

# Pericope

## PARTNERS

Advent and Christmas 2006  
Epiphany 2007

**Pericope Partners** are short stories that connect the ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America with weekly lectionary readings. This resource reflects the partnership we share as a whole church, based on the Revised Common Lectionary Readings Cycle C pericopes for the First Sunday of Advent through Transfiguration of Our Lord (Dec. 3, 2006 – Feb. 18, 2007).

**Pericope Partners** vignettes are suitable for use in sermons, bulletins, or newsletters. They may be downloaded from [www.elca.org/pericope](http://www.elca.org/pericope) and copied for congregational use. Print copies are available upon request by calling 800/638-3522.

### First Sunday of Advent (December 3, 2006)

by Carol Schersten LaHurd  
*Global Mission*

Novels and movies about the end of the world, online prophecy clubs, coffee mugs depicting the rapture: these are ways some American Christians respond to biblical predictions and global conflicts.

But our Lutheran companions around the world take a different approach.

On a sunny December morning in Sao Leopoldo, Brazil, 20 young people were being confirmed. Their pastor urged them to begin now to plan how they would help build a better world. He concluded by quoting Martin Luther: “If I knew that tomorrow the world would end, I would plant an apple tree today.”

The next summer in a Lutheran church in the West Bank, a Palestinian pastor echoed these words of Luther. He talked about planting not apple seeds, but seeds of understanding among Israeli Jews and Palestinian Muslims and Christians.

Our Palestinian Christian sisters and brothers live with danger and fear, as do many Israelis, but they also live under extreme economic hardships and constant restrictions on their movement, restrictions that divide them from work and school, medical care, church services, and even family members.

Yet Palestinian Christians — these “living stones” of the Holy Land — live as witnesses for democracy, provide schools and clinics for all Palestinians, and model positive interfaith relations. They look forward not to a violent Armageddon, but to the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s words, “In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety.”

*(Inspired by Jeremiah 33:14–16, Luke 21:25–26)*

### Second Sunday of Advent (December 10, 2006)

by Rosemary Dyson  
*Multicultural Ministries*

An ELCA congregation council member asks, “Why doesn’t the racial and cultural makeup of my church resemble my workplace or my children’s schools?” ELCA congregations, synods, and churchwide units and sections are asking the same question: Why is Sunday still the most segregated time of the week in ELCA congregations?

In many ways the staff of Multicultural Ministries, a program unit of the ELCA churchwide organization, can identify with John the Baptist. We truly are “the voice in the wilderness” as we engage in the ministry of justice, equal partnership, and reconciliation in a church that is struggling to welcome all of God’s people.

The ELCA lifts up strategies for five ethnic-specific ministries: Arab and Middle Eastern; Latino; American Indian and Alaska Native; African descent; and Asian and Pacific Islander. These strategies give the whole church an opportunity to become more diverse and multicultural.

The resource *Troubling the Water for the Healing of the Church: A Journey for White Christians from Privilege to Partnership* is designed for and by White people to provide tools to break the cycle of socialization that feeds into a racially exclusive church.

*One Body, Many Members: A Journey for Congregations Reaching Across Cultures, Race and Class* is a Web-based resource that helps ELCA members welcome people in the community whose race, culture, or class is different.

We’re preparing the way for the ELCA to be a church that lives out Jesus’ Great Commission. Will you join us?  
*(Inspired by Mark 7:24–37)*

---

## Third Sunday of Advent (December 17, 2006)

*by Celene Welch  
Campus Ministry*

My first year as a campus pastor I served at a church-related school in Texas. The University Ministries office sent a packet to incoming students, including letters from denominational ministries. My letter went to all self-identified Lutheran students.

Among the students who were active from the first gathering of Lutheran campus ministry, one of them came to me and told me her story. Her mother immigrated from Germany and her family had been Lutheran for generations. Everyone had been baptized in the Lutheran church, but none had been confirmed in decades. She decided that she wanted to be confirmed.

During her high school years she had felt disconnected from God, but had visited different churches with her friends. When she received my letter she thought, “Maybe this would be a good time to explore my Lutheran heritage and find out if it’s really right for me.”

The next semester this young woman was confirmed. That summer she worked in Lutheran outdoor ministry, including confirmation camp. She volunteered with the youth at a local Lutheran congregation and she was one of two Lutheran students who led an ecumenical Bible study for two years — “the best experience I’ve had in all of college.”

She graduated with honors and was commissioned in the Air Force. The next year she began medical school. God used a single letter — and Lutheran campus ministry — to bring this young woman to her spiritual home, which prepared her for a lifetime of witness to the grace of God.

*(Inspired by Zephaniah 3:14–20)*

---

## Fourth Sunday of Advent (December 24, 2006)

*by John Stumme  
Church in Society*

In the original planning for an ELCA social statement on education, not much attention was given to Christian education in the home and congregation. After all, this was a social statement that deals with issues in society.

The members of the ELCA Task Force on Education had a different idea. When they met for the first time, they insisted that Christian education should be a vital part of the social statement. How can we address education in society, they asked, if we do not address education in the faith in our homes and congregations? If we do not nurture children in the faith from an early age, what will happen to the church in the future?

How we welcome children into life and into the community of faith has a lasting impact on their life and faith. It also says a great deal about who we are.

The excitement and joy of Elizabeth and Mary in awaiting the birth of Jesus, the Messiah and Savior, are an example for us and our welcoming of children. Delight in their presence is the beginning point for teaching and learning from our children. That delight grows out of humble and grateful faith.

The task force is right, and so the proposed social statement on education reminds us both of our responsibility for educating all in our society in the skills for living and for educating the baptized in the faith.

*(Inspired by Luke 1:39–45 [46–55])*

## **Nativity of Our Lord** **(December 25, 2006)**

*by Russell Siler*  
*Global Mission*

The majesty of a Christmas Eve service in Bethlehem, just yards from the spot where tradition tells us Jesus was born, has melted into morning light for our congregation in Jerusalem. At St. John's Chapel in the complex of the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, people gather just yards from the spot where Jesus died and where he rose to new life!

Every day in the life of the English-speaking congregation brings new faces to the community. Christmas Day magnifies that pattern as pilgrims, tourists, and visitors to Jerusalem seek something of the family celebration they have left thousands of miles behind. Students and humanitarian workers join voices with teachers and travelers. Not one person leaves the Eucharist without others making certain that all are welcome to continue the sharing in some way with their loved ones.

The joy is real; the face of Christ is an ordinary Jerusalem dweller. Yet a shadow hovers over the warmth and elation. The Palestinian Christians we see throughout our work week will not be joining their extended families for quiet holiday celebrations because the human-fabricated barriers between the town where Christ was born and the city where he died are often closed to local people without the proper permits. So the intercessions on this blessed day, as on all others, include heartfelt petitions that God's grace and love will overwhelm the walls that divide God's people: that we will see in the midst of pain the Word that "became flesh and lived among us."

*(Inspired by John 1:1-14)*

## **First Sunday of Christmas** **(December 31, 2006)**

*by Kathryn Sime*  
*ELCA World Hunger*

Joyce proudly met us at the entrance to her home in Lyonatide, Uganda. Over 80 years old, Joyce cares for her daughter's three sons. The children's parents both died of AIDS years ago. At first the family lived in a poorly constructed house. "During the rainy season, I gathered the children in a corner and held them so it wouldn't rain on them!" With few resources of her own, Joyce did her best to take care of her young grandsons.

Joyce found help, thanks to your gifts to ELCA World Hunger Appeal and Stand With Africa. Through our partners Lutheran World Relief and the Lutheran World Federation, Joyce received help to rebuild her house, necessary household items, and a water tank and rain water catchment system. By conserving water more efficiently, the family can manage the challenges of seasonal drought more effectively.

Grandson Alex is grateful for the support from ELCA World Hunger partners. "We don't have parents, but as we are in this comfortable house, we have hope for the future," he told us. "We are very grateful because life has improved."

Joyce protected her grandsons by holding them in her arms, keeping them safe in the storms. When Jesus disappeared from his home, Mary's fears and anxieties about her son's safety were very real. God's love shared in abundance promises hope for all children of God. Like Joyce's embrace, our God-given gifts offer a safe haven from the storms of hunger and poverty.

*(Inspired by Luke 2:41-52)*

---

## Epiphany of Our Lord (January 6, 2007)

by Kevin Anderson  
*Worship and Liturgical Resources*

My congregation, like many others, recently began using *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. We are just starting to explore this new book of worship and discovering it is a gift to today's church. It is a treasure chest, storing gems from the past, bearing gifts from many cultures, containing creative new offerings, all paying homage to the Christ child. This treasure we have in worship has a purpose — it points to something more precious. Like a star it leads us to the one we worship and adore, bearing witness to Christ in our midst.

In our worship we experience God's presence among us in bread and wine, water and Word, confession and forgiveness, community and song. But to really live in this mysterious presence of Christ we must go about the messy business of breaking bread, tasting wine, touching water, hearing the Word, serving the poor, humbling our hearts, loving our enemies. This is the heart of worship. Worship sends us out to be Christ's presence for one another. Our lives are the treasure we offer in praise to God and service to others.

On this Epiphany day and in the weeks to come, let us pray that worship leads us to become Christ's light of justice and peace shining in the dark places of our world. Next time you leave worship, think about what it means to go in peace, serve the Lord, share the good news, remember the poor. And never forget — Christ is with you. Thanks be to God!

*(Inspired today's readings)*

---

## The Baptism of Our Lord (January 7, 2007)

by Joy McDonald Colvet  
*Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago*

We began at the top of the hill where the open-air church building stands and processed down the dusty road in powerful heat. People carried umbrellas as protection from the intense sunlight and we sang hymns and songs along the way. We walked through the harvested cane field and went to the community's river, gathering next to those doing laundry. A few men of the community posted themselves as sentinels around the group to keep watch. In the midst of worship, three pastors gathered up some of that gushing water and poured it over the heads of 13 young people in the community, one at a time, saying "I baptize you *en el nombre del Padre, y del Hijo, y del Espíritu Santo*." Salt was put on their tongues. "You are the salt of the earth." A baptismal candle was shared with each one, "The light of the world has called you to be light." Smiling faces, wet heads, and shining eyes — that's what I witnessed with Heroes of the Faith, a Lutheran congregation in El Salvador.

Because we are a global church, we gather as church with a community that is much broader than our particular congregational, vocational or educational context.

Wherever we gather with the assembly to witness baptism, to remember our baptism, to wade in the waters, we gather with sons from far away and daughters from the end of the earth. We gather as one body because of God who promises, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you."

*(Inspired by Luke 3:15–17, 21–22)*

## Second Sunday after the Epiphany (January 14, 2007)

by Wendy Blanck  
*Communication Services*

It was a wonderful concept. An interfaith group of churches would provide emergency shelter, food, and hospitality for homeless guests. Each church would serve as host one night a week.

Several ELCA congregations in the Chicago suburbs participated in the PADS (Public Action to Deliver Shelter) program, which began with much enthusiasm. Bedding and supplies for serving meals were purchased. Volunteers were enlisted, 20 a night for each site and another dozen or more to provide dinner, breakfast, and a sack lunch. Men, women, and children who otherwise might have spent the cold winter months on the streets now had a warm and welcoming place to sleep.

But after a few years a variety of problems threatened to shut down the program. The organization was deeply in debt. In an effort to save this important ministry for the homeless, lay leaders from the participating congregations gathered on a Sunday afternoon in a chapel basement while a worship service took place in the room above.

For a short time there was disagreement about how to proceed but soon one person after another offered their gifts of service. Some would raise funds, some would work on hiring a new case worker, some would look for new office space, some would make key contacts in the community, and all would pray.

As the discussion took place music from the worship service flowed into the room — “for thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory” — and the people of God from many different churches with many different gifts came together to do the work of Christ.

*(Inspired by 1 Corinthians 12:1–11)*

## Third Sunday after the Epiphany (January 21, 2007)

by Rebecca Sorenson  
*Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations*

I am fortunate to be both a seminary student and an intern at the ELCA churchwide office. But juggling homework, a job, church, friends, and family is a daily challenge. It’s easy to think that I’m alone in this endeavor, or that my actions will not result in the desired outcome.

But I am not alone. I am part of the bigger body of Christ. What more reassuring words can I ask for?

As an intern for Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations, I see (and help facilitate) how the ELCA fosters relationships with our brothers and sisters of other denominations and faiths. One exciting example is our work on an online resource, *Windows for Understanding: Jewish-Muslim-Lutheran Relations*. This resource challenges readers to explore faith in a new way, learn what others believe, overcome confusion, and build relationships among Jews, Muslims, and Lutherans.

We also connect ELCA members with brothers and sisters of other faiths and denominational backgrounds through educational events. College students have just returned from two weeks of studying the effects of globalization on ecumenism at the Ecumenical Institute in Geneva. At the end of January ecumenical partners from across the country will meet in Washington, D.C. at the National Workshop on Christian Unity to share ideas, create networks, and celebrate unity.

As we take part in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity this week, let us remember in our prayers our ecumenical and interreligious partners. May we all be cultivators of hope and unity in a world that needs both.

*(Inspired by 1 Corinthians 12:12–31)*

## Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany (January 28, 2007)

by Mark Holman  
*Lutheran Services in America*

Frederick Buechner, Presbyterian minister and author, wrote: “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet” (*Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC*).

Andrew Okworo, certified nursing assistant, finds this place of integration, this place of ministry, as he provides care and compassion for residents of the dementia unit at Martin Luther Manor, a skilled nursing facility in Bloomington, Minn. Andrew speaks of his joy in serving others: “When they have lost their sight, I am their eyes. Now I am an extension of their feet, their eyes, their hearing and their hands. We are here to lift up one another.”

While these words from St. Paul may be most frequently used in the context of weddings, they also apply to those who exercise their vocation with vulnerable adults. “Love is patient; love is kind. . . . It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.”

This very moment, as you hear those familiar words, there are thousands of committed workers serving through ELCA-affiliated nursing homes and homes for people with developmental disabilities. In such ministry contexts — operating in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and the Virgin Islands — people exercise their faith at the intersection of their deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger.

As you settle down for sleep tonight, be mindful of Andrew and so many others like him who remain alert through the darkness that others may rest safely and securely.

*(Inspired by 1 Corinthians 13:4–8)*

## Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany (February 4, 2007)

by Beth Lewis  
*Augsburg Fortress Publishers*

I was sure that I was the only one on the sixth floor of Augsburg Fortress Publishers office at a few minutes past 9 p.m. Then I heard laughter coming from a cubicle not far away.

I walked toward the sound to find out who else was working so late. Two members of our *Akaloo.org* Web design team were sitting totally engrossed in front of a computer monitor.

“Listen to this,” Chris said as soon as I entered. He had a brightly colored, cartoon-like picture on his computer screen. The perspective was from inside a car driving through a town. As he moved the onscreen pointer over a church at the side of the road, the bells chimed. As he moved the mouse pointer over the windshield, we heard rain and the slap of windshield wipers.

“Show her the rearview mirror!” laughed Linda. Moving the mouse over the mirror showed and let me hear a crying baby firmly buckled into a car seat.

What were Chris and Linda from the Augsburg Fortress media ministry team doing?

They were fishing for people for Jesus.

Their ministry is to build dynamic faith formation resources that invite adults, teens, and children to have fun while learning how to be disciples in the twenty-first century. Some of that work includes creating Web sites for use in congregations and at home. These Web sites help people of all ages learn about the Bible, God, the church, and living our faith in service to the world.

*(Inspired by Luke 5:1–11)*

## Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany (February 11, 2007)

by Miriam Schmidt  
Global Mission

Guyana, “the land of many waters,” is also a land of tropical heat. The sun beats down on the heads of the Guyanese along with fear of crime, discontent with the country’s economy, and the seeming inevitability of migration. Many born in Guyana will not remain here.

I feel truly blessed as an ELCA Horizon international intern in Guyana to be meeting so many who have planted themselves in this rich soil and are “here to stay.” The people of Transfiguration Parish in East Canje, Berbice, exhibit a powerful trust in God and an ability to hold each other up. The people daily drink in the life-giving waters of baptism and the promise of abundant life in the most unexpected places. These faithful ones do not fear when the heat comes as it does every day in Guyana. Their leaves remain green.

Recently, the women’s fellowship group met to plant trees in the churchyard. Together, we uprooted old plants, pruned overgrown branches, and planted baby pine trees. Hands covered in mud, we shared joys and sorrows, frustrations and laughter. As darkness fell and the work was not yet done, the group leader called out confidently, “Let’s come back tomorrow, ladies, and finish the job.” Sure enough, everyone returned the next day to be stewards of their property while caring for one another.

No doubt Transfiguration Parish will not cease to bear fruit. As their intern, I count myself rich to be fed and watered in this particular garden.

*(Inspired by Jeremiah 17:5–10 and Psalm 1)*

## Transfiguration of Our Lord (February 18, 2007)

by Shenandoah Gale  
Office of the Presiding Bishop

The ministry of Luther Place Memorial Church in Washington, D.C. is grounded in God’s call to hospitality, justice, and community. For example, N Street Village offers hospitality to women moving from homelessness to self-sufficiency. Lutheran Volunteer Corps (LVC) offers a year of simple urban living in community while working for justice in community-based organizations.

In 1996 the people of these three organizations asked themselves: “What does it mean that while we profess hospitality, justice, and community, our ministry staff and volunteers are primarily white and those who receive ministry services are primarily people of color? In our organizational policies, practices and procedures how do we unintentionally perpetuate systemic racism rather than God’s invitation to community?”

To address their questions, Whites in the group learned about White identity and the history of United States race-based systems of oppression. People of color in the group addressed internalized racial oppression. Together the Luther Place community creates equitable hospitality.

Similarly, ELCA congregations, synods, partners and the churchwide organization continue to engage in conversations about identity, accountability, and racism. The ELCA Anti-racism program, located in the Office of the Presiding Bishop, exists to accompany the church through trainings, gatherings, and resource sharing. As a 98 percent White church in an increasingly multicultural world, how shall we live into God’s promise of an anti-racist, multicultural community of faith?

*(Inspired by today’s readings)*

**Pericope Partners**, available for download at [elca.org/pericope](http://elca.org/pericope), are examples of ELCA churchwide ministries suggested by the weekly lectionary readings for the First Sunday of Advent through Transfiguration of Our Lord (Cycle C). Send your comments to **Pericope Partners**, ELCA Communication Services, 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631, or e-mail the editor at [ben.mcdonaldcoltvet@elca.org](mailto:ben.mcdonaldcoltvet@elca.org)

Scripture quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright ©1989 by the Division for Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA and used by permission.

©2006 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
Produced by ELCA Communication Services  
8765 West Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631 800/638-3522  
Photocopy permission granted to ELCA congregations.

