

Setting the stage

This May we gather for the 2019 Southeastern Synod Assembly in West Des Moines knowing that many hours of prayers and preparation go into planning these events every year. As synod vice president, I am already part of the planning for the 2020 assembly when we will elect a new bishop. To be clear, the election is not until 2020, but we are asking for your help in the preparation now.

The Southeastern Iowa Synod Council has established what we are calling the Synod Ministry Profile Committee. I am privileged to be joined on the committee by Jenny Winn, Joe Nolte, the Rev. Brian Middleswarth, Julie Feier, Danny Stone and the Rev. Amy Diller. We are charged with describing the current status of shared ministry in and around the synod, noting opportunities, challenges, pressure points and needs. We will strive to outline hoped-for priorities as described by people from throughout the synod, and we will share what people describe as desired characteristics in a bishop.

As we look at what other synods have done and become familiar with the resources made available by our partners in churchwide ministries, we have and are developing tools that will provide opportunities for you to “weigh in.”

Our hope is that this work will be beneficial to lay members throughout the synod, as well as to pastors as they discern whether or not they wish to be considered for the call to be this synod's next pastor. That means we will do our best to be honest about some of the real challenges facing

the church in general and this synod in particular.

When our work is finished, we will look to a yet-to-be-named Bishops' Election Committee to guide the process during the 2020 assembly.

In the meantime, we are excited about the 2019 Southeastern Iowa Synod Assembly and our theme “ONE Bread. ONE Body.” And I am particularly grateful for the partnership of Bishop Michael Burk, who will continue to serve faithfully up to and beyond the 2020 election. (The current bishop's term ends July 31, 2020.)

Please pray for the preparations and all of the discernment that will unfold in the coming year. Visit the link below to see how and when you can participate. Thank you for helping us set the stage for a bishop's election. And please remember that in all of this, we are really #inthisTogether.

For more information, go to seiasynod.org/bishopselection.

Heather Miller



Vice president



Heather Miller

Snowstorm shows a portrait of God's kingdom

By the Rev. Chad Whaley

It was one of the worst snowstorms in many years. In late November 2018, we encountered many who were hungry, who were strangers and who needed a warm place to rest their heads.

Late on a Sunday afternoon, the West Branch Police Department contacted me to say travel on Interstate 80 had become nearly impossible and many motorists had pulled off at our exit in hopes of spending the night at the Days Inn. That hotel had long since filled up and people had nowhere to go. We quickly decided to bring them to Bethany Lutheran Church. Soon we had nearly 50 people in our building. With a few calls, I was able to secure blankets, inflatable mattresses, pillows, food, and people to come and help out.

We often find Jesus speaking of how he came to usher in the kingdom of God, and he didn't always speak of it as something in the future. He also spoke of it in the present tense. The kingdom of God seems to happen here and now. I believe we caught a portrait of the kingdom on that Sunday evening.

What I witnessed was something beautiful. People who in some cases had been involved

“My son was stranded today on the road headed back to IA State (Iowa State University). I (his mom) am in Texas worried for him! I can't thank you enough for opening your church to all those with no place to stay. God was truly watching out for my kiddo tonight! Bless you and your neighbors, too, who apparently came immediately, offering help and food. Thank you from my heart.”

in an accident and had to leave behind their vehicles, or whose vehicles had slid off the road and were now abandoned in the ditch, or who simply couldn't drive any farther gathered in the warmth and safety of our building and became united together.

A meal needed to be made quickly and folks stepped up. One woman began thawing ground beef left in the congregation's freezer. A gentleman lugged in a large portable cooler full of food, and his wife began slicing bologna and frying it in a pan. Others added a bag of snacks, chips or whatever they had. Soon there was a feast

“Thank you ... for sheltering me and my three children last night from that horrible storm. [I] never felt so welcomed in my life. I was scared and far from home, but I felt like I was home.”

ready to feed many and a prayer of thanksgiving was offered. That sounds a bit like something out of the Bible, doesn't it?

We had people of different races and ethnicities. We had infants and the elderly. We had people from outside of the U.S. and of different religions. Some spoke very little English. We even had a pet snake and dog. What we didn't have was division. People came together to support, care for and meet the needs of one another no matter how different they may have been.

Things happen in life that often are completely beyond our control. Many times we are left scratching our head or even banging it against a wall out of frustration, uncertainty, anger, fear or despair. We may even ask, "Is there a God?" Or, "If there is a God, where is God at in the midst of such troubling times?" I don't believe it was part of God's plan or will for so many motorists to be stranded alongside an interstate on a cold and snowy night. But I do believe God can work through such incidents to reveal the goodness and glory of God. That is what I witnessed while housing stranded motorists that night.

“Thank you for the warm and safe place to stay for the stranded travelers. God bless you and all that you do. It means so much.”

“A big thanks to the pastor and church for giving stranded travelers a warm, safe place to spend the night. Food we could prepare, breakfast as well. A heartfelt thank you to all.”

I would never wish for these folks to find themselves in the predicament they did. But, looking back, part of me is filled with joy and so thankful that this occurred because I caught this beautiful picture of the kingdom of God. I had the opportunity to meet some pretty amazing people, and my life is the better for it. I was able to experience part of what it means to be the church on earth.

Bethany could provide them a warm place to rest their weary bodies, a comfortable chair to sit in, a stove to cook on, or a bathroom to freshen up in because of the gifts God has entrusted to us. We provided some of those gifts to others as a response to what God has done for us. We did this because Christ's death and resurrection freed us from the bondage of sin and death and freed us to love and serve our God and our neighbor. **L**

Chad Whaley is pastor of Bethany Lutheran Church, West Branch.



Questions lead to community garden

The people of Peace Lutheran Church in West Burlington dreamed of creating a community garden, and they were able to do so by asking questions. A couple from the congregation who live near the YMCA noticed a fenced-in area of raised garden beds that was filled with weeds. They inquired, and we were given permission to use the beds for a community garden.

Through the partnership, the YMCA grants the use of the land and water for the garden, and the people of Peace grow fresh produce for local families and food pantries. In the fall of 2017, on "God's work. Our hands." Sunday, the congregation launched the project by cleaning and preparing the raised beds.

Peace also received a hunger grant through the Southeastern Iowa Synod. Members used the grant to create a sign for the garden and purchase all of the supplies for the first year. They even had money left over for next year's supplies and seeds.

Last summer their efforts resulted in many pounds of fresh produce. They also planted flowers to bring to families. Who doesn't enjoy receiving some fresh flowers! ♣



Do you have a story of community partnership in your congregation? Would you like to tell others about it? We love sharing stories of ministry! Email your story ideas to Val Harlynn, communications@seiasynod.org