

Pericope

PARTNERS

The first half of Pentecost 2005

Pericope Partners, vignettes about ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, interpret the partnership we share as a whole church. These brief thematic illustrations of mission and ministry are suggested by themes from the Revised Common Lectionary Cycle A pericopes for the Day of Pentecost through the 14th Sunday after Pentecost (May 15, 2005–August 21, 2005). They are not exegetical expositions of the texts, but are intended to be suitable textual partners for use in Sunday bulletins and congregational newsletters.

The Day of Pentecost (May 15, 2005)

*by Beverly Alexander
Division for Higher Education and Schools*

■ FOR THOSE OF US who serve in campus ministry, the first weeks of a fall semester can be just as amazing and perplexing as the Day of Pentecost. We have made contacts with all the new Lutheran students we can identify. We have practically begged them to come and be a part of a community gathered around the cross of the Christ. All that remains is to wait and see what “the wind blows in.” And blow she does!

At North Carolina State University “fresh” folk sail in on the wings of the Spirit from all parts of North Carolina and states beyond. Over the course of an academic year that same Holy Spirit “whips us into shape.” So by the time mid-May comes around we have become a community of faith in which we hear each other speaking about God’s deeds of power in our own languages, dialects, accents, slang.

Then comes graduation when some among us are once again lifted onto the wings of the Spirit that they might find employment or further academic study in other places, other colleges and universities. This yearly leave taking would be unbearable ... except that in August we know that we can depend on the Spirit to “blow in” another class of fresh students.

(Inspired by Acts 2:1-21)

Holy Trinity (May 22, 2005)

*by Kathie Bender Schwich
Department for Synodical Relations*

■ THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA, through its congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization, is called to “go and make disciples.” The synods of this church are doing so both globally and locally through the companion synod and partner synod programs.

Members of the Metropolitan Chicago Synod visited their companion synod, the Central Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa. There they helped to make disciples by supplying labor to build an HIV/AIDS clinic and providing financial support that includes the salary of a full time administrator and a volunteer in HIV/AIDS ministry. Those who made this mission trip found their faith and sense of discipleship strengthened through the stories and testimonies they heard from men, women, and children who continue to be filled with hope, resilience, faith, and determination in spite of the AIDS pandemic. The Metropolitan Chicago Synod also helped support Project Education, a program for volunteer educators to mentor South African teachers on an interim basis.

When members of the Florida Bahamas Synod experienced devastation and destruction when their churches and homes were hit by four successive hurricanes last fall, their ELCA partner synod, the Metropolitan Chicago Synod, called upon its members to donate financial and material resources to help those who had lost homes and livelihood because of these storms. This partner synod relationship has also resulted in the sharing of ministry stories and mission resources as these two synods strive to “go and make disciples” by reaching out to growing Latino populations and changing urban environments.

(Inspired by Matthew 28:16-20)

The Second Sunday after Pentecost

(May 29, 2005 - Proper 4)

*by Jonathan Strandjord
Division for Ministry*

■ “FOR I AM NOT ASHAMED of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” (Romans 1:16)

It was late in the day. The presidents of the eight ELCA seminaries were tired from a long day of discussions on how best to strengthen theological education. So many challenges had been named; so many new tasks had been identified. Rest would have been most welcome, but one more session was on the schedule that evening. The local synod bishop, along with a few area rostered leaders, had been invited to join us to talk about mission in this particular place.

A weary group assembled. Then, as the local leaders shared their stories, new energy and excitement began to flow. For these leaders spoke with deep conviction and passion about the need for gospel ministry in this place, about how their calling stretched them and the communities they led, and about the joy of seeing God at work among and around them. There were no stories of easy answers or quick success. We heard about hard and long-term labor. But we also heard about the wonder of witnessing the power of the gospel opening up new paths and bringing people together in new ways.

Again and again, these mission leaders expressed their gratitude for the preparation they had received at ELCA seminaries, for all the ways they had been equipped to understand the gospel, to interpret it in new contexts, and to lead communities in mission in rapidly changing times. At the end of the day, the seminary presidents walked out of that room with more tasks than they had had coming in. And more energy too. (*Inspired by Romans 1:16-17*)

The Third Sunday after Pentecost

(June 5, 2005 - Proper 5)

*by Darius Larsen
Division for Outreach*

■ “FOLLOW ME.” is the call. Some people follow, others criticize, and still others laugh. If we are doing God’s work, should we not expect all three reactions from the people we serve?

Pastor Jillian Ross, and ELCA mission developer in the Yakima Valley of South Central Washington, lives on the Yakama Indian Reservation. She ministers primarily with a Latino population that is monolingual (Spanish), poor, and full of dignity. She is looking forward to another summer youth program where she can enjoy watching children learn and be proud of their accomplishments.

One boy had a tough spring last year. At ten he got his hand caught in a tailgate of a truck and nearly severed his right index finger. He was flown to Seattle for emergency surgery and the finger was surgically reattached. Pr. Jillian spent many hours in a car with his mother who neither reads nor writes, and does not drive. Through a gentle witness on road trips to Seattle and back to Yakima, through filling out forms, interpreting, and sharing their life stories, this family began to consider Pastor Jillian as their pastor.

Once, after a visit to the physical therapist in Yakima, the mother announced that she was taking the family and the pastor out for ice-cream. As they were all trying very hard to eat their cones before the ice cream melted or fell on their shirts, the mom began to laugh. It was a laughter that came from deep within her soul, not in response to a joke, but rather in response to the goodness of this sweet moment in life—and the realization that such laughter is a response to the call to follow.

It is my hope and prayer that such a love and laughter continues to spread throughout the Yakima Valley and beyond. (*Inspired by Matthew 9:9*)

The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

(June 12, 2005 - Proper 6)

by Ted Schroeder

Division for Congregational Ministries

■ A YOUNG PASTOR began his first call with determination. He worked out a plan designed to increase attendance and enlarge the membership. But for all his doing, the congregation stayed becalmed in a sea of traditions and troubles. But then, gradually, things started to turn around. A gritty farmer named Mac joined the church. At first, he seemed no asset. Often coming to early service right from the barn, he lent a certain aura of reality to the gathering. His gruff talk and loud, almost crude speech irritated and embarrassed the pastor and some of the other members.

And yet, people started to come. It turned out that that Mac had a broken down van that he'd rebuilt. He began using it on Sundays to pick up the older folks for church and a gang of children for Sunday school. The clanking contraption would heave into the parking lot every Sunday morning and disgorge a gang of gleeful children right in the middle of the closing prayers of the early service. And the second service swelled with the town's elderly and disabled.

Somehow, in the passing months, the congregation became full of new faces, full of spiritually alive people eager to learn. And in his deepest moments of reflection, the pastor knew that it was Mac who was making it happen. Mac was doing it—unqualified, unkempt, loud, and irritating Mac.

“How do you do it, Mac?” the pastor asked him one day. “How do you manage to bring all of these people in?”

“How?” Mac was puzzled. “I don't know. I just know I must do it, Pastor. These are my people. They're just like me. I see myself in every one. How could I not bring them?”

(Inspired by Matthew 9:35-10:8)

The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

(June 19, 2005 - Proper 7)

by Christoph Schneider-Yattara

Divisions for Global Mission

■ The NICOBAR ISLANDS belong to a cluster of 572 islands in the Gulf of Bengal, between India and Myanmar (Burma). Only 36 of these islands are inhabited. Known as India's forgotten islands, they entered the limelight when the South Asia tsunami struck.

The Nicobarese are a faithful people. On December 26, 2004, their faith was put to the test. It was a Sunday morning and people were getting ready for church when they felt the earth shaking. Running outside their homes, they shouted for one another. Outside they held each other's hands, praising God for saving them. After the earthquake they ran to see if there was anybody still alive under the debris. As they were rescuing their loved ones from underneath the rubble, warning shouts came from the beach. Soon they could see the gigantic wave coming towards them. Once again, they ran for their lives. This time they ran towards the jungle, away from the sea.

When they returned to where their homes had been, they realized that everything was gone and that many lives were lost. Nevertheless, they were determined to rebuild their lives. Knowing that they were saved by God's amazing grace, they began rebuilding their churches even before rebuilding their homes.

The people of the ELCA also know the power of God's amazing grace. We spread that good news through participation in rebuilding and healing ministries with our companion churches and other partners around the world.
(Inspired by Psalm 69:15-16)

The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

(June 26, 2005 - Proper 8)

by Arnold O. Pierson

Mission Investment Fund of the ELCA

■ I HAVE WORSHIPPED in many ELCA congregations in my work with the Mission Investment Fund (MIF). Many congregations I have visited were built or renovated with MIF loans. It is a joy for me to see, in person, how MIF assists congregations in expanding their ministries.

Although I grew up in a Lutheran church, it can still be intimidating to visit a new congregation. It is always reassuring to be directed to the worship area or office by a member or a sign. Knowing where the worship space and the fellowship areas are located makes me feel comfortable in new surroundings and helps create a more worshipful mood.

Members of ELCA congregations have some familiarity with the loans and investments offered by MIF. But they may not know about a free service that the Fund offers to ELCA congregations. The MIF's church building consultants counsel congregations on how to be more welcoming to all who enter. Many times the changes that our consultants suggest are simple and inexpensive, such as placing a sign in the parking area to direct worshipers to the church entrance. The focus is always on helping a congregation to be as hospitable as possible.

Pretend you are a first-time visitor to your congregation. Would you know how to find the entrance? Could you locate the nursery? Making a visitor feel at ease in a new space assists greatly in making the church a "welcoming" place. As Jesus said, "whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me."

(Inspired by Matthew 10:40)

The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

(July 3, 2005 - Proper 9)

by Arne Selbyg

Division for Higher Education and Schools

■ LIKE PAUL, people are at times tormented by our inability to keep from sinning. This text from Paul's letter to the Romans resonates particularly with American high school and college students. They are constantly torn between their desire to sin, and their desire to follow their ideals and act with virtue. The Lutheran colleges and universities create opportunities for young people to live out their desires to do good, to do what, deep down, they want to do.

Lutheran colleges understand that part of their mission is to motivate students to live lives of service to others. One way they do this is by sponsoring alternative spring break trips. Instead of heading to the beach, for example, a team from Susquehanna University (Selinsgrove, Pa.) hand delivered more than \$40,000 worth of medication, vitamins, shoes, school uniform shirts, videos and DVDs, educational supplies, and a laptop computer to Costa Rica and Nicaragua. Susquehanna University chaplain Mark Radecke reports that, "Since the program's inception in 1999, 145 members of the Susquehanna community have served and studied for two weeks each in Central America, delivering a combined total of more than \$215,000 in materials and donor-designated cash gifts, and contributing at least 7,100 hours of volunteer labor."

Susquehanna University is not alone in this mission to help students serve their neighbor. Last year, 12 of the ELCA colleges and 22 ELCA campus ministry sites received grants totaling almost \$1.8 million from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans. These grants will help fund the development of service learning and engagement programs in cooperation with Lutheran synods and congregations. Through such programs young people discover that in their inmost selves they do indeed "delight in the law of God."

(Inspired by Romans 7:15-25a)

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

(July 10, 2005 - Proper 10)

by Elizabeth Hunter
The Lutheran Magazine

READING ROMANS 8:1-11, I hear anew that “there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” But I’m left to wonder: How is it that so frequently we set our minds on fights about flesh, giving these more importance than the ways we can care for the spirit? How is it that so frequently we begin to condemn those with whom we disagree?

In some letters and e-mails readers have recently sent *The Lutheran* magazine, it’s as if two siblings are battling for what they see as the fleshly family inheritance—while other siblings take sides, refuse to choose sides, or ask for various sorts of split decisions.

I still remember reader Dennis King from Apple Valley, Minn., saying in “Treasures without turmoil” (Julie Sevig, *The Lutheran*, March 2004): “I don’t understand how property becomes more important than people.”

The Lutheran magazine’s managing editor, Sonia Solomonson, frequently wades through a stack of letters from readers. That stack always includes letters expressing readers’ viewpoints on sexuality, marriage, or same-sex relationships. Though the magazine’s stories related to spirituality and faith far outnumber those related to sexuality, more folks seem to write in about sexuality. Some letter writers offer thanks for the variety of views within the magazine’s pages. But others (from all perspectives) cry favoritism if we print a perspective with which they disagree.

On those days when I’m tempted to set my mind on flesh over spirit, I turn to page five of the magazine and reread our mission statement: “*The Lutheran* magazine belongs to the people of the ELCA in all our diversity.” It goes on to say that the magazine “provides a forum for open discussion” and “challenges us to bring God’s grace and care to all.”

(Inspired by Romans 8:1-11)

The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

(July 17, 2005 - Proper 11)

by Janet Hunt
Division for Outreach

CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH in Plainfield, Illinois, is the newest mission start in the Northern Illinois Synod. Pastor Ron Voss entered this mission field in October, 2003 and made more than 5,000 door-to-door calls before the fledgling congregation first gathered for Sunday worship in March 2004. He did not make decisions about which homes would more likely be weeds or wheat before he ventured down a particular street or into a new neighborhood. He just went and knocked on door after door and invited people to follow Christ by being part of this new congregation.

As he met people in the community and kept inviting them to be a part of this new ministry, leaders began to emerge. They joined him in knocking on doors, in working in the office, in leading worship, and in serving on the leadership team. As the mission grows, the pastor and leaders continue to invite and invite and invite. They don’t wonder about who is weed and who is wheat. Instead they are nurturing the field so that wheat can grow, by emphasizing the basics of what it is to follow Jesus.

By inviting people into significant Bible study, by encouraging good financial stewardship, and by building a welcoming community this new congregation is a growing witness to God’s call to follow Christ. A year after first gathering for worship, more than 50 faithful gather every Sunday, the congregation is giving 25 percent of its income to mission support, and half of its adult members are gathering for weekly Bible study. Indeed, they don’t always know what will take root and grow but they recognize it is God’s field and God’s work they are called into and that is enough.

(Inspired by Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43)

The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

(July 24, 2005 - Proper 12)

*by Ian and Joyce Graue
Division for Global Mission*

■ JESUS ASKS HIS DISCIPLES, “Have you understood all this?”

We could ask the same of our three children. They were eight, 10, and 13 years old when we accepted the call to serve as long-term missionaries in Papua New Guinea. Two were excited about the move; one was not. That was 1995.

Ten years later we have been re-assigned by the ELCA. Our children are now 18, 20, and 23. But they are not moving with us this time. They are at home in Australia and we are presently in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, learning French in preparation for serving the Evangelical Lutheran Church-Central African Republic.

Our children marvel at our recent move. They also have a few reservations about their parents doing this. That we not only are undertaking to learn French, but later in the year are committed to learning Sango, is mind-boggling to them. After all, we are old (47 and 52)! They envy their friends who have parents who are always there for them because those parents—unlike us—are not living half-a-world away.

Some of our friends wonder too about what we are doing. Even our new neighbor behind us here in Ouagadougou isn't so sure we know what we are doing.

Are we crazy?

We pray that in us our children and others will glimpse God's kingdom at work. We pray too that they will discern God's will for them and they will respond likewise in faithfulness and with courage—despite what others think!

(Inspired by Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52)

The 11th Sunday after Pentecost

(July 31, 2005 - Proper 13)

*by Johanna Olson
ELCA Disaster Response*

■ I WAS SITTING IN A MEETING a few weeks ago, planning children's programming in Florida. We needed something to help children who had come through the repeated hurricanes that attacked the state in fall 2004. We talked about Camp Noah, a weeklong day camp for children survivors of disaster.

How many day camps could we reasonably sustain? I was conservative, suggesting we should plan fewer to ensure quality camps. My colleague Melanie resisted limiting the number of camps. Her compassion was palpable. She reminded me that over 100,000 children had been impacted by the four successive hurricanes. Cities and towns across the state wanted to sponsor a Camp Noah day camp, some for a week and others for 8 weeks. I was still concerned about our resources. Funding was far from abundant and the orchestration of training and consulting would be enormously demanding. She said God would provide. I didn't really know what to say. I knew, in theory, she was right, but I didn't know, in practice, what “God's provision” would look like. Melanie was asking me to live out my faith with a courage I wasn't sure I had.

In reading today's gospel, I feel a bit like one of those hard working disciples balking at Christ on his suggestion of feeding thousands of people. “You've got to be crazy!” But knowing God's grace in my life, I'm crazy not to live in the courage of my faith.

This summer, many Camp Noah day camps are taking place across Florida.

(Inspired by Matthew 14:13-21)

The 12th Sunday after Pentecost

(August 7, 2005 - Proper 14)

by Kay Bengston

Division for Church in Society

■ JUST AS JESUS put out his hand to rescue Peter, we too can reach out to rescue others from the tumultuous sea of poverty. Marilyn is the director at an early childhood center in a Lutheran congregation. The childcare center participates in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), a nutrition program provided through the U.S. Department of Agriculture. CACFP helps to finance nutritious snacks and meals in centers serving low-income children.

Marilyn remembers a young woman who had two children enrolled in the childcare center a few years back. As a single mother, she was struggling to gain a college degree and thereby improve her family's life. The food program as well as childcare assistance were critical factors to her success. Years later, Marilyn received a thank you letter from this woman telling her about her graduation from college and that she now had a good job. The young mother went on to comment on the importance of a program which offered breakfast, snacks, and a hot lunch. In the letter was a check for \$1,000 with the request that it be used to assist another young parent who could only accomplish a radical change in her family's fortune if given assistance.

Through the Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs (LOGA), the ELCA advocates for childcare and nutrition assistance such as CACFP. Advocacy is reaching out a hand as Jesus did to rescue the poor and vulnerable from the tumultuous seas of poverty and despair in order to provide a boat of support and hope. All can participate!

(Inspired by Matthew 14:22-33)

The 13th Sunday after Pentecost

(August 14, 2005 - Proper 15)

by Rosemary Dyson

Commission for Multicultural Ministries

■ JUNE 2004 WAS A VERY BUSY TIME in the ELCA Commission for Multicultural Ministries. We were making final preparations for the Lift Every Voice Multicultural Gathering held July 2004 in Orlando, Florida.

Yes, this was a very exciting time for all of the people who were preparing for this event that drew 700 participants. In the midst of all of the frenzied activity I received about six voicemail messages from Stephanie. Stephanie had retrieved the flyer for the Multicultural Gathering from the wastebasket in her church. She was drawn to the flyer because it talked about an event which celebrated the gifts of people of color. This flyer also invited young adults of color to come for the HOLLA TIME program held in conjunction with the Multicultural Gathering. HOLLA TIME was designed for young adults of color—for people like Stephanie. It is one way the ELCA is counteracting a trend documented by Barna Research. In a study conducted in 2003, they reported that only three out of 10 twentysomethings (31 percent) attend church in a typical week.

Stephanie did find a way to attend the Multicultural Gathering and HOLLA TIME. In a videotaped interview at the event, she said she felt called to do everything possible to attend. She also said that she was one of the last young adults worshipping in her congregation. Indeed the Holy Spirit had led her to a place where she could be with other young adults of color who were searching for their place as full partners in their congregations. "... For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. Thus says the Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather others to them besides those already gathered."

(Inspired by Isaiah 56:7b-8)

The 14th Sunday after Pentecost

(August 21, 2005 - Proper 16)

by Donna Braband

Division for Higher Education and Schools

ON DECEMBER 26, 2004, an earthquake struck the Indian Ocean area with a force so strong it set off tsunamis that traveled from South Asia to Africa causing destruction. The most affected were the children of the areas. Nikki Lambert, a preschool teacher at Trinity Lutheran School in Marysville, Ohio, knew exactly how to use this experience to teach a lesson of giving cheerfully, leading, ministering, and showing compassion to the children of the affected areas of God's world.

Using the idea of children's "blankies," Ms. Lambert talked with her 46 three and four year-olds about how not all children in the world have a lot of toys, clothes, or even their own "blankies." The students shared how that made them feel sad and they should help these children. The students in Ms. Lambert's class talked about how their "blankies" made them feel safe. Here she brought her lesson into their lives and shared with her young students how God's love is all around them just like their "blankies." She reassured them that God's love will always comfort them and all of his children even if they don't have a "blankie."

Each child and their family designed a square for a "love and comfort blankie." These "blankies" will be sent to Lutheran World Relief to wrap the love of Ms. Lambert's students around a new friend in God's world.

(Inspired by today's readings)

These stories are examples of ELCA churchwide ministries suggested by the pericopes for the Day of Pentecost through the 14th Sunday after Pentecost (Cycle A). **Pericope Partners** stories are available for free download at www.elca.org/pericope

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