

# Pericope

## PARTNERS

The second 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 15th Sunday after Pentecost through the Reign of Christ Sunday (August 28, 2005–November 20, 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.

*Pericope Partners* stories may be downloaded free from [www.elca.org/pericope](http://www.elca.org/pericope) and copied for congregational use. Print copies are available upon request for those who have no Web access. Call 800.638.3522.

## The 15th Sunday after Pentecost

(August 28, 2005 - Proper 17)

by Kathryn Love  
Division for Congregational Ministries

■ MALCOLM, A 6'5" MAN, stood to tell the congregation his name. Malcolm had had a troubled life. He had been a man on the road to self-destruction through substance abuse. So, the congregation was joyful when he sounded so upbeat about his recovery and his desire for a better life. Then, delighted, Malcolm added, "I am three weeks clean," and some joyful expressions turned to dismay and even discomfort. They knew that the chance for recovery was only 26 percent.

Malcolm kept coming to church and telling his story. He loved to hum the song, "I Fall Down, But I Get Up" and when he was employed he proudly told people, "I am now a citizen, up from sleeping in abandoned buildings to paying taxes." He went to Bible study, but had to leave early to keep the group home rules. Later he attended new members' class and was baptized. Every chance he got he boasted of transformation. He claimed God sustained him and that had it not been for the church's invitation and encouragement, the temptations of his old life might have overcome him.

Once lying like garbage on the ground, now Malcolm is an example of how God's recovery system is available for all. God says to Jeremiah, "I will make you ... a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you but they shall not prevail over you, for I am with you."

Eighteen months later Malcolm was overheard saying to a group of people, "I am 18-months clean."  
(Inspired by Jeremiah 15:20)

## The 16th Sunday after Pentecost

(September 4, 2005 - Proper 18)

by Peter Grow-Hanson  
Division for Global Mission

■ OUR SEMINAR on Luther's Small Catechism was getting off to a rocky start. Things never begin on time in rural Senegal, but this two-day workshop for baptismal candidates seemed to be starting worse than usual. The four presenters—an ELCA seminarian, two Senegalese Christians and me—were seated on mats under the thatched roof ready to offer our best attempt at contextualizing Martin Luther for a group of mostly nomadic Fulani.

People straggled in, offering one after another the limitations of their participation; "I have to get to market, so I can only stay until noon," "I can't stay, either, I have to get to the pharmacy," "I'm here today, but not tomorrow" "He'll join us tomorrow, God willing." We began to wonder if even a few of the dozen catechumens would really benefit from our sessions.

Finally, Aissata spoke up. "I'm planning to spend all day today *and* all day tomorrow hearing the word of God and learning how to follow Jesus." We four looked at each other, and back to Aissata, and without another word, we began. Even if no one else was able to be a part of this weekend, Aissata's commitment was enough for us. Her witness must have had some effect on the others, since many of their alternate plans never seemed to materialize.

A few months later, on the eve of Pentecost, eight were baptized into Christ's church.

"For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."  
(Inspired by Matthew 18:15-20)

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## The 17th Sunday after Pentecost

(September 11, 2005 - Proper 19)

by Jack Saarela  
Division for Higher Education and Schools

THE LUTHERAN CAMPUS MINISTRY at a state university in the northeast spent six weeks last fall discussing *Journey Together Faithfully*, the study prepared by the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality.

When the question of the blessing of same-sex unions and the ordination of gay or lesbian people in faithful, lifelong relationships arose, some of the students thought that Scripture is quite clear that making provision for either is out of the question. They found it somewhat surprising, in fact, that there were others in the room who didn't find what Scripture says self-evident at all. Others were confused because they had gay and lesbian friends, some of them Christians.

Only when the emotional temperature in the room had risen to an unproductive level did the campus pastor enter the conversation. She asked the students who seemed offended at the "lax" attitude of some others towards homosexuality, "Do you think that those who disagree with you are any *less* dependent on the Bible for their view than *you*?" Silence.

Then she turned to those who were beginning to lose patience with the more traditional students, "And do you really believe that those who feel differently from you about this subject are any *less* compassionate towards people who are gay or lesbian than *you* are?" More silence—silence that indicated they had all come to a new realization about what it means to be a Christian community.

*(Inspired by Romans 14:1-12)*

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## The 18th Sunday after Pentecost

(September 18, 2005 - Proper 20)

by Dina Tannous  
Division for Congregational Ministries

GOD'S WORK CAN APPEAR in the least expected moment.

Ed was flying back to Chicago. He was tired and not in the mood for making conversation with people sitting next to him. However, towards the end of the trip, he started talking to the man sitting next to him whose name was Christopher. Christopher, his wife Constance, and their three children were coming from Tanzania where they had spent 11 years in a refugee camp having fled from unrest in neighboring Burundi.

Christopher asked Ed what he did, and Ed told him about his work in the ELCA. Christopher had tears in his eyes and pulled out a little wallet that had five immigration and naturalization cards and one business card that said "Lutheran World Relief" (LWR).

LWR had helped Christopher and his family—without the work of LWR, this family would not have survived.

The work of this church affects people thousands of miles away. Our prayers, training and educational programs, and campaigns such as Stand with Africa or Peace not Walls: Stand for Justice in the Holy Land are some of the many ways members of the ELCA are doing what Christ commissioned us to do—feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and be disciples of the spirit.

Christopher, and his family currently live in Aurora, Illinois. They attend a Roman Catholic church and are adjusting to the life in the United States. The children are going to school and both parents are employed.

God is good and merciful and definitely works in mysterious ways.

*(Inspired by the day's lessons)*

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# The 19th Sunday after Pentecost

(September 25, 2005 - Proper 21)

by Henry Boschen  
Division for Outreach

■■■■■ "IN HUMILITY, REGARD OTHERS as better than yourselves." –Philippians 2:3

One of our faith practices of discipleship is serving for the sake of others. We seek meaningful ways to put others first. Jesus calls us to put the welfare of others ahead of our own needs.

I see this happening in many places like Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Greensboro, North Carolina. They have opened their doors wide to their neighborhood and offer the health services of a parish nurse to all who come.

I see this in the ministry of Living Waters Lutheran Church, Cherokee, North Carolina. There a ministry helps girls feel the love of God and know they are valued by God and created in God's image. Their self-esteem has grown and, as they have developed life and leadership skills, they have grown in faith.

I saw Reformation Lutheran Church, Culpepper, Virginia, respond to the needs and welfare of their community's children when they discovered that many of their homes did not have a single book. The congregation developed a Saturday Bible Story time and gave books to elementary-school-aged children.

I see it in the ministry of a congregation under development in Massaponax, Virginia, as a young pastor who didn't relish the thought of going door to door and inviting people to the new congregation went faithfully anyway. He wore out several pairs of shoes knocking on hundreds of doors to share the good news of Jesus' great love.

Jesus calls us to change our minds from our way to His way and to live into His way every day all the way.  
(Inspired by *Philippians 2:1-13*)

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# Lutheran World Federation Sunday

(October 2, 2005)

by Kathy Magnus  
The Lutheran World Federation (LWF)

■■■■■ IT IS OLIVE HARVEST TIME on the rocky hillsides of the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. Volunteers and paid workers are pulling the olives from the branches of young and hundred-year-old trees. Two thousand years ago Jesus spent countless hours here, overlooking what is now the Old City of Jerusalem and making prophecies that would change the world. He would have been well acquainted with this particular hillside and the age-old methods of hand picking the olives.

Today this rocky hillside is also home to Augusta Victoria Hospital, which since 1950 has been owned and operated by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). The hospital serves the Palestinian community, caring primarily for refugees residing in the West Bank. No one is denied treatment, as the hospital does not discriminate based on race, nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender, or ability to pay. Each year LWF harvests and presses olives from the 800 trees on its property. Some of the oil is used in the hospital kitchen, while the rest is made available to visitors and friends in hand-blown bottles made by Palestinian artisans using recycled glass.

This Sunday is Lutheran World Federation Sunday in the ELCA. Our ministry together includes not only a hospital on the ancient Mount of Olives, but clean water projects, evangelism training, farming techniques, ecumenical relationships, grain banks, theological education, Bible school curriculum, literacy training, HIV/AIDS workers, and emergency relief. We gather as 66 million Lutherans to make a difference.

We go in Jesus' name, for the healing of the world!  
(Inspired by *the day's lessons*)

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# The 21st Sunday after Pentecost

(October 9, 2005 - Proper 23)

*by Andrew Willis*

*Division for Global Mission*

■ A NORMAL DAY day in Jerusalem's Old City: church bells and prayer calls mixed with the shouts of bakers selling bread, vendors selling vegetables, and the bustle of working people, wanderers, and tourists crowding the narrow stone streets. On this otherwise ordinary Friday, however, an extraordinary event was taking place: a local Christian organization had coordinated a trip to Jerusalem for Palestinian Christian students from nearby West Bank schools, including the four schools administered by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL).

Though they traveled no more than five or ten miles from their homes, this excursion was no everyday field trip for these Palestinian students. Jerusalem, an integral part of both the religious and political identity of the Palestinian people, is swiftly becoming isolated from the West Bank. A complex system of checkpoints and roadblocks control the movement of Palestinians in and out of the Jerusalem area, and a separation wall is further isolating Palestinians from the city, as well as from family, land, and necessary health and social services. Over 1,000 Palestinian Christian students—fifteen to sixteen years old—traveled the few miles to their holy city that day; I later found out that for most, it was the very first time they'd been able to visit.

The people of the ELCJHL know the importance of rejoicing always, even in times of despair. Living and worshipping in a place where injustice and oppression are a part of daily life, they know the depth of God's love and the triumph of his victory over sin and death even when life is almost unbearably difficult. The promises of God are with us always; we would do well to follow the example of the ELCJHL and rejoice in God's love in this day and in all days.

*(Inspired by Isaiah 25: 9)*

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# The 22nd Sunday after Pentecost

(October 16, 2005 - Proper 24)

*by David Novak*

*ELCA Foundation*

■ GERALD LIVED ON A SMALL FARM in Missouri.

At 63, he had never married and had no close family. When I visited, I noticed wallpaper peeling off the walls ... a single light bulb hanging from the ceiling ... a small black-and-white TV with a broken antenna. Diabetes had cost Gerald part of his left leg and his right foot, and soon it would destroy his eyesight. Gerald's dog had died ten days before my visit.

Ignoring his difficulties, Gerald focused on a newsletter from the residential care facility for abused children where I served. "I see Tony plays basketball. Can you tell me about Tony? Angelina likes to sing. David, can you tell me about Angelina?"

Gerald's obvious health needs and generous spirit touched my heart. I thought of ways I might help. I asked a retired pastor friend of mine to visit occasionally, and researched bus routes to local medical facilities. Since I was a fundraiser, I also sent Gerald information about our charitable gift annuities.

I visited Gerald a few more times. After his death, I got a call from a bank in Kirksville. Gerald had named us as beneficiary of some CDs. Then a second bank in Kirksville called. More CDs. Then the bank in Milan called, and then the bank in Green City. Gerald had given virtually all he had to children in need.

"Whose image is on the coin?" Jesus asks. God's image is upon us all and on everything that surrounds us. It certainly was on Gerald. When his time on earth drew to a close, I am confident he heard Jesus say, "Gerald, this is a beautiful thing you have done for me."

*(Inspired by Matthew 22:15-22)*

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# The 23rd Sunday after Pentecost

(October 25, 2005 - Proper 25)

by *Becky Sorenson*  
*Lutheran Student Movement*

■ GOD CALLS EACH OF US to love our neighbor, but for many people in the world this is a calling that is much easier said than done. We're forced to think about the question—Who *is* my neighbor?

Thankfully, I've had many opportunities in my life to see that *everyone* is my neighbor. High school service projects took me from the poorer parts of my own hometown to Appalachia, where I learned that "neighbor" didn't simply refer to the people who lived next door to me, or even in the same city as me. Then, while studying at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities I was fortunate enough to travel twice to Tanzania, East Africa, with my Lutheran campus ministry. Talk about the opportunity of a lifetime! I was shocked that going so far from home actually made the world feel like a much smaller place. It doesn't matter where we are, or how much money we have, we're still all neighbors.

This year, thanks to grants from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans, college students around the country are exploring this question of "Who is my neighbor?" by participating in service-learning projects. The students will not just be *doing*, they will be *learning* by doing. They will be put in places and situations that many of them have never been in before. They will learn that a "service project" entails much more than going to a community and just helping *them*. I'm sure these service-learning projects will have a similar effect on these students as mine did on me. They will feel called to embrace God's commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself."

(*Inspired by Matthew 22:34-46*)

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# Reformation Day

(October 30, 2005 )

by *Michael Root*  
*Department for Ecumenical Affairs*

■ THE HERITAGE OF THE REFORMATION is not just a witness to our justification by grace through faith for the sake of Jesus Christ. The Reformation also bequeathed us the lamentable division of the Church. The last 50 years have seen great strides toward a deeper agreement in the gospel between Lutherans and Roman Catholics, none more important than the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) signed by Roman Catholic and Lutheran church leaders on Reformation Day, 1999.

And yet, this event almost did not occur. In the summer of 1998, the Vatican released an endorsement of the JDDJ so qualified and limited that the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) stated that a joint signing ceremony would be impossible. Testy meetings followed; tempers were tried. In the meantime, Johannes Hanselmann, the retired bishop of the Lutheran Church of Bavaria and former president of the LWF, met privately with his old friend, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, vacationing in Germany. Each called in a theologian to help out and, together, the four produced the first draft of what became the Annex to the JDDJ, ironing out small difficulties. This private initiative created some perplexity, but it was a crucial step toward the affirmation of the consensus.

The path toward unity in the truth is not an easy one; we must be on the lookout for initiatives of the Spirit. Cardinal Ratzinger is now Pope Benedict XVI. On this Reformation Day, we should pray for impulses toward a shared understanding of the gospel, both within our own church and among our sisters and brothers in Christ.

(*Inspired by the day's lessons*)

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## All Saints Sunday (November 6, 2005)

*by Yutaka Kishino  
Division for Outreach*

GLORY LUTHERAN CHURCH started as a satellite ministry of Taiwanese Lutheran Church housed at St. Mark Lutheran Church, San Diego.

The Pacifica Synod granted the status of Synodically Authorized Worshipping Community to this developing Chinese outreach ministry, but it does not have a full-time pastor. Instead, lay worker Betty Chen trains others to lead Bible study and, once a month, one of the pastors from St. Mark administers the sacraments. In the last two and a half years 25 new Christians have been baptized at Glory Lutheran and 65 people regularly attend worship services.

When Pastor Jan Brosen preached at Glory Lutheran for the first time, someone told her: “You are a good witness for abortion.” When the pastor, born with cerebral palsy, hesitatingly asked, “Pardon me?” the statement was repeated, and this clarification added: “In our culture, a person like you would have been aborted. But it’s a good thing you weren’t, or the church would be without a good pastor and a great leader!”

The relationship between Pastor Jan and Glory Lutheran continues to be a positive one. This Easter she baptized six adults and four children. One by one they knelt beside her on a cushion and she said to each, “Child of God, I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”

Ten new saints were added to the family of God! And Pastor Jan, another saint, was there to affirm the mystery—Happy are those who share the joys and burdens of each other. They are indeed the saints of God!

*(Inspired by Matthew 5:1-12)*

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## The 26th Sunday after Pentecost (November 13, 2005 - Proper 28)

*by Craig Settlage  
Division for Ministry*

“ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER and build up each other.” –1 Thessalonians 5:11

One of the privileges of serving on the churchwide staff of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is being invited to be the churchwide representative at a synod assembly. Over the years I have attended ELCA synod assemblies from coast to coast. Each synod has its own way of conducting a assembly, and each year there are particular concerns that emerge during the discussion and debate on memorials and resolutions. At times these debates become quite intense, and it is the role of the churchwide representative to respond to questions regarding a synod action and the churchwide expression of the ELCA. Sometimes such discussion can indicate what some perceive to be a divide between their particular place of ministry and the ELCA churchwide offices in Chicago.

However, what is far more prevalent is the gratitude for the shared ministries carried out by the churchwide expression with and on behalf of the congregations and synods of this church. Again and again the voting members of ELCA synod assemblies will struggle with the financial challenges facing their synod, and then commit to continuing the mission support that comes from the synod for such churchwide ministries.

The ELCA is an embodiment of what Apostle Paul expresses in the second lesson for today. We live in an anxious age where there is need for the ministry of the gospel. We need each other as partners in that ministry and thus his exhortation is important: “Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.” Baptized member, congregation, synod and churchwide—we are all “one in mission.” Thanks be to God.

*(Inspired by 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11)*

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# The Reign of Christ

(November 20, 2005 - Proper 29)

*by Roger Willer*  
*Division for Church in Society*

■ HOW BIG IS YOUR GOD? One danger in the otherwise salutary Lutheran emphasis on God being “for us” in Christ is that our thinking about God can become limited. God becomes not much bigger than the relationship between Jesus and me. Against this tendency, the breath-taking advances of scientific knowledge can crack open an experience of humility and awe before God. Scientists and science teachers in our congregations can enrich our thinking with this knowledge.

One example from contemporary scientific understanding: if the 14 or so billion years since the big bang were placed into 14 encyclopedia-like books, the time since Christ would include only the last letter of the last sentence of the last page of the last book. Yet God’s work and Christ’s reign includes all the rest of those 14 volumes of space-time. Mind-bending? Yes, but certainly the writer of Ephesians meant nothing less than this when he wrote that God put his power to work in Christ in raising him from the dead and putting “all things under his feet.” Whether it is the mind-bending immensity of space-time, the confounding complexity of the human brain, or the never-ending variety of species created through evolution, science broadens our understanding of “all things under his feet.”

The ELCA Alliance for Faith, Science, and Technology assists the ELCA in carrying-out its mission in this age of science. The Alliance is a group of scientists and others dedicated to, among other things, reminding us how big, how confounding, how wonder-full, how truly awesome is the Spirit whose power holds the universe together and is yet “for us” in Christ. How big is your God?

*(Inspired by Ephesians 1:15-23)*

These stories are examples of ELCA churchwide ministries suggested by the pericopes for the 15th Sunday after Pentecost through Reign of Christ Sunday (Cycle A). **Pericope Partners** stories are available for free download at [www.elca.org/pericope](http://www.elca.org/pericope)

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