly smaller now, the Pare Diocese continues to function and will convene an Extra-ordinary General Assembly in December to make the necessary changes to governing documents and strategic decision making in light of this change.



The newly formed “diocese in preparation,” the Mwangi Diocese, has elected leaders (Bishop-elect Chediel E. Sondoro and Assistant Bishop Timothy J. Msangi), and will continue the necessary steps to begin functioning independently of the Pare Diocese.

It will take some time to sort out all the implications for our companionship. Our synod remains a companion synod to the Pare Diocese. Several Southeastern Iowa Synod congregations have longstanding relationships with parishes in the emerging Mwangi Diocese. But all companion relationships fall under the umbrella of the church-to-church relationship between the ELCA and the ELCT and we will work closely with our partners in Global Mission to determine how best we can serve the interests of the church-to-church partnership.

Please pray for the Pare Diocese as they face a more challenging new reality and for the Mwangi Diocese as their new identity continues to emerge. And pray that regardless of how all the details are sorted out that, together with our sisters and brothers in Tanzania, we might provide a bold witness to the unity that is ours in Jesus Christ.

More about our Companion Synod Relationship

The Imani Moja Companionship between the Southeastern Iowa Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, Pare Diocese began in 1988. Former bishops, Werger and Mshana, initiated the companionship and visited each other's territory between 1988 and 1993. Companion Congregation relationships began in 1998. Over the years, bishops have continued to build relationships with each other by visiting each other's country. Bishop Burk visited the Pare Diocese in May, 2009, and Bishop Mjema traveled to the Southeastern Iowa Synod in May, 2011. Bishop Burk returned in June, 2012 along with 8 members of the Companion Synod Vision Trip. In the spring of 2015 Bishop Mjema visited congregations and lawmakers in Iowa. Many people from congregations have visited and corresponded, building upon the foundation principles of accompaniment: “Walking together in solidarity that practices interdependence and mutuality.”

2016 Southeastern Iowa Synod Assembly

Drawn to the Light of God

The 29th Assembly of the Southeastern Iowa Synod was held May 6 – May 7, 2016, in Coralville, Iowa. Over 400 voting members and visitors gathered around the theme “Drawn to the Light of God.”

Bishop Michael Burk presided over the assembly, including the Friday evening service of Holy Communion. In his report, Bishop Burk provided highlights of our shared ministry since we last gathered in assembly, providing his assessment of the ways we are being “Drawn to the Light of God.”

Special guest, Pastor Jason Chesnut engaged the Assembly with biblical storytelling from the the gospel of John. Pr. Joel Nau gave a presentation about hunger, Pr. Lee Schott presented about prison ministry and A.J. Houseman gave a talk centered on leadership. Additionally, there were interest groups and forums on various informational topics.



Resolutions adopted included: 1) Ministry around the Military; a resolution encouraging those in the Southeastern Iowa Synod to offer gratitude and support for military personnel, veterans and their families. 2) Life of Faith initiative; encouraging the synod to create learning opportunities and communities to equip and support all its members for ministries in the world. 3) Southeastern Iowa Synodical Women’s Organization encouraging congregations and groups to discuss and act on the role media plays in the objectification of women. 4) A resolution encouraging congregations in the Southeastern Iowa Synod to pray for, engage, and support Lutheran Campus Ministries at Iowa’s public universities. 5) Peace Not Walls: a resolution encouraging the Southeastern Iowa Synod to advocate for a peaceful resolution to conflict, the end of human rights abuses, and the end of occupation of Palestinian territory through Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. 6) A resolution of thanksgiving for the assembly and various ministries of the Southeastern Iowa Synod. Visit the 2016 Synod Assembly webpage for the full text of resolutions.

Other business included the approval of the 2017 synod budget and minimum compensation guidelines. Congregations and rostered leaders celebrating anniversaries were acknowledged and voting members took advantage of the many forums and organizational displays that were offered during assembly. The synod assembly offering was designated to the ministries of the Southeastern Iowa Synod, \$35,987.78 was given by congregations and individuals.



The 2017 Assembly of the Southeastern Iowa Synod will be held May 19-20, 2017, at Lutheran Church of Hope in West Des Moines, IA. ■