



How Lutherans respond to international disasters

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In 1998 Hurricane Mitch destroyed the small village of Aquespalapa, Nicaragua.

Torrential rains and flood waters engulfed every building except a warehouse used to store chemical pesticides. For three days, village residents huddled on its roof as their homes, belongings, and carcasses of their cattle floated by.

Seven years later, Aquespalapa has recovered from the devastation of Hurricane Mitch. Wooden homes swept away by the flood have been replaced by stronger, concrete houses. A new well provides a secure source of clean drinking water.

Most of these transformations took place through the work of the Lutheran Church in Nicaragua, which received ELCA disaster funds. "The institution that helped us rebuild our homes, replace our animals, and replant our crops was the Lutheran church," says a resident. "The church was God's instrument for our salvation and that's something we will never forget."

To remember, the village worships weekly in the former warehouse—now Iglesia Luterana de Nicaragua Fe y Esperanza (Faith and Hope Nicaraguan Lutheran Church). "We gather here to worship," says the pastor, "because it was on the roof of this very building that God saved all of us."

A long-term, coordinated response

Like the South Asian tsunami, Hurricane Mitch affected thousands of people in several countries. ELCA members responded generously, giving \$2.3 million to the ELCA International Disaster Response Appeal.

ELCA disaster funds were distributed through a number of channels: Lutheran World Relief, Church World Service, Action by Churches Together, and local companion churches like the Lutheran Church in Nicaragua. Some funds helped provide desperately needed food, medicine, drinking water, and emergency shelter. Others supported projects that restored Central America's infrastructure and economy. In Nicaragua, for example, ELCA funds helped the Lutheran church dig 300 wells and supply seeds and equipment to farmers.

In South Asia, multiple partners will again ensure that ELCA donations make a difference where it counts. Lutheran World

Relief, a trusted partner of the ELCA and The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, is working with community-based organizations and will receive up to half the total South Asian tsunami dollars raised through ELCA International Disaster Appeal.

Action by Churches Together (ACT), a global alliance created by the World Council of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation, facilitates the disaster response of Protestant and Orthodox churches throughout the world. In South Asia, ACT will make sure that aid is effective and non-duplicating by evaluating requests, coordinating responses, and overseeing funding flows.

Church World Service, the Lutheran World Federation, and LWF member churches will also receive ELCA funds. Direct grants from the ELCA have already enabled the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches of India (UELICI) to begin implementing an 18-month plan for relief and recovery that focuses on the coastal areas of Tamilnadu. For now, Indian churches are focusing on feeding affected people, and cleaning and disinfecting areas. Ultimately, the UELICI plans to rehabilitate wells and drinking water sources destroyed by the tidal surges, and help fishing communities purchase boats.

Church versus government aid

When governments and groups like the Red Cross give millions to fund recovery efforts, are ELCA funds needed?

Yes, says Dr. Belletech Deressa, director, ELCA International Development and Disaster Response, "Church-funded recovery efforts reach people who are in need—often those who are very poor—and are not receiving the resources they need to recover. The church will always be there with the people, regardless of their politics, ideology, or religion."

ELCA funds also help cover pastoral care and counseling—an aspect of disaster recovery that is overlooked by some



Tranquebar, India. Volunteers at the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India Tsunami Relief and Rehabilitation Coordination office help children "return to normalcy" by sewing school uniforms.

secular organizations.

"After a disaster, there is an immediate need for people to tell their stories to someone who will listen," says the Rev. Rafael Malpica Padilla, executive director of the ELCA Division for Global Mission. "Pastors and lay people can also help victims struggle with the question, 'why, God, why?' Our partners present the love of God through every stage of the disaster, from funerals to rebuilding."

"The best way to make an impact after a disaster is not to rush into a region, but to work with partners who are already on the ground," says Dr. Deressa. "Our solid partnerships with companion churches, agencies, and organizations mean that our dollars go to work immediately, and continue to make a difference for years."

Staying involved in disasters

- It will take years to rebuild lives and communities in South Asia. Contribute to the ELCA International Disaster Response Appeal by calling 800/638-3522 or visiting www.elca.org/disaster

- Stay informed. Track relief efforts at www.elca.org/disaster/sasiatsunami.html

- Strengthen your current companion synod relationships. You may need one another in the next natural disaster! If you don't know your synod's companion, visit www.elca.org/companionsynod

- Engage and support those affected by the tsunami through prayer and worship. Find stories and reports posted on the ELCA, LWR, and LWF Web sites and use them in your congregation newsletter.

Companion synod strengthens aid for tsunami relief

Last summer, Indonesian pastor Nelson Siregar helped lead a workshop on Muslim/Christian relationships at the Indiana-Kentucky Synod Assembly. Today the Rev. Siregar is leading the Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (HKBP) church's tsunami relief efforts.

"Our whole synod has been praying for our sisters and brothers in Indonesia," says the Rev. William O. Gafkjen of the Indiana-Kentucky Synod. "Our companion synod relationship with HKBP means we have faces to go with names."

Visits, regular correspondence,



(left to right) The Rev. Balosan Rajagukguk, bishop of the HKBP district adjacent to Aceh, the Rev. Bill Gafkjen, assistant to the bishop of the ELCA Indiana-Kentucky Synod, and the Rev. Nelson Siregar, who is leading the HKBP's tsunami relief efforts.

prayers, and special worship services have helped connect Indiana-Kentucky's 226 congregations with the 2,800 congregations of HKBP, the largest Protestant denomination in Indonesia. Through regular e-mails and cell phone text mes-

sages from Indonesia, Indiana-Kentucky Lutherans have followed the church's initial efforts to aid homeless and orphaned HKBP members in Banda Aceh. Funds raised by the synod's

"HKBP Love Offering" are designated for HKBP's relief account. "This is why the ELCA has companion synods," says Gafkjen. "Our relationship with folks gives us an excellent foundation to stand on as we walk together for the long haul."

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Ideas for 50 days of Easter and Feast of Pentecost

The liturgical year that we have inherited with its rhythms, rites, songs, and sights, is indeed treasured by many of us who work and worship in the church. The reality, however, is that our cultural



calendar, shaped largely by school schedules and secular holidays, often bumps into our liturgical festivities. The challenge with Easter is that it is a festival that lasts for 50 days. Anyone working

with the church's calendar has read and heard this many times, but soon realizes that as semesters end and Memorial Day looms nearer, the chance of keeping the choir together and the Easter spirits high through the great feast of Pentecost is daunting, if not impossible.

This is an excellent year to step up to the challenge. Because Easter falls so early in the calendar (March 27), the entire 50 days—including the great feast of Pentecost—will occur before Memorial Day. Working with pastors, musicians, artists, worship committees, and lay leaders of all sorts, consider putting special attention into the 50 days that stand at the heart of our Christian life.

The Easter season

Easter is a season of baptismal living. On the Sundays of Easter, in place of the usual Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness, consider using the Renewing Worship option for "Thanksgiving for Baptism." (See *Holy Communion and Related Rites* page 8; available at www.renewingworship.org/resources/communion/download.html)

Easter is a season of endless Alleluias. Pay special attention in your musical planning to include as many Alleluias as possible. The Gospel Acclamation would

be an especially important time to "let it all out." Check out some of the new possibilities in the Renewing Worship *Holy Communion and Related Rites* volume with their varied accompaniments. Dress them up with bells, color, and movement. Explore the many Easter hymns with Alleluia refrains. The refrain could be used alone at various times in the liturgy to provide an Easter exclamation point. There are numerous choir anthems composed solely around the word Alleluia (repeated many times). Consider Randall Thompson, J.S. Bach, Calvin Hampton and more. These anthems could make glorious Gospel processions or offerings.

Festivals of the church, including Easter, usually have white as the primary liturgical color. How might the white of Easter be dressed up this year, clearly making it the "queen of feasts"? Could gold or other bright spring colors be added to the usual white? Might lilies be supplemented with yellow daffodils or multi-colored tulips?

The Day of Pentecost

Tongues of flame appeared as a sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, red is the energetic color for this day. Consider creating red banners or using poles with red streamers in procession. Sunday school classes could easily contribute to such a project. Invite members of the congregation to wear red on that day. Put as much work into arranging for red flowers, such as geraniums or roses, as you did for poinsettias and lilies.

The reading from Acts tells us that God's Word was proclaimed in many languages. On that day, consider reading a portion of the Scripture in many languages, perhaps simultaneously. Be sure that the message is heard clearly and understood by all before launching into a cacophony of sound. This need not be done for an entire

reading. Perhaps the Gospel could be read entirely in English (or your congregation's primary language), then just a few verses repeated in many languages.

You may be surprised at how many languages may be known by the members of your congregation.

The Gospel speaks of Jesus "breathing" on the disciples as he gives them the Holy Spirit. Organ pipes and other instruments speak a breath in worship. How might air, wind, or breath, be experienced in a different way in worship on this day? Wind chimes or bells could be tied into banners or streamers. Be sure to instruct those who carry them to jiggle them slightly as they process to be sure they will be heard.

To further enhance the Pentecost experience, this would be an excellent day to have your congregation sing in a different language. For some people, this can be very uncomfortable and frustrating, so start slowly. "Veni, Sancte Spiritus" (Come, Holy Spirit, *With One Voice* #686) is a simple refrain in Latin (a neutral language), or try a song from Africa, such as "Wa, wa, wa Emimino" (Come, O Holy Spirit, Come, *With One Voice* #681). Either song could make an effective, quiet introduction to a rousing entrance hymn, allowing the procession of red streamers and bells (described above) to be experienced and heard by all before launching into the hymn.

Many other possible songs are available in the worship books of this church. The possibilities are endless. Plan to make this an extraordinary 50 days!

An excellent source for many more ideas is the annual planning guide *Sundays and Seasons 2005* (ISBN 0-8066-4674-8; \$35 plus shipping) available from Augsburg Fortress at 800/328-4648.

The latest on the Renewing Worship proposal

"The worship of the Christian assembly is at the heart of the church's identity and purpose." These words begin the draft of a proposal to come before the Churchwide Assembly in August. For five years, you have been reading on these pages and throughout many ELCA publications, about the Renewing Worship process. You have been studying the Principles for Worship and using them with your congregation, engaging them in conversation about the deep foundations of worship renewal. New hymns, songs, prayers, and rites have been sung, prayed, tested, and evaluated. Through all this advance work, you have prepared your congregation for the new book of worship and all the print and electronic resources that will be forthcoming.

Despite the excitement or anxiety that a new book of worship may cause, it is critical to remember that Renewing Wor-

ship is about far more than a book. It is about a future of ongoing renewal in this church. With new technologies and the increasingly diverse landscape in which we minister, the proposal is very different than we have known in previous generations.



Anyone concerned about the future of worship in the ELCA is encouraged to read the proposal. Go to the Web site and check it out for yourself. The first draft of a report on the Renewing Worship project was received by the ELCA Church Council in November. That document is available at www.renewingworship.org/about/proposal.html

You are encouraged to read the document carefully and to offer your constructive ideas and concerns before it proceeds to the Churchwide Assembly for approval. Instructions are given for the offering of your evaluations on the Web page.

New Bible study: No Experience Necessary

No Experience Necessary is a new adult Bible study from Augsburg Fortress in response to the need for biblical literacy across this church. Written by Kelly Fryer (author of *Reclaiming the "L" Word: Renewing the Church from Its Lutheran Core*, Augsburg Fortress, 2003), the study is a series of units with seven sessions each that empowers participants to open the Bible and read it for themselves. All participants—regardless of their Bible study experience—will encounter a Bible that is rich in story, meaning, and relevance that changes how they live each day.

Based on the need for interaction among today's learners, the study fosters fellowship and small-group discussion to set

people free to interpret the Bible together in ways that will transform their lives. Each session draws participants into the story of God's mission to bless the world and God's call to be a part of that adventure, encouraging participants to take part in order to cultivate a relationship between life, faith, and the Bible.

The series also takes into account the hectic lives of today's participants and has been planned intentionally around seven-week units. *No Experience Necessary* units are designed to be fresh for those who have done Bible study, and inviting for those who have not. To learn more, call Augsburg Fortress at 800/328-4648 or go to www.augsburgfortress.org

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Grace Matters brings new format to ELCA radio ministry

Known to many people for decades as *Lutheran Vespers*, the radio ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is raising a fresh new voice. In February, *Grace Matters* filled the airwaves with an exciting new name, host, and format. But the 30-minute weekly radio broadcast, featuring a Christ-centered message, celebrates its future with a well-grounded past.



The Rev. Peter W. Marty

Drawing on 58 years of quality Sunday broadcasts, the new name more accurately reflects the program content. *Grace Matters* is geared toward discovering how grace really matters in everyday life. Each program aims to meet listeners where they happen to be in their lives, but not leave them exactly as they were found.

The new host, the Rev. Peter W. Marty, is senior pastor at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Davenport, Iowa. Through the interpretive lens of parish pastor, Marty teaches about faith in this lively and resourceful program. He says, "There is nothing quite like grace.

It's one of the most bizarre things in the world. Like punching 3 + 3 into your calculator and coming up with 7, grace is that love of God that always adds up to more than we deserve."

Marty describes the new format as "a bit journalistic and a lot meditative," with personal interviews each week. Listeners

have the chance to get inside the heart and mind of interesting, faithful, and wise people. They'll hear exhilarations and achievements, as well as heartaches and sorrows. New music is also part of the production package.

Grace Matters is currently heard on 175 radio stations nationwide and around the globe, on the Web, and by CD subscription. You and your congregation can support this outreach ministry by placing the program on a local radio station, or promoting a local broadcast. To learn more about *Grace Matters*, the radio ministry of the ELCA, call 800/638-3522, ext. 2967, or go to the Web site at www.gracematters.org where you can also listen to the program online.



What you should know about video game violence

Video games have emerged as very popular entertainment, with 70 percent of children living in a home with at least one video game player and 33 percent have one in their bedrooms.

In 2003, \$7 billion was spent in the United States on video and computer games. Since the days of PacMan (a favorite video game to those now in their mid- to late 30s), video games have grown increasingly realistic and violent. Worse, they are often available to young teens whose parents don't understand what they are playing.

Several games are especially graphically violent. "Grand Theft Auto 3," for example, rewards players for stealing cars, assaulting police, and beating sex workers. Another version of this video game, "Grand Theft Auto: Vice City," calls for killing Haitians. This video earned \$260 million in its first year of release. The game "Carmageddon" has players run down pedestrians, including elderly women; completing all levels of this game requires killing 33,000 people. What parents do not realize is that games like these become more violent as players advance to new levels of the game, based on their improved scores.

The American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and the American Psychological Association have issued a joint statement on the impact of entertainment violence on children, saying that "exposure to violence in media...[and] video games...contribute[s] to aggressive behavior, desensitization to violence, nightmares and fear[s] of being harmed."

The two students responsible for the 1999 Columbine high school shooting and the 17-year-old Washington, D.C., sniper played video games featuring violence. In June 2003, two boys decided to shoot at trucks on Interstate 40 in Tennessee, just as in the video game "Grand Theft Auto 3."

The interactive entertainment industry has sales of \$10 billion annually, not including sales for game development, licensing, or hardware. The industry takes little responsibility for what is available, though it has developed a voluntary rating system to help parents evaluate games. The rating system covers things such as alcohol, blood and gore, drugs, gambling, nudity, and intense violence, but lacks descriptors demeaning women and minorities. In addition, retailers have not been careful about selling mature-rated violent games to minors.

Why is this important?

Interactive video entertainment that treats violence as a game is part of a culture of violence pervading our society.

In 1999, the ELCA affirmed its support for the Decade for a Culture of Nonviolence (2001-2010) with special attention to children and youth.

In its message on Community Violence (1994), the ELCA said, "Many of the young, who previously were sheltered from exposure to violence, are now not only 'entertained' by violence, but increasingly are both its victims and perpetrators." When they perpetuate stereotypes, violent solutions to community problems, and disrespect for life, video games are a hazard to the spiritual, emotional, and social health of children and youth.

What congregations can do

As part of their ministry to children as well as their support for nonviolence, congregations can play an important role in addressing violent video games. They may:

- help parents and guardians evaluate the suitability of video games and encourage them to talk to their children about them
- as part of church school, vacation Bible school, and other activities for children and youth, talk about video games and how the message they convey meshes with the Scripture's message of honoring and respecting life
- study the ELCA's message on Community Violence. Single complimentary copies are available by calling 800/638-3522, ext. 2996; also available at www.elca.org/socialstatements/violence/

- write to manufacturers, asking for more accountability in terms of what they produce (see below).

How the ELCA is addressing this

The ELCA churchwide organization is addressing increased violence in video games by joining other faith-based organizations in asking corporations to assume greater responsibility for education about and enforcement of rating systems and guidelines that are applicable to violent interactive videos.

The ELCA is doing this through the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program, an advocacy ministry conducted by the Division for Church in Society. Information on this campaign, as well as a grassroots letter-writing response, can be found at the Web site of the Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility at www.iccr.org/issues/violence/featured.php

Resources

For information and resources, check out these Web sites:

- American Academy of Pediatrics (www.aap.org) especially, "The Rating Game"
- American Psychological Association (www.apa.org), especially, "Violent Video Games Can Increase Aggression"
- National Institute on Media and the Family (www.mediafamily.org)
- Parent Teacher Association (www.pta.org/parentinvolvement/healthsafety/crisis/sgyc/psychom.asp#Dealing)



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Workshop on Christian unity

The 41st National Workshop on Christian Unity will be held in New Orleans, April 4–7. Geared for both lay and ordained leaders, the National Workshop on Christian Unity offers ecumenical meeting sessions, provides seminars on Christian unity, encourages denominational networking for shared ecumenical aims, addresses pressing questions of ecclesiology and disaster response, and offers a forum for reflection and celebration of Christian unity. Registration costs \$150. Learn more about the NWCU and request a brochure describing this year's workshop by contacting the ELCA Department for Ecumenical Affairs at 800/638-3522, ext. 2610, or go to www.elca.org/ecumenical/nwcu/index.html

The Lutheran E-newsletter

It's not spam. It's not any of those e-mail offers you hope your anti-virus software keeps far away from your inbox. Instead, it's



"news you can use" and inspiration. Would you like a short breaking news story served up with a specifically Lutheran slant? A brief inspirational story?

The Lutheran offers you that and more in its short, free weekly e-newsletter that features special content available only to e-newsletter subscribers. The e-newsletter features theologians, freelance writers, various staff members of *The Lutheran*, and writers from around the world.

Past newsletters featured theologian Barbara Rossing on hope and end times; section editor Julie Sevig on St. Francis and pets; reflections from Shishmaref, Alaska, by writer Ann Dixon; and a reflection for Christ the King Sunday by Stan Meyer from the Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod office. Sign up for this free newsletter at www.theLutheran.org/thisweek.html

Training for disabled youth

Approximately one in every five Americans ages 4 to 15 lives with a disability, according to the U.S. Bureau of Census report on Americans with disabilities. How many youth with disabilities are active in your congregation? According to the Definitely-Abled Advisory Committee (DAC) of the Lutheran Youth Organization (LYO), there are probably more than you think, and most want to be involved fully in the mission and ministry of their congregations. Members of DAC know the barriers to full participation firsthand. Every one of them lives with a disability and because of experiences in their own congregations, they want to help others recognize and draw out the assets of youth with disabilities in their communities of faith.

DAC has received two grants to facilitate the training and travel of 12 teams, each team consisting of a youth with a disability and an adult, to lead learning experiences in congregations and synods. The teams will promote and facilitate the full involvement of youth with disabilities in the life, mission, and ministry of the church. DAC is currently looking for high-school-aged youth or youth with the equivalent cognitive ability, to participate in a training session to be held in Chicago April 29–May 1. Each youth should be accompanied by an adult caregiver and/or an adult who will serve as a training partner. Those who are trained will conduct three learning experiences May through December 2005. If you are interested in being a trainer and/or hosting a learning experience, contact Pastor Lisa Cleaver at 800/638-3522, ext. 2692 (e-mail lisa.cleaver@elca.org) or Heidi Hagstrom at 800/638-3522, ext. 2479 (e-mail heidi.hagstrom@elca.org). This training is supported by grants from Wheat Ridge Ministries and Thrivent Financial for Lutherans.

Transform your ministry

Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn., is offering two D.Min. programs that might be of interest to *Seeds* readers.

Doctor of Ministry in Biblical Preaching

Passionate about preaching? Want your preaching to transform lives and congregations? In this three-year program students learn through three-week summer residencies and independent, contextually based study.

Doctor of Ministry in Congregational Mission and Leadership

Looking for a new way to do church? Excited about the church in mission? In this five-year program students meet regularly as a virtual online community and also in week-long seminars held every six months.

In both of these programs, students enter, study, and graduate with the same group (cohort) and can remain in their current ministry setting. Learn more about these programs at www.luthersem.edu/dmin or call 651/641-3203.

Genetically modified food

In the past decade in the United States, genetically modified crops (plants that have been manipulated at the genetic level by means of biotechnology) have stirred up a fierce debate. Farmers, companies that research and implement the technology, people concerned about the environment, hunger advocates, and consumers all have a stake in the outcome. What would you say if you were asked to vote on whether to ban genetically modified crops? What would you do if you had to decide whether to plant them on your farmland?

The ELCA seeks to provide guidance to its members on this highly charged and complex issue through its social policy resolution

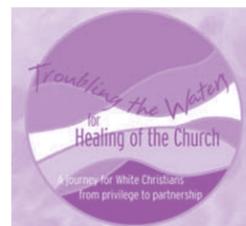
"Genetically Modified Organisms in the Food Supply," prepared by the Division for Church in Society (DCS) and approved by the ELCA Church Council last November. The resolution uses the tools of ELCA social statements to discern the principles which apply to how this technology is used. We are asked, for example, whether a particular policy or practice will alleviate hunger "at the household and community level in a just and beneficial way." Order a single, complimentary copy from the DCS resource line at 800/638-3522, ext. 2996, or print off a copy online from www.elca.org/dcs/elca_actions.html

Grantwriting workshop

The ELCA Division for Congregational Ministries will hold a two-day interactive training workshop on grant seeking and fund raising May 20–21, in St. Louis, Mo. This event is for pastors, congregational members, community leaders, individuals involved in social ministry programming, and anyone wanting to enhance proposal writing and fund-raising skills. The registration fee is \$300. To learn more, contact Loretta Horton, director for social ministries for congregations at 800/638-3522, ext. 2404, or go to the Web site at www.elca.org/dcm/socialministryevents.html

Troubling the Waters resource

Troubling the Waters for Healing of the Church: A Journey for White Christians from Privilege to Partnership is a resource that was developed specifically for White congregation members and other White community members to help them understand the role that White privilege has had in shaping their own attitudes and belief systems. This resource has been designed by White people for White people



to equip them with tools that will aid them in addressing and breaking the cycle of socialization that perpetuates racism and sustains an

exclusive church.

The 18-session resource begins with the season of Advent and ends with Pentecost, but congregations may start using this resource at any time as long as they follow the sessions in order. The resource comes in a three-ring binder and has two sections—a facilitator guide and participant hand-outs that may be photocopied. To order, call Augsburg Fortress at 800/328-4648 (ISBN 6-0002-2031-6; \$35 for the first copy, with a 20 percent discount for each additional copy purchased on the same day; additional discounts apply to purchases of 10 or more).

The companion to this resource for people of color is called *Breaking the Bonds: A Workshop on Internalized Racial Oppression*. This resource is available from Augsburg Fortress at 800/328-4648 (ISBN 6-0001-7445-4; \$19.95).

Clergy renewal grants

Lilly Endowment Inc. is offering awards, up to \$45,000 for each congregation, to allow pastors to go on journeys of renewal and refreshment for creative ministry with the active support of their parishioners. Just last month the Indianapolis-based Endowment announced the 132 recipients in the 2004 program. Interested pastors and their parishioners plan the sabbatical together. The competitive grants program is open to Christian congregations in any state, other than Indiana, that are served by ordained pastors who hold a master of divinity degree from an accredited theological seminary. (The Endowment administers a separate program for Indiana congregations.) People interested in the 2005 program may contact the Lilly Endowment Web site (www.lillyendowment.org), click on Religion, scroll down to the National Clergy Renewal Program, or e-mail clergyrenewal@yahoo.com. Questions? Call 317/916-7302. Deadline for applications is June 10, and recipients will be notified by next October.

Sermons on hunger topics

Hungry for hunger sermons? "A good start" is what you'll now find on the new ELCA World Hunger Web page at www.elca.org/hunger. Look for the feature called "Hunger Sermon Starters" in the upper left-hand corner. Click on "More," and read some thoughts that nudge you toward hunger and justice themes in the lectionary for the coming Sunday.

Developmental disabilities worship guide

The majority of people with developmental disabilities, their families, and caregivers are not part of a faith community. St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Exton, Pa., recognized the need to reach out to these individuals and invited them to become part of an inclusive community of believers. St. Paul's designed a unique worship service that provides opportunities for individuals with developmental disabilities to worship and serve through the Rejoicing Spirits Ministry.

The Rejoicing Spirits Ministry was launched in October 2003 and continues to grow, both at St. Paul's and beyond its environs. Calvary Lutheran in West Chester, Pa., launched a Rejoicing Spirits Ministry in October 2004. St. James in Pottstown, Pa., will start a Rejoicing Spirits Ministry in April.

Because of the positive response from the community and the interest expressed by other congregations, St. Paul's created a model in their "How to Start a Rejoicing Spirits Worship Service" guide. It outlines the procedures from

setting up an initial feasibility review committee to launching the first worship service. Included in the guide are examples such as invitations, letters to provider agencies, newsletter articles, press releases, and a sample worship bulletin. To order a copy of the guide, send a suggested donation of \$20 (includes shipping) made payable to "Rejoicing Spirits" and mail to St. Paul's Lutheran Church – Rejoicing Spirits, 104 South Village Avenue, Exton, PA 19341. For further information, contact Susan Crawford at 610/363-6264, or go to www.stpaulslionville.org

Episcopal-ELCA campus ministry

A joint Episcopal-Lutheran Campus Ministry Conference will be held June 22-26 at the University of Chicago. The conference is for people engaged in campus ministry at whatever institutions they find themselves, including chaplains, campus ministers, campus pastors, laypeople, and congregational pastors who may serve academic communities. The keynote speaker is Lauren Winner, author of *Girl Meets God* and *Mudhouse Sabbath*. There will be a theological panel focusing on campus ministry issues, featuring Dr. Martin Marty. The event will offer enrichment, networking, and time for sharing ideas and concerns of campus ministry. Workshops will be offered on various topics such as fund raising and working in ecumenical settings. To learn more and to register, go to www.elca.org/campusministry

Health care study guide

Health and health care are among the most pressing and debated topics in our society today, and the 2003 ELCA Churchwide Assembly overwhelmingly adopted the social statement "Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor" to help members discuss these issues in the light of their faith. To help plan and carry out this conversation, a study guide is now available for congregational use. *Using 'Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor' In Your Congregation* is a five-session guide focusing on many of the themes of the social statement, such as theological perspectives on health, how health is a "shared endeavor," envisioning a health-care system, and love and justice in health care. For multiple copies, call Augsburg Fortress at 800/328-4648 (ISBN 6-0002-0254-7; \$1 each, plus shipping). For a single complimentary copy, call the ELCA Division for Church in Society resource request line at 800/638-3522, ext. 2996.

Resource on sexuality

Looking for thoughtful articles to help supplement the study materials from the ELCA Sexuality Studies Task Force? *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* at www.elca.org/jle

has a portfolio of articles on moral deliberation on sexuality, which can act as a complement. These carefully selected articles, written by people from many different points of view, help the reader understand how and why this issue affects this church. The articles range from reaction to the study guides to thoughts on the report and recommendations on ordination and blessings to scholarly thought on intimacy and belonging.

As the August 2005 Churchwide Assembly approaches, *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* seeks to contribute faithful, rigorous, ethical thought to the moral deliberation of this church.

Families talk about faith

Two new resources from the Youth and Family Institute in Bloomington, Minn., help families talk about faith.

• **FaithTalk Cards.** Designed for families to talk about faith when they are home and when they are away from home, and in their ups and downs, this set of 192 sharing cards comes in a canvas carrying case. From four areas—Memories, Values, Etchings, and Actions—families will share stories of God's faithfulness. These are a wonderful gift for family milestones: weddings, confirmation, baptism, anniversary, or family reunion. They can also be used in other educational settings. \$29.75.

• **FaithTalk Cards for Children.** Designed for faith conversation between parents and other adults and children between the ages of 3 and 11. The faith-sharing cards focus on four areas: Memories, Actions, Growing Together, and Wonder. The canvas carrying case makes it very usable when traveling. \$19.75

To order, go to www.youthandfamilyinstitute.org or call the Institute at 877/239-2492.

Luther film and materials

Luther, the big-screen historical biography starring Joseph Fiennes is now available from Augsburg Fortress on DVD (ISBN 6-0002-3355-8; \$25.99 plus shipping) and on VHS (ISBN 6-0002-3352-3; \$14.95, plus shipping.)

To order, call Augsburg Fortress at 800/328-4648.

Thrivent Financial for Lutherans is offering a kit of educational resources to be used as a companion to the recently released DVD and VHS versions of *Luther*. The 300-page kit includes a leader's guide with background information and reference material on Martin Luther; educational activities; a "Getting Saved Game" game board and playing cards; participant handouts and more.

Lutheran congregations, schools, and educational ministries can order the *Luther* kit by calling toll-free 800/836-7862 and mentioning reference number 003520101. Only staff of Lutheran congregations, schools, and education ministries will be able to order these kits.



See what's new and helpful on the World Wide Web

New Disability Ministries site

Be sure to explore the new Disability Ministries Web site from the Division for Church in Society. Now at www.elca.org/disability this site holds a variety of resources, insights, and answers to questions people have about inclusion, accessibility, and the variety of disability ministries offered by the ELCA. Also, be sure to read reflections and updates on Disability Awareness Week.

Faith and Wisdom

Check out www.faithandwisdom.org a searchable events calendar used by hundreds of congregations, synods, colleges, seminaries, and other groups to advertise upcoming events and educational opportunities. Many groups, like the National Council of Churches, link to this site on their home pages. This ecumenical advertising resource is a free and easy way to create a regularly updated community calendar. Congregations in a region can post events, and then a home page button link (www.faithandwisdom.org/buttons.html) that allows members to search for activities in their area.

Help for life transitions

"Nurturing Faith Through Life Transitions" is a Web resource based on the series of articles that have appeared on the back page of "Seeds for the Parish." Go to

www.elca.org/dcm/christian_education/lifetransitions/index.html to find resources to help congregations support members who are going through life transitions or difficult situations. Topics include separation and divorce, first-time parenting, domestic violence, eating disorders, adolescence, financial concerns, depression, unemployment, and more.

The 2005 ELCA Churchwide Assembly

To learn about what's coming up at the 2005 ELCA Churchwide Assembly, August 8-14, in Orlando, Fla., go to www.elca.org/assembly/05/. You can find information about the Renewing Worship proposal, the Sexuality Studies recommendations, the Plan for Mission in the ELCA, the proposed interim Eucharistic sharing agreement with the United Methodist Church, and other business matters coming before



the voting members at the assembly.

Online registration services for events
For congregations that sponsor events, online registration can be a tool that can help planning

and fund-raising activities run more efficiently. The ELCA has a deal for reduced rates with SPORG Internet, a leading provider of online registration and online donations solutions to faith-based groups. Several ELCA synods have used their services effectively. To learn more, go to www.sporg.com or e-mail Albert Baerg at abaerg@sporg.com.

Learn about the ELCA Archives

Need help with your congregational archives? The Web site of the Archives of the ELCA, www.elca.org/archives, provides guidelines on the preservation and arrangement of congregational records. Also available are online exhibits featuring historic prints of Martin Luther, images of rural Midwestern congregations, and a genealogical guide to Chicago churches.

Come to Lutheran Men in Mission Gathering 2005

Lutheran Men in Mission will host its triennial gathering July 22-24 in Charleston, S.C., under the theme "Run the Race: Keep the Faith."

Men young and old are being invited to give the "rat race" a rest and run the race that counts—to come together and to discover a fresh relationship with God and with other men on the same journey.

This is an opportunity for men to get in condition to run the race of their lives with Bible study, fellowship, and prayer. Men are invited to bring their "pit crew," those guys—fathers, grandfathers, sons, and friends—who help them run the race.

There will be inspirational speakers such as NASCAR legend and former

broadcaster Ned Jarrett, noted church leader Mike Foss, and Clemson football coach Tommy Bowden. "Run the Race: Keep the Faith" will also mark the release of the book based on the research Lutheran Men in Mission has done with young men. The authors of that book, Rollie Martinson, Paul Hill, and David Anderson, will be there, too.

Also inspiring will be the music of Peter Mayer. Peter and his brother Jim grew up in a Lutheran missionary family in India. For the past 14 years Peter has played lead guitar for Jimmy Buffett, and Jim has played bass. Peter released his first inspirational, award-winning CD at the 2002 Lutheran Men's Gathering.

There will be terrific worship opportunities and an Inter-Action center that will include energetic games and sports and "hands-on" activities.

There are two ways to register: online (credit card only) and by mail. Substantial registration discounts are available for those who register early and in groups.

Early registration (before April 1) ranges from \$130 for one man to \$75 each for men registering in groups of three or more. Late registration ranges from \$180 for one man to \$100 each for men registering in groups of three or more.

Visit Lutheran Men in Mission online at www.elca.org/lmm for more information.



Resource centers discuss 'being church together'

In every issue of Seeds, ELCA resource center staff pull together a "Q&A" on topics that they discuss in their meeting on LutherLink. To find the resource center near you, go to www.elca.org/co/centers.html

Q Our congregation is interested in studying what it means to "be church." Can you help us find good resources?

A A video that immediately comes to mind is *Dealing with Tough Issues as Christians* (www.elca.org/leadership/multimedia/mult7.html).

It really stresses the point of working through a process together while learning to respect and accept each other's differences. The narrator begins: "Deliberation about tough social issues is based on a firm conviction that God is involved in our world with all its conflicts, confusions, complexities and competing ideas of what is right and good. Conflicts in our congregations and communities can become teachable moments if we claim God's promise to be present amongst us." Small groups can use the leader's guide to work through sessions. I highly recommend it!

—Darlene Kalfahs, director, East Central Synod of Wisconsin Resource Center, Appleton

A Check out the printed resource, *Talking Together as Christians about Tough Social Issues*. It can be downloaded at www.elca.org/dcs/talkingtogether.html or ordered from Augsburg Fortress (800/328-4648; www.augsburgfortress.org). I have used the "diamond" exercise from this resource with groups on every subject imaginable—money, homosexuality, working together—and everyone is always amazed at how well it works! This is a wonderful resource.

—Irene Flynn, director, Florida-Bahamas Synod Resource Center, Tampa

A For personal or small group reading, I recommend Marva Dawn's *Truly the Community* (Eerdmans Publishing, 800/253-7521, www.eerdmans.com) which focuses on Romans 12 and how to be the church. Chapters are short and provide discussion questions. I think it would also be a good resource for a sermon series.

—Karen Kaufman, director, NE Ohio Synod Resource Center, Cuyahoga Falls

A When I think about images for "being church," the very first thing that comes to mind is a beautiful set of videos from Liturgy Training Publications. The first is *Say Amen! to What You Are* about communion and what it means to be the Body of Christ; the second is *The Word of the Lord* about the proclamation of scripture in worship; the third is *We Shall Go Up with Joy* on the entrance rite and how people are invited and included as they come together to worship; and *Lift Up Your Hearts* on basic worship liturgy. These all feature real congregations working to embody the best of "being church" and though they are Catholic parishes, the theology, the images, and the thoughtful reflections can be helpful to anyone interested in good worship. (LTP, 800/933-1800, www.ltp.org)

Also, Presiding Bishop Hanson's Epiphany letter is posted at www.elca.org/bishop/m_epiphany05.html. About "being church," it's a clear and passionate call to recognize God's presence in the midst of much suffering and in a church that wrestles with all the complexities of life.

—Julie Aageson, director, Eastern North Dakota Resource Center, Fargo

A *How Do Lutherans Interpret the Bible?* by Dr. Mark Allen Powell (SELECT, www.elca.org/select) has been a very popular video in our synod for helping congregations begin to work through some tough issues. The four segment titles: We are more interested in understanding it than defending it; We acknowledge how we received it; We use it to shape our morality; and We recognize it has multiple meanings. The series seems to empower participants to listen to one another and realize others may have different interpretations of the same Bible passages. It's a great resource!

—Bonnie Weber, director, NW Synod of Wisconsin Resource Center, Eau Claire

A One of the ways we can "be church together" is to reach outside of ourselves with a common purpose and focus. One of the best resources I've found lately is the *Just Neighbors* (Family Promise, www.nihn.org/neighbors.html) ministry toolkit. This toolkit educates congregations about poverty, helps spur them on to greater service, and empowers them as advocates for their neighbors in need. *Acting on Your Faith: Congregations Making a Difference* (Insights Press, 800/323-6809) is another favorite resource. *Public Offerings: Stories from the Front Lines of Community Ministry and Cooperating Congregations: Strategies of Mission* are both from Alban Institute (800/486-1318; www.alban.org) and detail the impact that many congregations are making on their community.

—Catherine Fink, director, Heilig Resource Center, Salisbury, N.C.

Prayer Ventures highlights young women missionaries

Wangechi, Wambui, and Wanjiru had a busy fall.

Wangechi visited and evaluated projects of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Africa, and directed 12 young adults in the musical "Godspell" at St. Andrews Presbyterian church in Nairobi, Kenya.

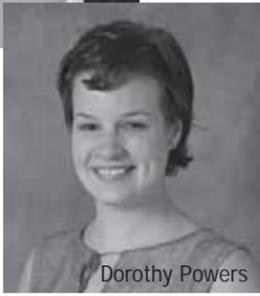
Wambui pretty much worked around the clock in her position at Wema Centre, a home for street girls in Mombasa. "I work as a teacher by day and a peer counselor at night," she says.

Wanjiru assisted the All Africa Conference of Churches in French/English translation and research for a newsletter on the New Partnership for Africa's Development. In her free time, she played the piano for "Godspell."

These young women are three of the ELCA's newest and youngest missionaries. Wangechi, Wambui, and Wanjiru—otherwise known as Alexis Confer, Jennifer Peck, and Dorothy Powers—are part of the



Alexis Confer



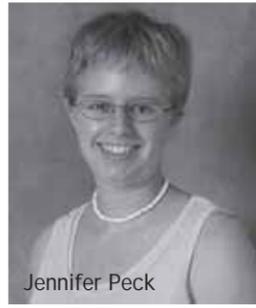
Dorothy Powers

ELCA's Young Adults in Global Mission program. They received their new names during their first weeks in Kenya, from host families who helped them begin to understand and navigate Kenyan culture.

This year 41 young people are participating in this one-year international service opportunity organized by the ELCA.

Volunteer assignments in Argentina, Egypt, Germany, Kenya, Thailand, and the United Kingdom are designed to build leadership skills, spiritual growth, global awareness, and understanding.

The young missionaries are enthusiastic



Jennifer Peck

about their assignments. "Young adults can bring fresh ideas and energy to the areas they are serving, and are able to reach out to and relate to younger Christians," says

Alexis. "I think it's positive for others to see that our faith crosses international borders and our lives are not as different as they may seem."

You can pray for Alexis, Jennifer and Dorothy on April 15 as part of the *Prayer Ventures* daily prayer guide at www.elca.org/prayerventures. Pray that these young people may open their minds, deepen their faiths, and return home with "wisdom and experience that promises to challenge not only ourselves, but those we come home to—old and young," says Jennifer.

Global Mission Events to make a joyful noise

Bersorak sorai bagi Rajamu! Sounds daunting, but this Indonesian hymn became a crowd-pleaser at the 2004 Global Mission Events.

Global Mission Events
Gathered by God's grace for the sake of the world
July 14-17 at North Dakota State University, Fargo
August 25-28 at Baltimore Convention Center, Baltimore

Global music is a big part of each year's Global Mission Events. Between plenary sessions, devotions, and global sing-alongs, participants and their vocal chords get quite a workout as they

learn hymns and praise songs in all manner of languages.

This year you can look forward to singing songs that express and interpret the 2005 theme, "Gathered by God's grace for the sake of the world."

Plan now to lift your voice in global song at one of the 2005 Global Mission Events. For details on plenary speakers, Global University sessions, and programs for children and youth, visit the GME Web

site at www.elca.org/gme. You can also register online. Free posters, registration forms, and a four-minute video are available to promote the GMEs in your congregation.

For materials or information, contact the ELCA Division for Global Mission at 800/638-3522, ext. 2642 or 2645.

Seeking Global Mission Event musician interns

Are you a musician interested in learning to lead global worship and song? The ELCA Division for Global Mission (DGM) is looking for six to eight musicians (ages 18-35) who have an interest and some experience in Lutheran worship and the music of the global church, and who want to help others sing this music.

Musicians who are accepted must



Musicians from the 2004 GMEs

commit to:

- a three-day training event April 22-24 (travel, meals, housing, and event will be covered by the Division for Global Mission) with veteran GME musicians Tom Witt, Mary Preus, and Tony Machado.
- a three-day rehearsal

beginning July 11, prior to the Fargo, N.D., Global Mission Event.

- attendance at both Global Mission Events, July 14-17 in Fargo, and August 24-28 in Baltimore.

Musicians who are accepted will receive free training in song-leading and worship leading techniques, especially as they relate to leading songs, chants, and hymns from cultures around the world—including theory and theological underpinnings of global worship. For more details and an application to join this training program, visit www.elca.org/gme. Applications will be accepted until March 15 or until positions are filled, so act now.

Involve youth in this summer's vacation Bible school

Want to *really* involve youth in VBS? Looking for people who "connect" with kids? "Davey and Goliath's Circus Spectacular VBS 2005" program from Augsburg Fortress has some ideas to help you.

Today's youth

Many of today's youth have an abundance of characteristics that make them prime candidates for discipleship. Almost every youth possesses some leadership ability, whether it be upfront, behind the scenes, or somewhere in between. Just as Jesus trained and nurtured the first disciples, we need to train and nurture today's youth. As adults we can give youth the opportunity to serve others and assume real responsibility, not just a helping role. They are capable when we equip them with leadership tools and planning skills. We can rethink the way we have traditionally "plugged" youth into our VBS programs.

Personal faith growth

There is little doubt that youth leaders grow in faith. Each day at VBS, they are speaking and modeling their faith. All the Bible knowledge and faith development they have experienced through Sunday school, VBS, and confirmation can take on new meaning and application. Youth need opportunities to speak their faith in order

to teach others. They also gain an understanding of what it means to be a role model. This role continues after VBS as they are in the community with the kids they have led. Younger children will still be watching them and learning from them far beyond VBS.

Youth leaders benefit kids—and the church

Younger children often take "big kids" very seriously. The younger kids are working with someone they look up to—someone who thinks it is okay to sing songs, play games, and talk about God; someone who shows them that church can be fun, while demonstrating that it's appealing to be a good person.

Training youth as leaders also has year-round benefits. Giving them leadership roles encourages them to stay involved in the ministries of their congregations. Youth who are active in their congregations often develop a following. Kids will attend activities because youth are leading them. Allowing youth to be leaders can increase participation in church programs.

Shifting roles

Empowering youth with leadership responsibilities changes the role of adult leaders. Adults become "cheerleaders" who offer encouragement through good

times and tough times. They may challenge youth to try new approaches to leadership, and may also suggest ways in which youth can use their skills in the church and community after VBS. Youth can learn from their experiences and improve their skills every day when they feel supported. Empowering youth is enriching for both youth and adults.

2005 VBS from Augsburg Fortress

VBS 2005, "Davey and Goliath's Circus Spectacular," offers more specific ideas for utilizing and training youth to make a real impact on your VBS—and for your VBS to make a real impact on their lives.

"Davey and Goliath's Circus Spectacular" helps children experience Bible stories through an interactive combination of music, art, snacks, games, worship, puppetry, and drama. This year Davey and Goliath invite their friends Cisco, Sally, and Jonathan to join them under God's Big Tent.

To learn more about "Davey and Goliath's Circus Spectacular," call 800/328-4648 or visit www.augsburgfortress.org/vbs. Circus Spectacular Starter Kit (ISBN 0-8066-5512-7; \$59.99 plus shipping)



Supporting those living with Multiple Sclerosis

Two to three times as many women as men have MS.

Multiple Sclerosis (MS) is a progressive disease of the nervous system. Currently there are some 350,000 to 500,000 people diagnosed with MS living in the United States.¹ So there is a good chance someone in your family, circle of friends, or congregation has MS.

There are no specific tests to determine if a person has MS or will have it in the future, although an MRI of the brain is one of the major diagnostic tools used.²

As we surround and uphold people who are living with this challenge, it is important to be knowledgeable of some facts about it.

- MS is not contagious.
- Men and women have different experiences and different needs when dealing with MS.³
- Not all symptoms affect all MS patients. No two individuals have the same complaints; no one develops all of the same symptoms.
- Common symptoms of MS include fatigue, weakness, spasticity, balance problems, bladder and bowel problems, numbness, vision loss, tremors, and depression.
- Symptoms may be persistent or may cease from time to time (episodic patterns and remissions); in fact, symptoms can remit completely, leaving no residual

damage, or remit partially, leaving degrees of permanent impairment.

Most people with MS are diagnosed between the ages of 20 and 50.

How can congregations help those with MS?

Becoming familiar with different challenges and realities of people with disabilities increases our sensitivity to their needs and strengths for ministry. People with MS have the same desire to be involved and to experience a sense of belonging in their faith community. Consider their needs when making plans for programs and events.

- Check with your local community service organizations to explore the possibility of providing wheel chairs or automatic carts for people with MS and other physical limitations.
- Look for gifts they might have to offer your faith community. Many people with MS have a keen ability to adapt to their health on any given day. They usually plot out a plan "A" and a plan "B." They also frequently develop an ability to problem-solve in the midst of transition. These gifts



may serve you well on a committee or in the call process. They also have the advantage of sharing insights regarding reasonable accommodations for people with special needs.

- Check with them about any needs for companionship or assistance with home maintenance. Invite members with known gifts in these areas to establish appropriate relationships.
- Encourage members to

pray for people who deal with MS every day. Ask for God's special blessing of resilience as they master the challenges of each day.

Check out these Web sites for further information and resources:

- Medline Plus from the National Institutes of Health at www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/multiplesclerosis.html
- Multiple Sclerosis Foundation at www.msfacts.org
- National Multiple Sclerosis Society at www.nmss.org/

—Inez Torres Davis is an associate in ministry currently serving on the program staff of Women of the ELCA at the churchwide offices in Chicago.

¹ www.msfacts.org

² www.msfacts.org

³ www.nationalmssociety.org



Have enough for the cabin that suits you.

Have enough for the car that calls to you.

Have enough for the parent who raised you.

Choices. We all make them. The only question is, will you have the assets you need to make the choices that are right for you? At Thrivent Financial for Lutherans, we understand your dilemma because we share your values. We can help you build enough financial resources to do the things you need to do, as well as the things you'd like to do. To contact one of our financial representatives, call 800-THRIVENT, or visit www.thrivent.com

 **Thrivent Financial for Lutherans**
Where Values Thrive.™

Charitable giving and retirement plans

Did you know congregation members can give to ministries of the church through their retirement plans? If members have sizeable amounts of tax-sheltered funds in qualified retirement plans (QRP), it may make sense to consider distributing assets to family and the ministries of the ELCA after death. Your QRP is a great way to save for retirement. Accumulations build up tax-free until you need them for retirement. However, while money withdrawn from these funds during retirement is taxed as current ordinary income, the real tax consequence may come when distributing assets to heirs in the form of federal, state, and, in some cases, city taxes.



With proper planning you can make a significant gift to ministry and leave more of your estate to family and less to taxes.

If you are already receiving your mandatory distributions from your QRP, you might consider use of these funds, which have built up tax-free, for either outright or planned gifts.

For more information, contact the ELCA Foundation at 800/638-3522, ext. 2970, or visit www.elca.org/fo for the name of the regional gift planner nearest you.

Did you see the Action Packet?

www.elca.org/col/actionpacket

The contents of the March-April Action Packet included:

- *Grace Matters* newsletter
- Social policy resolution on genetically modified organisms
- *Our Calling in Education: A Lutheran Study* flyer
- *Procession* newsletter
- *Update: Evangelism* sheet