

# Serving as a missionary bishop



**Bishop Michael Last**

**T**he Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has called on its bishops to be missionary bishops, to grow the church both here and abroad.

In the Western Iowa Synod there is an emerging emphasis to grow, particularly in response to members who have lost their church due to a congregation's decision to disaffiliate with the ELCA. Two new house churches have been planted in the synod's south-central region and east-central region. A third is in the planning stage in northwest Iowa. Additionally, we have a young church emerging in Sergeant Bluff.

The ELCA, with help from your mission support shared through the Western Iowa Synod, is also planting new churches across the country.

In September, I traveled to Chile in South America. At the invitation of the ELCA Global Mission unit, the Western Iowa Synod has been invited to be in dialogue with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile, a denomination of 10 congregations and five points of mission that is open to a companion relationship with our synod. Delegation members included my wife, Colleen Last; Cindy Wells, synod global programs coordinator; and Jan Rosdail-Aegerter, a member of the Companion Synod Committee (they self-funded the trip).

The Chile itinerary included visits to congregations, schools and with denominational leaders. My report to our synod's Companion Synod Committee includes the unique challenges and opportunities such a relationship might afford.

In October, I participated at the consecration of Isaya Mengele, the newly

elected bishop of the Southern Diocese, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, our companion synod. Additionally, I checked in with our well-drilling crew and with developments at the Center for Agricultural Development.

My hope is that this, in part, is what it means to be a missionary bishop: extending kingdom work among our brothers and sisters here in Iowa, in Chile and in Tanzania. It's a joy to represent you and to plant seeds of this great synod far and wide, looking for ways to build bridges with brothers and sisters in Christ near and far, underscoring that we are a great commission church, walking together with others in the faith to share the name of Jesus as Savior and Lord.

You are never far from me as I share your greetings to those I will meet along the way.

*+ Bishop Michael Last*

## Swimtastic! Feeding the multitudes

**S**outhWest Iowa Ministries (SWIM) challenged its congregations to collect 1,000 cans of tuna in addition to other nonperishable food and health-care items for local pantries.

SWIM (<http://swimwebsite.weebly.com>) is administered by Jerry Lamb, an ELCA pastor, and an intern. It is composed of the following congregations: Bethesda Lutheran, Clarinda; First Presbyterian, Essex; Fremont Lutheran, Nyman; St. John's Lutheran, Essex; Strand Lutheran, Strand; and Tabor Lutheran, Wallin.

SWIM members met their goal and more—the pools of tuna overflowed with a total of 2,130 cans. In addition, 2,948 nonperishable food and health-care items and \$587.50 were collected.

These donations were delivered to food pantries in Clarinda, Corning, Red Oak, Shenandoah, Stanton and Villisca. □

**Laurel Jean Winsor, 5, with the SWIM "catch" at Bethesda Lutheran of Clarinda, Iowa, one of the group's six member churches.**



## Western Iowa



Worship is held at The Church of the Damascus Road.

### A church that is hard to leave

Like many growing congregations, The Church of the Damascus Road (CoDR) has two sites: one in the Fort Dodge Correctional Facility and one in the Rockwell City Correctional Facility. Paul Stone, pastor, calls CoDR a true Great Commission church. Its worship and Bible study gatherings are growing due to word of mouth.

“These guys want to do better and have a better life through a relationship with the Lord,” Stone said. “They know it’s possible, and they talk about it with others in the facility. They are tremendous evangelists.”

In Fort Dodge, more than 80 men regularly attend worship and more than 40 are part of a Bible study, Stone said. In Rockwell City the worshiping community averages in the mid-30s, with two-thirds of that number attending Bible study. Stone said they try to make all the gatherings fun yet meaningful.

Statistics from Prison Congregations of America note that the normal recidivism rate (the number of offenders who return to prison) is as much as 60 percent. But if an inmate has been involved with a prison congregation, that number drops to 15 percent. And if they connect with a congregation after release, it further drops to 2 percent.

Stone said CoDR is the best thing

going for the state of Iowa when you consider the annual cost to keep a person in prison is approximately \$31,000.

When asked about his relationship with the wardens, Stone said they are very supportive. He cited a three- and-a-half-day opportunity for spiritual renewal called Brothers in Blue, which has been overwhelmingly received. There was some concern that participation might have to be limited, but one warden had issues about putting restraints on attendance. He told Stone that he didn’t want any man to miss a life-changing event.

#### Life after prison

CoDR’s ministry doesn’t stop when a prisoner completes his sentence or is paroled. A crucial part of the ministry is aftercare, which is “wraparound support for those who want to be successful,” said Carroll Lang, director of the reentry aftercare ministry and a retired pastor of CoDR.

Teams in communities throughout Western Iowa provide former inmates mentoring and physical support for about a year. Lang said there is a great need for more of these teams. “No one needs to be afraid of this work. We provide training and ongoing support for all the volunteers,” he added.

There are currently 14 active teams in the area, with prayers that new ones could be formed in the Remsen, Clarion, Rockwell City, Pocahontas, Thor, Fort Dodge and Spencer areas.

Read more about The Church of the Damascus Road and its reintegration reentry ministry or sign up to get its newsletter at [www.codrcare.org](http://www.codrcare.org). □

### ‘Fun-raising’ for Tanzania wells

The Western Iowa Synod, in collaboration with its companion, the Southern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, coordinates a well-drilling project. This project is a vital, lifesaving effort that provides clean, sanitary water to thousands of people in Tanzania, greatly improving their overall health.

In addition, a well frees up time once spent looking for and carrying water—time that can be better used in educational and economic activities.

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Rock Rapids, has contributed more than \$30,000 over the past four years to the Companion Synod Well Project.

In 2007, Immanuel was motivated by its Sunday school children, who raised the first \$180 to dig one well for one village. During that first year members transformed fundraising into “fun-raising.” They ended the year with \$7,000, nearly enough for three wells.

The “fun-raising” challenge was highlighted through temple talks, bulletin boards, graphs, regular updates in Sunday bulletins, newsletter articles, and dinner place mats made by the children.

Money was raised through several events: table wishing wells, a harvest carnival, taco feed, silent auction, chili dinner and pie auction, an omelet breakfast, and a re-birthday party celebrating baptismal anniversaries. Two individuals also donated meals for the whole congregation—a ham dinner and a pork loin dinner—for a freewill offering.

Immanuel heard the message pre-





**A well in Igelango, Tanzania, is dedicated.**

sented by Ron and Phyllis Sterler, the synod well project's coordinators, of the need for consistently safe water in the villages of the Southern Diocese, and in the following years has continued to respond generously.

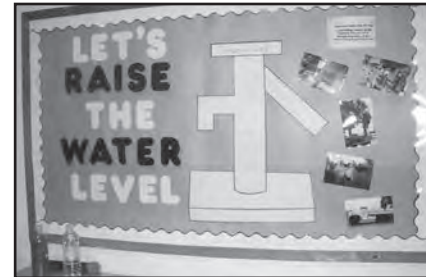
One of Immanuel's well committee members remarked, "This project was not just about raising money. It was a spiritual experience, bringing people together, having fun working for a common cause—a most worthy cause. Those who participated in this project not only felt the joy and blessing of giving, but also gained a new appreciation for the fresh clean water they use every day."

In 2010, newer, more efficient well-drilling equipment was provided. The Tanzanian well-drilling team has since been trained on its use and maintenance, as well as how to drive and transport it. This higher capacity equipment will allow for the drilling of considerably more wells, challenging us to provide for the increased funding to do so.

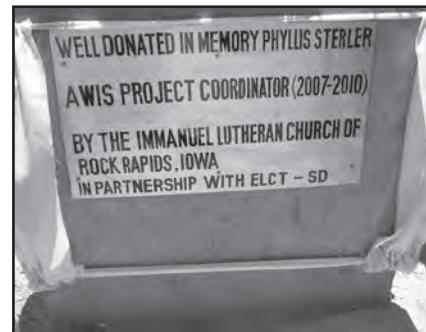
The synod encourages all of its

constituents to uplift this project in prayer and financial support. Send checks (write "well project" on the memo line) to the Western Iowa Synod, PO Box 577, Storm Lake, IA 50588.

*Asante Sana* (thank you very much)! *Mungu Awabariki* (God bless you all)! ☐



**"Fun-raiser" bulletin board at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Rock Rapids.**



**The Igelango well was donated by members of Immanuel in memory of Phyllis Sterler.**

**Igelango Choir celebrates the well.**



## Western Iowa



### Newly ordained

Congratulations to Nathan Winterhoff (center) who was ordained July 6, 2011, at Trinity Lutheran Church, Alta, Iowa, by Bishop Duane Pederson (left) of the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin. Bishop Michael Last of the Western Iowa Synod also participated in the service. Winterhoff has been called to Our Savior Lutheran Church in Solon Springs, Wis.

## News briefs

### Backpack ministry

“How can our kids be going hungry?” asked the superintendent of the Webster City School District. With emotion in his voice, he talked about how some of the kids under his charge had little or no food over the weekend when they didn’t have a school meal to fill them up. He shared this at a gathering of community leaders meeting in response to the closing of Webster City’s largest

employer: Electrolux.

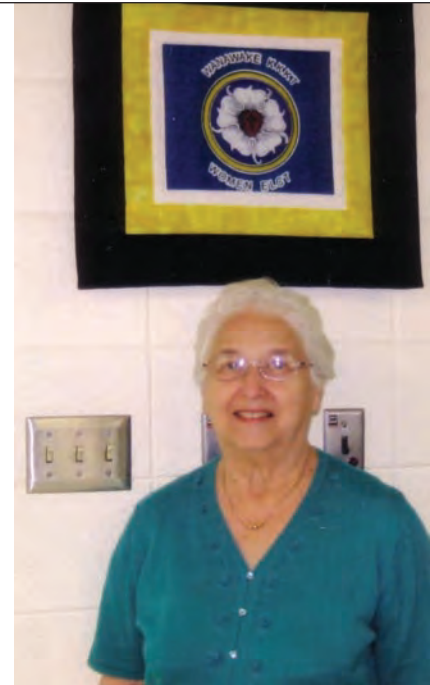
Michael Kroona, pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church, Webster City, heard this question and visited with the superintendent after the meeting. He was then directed to the head of the school’s food service department, Lori Hartnett, who was also trying to respond to this need.

As a result of those meetings, a backpack ministry was started.

Plans were put into place to find out which youth and children needed help. Teachers, counselors and principals were surveyed and a list generated.

Kroona and his wife, Shelby, purchased what was needed to provide a Ziplock baggie of food for the long Easter weekend. High school students packed the backpacks and confidentially distributed them to 17 children.

A couple weeks later, with the list now grown to 40, food was purchased for two more weekends. Now using gallon baggies, high school students once again packed the backpacks. Forty were sent home each of



### A banner effort

Lutheran Women of Western Iowa collected funds for the Igumbilo Lutheran Girls Secondary School and the well-drilling project in Tanzania. In appreciation for the support, Tanzanian fabric was distributed to the congregational units. First Lutheran Church, Algona, Iowa, decided to make a banner. Beryl Soderberg (above) created the banner that is now displayed in First’s fellowship hall. The banner features the Luther rose and the words *Wanawake KKKT (Kanisa la Kiinjili la Kilutheri)*, which means Women of the ELCT (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania).

the next two weekends.

As chair of the Webster City Ministerial, Kroona elicited funds from member congregations to support the project. The response of the faith community has been outstanding. More than \$4,000 has been raised to buy food and baggies. The teachers and staff have pitched in by holding a fundraiser.

Members of ministerial churches gathered to continue the project into the new school year. It all began again with backpacks going out for the long Labor Day weekend. □

**Let us know what exciting things are happening in your congregation!**

News and photos may be submitted to:  
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