



From the bishop

Welcome to baptism

An increasingly familiar hymn (“All are Welcome” by Marty Haugen), a movement to open the communion table to all who are hungry, and a societal context that causes more and more people living on the margins or who are seeking safe refuge, has led many Christian communities, including many ELCA congregations, to declare: “All are welcome.” The instinct is sound. But the intent is genuine. The way that this declaration is actually lived out often falls short of the goal.

It is by no means the only instance of faithful people—all of us—not quite achieving what we set out to achieve. Hopefully, the striving continues. But I find myself wondering if the words themselves fall short of what we really mean to say, ought to say.

“All are welcome” can be heard as a description of a particular place, a certain community and even a church body, reflecting a promise that together we hope to embody. But these words are too often experienced as untrue, often because the ground of the promise is unclear.

“All are welcome to the love of God” is always true. Always—regardless of our own shortcomings. God’s unrelenting love is the reason for our hope-filled singing, our desire to feed all who are hungry, and our commitment to provide safe refuge, even a home among us, for anyone made to feel they are beyond our reach.

“Welcome to Baptism,” is an underused resource tucked away in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (page 232). It serves as a way of publicly marking the start of a journey that will lead to the font. At best, it’s an encouragement to be as bold about inviting people to baptism as we are about singing of welcome and inviting people to the communion meal.



Bishop Michael L. Burk

Frankly, I’m a proponent of frequently extending an invitation during worship to any who wish to be baptized right then if they desire. Come to the waters! Enter into a baptized life! But that makes a lot of Lutherans nervous. Still, even the nervous among us can and are called to do much more. “Welcome to Baptism” can serve as a way for individuals and families to signal to the whole community that they are “on the way.”

Hopefully, “on the way” to “All are welcome” is where we are headed together, knowing that the destination is Jesus Christ, who is the love of God.

Bishop Michael L. Burk



“God’s work. Our hands.” day of service

Communities of faith of the Southeastern Iowa Synod rolled up their sleeves, put on hairnets, and grabbed chain saws and spatulas to serve their neighbor for the annual “God’s work. Our hands.” day of service.

Capitol Hill Lutheran Church, Des Moines, picked up trash and cleaned up in their downtown neighborhood. They also visited Trinity Center, a memory care facility, for fellowship and songs.



Zion Lutheran Church, Davenport, purchased supplies and packed them into 120 backpacks for Lutheran World Relief.

St. John’s Lutheran Church in St. Donatus and **St. Paul’s** in LaMott prepared 80 school kits for Lutheran World Relief. They also hosted a meal for students, faculty and staff from Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, feeding current and future leaders of the church. This was their third fall cookout for the Wartburg community.

St. Stephen’s Lutheran Church in Cedar Rapids served under the theme “Season of Creation” and cleaned up trash along the Sac and Fox Trail in Cedar Rapids.

Trinity Lutheran Church, Pleasant Valley, packed meals for Kids Against Hunger and had participants ranging in age from 5 to 90.

Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Vinton assembled 72 school kits, 60 health kits,



53 baby layettes and 23 fabric kits. They also tied four quilts to be sent to Lutheran World Relief, adding them to the 34 tied quilts and 24 fleece blankets that had been previously made. The whole congregation joined together for a potluck lunch after the project was completed.

Christ Lutheran Church, Des Moines, participated in the Meals From the Heartland 12th Annual Hunger Fight to help prepare and package meals. They also held a diaper drive throughout September.

Bethany Lutheran Church in West Branch completed some projects stewarding the church grounds. They



Continued on page D



God's work continued from page C

also made greeting cards for the residents of the local nursing home; made quilts that are sent to various places such as the Domestic Violence Intervention Program, Ronald McDonald House and a local nursing home; painted a gazebo at the public library; and did various outdoor projects at the homes of people in need of a helping hand.

Immanuel Lutheran Church in Ogden celebrated their day of service by joining the Meals from the Heartland's Fall Hunger Fight on Aug. 29. They also delivered cookies to our district schools for the teachers and bus drivers to brighten their days a little with a bit of sugar to help them keep up with the kiddos.

Peace Lutheran Church in Pella held a pulled pork lunch and then tied fleece blankets to be donated to a homeless shelter, packaged food for the local pantry, and packed a "goodie" bag for the area's first responders. They counted about 50 yellow shirts doing God's work with their hands.

St. Paul Lutheran Church in Martensdale gathered 16 volunteers to purchase, prepare and sell food at a local auction house in Indianola during an auction day. The group raised \$800, and 100% will be donated to two local school food programs, which pay off outstanding lunch accounts and support a weekend backpack program, and to Lutheran Disaster Response. ☩

*Advent Greetings from the Office of the Bishop of the
Southeastern Iowa Synod*



**Bishop Michael Burk, Pastor Paul Ostrem,
Pastor Erika Uthe, Kathy Smith, Lorraine Jordan,
Cristina Barkalow, Val Harlynn**