

Assembly offers many opportunities



Bishop Michael Last

The 24th assembly of the Western Iowa Synod, June 3-5, in Sioux City, has as its theme: “God’s work. Our hands. Do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with your God,” a familiar admonition from Micah 6:8. As with previous assemblies, this year’s event will be filled with many opportunities, including assembly plenary; spirited worship with Dakota Road; youth participants; forums; and churchwide representative Rafael Malpica Padilla, former bishop and now Global Mission executive director.

As you have likely heard, malaria is nondiscriminatory, killing men, women and children alike. It is a senseless killer because effective treatment is readily available ... if you have the money to access the treatment. The ELCA is determined to be a strong partner with other church bodies and relief organizations to eradicate the spread of this infectious disease.

This year will provide a very special challenge: to raise \$25,000 for ELCA World Hunger (www.elca.org/hunger) and the ELCA Malaria Campaign (www.elca.org/malaria). Offerings have been designated one-half each for World Hunger and one-half for the Malaria Campaign. Congregations are urged to begin collecting offerings toward this \$25,000 goal between now and the assembly. Voting members are urged to come prepared as there will be “spontaneous” hunger/malaria fundraising events throughout the assembly.

Additionally, cash offerings given at Friday evening’s opening worship are designated for the Mission of the Messiah thrift store, an exciting new outreach ministry of the Siouxland ELCA Lutheran and Episcopal congregations, providing low-cost clothing and home furnishings to those who need a helping hand.

A highlight of the assembly will also be guests (perhaps six) from our companion synod, the Southern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania. Sister Atu Bange, medical director of the diocese, will lead an assembly forum on health concerns in Tanzania. The Western Iowa Synod Women of the ELCA, which has long supported Igumbilo Lutheran Girls

School, are sponsoring the visit of a recent graduate of the school. She will stay for the Women’s Convention in late June. During her visit she will also interact with the LYO. Several congregations have invited representatives from their companion congregations in Tanzania to visit.

I look forward to meeting with you at this year’s assembly, knowing that though these have been unsettling times in the church, nevertheless, that which continues to bind us together is God’s gracious love and mercy in Jesus Christ, calling us to do God’s work, using our hands.

Bishop Michael Last



Atu Bange, medical director of the Southern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, will lead an assembly forum.



2011 synod assembly

The ELCA Western Iowa Synod meets in assembly June 3-5 at the Sioux City [Iowa] Convention Center. Assembly opening and closing worship services will be held at the center. A variety of thought-provoking activities, opportunities and forums will take place. Justice-themed worship will add depth and spiritual connection to the theme. Rostered leader anniversaries of ordination and congregation anniversaries will be observed Saturday evening.

Youth of today—leaders of tomorrow

By Lynn Egesdal

Synod assembly—it's not just for adults. Our Western Iowa Synod Assembly will be here before you know it. At last year's event, we had approximately 43 youth in attendance, our largest turnout in many years. Of the 43, 30 were voting members.

Each synod congregation can send one youth voting member to the assembly; others can attend as visitors. Therefore, we should have a minimum of 143 youth at the synod assembly. This is a great opportunity for the youth to learn about the three expressions of the church (congregation, synod, churchwide) and so much more.

Besides being part of the plenary sessions, the youth will also have time together for activities, learning, worship, discussion and fun. The evenings will include activities for them.

I hope this year will be another record-breaking year (especially since school will be out at assembly time) and that our synod's youth will be well represented.

After last year's assembly I heard such things as: "I didn't know Lutherans liked to argue so much"; "I thought it was interesting"; and "It was a lot of fun!" We had a great group of youth last year, and there were again great comments about their unforgettable report. You just never know what the youth are going to do when they are on stage.

Have you invited a youth voting member of your congregation to attend synod assembly? All it takes is an invitation from a triple A adult (Authentic, Available and Affirming). If we don't invite, they won't come!

Where does the importance of youth voice and vote stand in your congregation? Help us lift up the youth in our synod and in your congregation—these wonderful and caring young people are part of our church and our ministry now, and they will some day be leaders and/or pastors in our church. If your congregation's youth aren't active in ministry now, statistics show they are less likely to be active in the life of a congregation when they are an adult.



During last year's youth report, Cayla Egesdal and Wendy Broich performed a hip hop routine to Agape's ELCA song.

How can we change that? What can we do now to influence the church of tomorrow?

Please support your congregation's youth. Encourage and invite them to attend the synod assembly, youth gatherings and other events. The youth who are active in these events and feel a connection to their congregation end up being leaders in our congregations, at Bible camps and in campus ministry settings.

Some of the upcoming synod events are as follows: synod assembly, June 3-5; WIS Youth Group day at Adventureland with worship in June; WIYLDE at Luther College, Decorah, Iowa, July 25-29; Bible camp; ConFest events; and the Junior High Youth Gathering Nov. 4-5.

We hope you will encourage youth from your congregation to attend these events, which are designed with components to strengthen their relationship with God. It's always great to get together with youth and leaders from around the synod to worship, learn, and sing praises to our Lord and Savior! □

Egesdal is education, youth and family ministry coordinator for the Western Iowa Synod.



Last year many of the youth and members of the assembly enjoyed an evening concert by the band LightSwitch. Several of the youth are pictured above with band members.



Two Council Bluffs congregations merged to form Our Savior's Evangelical.

Two Council Bluffs churches merge

On Jan. 30, two Council Bluffs congregations celebrated their merger with a festival worship service, a ministry fair and (in fine Lutheran tradition) with a potluck. Our Savior's and Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran churches were united Jan. 1, following a year of getting acquainted with each others' vision for mission and ministry.

The merged congregation is named Our Savior's Evangelical Lutheran. It worships at 313 Story St.

Shepherd of the Valley was established as a mission of the American Lutheran Church in 1966 to provide a Lutheran presence in the west end of the city. They had a heart for evangelism and Christian education and served the ELCA as a teaching congregation for 10 pastoral interns.

Our Savior's was established in 1876 as a Danish-speaking church, moving to its present location in 1927. Yvonne Marshall was called to serve the congregation in January 2010.

Members of Shepherd of the Valley approached Our Savior's with the

idea of a merger in March. It hadn't had a full-time pastor for almost 20 years and had experienced a decline in membership. They felt Our Savior's was not so big that their members would feel lost in the transition.

As the first merger of two congregations in the Western Iowa Synod, this has been a learning process for all involved.

During the months of merger discussion and negotiation, members of Shepherd of the Valley were invited into leadership positions on ministry teams. Our Savior's was in the process of restructuring and redevelopment, which provided both congregations an opportunity to learn together how to live into a new vision for mission and ministry.

To help in the transition, a team was formed from both churches to integrate members into the life of the congregation. Another team will decide what to do with the Shepherd of the Valley property.

"Like a marriage, we are finding room in our home to accommodate treasured items and traditions as

we learn how to be a new family together," Marshall said. "We are just starting our life together and are getting to know one another and appreciate what each brings to the relationship."

In the words of the merger document: "United in our baptismal identity, and moved in the power of the Holy Spirit to come together as one church body, we seek to live together as one church, in joy and mutual strength, to care for and nurture one another as children of God, and to bear witness to the world of God's own self-giving love on the cross."

We are called is the foundation of our vision for the future as we humbly seek to do God's will to "do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God." □



Faith Lutheran gift

Trish Underberg, pastor of Faith Lutheran Church, Odebolt, presents a check for \$71,000 to Bishop Michael Last of the Western Iowa Synod for various synod and ELCA churchwide ministries. "As a congregation, for the last 46 years we have been truly blessed by [member] John Nelson's forward thinking as he did his estate planning, and we are glad that others outside of the local congregation also benefit from his generosity," Underberg said. "I don't believe he ever dreamt that his gift would grow as it has and affect so many lives." Faith also donated \$37,000 to other ministries both locally and nationally.

Western Iowa



Ben Worley ordained

Congratulations to the Rev. Ben Worley (front row, center) who was ordained Jan. 23 at Calvary Lutheran Church, Alexandria, Minn. He has accepted a call to Christ (Le Mars) and St. Peter (Brunsville) Lutheran churches.

News briefs

Marino Melsted retires

Marino Melsted grew up in North Dakota and was educated as a mechanical engineer. He worked at the Naval Weapons Center at China Lake, Calif., from 1960 to 1981. At age 47, he entered Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa.

Melsted was ordained in 1986 and served East Freeborn Lutheran Church, Albert Lea, Minn., until 1998. He was called to St. Paul Lutheran

Church in Lakota, Iowa, in 1998. He is known for thoughtful and reflective speech and writing and brings a heart for stewardship to ministry.

Melsted and his wife, Marlys, have raised two daughters and a son. They look forward to opportunities in retirement to savor family relationships.

Prayer shawl ministry

The prayer shawl ministry was started four and half years ago at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Forest City, Iowa. Twenty women of all ages have made



Bishop Michael Last and Marge Solberg.

more than 200 shawls or lap robes for members and friends of Immanuel who are facing physical challenges, grief, loss or other situations for which they would like prayer. Each child baptized also received a shawl. And last year, shawls were given to longtime members who were moving away, to visiting seminarians and to each staff member of Immanuel as a reminder

that they are receiving prayers.

The prayer shawl ministry meets the third Monday of each month at 2 p.m. in the Shalom Room. The ministry and the meetings are centered in prayer: from the selection of yarn, to the making of the shawl, to who the recipient is to be, to the blessing of the shawl, to its presentation. The shawls have been a blessing to many lives in this church community and around our country.

“That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love” (Colossians 2:2).

CAD progress

The Western Iowa Synod is a partner in the Center for Agricultural Development as part of its companion synod program. The Rev. Charles Mwantepele, CAD executive director, recently reported on the project’s progress.

- Demonstration plots developed.
- Farmer trainings to begin soon in the areas of crops, poultry, dairy and biogas.
- Mwantepele attended a workshop at the National Ministry of Agriculture, with President Jakaya Kikwete of the Republic of Tanzania in attendance, enhancing knowledge and collaborative bases with the government.
- Mwantepele attended a seminar with national 4-H leaders of Tanzania and Iowa State University as CAD looks to implement 4-H. Currently there are 33 clubs with 1,100-plus members.
- Facility and infrastructure renovations of staff/guest house; classroom/administration building; water, electricity, and Internet access; and director’s home.

God has richly blessed these developments, which provide wonderful mission as we reach out to our brothers and sisters who desire to provide for their families and make progress in their lives. □

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

News and photos may be submitted to:

Western Iowa Synod
318 East Fifth St.
PO Box 577

Storm Lake, IA 50588-0577
712-732-4968

Fax 712-732-6540

wis@wisynod.org