



Stories of
HOPE
 Central States Synod
 Evangelical Lutheran
 Church in America



Introduction

Thanks to all of the ministry leaders who submitted your Stories of Hope from around the synod!

Your personal narratives and photos provide additional insight and greater meaning to your ministry description. Over 30 Stories of Hope follow the introduction from Bishop Gustafson and the letter from Bishop Eaton. May they inspire and bless all who read them.

Many thanks to St. James Lutheran Church, Kansas City, Mo. and First Lutheran Church, Mission Hills, Kan. for their assistance with the printing of this booklet.

From Bishop Roger Gustafson

It truly is a great time to be in ministry in the Central States Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America! These Stories of Hope give us a strong sense of the partnership with we have with each other to live into God's mission to love and bless the world.

Peace and Joy



Roger Gustafson, Bishop

Central States Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



From Presiding Bishop Eaton



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.



“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

– John 3:16

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

John 3:16, perhaps one of the most quoted passages in the New Testament, hangs on bed sheets in football stadiums; it is almost ubiquitous. It is also true. If God so loves the world, we should too. Lutherans show up – as Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and as The Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

We are church for the sake of the world.

In our congregations we address hunger and poverty through food pantries and community gardens, in health care clinics and job training programs. We foster unity among the children of God in relationship with our ecumenical and inter-religious partners. Together, with our companions in Central America, we are working with unaccompanied minors and the conditions in their countries of origin that force these children to flee. Through LWF, we support Syrian refugees in Jordan who are living in Za’atari camp, provide education and child protection assistance to Sudanese refugees, and offer specialty care at the Augusta Victoria Hospital for Palestinians.

We have surpassed our fundraising commitment to eradicate malaria and bring about lasting change. Always Being Made New: The Campaign for the ELCA will emphasize ELCA World Hunger this year to support our comprehensive approach to solve challenges that perpetuate hunger and poverty. All of this good and hard, sometimes dangerous, work is the work we are able to do because we are church abiding in Christ – God’s beloved people gathered around word and sacrament.

We are church for the sake of the world.

In preparation for the 500th anniversary observance of the Reformation, I encourage you to visit ELCA500.org for more information and resources. One of the featured events for the 500th anniversary is the Grace Gathering in conjunction with the 2016 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. Come experience a churchwide assembly, be centered in God’s word, participate in experiential learning, hear Nobel Peace Prize winner Leymah Gbowee, attend workshops to equip you in observing the 500th anniversary in your local ministry setting and much more! You can register today at ELCA.org/GraceGathering.

On Sept. 11, our country will be remembering the lives lost and the lives forever changed by the tragic events 15 years ago. The events affected all of us, and it will be an important moment for us to be together as a church and with all people of faith. Part of our “God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday on Sept. 11 is a chance for us to show up as Lutherans, freed and renewed in Christ, to serve and love our neighbor.

From Presiding Bishop Eaton

We are church for the sake of the world.

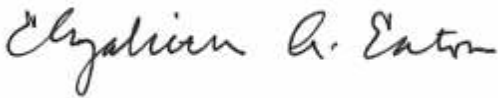
As we gather in our assemblies, let us be a faithful witness to God's work in our local communities, across the country and around the world. I am hopeful that our time together in assembly will be an opportunity for us to get to know each other and come together as a church. This is a good time for us to talk about the priorities and future directions of the ELCA.

I will be leading a process endorsed by the ELCA Church Council and the Conference of Bishops to discern in faith the future of the ELCA. Through an initiative titled Called Forward Together in Christ, we'll be assessing where we are as God's people and working to understand what God has in store for us. I am inviting you to take part in a conversation about the future of this church. For more information or to get involved, visit ELCA.org/future.

Thank you for your continued prayers and encouragement. As I am out and about in my travels, I am reminded that no one of us does God's work alone, and I am grateful for the opportunity to be a partner with you in that service. Thank you for your leadership in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

God's blessings to you as you gather as the living body of Christ. May you be guided by the Spirit as you do God's will for God's people.

With gratitude,



Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

From Presiding Bishop Eaton



Iglesia Evangélica Luterana en América

La obra de Dios. Nuestras manos.



“Porque tanto amó Dios al mundo, que dio a su Hijo unigénito, para que todo el que cree en él no se pierda, sino que tenga vida eterna.”

– Juan 3:16

Queridos hermanos y hermanas en Cristo,

Juan 3:16, quizás uno de los versículos más citados del Nuevo Testamento, escrito en sábanas que cuelgan en los estadios de fútbol americano; es casi cotidiano. También es verdad. Si Dios ama tanto al mundo, también nosotros debemos amarlo. Los luteranos se presentan—como la

Iglesia Evangélica Luterana en América (ELCA, siglas en inglés) y como la Federación Luterana Mundial (LWF, siglas en inglés).

Somos iglesia para el bienestar del mundo.

En nuestras congregaciones enfrentamos el hambre y la pobreza por medio de despensas de comida y huertos comunitarios, en clínicas de atención médica y programas de adiestramiento laboral. Fomentamos la unidad entre los hijos de Dios en la relación con nuestros socios ecuménicos e interreligiosos. Juntos, con nuestras compañeras en Centroamérica, estamos trabajando con los menores no acompañados y las condiciones en sus países de origen que los obligan a escapar. Por medio de LWF, mantenemos a los refugiados sirios en Jordania que están viviendo en el campamento Zaatari, proveemos de educación y asistencia en la protección de los niños de refugiados sudaneses, y ofrecemos a palestinos atención especializada en el Hospital Augusta Victoria.

Hemos sobrepasado nuestro compromiso de recaudación de fondos para erradicar la malaria y producir un cambio duradero. *Siempre siendo hechos nuevos: La campaña para la ELCA* enfatizará el Programa de la ELCA para el Alivio Mundial del Hambre de este año para apoyar nuestro minucioso enfoque en resolver los retos que perpetúan el hambre y la pobreza. Toda esta obra compasiva y difícil—y a veces peligrosa—es una obra que podemos llevar a cabo porque somos una iglesia que permanece en Cristo—el pueblo amado de Dios reunido en torno a la palabra y el sacramento.

Somos iglesia por el bienestar del mundo.

En preparación para la celebración del 500 aniversario de la Reforma, les animo a visitar ELCA500.org para más información y recursos. Uno de los eventos preparados para el 500 aniversario es la Asamblea de la Gracia en conjunto con la Asamblea General de la ELCA de 2016. Venga y viva la experiencia de una asamblea general, céntrese en la palabra de Dios, participe en el aprendizaje por experiencia, escuche a la ganadora del Premio Nobel Leymah Gbowee, asista a talleres que lo equiparán para la celebración del 500 aniversario en el escenario de su ministerio local, y mucho más. Puede inscribirse hoy en ELCA.org/GraceGathering.

From Presiding Bishop Eaton

Somos iglesia para el bienestar del mundo.

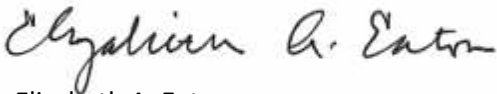
Mientras nos reunimos en nuestras asambleas, seamos testimonio fiel de la obra de Dios en nuestras comunidades locales, a lo largo del país y en todo el mundo. Espero que nuestro tiempo juntos en asamblea sea una oportunidad para que nos conozcamos unos a otros y estemos unidos como iglesia. Este será un buen momento para hablar de las prioridades y rumbos futuros de la ELCA.

Voy a estar dirigiendo un proceso respaldado por el Consejo Eclesial de la ELCA y la Conferencia de Obispos para discernir en fe el futuro de la ELCA. Mediante una iniciativa titulada Llamados Juntos hacia Adelante en Cristo, estaremos evaluando dónde estamos como pueblo de Dios y esforzándonos por entender lo que Dios nos tiene guardado. Les estoy invitando a participar en la conversación sobre el futuro de esta iglesia. Para más información o para involucrarse, visite ELCA.org/future.

Gracias por sus oraciones y aliento continuos. Mientras yo viajo de un sitio a otro, me acuerdo que ninguno de nosotros realiza la obra de Dios solo, y agradezco la oportunidad de ser socia de ustedes en ese servicio. Gracias por su liderazgo en la Iglesia Evangélica Luterana en América.

Bendiciones de Dios para ustedes mientras se reúnen como el cuerpo vivo de Cristo. Que sean guiados por el Espíritu mientras hacen la voluntad de Dios para el pueblo de Dios.

Con gratitud,



Elizabeth A. Eaton
Obispo Presidente
Iglesia Evangélica Luterana en América

Stories of Hope from Our Synod - Area Ministry 1 & 2 Western Kansas

St. John, Bird City, now has the services of a new pastor (Rev. Jim Gleason). One could say this is normative, however in rural western Kansas where ordained clergy are scarce, a congregation with a pastor brightens a surrounding community in ways often taken for granted by congregations who have little difficulty receiving numerous applicants.

Trinity, Otis now has a Sunday School Class. One student and one teacher mark the first Sunday School class in more than a decade at Trinity. The angels celebrate this twig that may become a branch of faith.



Trinity, Hays offered a BBQ to the community, May 1, at the church. This semi-annual “party” not only feeds but the proceeds go to much needed community organizations that help the powerless. First Call for Help (domestic violence) was the recipient. CASA was blessed with the previous gathering. A member of the congregation donates time and the meat. The congregation assists. One individual’s generosity begets additional generosity which begets hope.

The relatively new Parish Nurse program at **Prairie Faith Shared Ministry** (WaKeeney) continues to expand health awareness with workshops in diverse areas. The cluster’s human trafficking workshop drew folk from around the area. If the awareness stops one van laden with young women or men, hope appears in the lives of not only the victims, but their families as well.

St. John, Russell’s, backpack program addresses hunger in the elementary schools. From a teacher’s comment, the resulting ministry expands each year and now reaches more than 60 families. Community awareness of hunger impacting education and child development increases with the program and more support is being received by other churches and community groups. The number of children reached now strains financial resources available. This financial challenge becomes an opportunity as a major community event is considered to bring hope to even more children and their families.



St. Mark, Great Bend, members noticed the burden on a local landfill as electronic equipment was dumped. Three years later, the congregation sponsors its third annual electronics recycling day. Increased awareness of creation and stewardship of resources are the result of an initial desire to do something to care for the earth. The awareness that something can be done spurs further consideration of future ministry projects that bring hope.

Rev. Roger Dennis - Dean, Area 2 & Acting Dean Area 1

Stories of Hope from Our Synod - Area Ministry 5 South Central Kansas



Area Ministry 5 congregations traveled together to Detroit for the ELCA National Youth Gathering in July 2015. Filling the majority of the seats on the bus, we traveled over the course of two days with a quick overnight stop outside of Chicago. Once we arrived in Detroit and were checked into our various hotels, we had the opportunity to do some sightseeing. A big highlight for these Area 5 youth and the adults, was the Motown recording studio and having the chance to see where some of the “greats” had their big start in the music industry.

The congregations that traveled together took advantage of leaving for Detroit a few days before the gathering actually began. They learned early on that it would be more economical to share the cost of a bus than for them to travel individually. They also learned that booking tours together meant that we could stay together as a group and not get separated at the various tourist attractions. Everyone had a wonderful time and shared memories that will last a lifetime.

By sharing our resources with one another, the churches of Area Ministry 5 were able to divide their travel costs and promote a sense of the larger church among the youth and adults who attended the ELCA National Youth Gathering. In the months following the gathering, many of the youth remained in contact with friends they had made from other congregations. By sharing in this opportunity, all who attended were connected to the greater church, connected to other Lutherans from across the country, and connected to their faith.

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Cummings - Area Ministry 5 Dean

Stories of Hope from Our Synod - Area Ministry 7 Western Mo. & Eastern Kan.



A new facility for Metro Lutheran Ministries' Northland operation, at St. James Lutheran

The congregations of Area Ministry Seven are in mission with God across the Greater Kansas City Metro and Lawrence, KS. Area congregations are serving the hungry and homeless, providing safe and fun spaces for local kids, advocating for those who need a voice, and caring for God's creation in vibrant and faithful ways. Here are stories from a few of our congregations:

Advent Lutheran supports a home-grown ministry called Global Therapy Group in Haiti. GTG is a physical therapy clinic entirely supported by donations and volunteers, and was founded by an Advent member, Donna Hutchinson, immediately following the earthquake. We travel to Haiti to help out and sometimes connect these trips with visits to the children Advent members sponsor in the Dominican Republic through Children International.

Lutheran Church of the Resurrection's Green Team recently planted 6 apple trees on the church property as part of the Giving Grove project. When the orchard begins producing (3 to 5 years from now) the apples will go to area pantries as well as guests of the Saturday's Miracle Breakfast program.

Resurrection's Green Team hosted an Earth Day Event for 150 students at John Diemer Elementary School on April 22nd. The activities included a classroom with a live camera feed of an Eagle's nest and the creation of bird feeders using re-purposed punch cups and homemade suet/seed. We are partnering with the school year round as part of the Caring for Kids program. The Saturday's Miracle Free Breakfast ministry has just celebrated its 5th anniversary! We have only missed one Saturday in all that time.

St. James Lutheran in the Northland is focused on serving its community by providing a new home for the Northland Offices of Metro Lutheran Ministries via a partnership that allowed them to remodel a portion of their building. St. James also engages in efforts to provide supplemental nutrition to school children and their families who are on free and reduced lunch. Through Grocery Recovery programs and Harvester's purchases, in 2015 St. James distributed over 98,000 pounds of food through its connections in the North Kansas City School district and the Karan Refugees in the area.



Inside the new MLM Northland facility

At Hillside Community Lutheran, God's Mission for us is to connect people to build the community as engaged followers of Jesus Christ! Here are ways we reach into the community to find God at work.

- Helped start Living out Circles (an 'out of poverty initiative') across Miami County. This provides an opportunity to walk with those who are helping their families get out of poverty, as well as periodically providing dinners.
- Welcoming families with hardships to utilize our Church as a "safe" place to gather and grieve. Helping with yard-work for others.
- Working for Annual Adopt-a-Family with donations to families in need/support of the Community Food Pantry.
- Hillside reaches out and offers VBS; last year's VBS allowed Bailey's family to finally feel connected to a Church and ultimately join and enrich their lives in a faith community.
- Worship with Assisted Living Residents - Communion and monthly Worship at various facilities to minister to those who can't get out and come to a church. We go there!

St. Mark Hope and Peace is focusing upon service to the youth in our community, and to work for justice and reconciliation. The congregation is very involved in our local low wage worker campaign, which is headquartered in the church building. The Hope and Peace Center for Youth will serve high school youth after school, beginning late 2016.

A spirit of collegiality and partnership has been a joyful part of the life of Area Seven congregations. We are excited to see what God does with us in the coming days.

The Rev. Donna Simon, Area Ministry 7 Dean

Stories of Hope from Our Synod - Area Ministry 8 Southern Mo. & South Eastern Kan.



Peace Lutheran Church, Joplin, Mo.

During the season of Lent, 2016, Peace in Joplin took the 40 Days of Giving Challenge. Through the ELCA's World Hunger appeal, we received free materials which included daily devotion booklets, colorful posters, inspiring lessons, and creative ideas for raising awareness of hunger around the world and for collecting money to reach our courageously set goal of \$500.



Throughout the six weeks of Lent we distributed the devotionals, we hung the posters, we taught the lessons, and we experimented with some clever ideas for raising money. Each Sunday and Wednesday we passed an empty bread pan to gather loose change. One Sunday we held a "No Pot Potluck" where people were encouraged to skip the covered dish preparation and instead contribute what they might have spent on ingredients. Another Sunday we had a Baked Potato Bar where all were fed and free will donations we accepted.

The week following Easter we celebrated as we unveiled the final amount of our contributions. We had stepped out in faith and with great hope as we set our \$500 goal. We were amazed when the final tally showed that \$700 had been collected!

While the congregation struggles to meet its regular budget, it gives me great hope to see such generosity. Food is such a fundamental need, and helping to alleviate the hunger of strangers is a hope-filled commitment that this gathering of God's people were ready to meet!

Submitted by Pr. Katharine Redpath

Specialized Ministry - Mercy Hospital Springfield, Mo.

After 13 years in parish ministry, I transitioned into healthcare ministry in 2008. Specializing in palliative care chaplaincy gave me the opportunity to work with Dr. Robert Saylor, the Director of Ethics at Mercy Springfield. Dr. Saylor became my friend and mentor, and encouraged me to pursue my goal of working towards a degree in Bioethics. My love for bioethics grew as I witnessed the difference made in the lives of patients and families when an ethicist facilitated conversations bringing out their hopes and fears, their values and beliefs. The role of an ethicist is to draw out conflicting values and to make moral recommendations that guide patients, families and healthcare teams in making decisions. What I valued the most about my friend was his moral courage. He led honest conversations that often allowed families to face painful realities so they could finally embrace sacred time together.



The last Mercy Corporate Ethics Dinner with Dr. Saylor (near in the center in a blue shirt)

In the fall of 2014, I learned that my friend had been diagnosed with a glioblastoma. Since then I have covered ethics full-time. Often I walk into very challenging situations and make recommendations that impact medical decisions. It can be a heavy responsibility.

My story of hope is that I know that I am not alone. God formed us to be in community. When I got the phone call that I would be covering ethics, I felt it was "all on my shoulders." Instead, I found myself surrounded by a strong community. The ethicists across our ministry are some of the smartest, kindest and bravest people that I know. They have been signs of hope for me, as I witness their wisdom, perseverance and sense of community. The ethicists, as well as other members of the healthcare team in Springfield and across our ministry, have reminded me that we are all members of one body.

Submitted by The Rev. Linda M. Bollenbach, Ethics Consultor, Mercy Hospital Springfield, MO

Stories of Hope from Our Synod - Area Ministry 8 Southern Mo. & South Eastern Kan.

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Springfield, Mo.

Cassandra Manning knows first hand how hope is found in and through the love of God. She knows that others may find strength and hope in her story, so she wants to share it.

As Cassie struggled to get clean from drugs so she could face drug court, she discovered she was pregnant. She knew she had to get her life back, especially for her children's sake.

God gave her what she needed, she embraced those gifts, and despite the struggles is living into a new life.



Life House is a ministry for homeless, pregnant women. God loved her there. She was made aware of and received transportation to drug court appearances, counseling, healthcare, job opportunities and daycare. But there was one thing they had no clue how to help her with: housing. Many landlords had policies prohibiting them to rent to someone like her.

Our congregation owns a home that was once used for classrooms and for the youth group. We no longer need that space. So, we planted a seed with the Council of Churches of the Ozarks hoping to gain a referral of a family who could benefit from living next door to a great school and a congregation who knows how to love and help raise families. We met Cassie and her son, Liam, four months later last March. She worshipped with and developed relationships within our faith community. She continued to jump through difficult hoops so that she would be set up for success. It was a joyous day when she moved into our home in November.

She depended completely on others for her room and board, but now she is gainfully employed, driving and learning how to be interdependent. Cassie was embarrassed to have very little Bible knowledge, but now she knows she is a disciple on a journey. She works in our nursery, attends a weekly Bible study with her peers and meets with me every other week to share how God is working in her life and to pray together. She obtained her GED and is now taking steps to begin classes at Ozark Technical College toward certification as an Addictions Counselor. Once afraid to speak up because of shame and fear, Cassie is now finding her voice as an advocate for those who are struggling to get straight. In fact, the National Association of Drug Court Treatment Counselors invited Cassie to speak at their regional conference at the Lake of the Ozarks in April. They have invited her to speak at their national conference in California in 2017.

It is my honor and joy to be just one vessel amidst a congregation and a community of vessels God has used in Cassie's story. We look forward to witnessing how God will continue to give Cassie hope, and to use Cassie as a vessel of hope for others!

Submitted Katherine Hayes, Pastor
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Springfield, MO

Pastor Katherine Hayes, Dean Area Ministry 8

Stories of Hope from Our Synod - Area Ministry 9 Mid-Missouri



The story of **Area Ministry 9** goes back to the days just before the Civil War. German settlers continued to move up the Missouri River and then, near Jefferson City, left the river valley to farm the lands in the west center of the state. Some brought their Lutheran faith and, along with their crops, planted the Church. (As an important note in history, the immigrants from Germany were strongly anti-slavery. Their presence in the middle of the state prevented the pro-slavery northern portion from uniting – politically and militarily – with the south, thus preventing Missouri from fully joining the Confederacy. Sadly, this did not prevent some very bloody battles in the territory of our Synod.)

We are twelve congregations in open country, small towns, and the “big cities”. Of our congregations, four are served by Parish Ministry Associates. One is served by an ordained pastor, part-time. Three calls are currently vacant. Four are served by ordained pastors under full time call. Our roster includes one pastor serving a congregation of the Episcopal Church full-time. One of our retired pastors serves as Chaplain to the State Senate.

A highlight this year was *Hey Church! Let's "Rise Up" Together*, also billed as a “youth gathering for adults.” Planned and hosted by Saint Paul’s Church, Cole Camp, the event featured presenters Mark and Sarah Huber, Pastor and Creative Director from *Sanctuary*, a worshipping community near Boston. *Re:vival* is the theme for the next gathering, Saturday, October 15, again at Saint Paul’s.

Our major annual effort is the Bible Camp for grades 5 through 9, held at a state park on the Lake of the Ozarks. All the work is provided by lay and clergy volunteers, with the exception of the program led by staff from Lutheran Outdoor Ministries, Oregon Illinois. The area ministry subsidizes the program, this year at the level of \$2000, which keeps the cost per camper very low. Approximately 50 campers participate each year.



On April 30, we co-sponsored *Agape* (David Scherer) in concert at Saint Andrew’s, Columbia.

Congregations offered spiritual and monetary support for one of our pastor-families following a disastrous fire.

Pastoral leaders, including PMA’s and retired pastors, meet (almost) monthly for Dwelling in the Word, mutual support, and to address Area Ministry matters.

We support our work with a contribution from each congregation at \$1 per confirmed member.

We live with gratitude to God for the joys in our unique and common ministries, for the hope leading us to address the challenges of ministry in each new day, and for the partnership we share in Area Ministry 9!



Pastor Paul H. Moessner, Dean Area Ministry 9

Stories of Hope from Our Synod - Mission Tables

LUTHERANS RESTORING CREATION - SYNODWIDE MISSION TABLE



CSS LRC Leadership Team Retreat at
Camp Tomah Shinga, February 26-28, 2016

Once upon a time in June 2015 our Central States Synod Assembly passed a resolution to become a Lutherans Restoring Creation Synod. A Mission Table was formed and in February 2016 members of the Mission Table and others from across KS and MO came together at Camp Tomah Shinga to experience a leadership retreat to enable us to share the concepts and practices of LRC among our congregations and members.

We enjoyed the Camp setting and were hosted by Camp Director Ben Fulton, and his staff and family. We had 24 participants who came from 11 congregations, college, or Synod. Our leader was Phoebe Morad, from MA, the LRC Synod Training Coordinator. Participants shared our personal "Aha!" moments of how creation care came to be a part of our calling. We learned about LRC

goals, resources, action plans, sustainability, etc. We learned how we can integrate creation care into the life of our congregations.

CSS in partnering with LRC has committed to fulfill this task in the following areas: Worship, Education, Property, Personal Discipleship, and Public Ministry/Political Advocacy. In part the commitment reads, "We will pursue them in a grace-filled and non-legalistic way, seeking to find hope and joy in the commitments that these provisions may entail and in the restorations that they engender. Because we desire to leave Earth a better place for our children and grandchildren, we will promote love and respect for creation in our youth, teach them responsible Earth practices, and engage them in programs that restore creation." As we worked together we were continually inspired by our worship, prayer and each other. Even our young children who attended some of our meals and activities, Lillie and David Fulton, inspired us to become dedicated to these efforts to provide a better place filled with hope and joy for our children and grandchildren being ever mindful that it truly is God's creation.

Gary Anderson, LRC Mission Table member, May 3, 2016



CITY STRONG—KANSAS CITY METRO MISSION TABLE

City Strong is a partnership of congregations from the whole KC Metro, focused specifically on ministry in the urban core. Two congregations—Children's Memorial and St. Mark Hope and Peace—are the current ministry sites for City Strong. We are working to develop new ministry opportunities as well. We know that God is at work in every corner of the city. A profile of Children's Memorial may be found in these Stories of Hope. Children's serves its neighbors, many

of whom are homeless, with food, clothing, care of all kinds, and needed items. The services provided at Children's are invaluable to the community.

The Rev. Donna Simon, City Strong Table



Stories of Hope from Our Synod - Congregations

Children's Memorial: Food, Family and Fellowship in KC for Those Who Have None

Children's Memorial Lutheran Church is an ELCA congregation in northeast Kansas City, Missouri that was established in 1884. The church's name is based on a capital campaign conducted in 1882 where children across the U.S. sent money to the congregation so they could buy land and build a new church. The church has been through some very rough times, but Pastor Ann Rundquist sees hope. The church is under synodical administration with an oversight board consisting of the community and synod representatives. "We really are the synod's church. . . a mission outpost. . . with nontraditional ways," Ann remarked.



"I am so thankful that ELCA congregations support our unique ministry in what many think is an 'undesirable' location. Isn't that where Jesus lived?" Though she only serves part-time, she is breathing new life into an area that is comprised mostly of people who are homeless or living in extreme poverty. "One of my roles is to develop leaders who love to spread the good news of Jesus Christ, welcome others, and serve one another. Our consistent message is 'come and see.'"

Even in such a poor area, where the total weekly offering might average \$5, God is doing something extraordinary.

"Gone are the days of just a handful worshipping and serving on Sundays. Thirty faithful disciples consistently come together as a Christ driven community," Ann said. Retired pastor and church member Bill Pape suggested a Saturday morning worship, which gathered 30 people to word, sacrament, service and lots of singing. And the church's street corner worship on Fridays attracts about 10 people. Bible studies are on Tuesday and Fridays. Two hundred hot nutritious meals are prepared and served each week. Holiday diners (Easter, Thanksgiving, Christmas) number about 300.



Thirteen synod congregations partner with CMLC to serve lunch, donate clothing, provide financial support and prayer. Generosity USA, a local nonprofit agency, funds all the food expenses and in 2015 MLM volunteers donated Christmas gifts. "It is amazing how adults and students come to serve lunch and before long they match their talents with our needs. An Eagle Scout built shelving units and a Girl Scout just brought us twenty Easter baskets. The Chamber of Commerce and Northeast High School partner with us, too. And we look forward to Youthworks volunteering, again, this summer," Pastor Ann commented.

"Our ministry is word, sacrament, fellowship, meals, and clothing. Most of the people who come here learn about us from a friend on the street. Creating a safe, family environment has been key in welcoming others as many don't have families. So we visit, eat, work, and pray like a family. Nutritious meals, which include fruits and vegetables, are often a luxury to our diners. Travel with us from the dinner table to the Lord's table," said the determined pastor.

Because of the support from other congregations and God's grace and abundance, a growing church ministry has been created here at the corner of Independence and Brighton. Instead of children across the U.S. sending their pennies here to build a new church, local congregations and volunteers are making contributions and driving a short distance to rebuild what was once a thriving congregation.

"As you may guess, we have few 'frills,' such as a telephone, janitor, secretary, or musician. However, our followers of Jesus pitch in and take leadership roles to maintain the building, sing solos, prepare meals, and spread the good news of Jesus Christ," said Pastor Ann. "Jesus instructed us that 'when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. . . you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.'"

Stories of Hope from Our Synod - Congregations

This outreach ministry began with the spring semester 2005. Trinity members met with administrative staff at Baker University School of Nursing at the Stormont Vail campus to ask if we could become community partners. Since that first meeting we have received support from our members, friends, students, staff, faculty, the community. The school is only a few blocks from our church in central Topeka.



With this partnership, relationships have emerged over the years. A few students have attended worship while attending nursing school. Many of our members have felt comforted when they have been hospitalized and connected with former students who are now their nurses caring for them. A few students have kept in contact with our members after they graduated, fostering friendships.

Some of the activities each semester include a welcome program and lunch inviting the incoming students and faculty to the church. Some students have never been to Topeka or Kansas before and we strive to welcome everyone to our church. We provide treats monthly at the school for students, faculty and staff each semester.



Nursing students provide a blood pressure screening clinic at our church following worship each month. Many of our members participate in their education process by being interviewed for an elder's class project. As the senior students graduate we provide a graduation gift to the new nurses as a way of saying thank you for being part of our lives at Trinity.



We are encouraged with this partnership as it continues to enrich us, and we look forward to continue this relationship for many more years.

***Mr. Dean McGinnis and Ms. Cindy McGinnis
Trinity Lutheran, Topeka Kan.***



Stories of Hope from Our Synod - Congregations

About five years ago some members of Trinity Lutheran Church (Topeka, KS) read articles in newspapers and *The Lutheran* magazine about neighborhood gardens and the value of this project. Trinity has a large empty lot which the council agreed could be used for a garden. So, in the spring of 2012 we started with 10 neighbors and one Trinity member, plus 10 children involved in gardening. Some of these were at-risk children.

My wife, Helen, applied for and received \$1,000 from Women of The ELCA to be used for water for the garden and some equipment. I applied for and received a \$3,480 grant from the K-State Research and Extension office. This was used to purchase lumber for raised beds, drip irrigation supplies, a mower, tiller, weed eater and running a water line to the garden. In 2014 K-State notified us that we were eligible to apply for \$1,500 more. We did and used this gift to replace some equipment that was stolen and for more raised beds and irrigation materials. Most of the materials were purchased from Lowe's Home Improvement at cost.

During the summer of 2015 we had 14 gardeners using 17 raised beds. In a few of the beds some of the gardeners worked together. Three of these gardeners were members of Trinity. In addition we have four members who attend our business meetings and support us in other ways. We are not only growing vegetables but also a community. We usually work together on Sunday afternoons. Some of the produce is given to a food distribution organization and to other people in need. We usually host an outdoor picnic or two each summer to which neighbors and members of the congregation are invited. Of course, vegetables and flowers from the garden are featured.



Pr. Walt Laughlin, retired — Trinity Lutheran, Topeka Kan.



Lutheran Church of the Resurrection's "Green Team" spent a rainy Monday morning planting an apple orchard on our church property – a growing symbol of our hope in God's abundant future in the midst of uncertain times. There are six trees that will begin producing a variety of apples (roughly 400 to 450 pounds of them) in just four years.

The project was funded by a grant from The Giving Grove of Kansas City Community Gardens who also helped with tree selection and planting and provided training in apple orchard care. Our vision is that our Saturday's Miracle Breakfast guests and our local food pantries will be picking delicious free apples right off the tree.

Pastor Alix Pridgen - Lutheran Church of the Resurrection, Prairie Village, Kan.





Stories of Hope from Our Synod - Bethany College

This is a year when Bethany College has reached out to many for prayer and financial support. The response has been astonishing – GIVING HOPE! The College is grateful.



It is critical that the Church sustain its agencies and institutions. Bethany is the Church in mission in higher education. Lutherans bring a very distinctive gift to the world of higher education – our strong emphasis on vocation, helping students discover and claim their callings in life. At our best we help students “put it all together”: what they bring from family, community and church, their faith and values. Putting that together with new experiences and new learnings. Helping them discover more about themselves, their interests and passions. Challenging them to match their passions with something that

needs done in this world. Preparing them to provide leadership and service in church and community.

There are more than 2,000 Bethany graduates within the borders of the Central State Synods. Many, many are members of your congregations, sharing their gifts.



In addition, the College is a laboratory for the Church’s efforts to connect meaningfully with a new generation of young people. At a time when our Church is challenged to retain its youth, Bethany is committed to helping students hold faith and learning together, claiming for themselves that firm foundation in faith that gives meaning and purpose in life.

We cherish the partnership we share in this mission. God bless all of you and God bless those who serve you at Bethany College.

Dr. Robert Vogel
Interim President, Bethany College

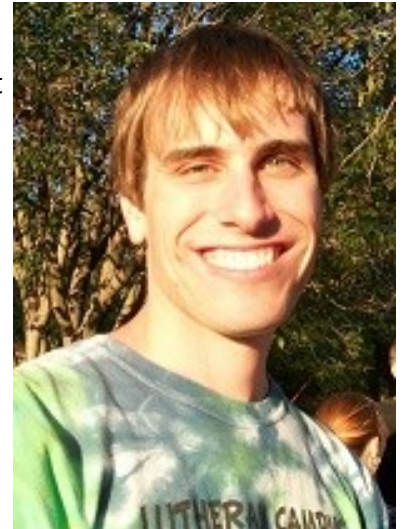
Stories of Hope from Our Synod - Campus Ministries

I first met Clinton at a K-State Activities Fair when one of our Peer Ministers invited him to attend Lutheran Campus Ministry. He was not interested in Bible Study or Worship, but was interested in Disc Golf and Free Food! After a few weeks, Clinton found that he loved the LCM community. Later on, he shared that he had not been looking for a church when he came to college, and probably would not be a part of any religious group if not for Lutheran Campus Ministry.

Clinton had often experienced Christians as judgmental people, who tried to mold others to their own narrow views. He was surprised to find a ministry that welcomed and accepted his questions, doubts and uncertainties.

Soon, Clinton was very involved in LCM, attending worship regularly. The next semester he became a Peer Minister, then President of LCM—Yes... President Clinton!

Clinton was quirky, and sometimes seemed a little awkward—not the kind of person one would usually think of as being popular. But people LOVED Clinton. Clinton's primary spiritual gift was "People Magnet". He invited everyone to LCM, including many of his atheist friends. Because of him, our ministry grew not only in numbers, but in its impact on students!



Truly, Clinton is a grace-filled, non-judgmental person, who understands the good news of God's love for us. People gravitate to him because they trust him and feel welcomed and accepted by him just as they are.

After graduating, Clinton moved to Omaha, and asked me to help him find a church there. Clinton, the student who didn't want anything to do with a church when he came to college, is now attending an ELCA congregation, with his fiancé, where he will continue to share his questions and doubts, as well as his extraordinary gift of grace-filled magnetism!

Pastor Kevin Clark—Lutheran Campus Ministry at Kansas State University

Stories of Hope from Our Synod - Campus Ministries
LUTHERAN CAMPUS MINISTRY IN ST LOUIS
www.LCMstl.org

“If there is no friendship and no sharing of the life of the poor, then there is no authentic commitment to liberation, because love exists only among equals.”
— [Gustavo Gutiérrez](#)



Every April, St Louis University holds ATLAS Week to “increase awareness of global issues and inspire & inform action.” Johanna is a junior @ SLU and organized LCM to present “Liberation Theology and Guatemala.” She is new to our LCM community and even invited 3 friends to join our 2016 spring break service trip to Guatemala to help build a home with Constru Casa (CC). We love working with CC because they deeply listen and respond to the needs of Guatemalan families. Even as a secular organization, they have taught us abundantly about accompaniment.

So often ministry is scattering seeds we don’t see fully bloom--especially when two large college campuses with ever-changing populations is your mission field! On this rainy night in April, though, we experienced a full bloom. Celia, a Washington University senior who grew up as an ELCA missionary kid in Tanzania beautifully presented how this theological shift is deeply transformational for communities. Our SLU students shared powerful stories about hope in the developing world--from the ninos to family values to learning to respect coffee production from the farmers.



It is quite unexpected that a Lutheran community would be teaching/modeling to Catholic students about liberation theology...yet there we were! Over the past few years we’ve helped build eight homes in Guatemala and equipped 75 young adults to be more thoughtful, respectful global citizens. One of our SLU students, Aaron, said it best with these words, “the family of God is so much bigger than I ever expected! We needed to leave my university/city/country boundaries to actually realize that.”

Pastor Rebecca Boardman

Lutheran Campus Ministry of St. Louis
7019 Forsyth Blvd (at Big Bend) | St. Louis, MO 63105
314.863.8140--office | 314.322.8120--cell (preferred)
www.LCMstl.org

Stories of Hope - Central States Synod, ELCA 2016

Stories of Hope from Our Synod - Campus Ministries



Lutheran Campus Ministry at KU (LCM) shares God's abundance with students by hosting a food pantry and offering free coffee and lots of free food each week.

Our cook for the last three years is Abby Bair, who just graduated from Johnson County Community College with a degree in Culinary and Restaurant Management. When she first started participating in LCM Abby described herself as an atheist. She used LCM more as a place to hang out with friends. But after serving food to the homeless on the New York City mission trip for two years, participating in the Ever Onward fundraiser, cooking for LCM and occasionally attending services her views have shifted. "I no longer consider myself a nonbeliever. After being involved in LCM, my views have shifted into believing that there is a higher power. I don't know if I'm necessarily, fully there yet, but I can accept that there is something greater than myself."

Other KU students are experiencing similar transformations. After serving in a Lutheran after school program in the Bronx this spring, several students said they saw the church in a much more positive light. Like Abby, these students are on a journey of faith that is nourished by seeing others sharing God's abundance



Pastor Shawn Norris —Lutheran Campus Ministry at Kansas University



Stories of Hope from Our Synod - Hollis Renewal Center

**Arms wide and ready for embrace,
Jesus is welcoming children through Hollis Renewal Center this summer.**

Just as Christ is the perfect model of hospitality, so we too should strive to welcome our family, friends, and especially those whom we do not know, as brothers and sisters. With joy, Hollis is reaching out now to bring the children of the inner Kansas City Metro, many of whom are in difficult situations, through the tenth annual Hollis Crossings Day Camp themed "Upside Down." Sponsored by organizations such as Atonement Lutheran, Salem Lutheran, St. Martin Lutheran, and by the Trinity Lutheran Garage Sale, this camp will be hosted at Hollis Renewal Center.



With the help of trained counselors from Nebraska Lutheran Outdoor Ministries (NOLM), we will reach out to these children and witness the love and hospitality of the Gospel. Throughout the week of June 13-17, kids will engage in activities such as hiking, nature exploration, cookouts, community building, as well as Bible exploration as they gain experience in cultural differences and learn about Christ's power to bring hope to difficult situations.



Offering 25 scholarships, the program hopes to engage kids from all social classes and backgrounds by teaming up local churches with Revision, a program for kids who currently have an incarcerated parent. Additionally, 25 or more children from the Kansas City community are welcome to attend, and will provide those who come with fresh perspectives on what it truly means to be both a child of God and larger Christian community.



For information about either the camp or Revision, please contact Hollis Renewal Center at info@holliscenter.org or by calling (913) 441-0451. www.holliscenter.org

David Mareske, Executive Director - Hollis Renewal Center Kansas City, Kansas



Hollis Renewal Center
A place to be surprised by God.

Hollis Renewal Center provides a welcoming environment and experience for individuals and groups seeking spiritual growth and renewal.

Hollis Mission Statement

Stories of Hope from Our Synod - Camp Tomah Shinga

Wonderful things have been happening at Camp Tomah Shinga this year!



We continue to develop new and exciting programs and we have had a great response for spring registrations so far this year! We are providing many new opportunities for summer camp this summer to include new adventure camps, and Disaster Response Teen Corps! We are also going to provide programmed retreats starting in August and we will have one every month for the remainder of 2016. This will also include a Senior High and Middle School retreat for all Synod Youth.

There are many new developments on the property out at camp this year as well. We have had congregations adopt all of the cabins, the chapel, and the dining hall! People have been working diligently to make sure that all of the facilities are up to speed and ready to go for summer! Our first big project was the dining hall which was adopted by the Falun/Salemsborg Parish. They installed new windows, floors, ceilings, insulation and ducting! There were more than 70 volunteers out at camp making a huge difference!



A huge thank you to all of our congregations in the Central States Synod for the incredible support! We are excited to see how the Holy Spirit continues to work in this ministry!

Ben Fulton, Executive Director - Camp Tomah Shinga, Junction City, Kansas

Stories of Hope from Our Synod - Companion Synod Team

PLANES TRAINS BOATS AND BOOTS.

2016 is turning out to be a big travel year for members of the Central States Synod as they take to planes, trains, boats and hiking boots to spend time with our CoSyn Christians in the Companion Synods of the CSS-ELCA. On June 7, 4 youth together with 4 adults from the Central States Synod will take off for Papua New Guinea where the youth will participate in worship, bible study, recreation and fellowship with youth from one of the partner churches of the CSS-ELCA, the Kotte District of the Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea. Noah Hornbeck, Grace Vannoy, Emily Greble and Eli Truhe will spend nearly 50 hours on planes, 10 hours on boats and many more hours walking and talking with young people of Papua New Guinea long the roads and in the villages where they live. Their hosts in Papua New Guinea have promised them a night in a village with their hosts and a float trip down the "Mape" river (not to worry, they will be on a crocodile free part of the river).



Alex Lang and Daniel Lilienkamp be traveling with the youth to Papua New Guinea and will deliver 2 more computers to the district leaders (they delivered 8 computers to the 8 circuits of the Kotte District in 2014) and do additional computer training for the computer operators from the circuits and district. Pastor Amy Truhe and Gary Teske will also be a part of this group of 8 who will fly, float and hike their way to PNG and continue to build relationships through which we and our CoSyn Christians can strengthen one another in faith and mission.

And then, in late September, Rev. Len Dale who just retired from his position as Director of Evangelical Missions with the Central States Synod will take to the skies, the rails and the roads of Russia where he will spend about 6 weeks leading seminars for leaders of the Lutheran Church in Russia. He will be traveling and teaching together with Missionary Bradn Buerkle who will be his guide and translator. Len will work his way across at least 7 time zones beginning with Magadan and Vladivostok in the East and ending in Moscow and possibly St. Petersburg in the west of Russia. I am sure there will be a movie or two coming out of these adventures, so watch for the sequels to Planes, Trains, Boats and Boots that are sure to follow.

Rev. Gary Teske —Companion synod Team Chair

Stories of Hope from Our Synod - Bethany House of Studies

The Bethany House of Studies, an educational ministry of the church, is supported by individuals, congregations, Area Ministries I, II, III, and V, and Central States Synod.

The mission of the Bethany House of Studies is **“equipping the saints through education.”** As such it continues to **“to raise up leaders of all ages for the church and to inspire and equip people to be part of what God is up to in their everyday lives.”**

During the past year the Bethany House of Studies, in collaboration with Bethany College, presented three workshops. All three were held in the Pearson Chapel on the campus of Bethany College, Lindsborg, Kansas. The first was entitled “Preaching the Gospel of Luke” and was held on Thursday, September 17, 2015. Presenters included Dr. Tyler Atkinson, Dr. Adam Pryor, Dr. Benjamin Thomas, Dr. Carl Isaacson, and Rev. Rachael Pryor. They offered perspectives on the Gospel of Luke that were intended to assist both those who deliver sermons and those who faithfully listen and heed the gospel message. This workshop was designed for clergy and laypeople alike who are keenly interested in proclaiming and teaching the gospel. Forty-three Lutheran, Episcopal, and United Church of Christ clergy and lay leaders were in attendance.

Forty-five Lutheran, Episcopalian, Evangelical Covenant, and United Church of Christ clergy, laity, and students attended the “Collaborate – Integrate – Innovate Worship Symposium” at Bethany College on January 22 and 23, 2016. The second symposium, directed by Dr. Melody Steed, explored age-appropriate ways that children can participate in worship, blending instruments and voices for an inspirational new sound, incorporation of handbells to enhance worship, and bringing scripture to life through storytelling and drama. This event was designed to tap into the creative process that assists in designing meaningful worship for people of all ages. Presenters included Dr. Melody Steed, Rev. Susan Candea, Dr. Greg LeGault, Dr. Mark Lucas, Rev. Rachael Pryor, Linda Martin, and Rev. Richard Monson.

The third event was held on April 28th at Bethany College, Lindsborg, Kansas. “New Vision” was the title of this happening led by Dr. Pete Steinke. He has authored several best-selling books about congregations. The New Vision curricula reflected his wisdom, experience, and insight. He has deeply engaged the change process with congregations across the United States. In this training event, Dr. Steinke, along with co-presenter Bishop Paul Blom, addressed the challenges congregations face in the context of a rapidly changing world. Dr. Steinke is convinced that a sense of mission is needed in order to energize a congregation. The courses of study were presented and reviewed at this day-long event included ***All Things Restored*** (a ten-week adult class), and ***Like Fire*** (a leadership training course for call committees and church councils). Participants received both curriculum items, noted above. Twenty-two Lutheran, Episcopal, and United Church of Christ clergy, PMA’s, lay leaders, and students were in attendance.

The Bethany House of Studies is available to individuals and congregations for the following:

- Weekend Workshops
- Congregational Training Events
- Professional Coaching
- Internet Distance Learning

The Bethany House of Studies continues to serve as a provider of educational experiences for the pastors, PMA’s, and laity who provide leadership for congregations in central and western Kansas.

Rev. Richard Monson and Sharon Custer

Stories of Hope from Our Seminaries



One of the lessons Pastor Zac Sturm learned when he attended the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago was “Seminary is what you make of it. You have the freedom to pursue what you want.” At Trinity, Kirkwood, uses that lesson to encourage people to stretch beyond “what is” to “what is possible.”

They did that in a powerful way when a social event for the congregation raised enough money to feed hundreds of hungry people in their community.

Pastor Sturm said, “The church council wanted a way to bring our congregation together socially after the startups of fall worship schedules and Sunday school. The Outreach Committee hatched a plan for an Oktoberfest.” The social event expanded into a fundraising event when Trinity members learned that the local food ministry, Kirk Care, was running out of funds to continue operating. “We figured that if 50 people came and gave \$15 each, we could raise \$750 for Kirk Care,” Sturm said.

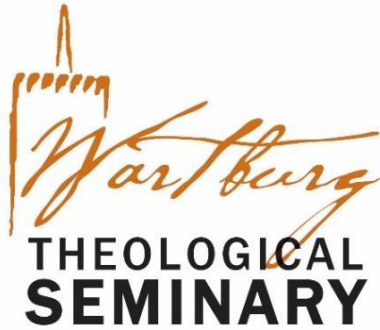


But the gifts of the people multiplied. Between admission, raffles, and freewill offerings, the 85 people who attended Oktoberfest gave over \$5,000 to provide food and hope to hundreds of hungry people in their community. The board of Kirk Care was amazed. One small ELCA congregation had raised more than the combined offerings of all the local congregations. Trinity's offering was a miracle of blessings for them.

This June, Trinity's Outreach Committee is joining two ecumenical partners to host a community meal fundraiser to feed the hungry and homeless for another ministry they support, "God's Helping Hands." Trinity is already planning a 2016 Oktoberfest. They hope other congregations will join them to support Kirk Care.

The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago's mission is to form visionary leaders like Zac Sturm who inspire people to bring the gospel into the world.

Stories of Hope from Our Seminaries



FORMING VALUED LEADERS for GOD'S MISSION

Wartburg Theological Seminary faithfully trains leaders who are 'sent out' to serve God's mission in the world.

Jia is a mother of five and the co-founder and executive director of Reaching Up Ministries, a faith-based nonprofit organization in the Twin Cities, MN. Jia is also a DL (distributed learning) student at Wartburg Theological Seminary. This program combines online coursework and on-campus intensive classes.

Being a Lutheran is new to Jia, which energizes her. "This message [of God's love] is what people need," she says. "We need to translate it into the languages [of the] people! Otherwise the message gets lost. I want people to experience what I experience: wonder and amazement and grace."

Jia has many hopes for the church. "The world is changing and the church [is] commanded to reach God's people; in order to do that, we have to get out of the traditional mindset that we have [regarding] what church looks like. Church is where God is and celebrating God with God's people. That means meeting people where they are: in the trailer parks, in the schools, and on the streets—wherever they are—because that's what Jesus did for us."

Jia feels called to create opportunities for people to be the church in non-traditional ways. "So many people that we serve are people that have been broken and buried by their perceptions of God's love for them. They are ashamed to come to church, and they feel alienated from God. I am devoted to developing authentic relationships with these people whether they enter the doors of a church or not."



Jia Brown, first year Master of Divinity student at Wartburg Seminary.

Wartburg Theological Seminary's mission of forming leaders for God's mission has a distinctive role in the life of the church as it prepares leaders for serving in congregations, communities, and in the world.

Wartburg Theological Seminary
333 Wartburg Place Dubuque, IA 52003 (563)589-0200
www.wartburgseminary.edu

Stories of Hope from Our Partners in Ministry



The Bishop Kemper School for Ministry (BKSM) stands as a testament to God's abundance. A partnership of four Episcopal dioceses and now the Central States Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, BKSM is dedicated to providing exceptional and yet affordable theological education to lay students as well as those seeking ordination as priests and deacons or certification as Parish Ministry Associates.

This collaborative venture is one result of a growing partnership of Lutherans and Episcopalians in Missouri and Kansas. As the Central States Synod broadens and deepens

its lay leadership structure we welcome new opportunities for PMA training, and the Bishop Kemper school joins the Bethany House of Studies in Lindsborg and the Lutheran School of Theology in St. Louis as another strong resource.

BKSM reflects the abundance of teaching gifts in the Church, drawing on the talent of more than 25 instructors from across four states and five dioceses and synods whose education and expertise rival those of any traditional seminary in the country. The faculty reflects the diversity of the Body of Christ: male and female, ordained and lay, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Nazarene, American Baptist.

The school welcomes 20-30 learners each month for weekend intensives. The student body is comprised of students who have said yes to God's call to lay and ordained leadership in the Church. New students coming forth each year reflect the diversity of our culture: young and more seasoned, men and women, gay and straight, low church and high church, from a variety of educational and career backgrounds.



Learn more about this unique educational opportunity at www.bishopkemperschool.org

Mosaic



Mosaic in 2015:

a message for the Central States Synod, where Mosaic provides services in Coffeyville, Ellsworth, Garden City, Liberal, Kansas City, Pittsburg and Winfield



Ryan experiences sushi in Detroit.

Together, we are the church.

If Mosaic had theme for 2015, it was “better together”. Too often people with intellectual disabilities are missing in our communities, not because of malice, but because of misunderstanding. Every day we work to ensure that the more than 3,700 people we support have opportunities to live, work and worship in supportive, inclusive communities.

A highlight of the year was attending the 2015 ELCA Youth Gathering in Detroit, Mich., where we shared the message that our faith communities are better when people with intellectual disabilities are included as valued and active participants. Hundreds of students and adult leaders stopped by to learn about the work Mosaic does from Ryan, who is served by Mosaic in Central Iowa.

Rejoicing Spirits, which helps churches partner with people with intellectual disabilities to build more diverse churches, continues to grow. You can learn more at rejoicingspirits.org.



Ryan and youth participants share their stories over social media.

We are also happy to report the success of our new partnership with Wartburg Seminary to educate future church leaders about ministry among people with disabilities through an immersion class taught at our campus in Axtell, Neb. There aren't many opportunities for church leaders to explore this type of ministry in a hands on way.

We invite you to come learn more about how we can work together to build more diverse and welcoming communities. Call any location or 877.366.7242 for information.



Dear Partners in Ministry,

It's so hard to pick which stories to share with you each year in this report. One thing we know for sure: none of this ministry would be possible without your generous support. We'd especially like to thank the more than 2,700 people who attended Discover the Possibilities events to learn about Mosaic, our donors and volunteers.

Please visit our new blog at www.mosaicpossible.org to learn more about the many different ways we are working to embrace God's call to serve in the world. Thank you for your support and prayers! Linda Timmons, President and CEO



4980 S. 118th St. | Omaha, NE 68137-2200 | 877.366.7242 | www.mosaicinfo.org

Oaks Indian Mission



Central States Synod

Lindsborg, Kansas

June 4 – 6, 2015

Osiyo Tsenalii (Hello Friends),

It is my pleasure to bring you greetings from the congregational members of Eben Ezer Lutheran Church, Pastor Meredith Harber, and the children and staff of the Oaks Indian Mission. Your synod and all of you, the voting members, are in our prayers, and we wish you a successful and faithful synod assembly.

Today in Oaks, we celebrate over 200 years of ministry with, for, and by Indian people. Looking to our history, we celebrate the invitation from Cherokee leadership to the Moravians who came, all those years ago, to educate future generations of Cherokee leaders, to tell the story of Jesus, and to journey with us through that infamous and deadly Trail of Tears. We celebrate their faithfulness and love for their Cherokee neighbors, and we celebrate their labors with us through the end of the 19th Century, which then allowed our Lutheran sisters and brothers to follow in their footsteps of love.

Since then, we have been blessed by countless faithful Lutherans, who have continued to support the legacy of education and faith-formation for Indian children who come to Oaks in hopes of a brighter future. Many of you, voting members, pastors, and lay leaders alike, have led the way in your congregations as allies and advocates for our children. You have voiced the importance of the ministry that happens here in Oaks. You have encouraged the giving of gifts by individuals, families, and your congregations, so this important ministry can continue blessing those who need it.

Thanks to so many generous gifts, we were able to open another cottage last fall, allowing us to care for more than 40 children each year. In honor of this achievement, we created the 40 for 40 Program, inviting a one-time gift from new donors and friends of \$40 to symbolically stand with each and every child on our campus. We also continue to receive many in-kind donations that provide for the daily needs of our residents, and we continue to encourage our friends to join the 1801 Society, a special community of leaders who give a bit more each year and that honors the year of our founding. Finally, we are prayerfully planning to introduce "Oaks Indian Mission Sunday" this fall to synods and congregations across Region 4. We look forward to sharing the history and stories of our community and ministry with you! Both are great and nuanced; both are unique and cherished. Indeed, both are blessed and ordained by our Creator to nourish our church and nurture our future.

The Oaks Indian Mission is represented at your synod assembly, so please stop by our table for a visit. We'd love to tell you how much "I love Oaks," and we'd love to share the many ways you can love Oaks with us! Wado (thank you) for blessing our children, tsunalii. Wado for being a part of this historic ministry.

Atsilvquodiyu (Respectfully),

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Vance Blackfox".

Vance Blackfox

Executive Director

Oaks Indian Mission

P.O. Box 130 | Oaks, OK 74359 | 918-868-2196 • FAX 918-868-3804 | www.oaksindianmission.org

Portico Benefit Services



Spring 2016

Dear Partners in Ministry,

It's an interesting — and challenging — time to be the church. Ministry leaders are learning to navigate the changing culture by holding on to the best of the past while finding ways to be creative, nimble, and resilient. This is just as true for Portico.

As we navigate the changing landscape, we are guided by two core values: stewardship and collaboration. For us, that means caring wisely for all we are entrusted to manage — time, money, our employees, and the well-being of those we serve — so leaders can access important benefits and resources, today and in retirement. Here are a few ways we're putting those values into practice:

We spend and invest with care. In these times of rising health care costs and tight church budgets, we work hard to follow a lean, carefully managed spending plan with a goal of keeping costs low. As 2015 investment markets dramatically rose and fell, our active investment management strategy and strategic asset allocations helped improve retirement fund returns in an otherwise disappointing year.

We seek opportunities to provide the best health care value. The past two years brought, in some instances, double-digit percentage increases for those employers sponsoring members in the ELCA Health Plan. Although this was in line with nationwide averages, we realize for congregations this is an unsustainable trend. We are committed to keeping administrative expenses below 12% of our health care budget, and are aggressively working with our vendor partners to find new savings opportunities.

We tap technology to reach our leaders more efficiently. By converting our popular pre-retirement seminar into a series of three webinars, we were able to complement the rich educational experience of our in-person seminars with the convenience and cost-effectiveness of online learning. We are also developing new webinars designed to help younger leaders establish a strong financial foundation.

We've raised the bar on top-notch customer service. Our members receive more than just a friendly voice when they call Portico's Customer Care Center. As a BenchmarkPortal-certified 2015 "Center of Excellence," we were recognized as one of the top call centers in the nation in both cost- and quality-related metrics.

We invest in our leaders. Because the future health of our church depends on the health of its leaders, we are leading the ELCA in calling for a wellness reformation — a renewed commitment to well-being that comes from healthy lifestyle choices, reduced health risks, and lower health care costs — for members, congregations, and the ELCA Health Plan. We are encouraging our congregations and church organizations to put the 'we' in wellness by joining in conversation with their pastors and professional staff about creating a culture that supports healthy lifestyles.

Portico is committed to providing a cost-effective, comprehensive benefit program that helps our church's leaders stay nimble, resilient, and confident in these interesting, challenging times.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeffrey Thiemann".

The Rev. Jeffrey D. Thiemann
President and CEO

Mission Investment Fund



Mission Investment Fund
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

The Mission Investment Fund (MIF), a financial ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, makes low-interest loans to established ELCA congregations, new-start congregations and ELCA-related ministries for building projects.

Established congregations use MIF loans to renovate, expand or relocate. New-start congregations rely on MIF loans to buy land and construct their first church buildings. ELCA-related ministries use MIF loans for a variety of capital projects.

At year-end 2015, MIF had 830 loans outstanding, totaling \$492 million.

To fund these loans, MIF offers a portfolio of investments for congregations, their members, synods and ELCA-related ministries to purchase. MIF investments offer adjustable- or fixed-rate terms and earn interest at competitive rates.



At year-end 2015, MIF investments by congregations, their members, synods and ELCA-related ministries totaled \$464 million. The Mission Investment Fund is a financially strong and stable organization, with a record of steady, controlled growth. With total assets of \$663 million and net assets of \$194 million at year-end 2015, MIF maintains a capital ratio of 29 percent—positioning MIF in the top tier of well-capitalized church extension funds.

MIF Investments and Loans in the Central States Synod

As of December 31, 2015:

- 18 Mission Investment Fund loans, with a balance of \$8,399,089, are at work throughout the synod.
- Investments in the Mission Investment Fund by 217 individuals, 104 congregations, 6 ministries and the synod totaled \$9,272,141.

MIF representative

Paula Kitt, Regional Manager: Tel. (773) 682-2738; e-mail: paula.kitt@elca.org

Mission Investment Fund | 8765 West Higgins Road | Chicago, Illinois 60631
Tel: 877-886-3522 | Web: mif.elca.org