

Accompanying one another: Angels in disguise



At one of our Rocky Mountain Synod assemblies, the Revs. Sonja and Joel Pancoast of Zion Lutheran in Loveland, Colo., led a breakout session titled "Neighborhood Church," where they shared the story of their growing partnership with the elementary school across the street from their building. Voting members from Holy Shepherd Lutheran Church, Lakewood, Colo., attended the session and left inspired to look at ways they could be of service to their community.

Members discovered that Eiber Elementary a few blocks from Holy Shepherd was a Title 1 school with more than 90 percent of students receiving free lunch. In further conversation with the school liaison, they learned that 14 families were living in their cars. After-school and evening programs had been dropped due to poor attendance.

The congregation began by reaching out to the school's PTA, asking the president: "How can we help?" A few weeks later, the president met with the congregation to talk about the school's needs.

"This outreach program has been unbelievable," said Holy Shepherd member Shirley Bradsby. "The PTA has welcomed us with open arms and we have so enjoyed being with these wonderful students and their parents."

The partnership began last June and has supported numerous programs with members' time, talents and resources:

- Summer Fun Calendar Project.
- Back to School Night with spaghetti dinner.

- Trunk or Treat Halloween event.
- Muffins for Mom and Donuts for Dad.
- Christmas "Angel Tree" and Christmas Celebration.
- Chili Cook-off.

For their final event, more than 40 parishioners helped organize and run the school carnival. They watched and laughed with the 300 students and parents who enjoyed the 25 games and activity centers. Students were amazed at how cotton candy was formed, loved the face painting and laughed through the cake walks!

Every month the liaison for Eiber Elementary writes a column in the congregational newsletter. In the Christmas article, the PTA president wrote: "The year is about to end, and here at Eiber Elementary we all feel this has been a very blessed year. We have our own army of angels in disguise. These angels have been looking after our families and staff through all this year in every and all the activities we had and will have ... they have even baked for us!"

"I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for providing the services that you do! It made all the difference to our families and personnel this year.

Thanks to your generous donations we could give assistance to 20 families that are in homeless or transition situations, most of them with children under 6 years old. Merry Christmas to all of you, Holy Shepherd community ... our angels in disguise"

Members look forward to continuing to grow this new relationship, knowing they are "Christ's Church, Better Together" with Eiber Elementary! ✚



A student visits a craft booth led by a volunteer from Holy Shepherd Lutheran Church, Lakewood, Colo.



From the bishop

Claiming the gift of our ecclesiology



The word “ecclesiology” describes how we understand and “do” church together. One gift of our ecclesiology really has to do with polity—our way of organizing ourselves to live as church together. We are a church body with three distinct

yet interdependent expressions: congregations, synods and our churchwide organization that facilitates our engagement with domestic and global ministries and partnerships on behalf of all of us.

To understand our organization, let’s look at our ELCA constitution. I know that may not sound too exciting, but our previous ELCA secretary, David Swartling, sold me on the notion that this is far more than a governing document—it’s a missional document that tells the story of what matters to us and why, and how we then live accordingly.

Chapter 8.16 highlights our interdependence: *In faithful participation in the mission of God in and through this church, congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization—as interdependent expressions of this church—shall be guided by the biblical and confessional commitments of this church. Each shall recognize that mission efforts must be shaped by both local needs and global awareness, by both individual witness and corporate endeavor, and by both distinctly Lutheran emphases and growing ecumenical cooperation.*

Digging deeper, our constitution has what I believe is an honest and beautiful description of Christ’s church in 3.02: *The Church exists both as an inclusive fellowship and as local congregations gathered for worship and Christian service. Congregations find their fulfillment in the universal community of the Church, and the universal Church exists in and through congregations. This church, therefore, derives its character and powers both from the sanction and representation of its congregations and from its inher-*

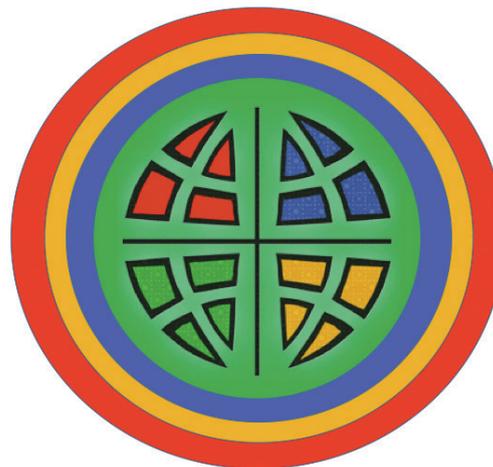
ent nature as an expression of the broader fellowship of the faithful. In length, it acknowledges itself to be in the historic continuity of the communion of saints; in breadth, it expresses the fellowship of believers and congregations in our day.

When the ELCA was formed in 1988, there was an intentional decision to create a church with three distinct but interdependent expressions. From the introduction to our constitution: *Each expression of this church—churchwide, synod, and congregation—is held together in a relationship of interdependence that encourages each to respond to its context.*

Chapter 8 offers this description of interdependence: *Each part, while fully the church, recognizes that it is not the whole church and therefore lives in a partnership relationship with the others.*

What this describes is a relationship in which the various expressions accompany one another in our engagement in ministry, mission and witness. No one part is the church by itself; no one part can be the church without the other expressions. Thus we truly seek to live from a vision of church described by Paul as the body, described in John’s Gospel as vine and branches, and named in the Rocky Mountain Synod as “Christ’s Church, Better Together!”

Yours in faith,
Bishop Jim



- Global Witness Lutheran World Federation 
- Our National Witness Evangelical Lutheran Church in America 
- Our Regional Witness Rocky Mountain Synod 
- Our Local Witness Congregations 
- Our Local Witness Partner Ministries 

Connecting with ecumenical partners

Connecting in Ministry & Witness

We are St. Peter Evangelical Lutheran Church in Carlsbad N.M., and we want to share our story of how we connect with our ecumenical partners.

The Rev. Martha (Marty) Singleterry, a retired United Methodist pastor, was called to serve our congregation in March 2016. In addition, a retired Presbyterian pastor and his wife regularly attend our Sunday worship, actively participate on our ministry teams and provide pulpit supply as needed.

Being a small congregation with approximately 40 active members in southeast New Mexico has its challenges, especially when it comes to our children's and youth ministry programs. We want our children to have the same opportunities and learning experiences as larger congregations in order to bring them into a closer relationship with God and Jesus, and to strengthen their faith.

One way we do this is by participating in an annual five-church vacation Bible school. We partner with First Presbyterian, First Christian (Disciples of Christ), Grace Episcopal and Carlsbad Mennonite. We each take a turn as host and director (on a five-year rotation), while all the other congregations contribute resources and manpower. Each church has a voice throughout the planning process, and it is a wonderful time of fellowship.



Bible school kids play games on the lawn.



Ecumenical colleagues gather for the Rev. Marty Singleterry's installation as pastor of Faith Lutheran Church, Carlsbad, N.M.

In addition to Bible school, we participate in an annual community Thanksgiving service, an ecumenical Maundy Thursday worship service, a day of prayer and the mayor's prayer breakfast to strengthen our ecumenical relationships.

Each year St. Peter hosts a rummage and bake sale with 100 percent of the proceeds donated to the Carlsbad Transitional Housing & Homeless Shelter. This organization was co-founded by members of St. Peter and a coalition of area churches nearly 20 years ago to help provide safe, sanitary and affordable housing to those most vulnerable in our community. Members of churches throughout the community support the annual sale by donating items, providing baked goods, and helping with setup, sales and cleanup.

St. Peter also helped found the Carlsbad/Terri Able Community Kitchen, another example of congregations coming together to serve the community.

Most recently, St. Peter has begun working with other local congregations in the formation of the Carlsbad Refugee Alliance, providing assistance to refugees in our area.

Being present, being active, addressing the needs of others and building relationships within our community has always been one of our principles and our strength. We are "Christ's Church, Better Together" in Carlsbad! 

Equipping all leaders: Educate, Equip, Enact (3E)

By the Rev. Janice Kibler



Several years ago I had the privilege of serving the American Church in Berlin, an English-language ministry for people from around the world who are in the city for a few weeks or a lifetime. It was a five-year learning experience, including lessons on stewardship.

My German colleagues were curious, and some quite envious, because our congregation functioned financially on the contributions of the participants, who understood that their giving was a response to God's grace and were necessary to fund the congregation's part of God's mission. That's the model for our congregations in the United States. German congregations received funds collected by the government and didn't necessarily have any personal connection to the givers.

That experience helped me realize the delight of our system, which encourages congregations to name how they are participating in God's work, and then invite people to participate with their wealth, talents and time. That work requires leaders, and Educate, Equip, Enact is ready to equip people for this work.

We currently have 14 synod congregations participating in Stewardship for All Seasons this year, funded in part by Educate, Equip, Enact. Through this May-April program, rostered ministers and congregational leaders are being equipped with skills and encouragement to talk about money in healthy, open ways, and to examine how their use of money reflects their faith in God the giver and their belief in the Spirit's guidance.

Stewardship for All Seasons has a proven track record of increasing giving (both in number of givers and in the amount given) from 10 to 40 percent.

We are planning for another 25 congregations to begin the program next May, also with generous support from Educate, Equip, Enact. The strengthening of our leaders strengthens our congregations, which strengthens us together as a synod. If you would like your congregation to participate in the second cohort (May 2018), contact me at jkibler@rmselca.org.

Several resources for talking about money and approaching stewardship in the congregation are posted at rmselca.org/lilly. Educate, Equip, Enact is designed to promote open conversations about money and faith, and to encourage healthy habits and generosity when considering our use of God's gifts. The resources include a personal money autobiography, a congregational money autobiography, questions for conversation about our values and money (perfect for your next council or stewardship committee meeting), and a brief history of stewardship.

My German colleagues were envious for a good reason. Stewardship in our congregations is an opportunity. It's not about keeping our doors open. It's about helping people see how they can invest in God's work being done through our congregations. **L**

Janice Kibler is the 3E project director.



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