

PARTNERS IN  
*the spirit*  
JULY 2005



The Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod

**Holy Listening:**  
Message from Bishop Margaret Payne

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Youth Participate in Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod Assembly

Sea Container Filled with Supplies for Tanzania

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God's Place, God's Space



ELCA.org  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
*Living in God's amazing grace*



(Excerpted from Bishop Payne's remarks at the 2005 synod assembly preceding the discussion of the recommendations of the ELCA Church Council on the Sexuality Study.)

Chairing the ELCA Task Force for Sexuality Studies seemed like a call to me when I accepted the task and it still does now. When I faced the reality of going to my first meeting, I realized I didn't know very much about sexuality. But I did know how to be a pastor. So I planned devotions for that first meeting.

I think that probably the most important things that happened in our time together took place during our times of worship. Those were the moments when we achieved the clarity of really understanding what we were called to do.

The members of the task force were clergy and lay, men and women. We had two homosexual persons. We had persons from very liberal perspectives and persons from very conservative perspectives. You can be assured that if you have an opinion on these issues before us, that opinion was voiced during our three years of meetings.

A highlight of our first meeting, one that continued throughout all of our meetings, was our sharing of the Eucharist. On that first weekend, we had an informal service in the Lutheran Center. As we passed around the bread and the wine, communing one another around the table, we sang, "Lord, listen to your children praying, Lord send your



spirit in this place. Lord, listen to your children praying, send us love, send us power, send us grace.”

### **Singing in Harmony: A Sign of Hope**

As we sang that again and again, the group broke into harmony. And as we sang softly together in harmony, I felt that that was a sign that we could do all this work together in harmony. If we could sing together around the body and blood of Christ, and have that be the center of all that we did, then surely the whole church could do the same thing.

And that has been my sign of hope throughout all of these months and years of working together. I continue to have that hope and I feel hopeful about our Churchwide Assembly in August.

The work of the task force went on for many months. We heard reports from biblical scholars, from theologians, from panels of scientists and psychologists, from sociologists, and from every possible perspective and the gamut of opinion on every conceivable part of this issue.

After each presentation, the task force would process the information. We had a lot of hard times together because we disagreed mightily right from the beginning. To this day we still disagree in our position about what the church should do. There could be fourteen different resolutions before you because each one of us was—and continues to be—in a slightly different place.

### **Holy Listening: Becoming a Community**

But we were working together to discern and to seek to do what God’s will was for the church at this time. Gradually, over these many months, we forged a bond with one another that probably is one of the deepest bonds of Christian love that I have ever experienced. The bond was not based on coming from the same part of the country or the same synod; it was not based on having the same opinion about the issues that are before our church.

Rather, the bond was based on the deep experience of holy listening to one another.

Over these many months, gradually, by our worship together, by our arguing, our sometimes hurting one another with angry words and then forgiving one another and trying one more time to listen, by trying so hard to love one another and to speak the truth in love to one another with deep respect, by this holy practice of seeing Christ in one another despite our differences of opinion, we became a community.

And when we did that, we found that, despite our differences on this issue, we shared two very important things: We shared a deep love of Jesus Christ and a personal commitment to Christ as our savior, along with a deep love of Christ's church and our willingness to serve it.

We also shared a dream. We dreamed that we would be the group of people who found the magic bullet—the one thing that no one else had ever been able to find—a solution to offer to the church that would enable us to remain together in the important mission that we do while disagreeing about these issues.

### **A Holy Solution**

Obviously, we did not discover a magic solution. What we did discover, however, was a holy solution. We discovered that, by talking together, our lives were transformed by our willingness to be more united by our love of Jesus than our opinion on this topic.

We also realized that we did have a gift to give to the church—the gift of our own experience of community. That experience was forged in our time together—the hours we spent listening to one another and reading and praying over all of the emails, letters, and responses sent in by more than 28,000 people across the country. Every one of those was read with respect and with the openness that we give to another person who shares our faith in Jesus Christ.

When I began the process, people would ask me, “What is your personal opinion about this?” I used to say that, for the sake of the work, God has given me no opinion. But that was not exactly true. I had set my personal opinion aside so that I could do this work that I was called to do.

An interesting thing happened when I came toward the end

of my work and prepared to take my opinion out again. I found that, through all the time and work of the task force, my opinion had been transformed.

My opinion had been a sharp sword with which I used to cut at people, using words that were sometimes angry and sometimes self-righteous. But when I took my opinion back out after all of these months of holy listening, both to people with whom I agreed and people with whom I disagreed mightily, I discovered that God had transformed the sword of my opinion into a plow.

I no longer have a desire cut into other people with my opinion. Rather, I have a strong desire to continue to be the kind of holy listener that has enabled me to use my opinion as a way to prepare soil for God's greater work that we can do. I have been deeply honored to serve in this capacity and deeply, deeply touched by the relationship that I have with the other thirteen people on this task force.

We offer this report to the church with great humility, with a great understanding that it would probably please no one—and that has proved to be true. We also offer it with an equally deep certainty that this has come out of very prayerful and persistent community building and love and listening. It comes not from “bureaucrats in Chicago,” but from fourteen of your Lutheran brothers and sisters who sought God's will for this church and who now lay before you a report that the churchwide assembly of the ELCA in August will consider. God's spirit will move through that time and we will find the way that God wants us to go.

I thank you for your time and I thank you for your holy listening to me. I look forward to hearing the kind of holy listening and respectful dialogue that you do with one another. This kind of listening in which we engage will not in itself solve the problems that are before us, but I know now that they will lead us to a place where those problems can be solved. Thank you.



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### Got Youth?

That was the question being asked at the 2005 Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod Assembly.

By two cows.

Yes, cows.

Well, technically, the cows didn't utter the question. Rather, they asked it via a magnet.

Members of the synod's Youth Ministry Team distributed Got Youth? magnets to voting members and visitors to the assembly both Friday and Saturday, June 10-11. The magnets included the address for the youth page on the synod's Web site, [www.godslove.org/youth](http://www.godslove.org/youth).

Even Bishop David Strobel and others on stage received a visit from the cows. During the Saturday morning plenary session, George Maura and Walt Hampton, dressed as cows, walked across the assembly stage and presented Bishop Strobel, Pastor Catherine Ziel, and Vice President Priscilla Kinney with magnets.

George Maura is a youth from St. Paul, Mountain Top, and Youth Ministry Team member; Walt Hampton is the current president of the synod's Lutheran Youth Fellowship and a



member of Christ, Dryville.

Check out the youth page on the synod Web site for the calendar of synod youth events for 2005-2006.

And check out the next cow you see – it could be toting a Got Youth? magnet.

## **Youth Drop-In Is Fun, Thought-Provoking, and Spiritual**

By Tyna Kaltenbaugh, coordinator of the drop-in center

Middle and high school youth and adult advisors were invited to visit the youth drop-in center offered during this year's Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod Assembly.

Housed at Trinity Lutheran Church, Reading, just steps away from the assembly meeting at the Sovereign Performing Arts Center, the center was open from 7:00 p.m. until 10:00 p.m. on Friday, June 10, and from 9 a.m. until the assembly ended around 4 p.m. on Saturday, June 11.

Over 25 youth visited the center throughout the course of the assembly. They received a visitor's pass to visit the assembly, made T-shirts, met other youth, played games, received Frisbees and key chains, and partook of snacks and drinks.

Many of the youth participated in the International (Companion Synods) Festival held Friday evening. They tried out games from other lands, made badges, listened to Latino, African, and German music-makers, and wrote postcards to congregations in our companion synods.

Youth also sat in on sessions of the assembly. They really did enjoy the company of other youth.

Pre-registered youth enjoyed an overnight at the church, a new feature this year. Four youth, one advisor, and I were involved in the overnight.

At the overnight we discussed what we had seen and heard

during the assembly sessions and had a Bible study on blessings. We discussed what blessings are, who are blessings in our lives, how we can be a blessing to others, and how God blesses us.

On Saturday we ate breakfast at Trinity church and visited the assembly again. After lunch it was T-shirt decorating time and game time. We again processed what we saw and heard at the assembly.

We closed our time together with prayer.

Our time together was fun, thought-provoking, and spiritual. We look forward to doing it again!

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By Mary E. Young, Reading Eagle

*(Used by permission. Article appeared in the June 5, 2005 issue of the Reading Eagle.)*

Vans loaded with school supplies, medical supplies, clothing and linens started pulling up to the loading dock at Boscov's Department Stores Inc. distribution center in Exeter Township around 8 a.m. on Saturday, June 4.

The Rev. Thomas F. Irwin, Jr. put his previous experience as a mover to work by stuffing the items into every available inch of space in a 40-foot sea container destined for Tanzania, a country in eastern Africa.

Pr. Irwin's church, Zion (Spies) Lutheran, is one of dozens in the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America that collected money and goods for the project.

The items will be distributed in the Makete district, where one-third to one-half of the children have lost parents to HIV/AIDS.

"In this country, we have the infrastructure to work on these problems," said Nancy Terry, St. John Lutheran Church, Ringtown. "We have public agencies. We have private agencies. The government can help.



“ In Tanzania, they have nothing. This is the reason we need to share our wealth with them.”

Tanzania was chosen because its South Central Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania was assigned as a companion church to the synod by the ELCA.

The 29 tons of supplies will arrive there by September, when eight people from St. Paul Lutheran Church in Fleetwood will help members of the diocese in Tanzania distribute them.

Among the items that will be delivered is a hammermill built by J&J Silo Co., Paradise, Lancaster County.

The diesel-powered machine used to pulverize grain for use in baking or porridge is destined for Bulongwa, an area about 10 miles from Makete that has no electricity.

St. Paul church member Stephen R. Deysher, a Rockland Township resident who works for F.M. Brown Sons, Inc. feed mill in Birdsboro, made special arrangements with J&J because it is owned by Amish people who make equipment for farmers who don't use electricity.

Charles Mohn, a member of the Fleetwood church and head of the project committee, said the church raised \$6,500 in about three months to buy the machine. The church members who go to Tanzania will also help assemble the machine and teach residents how to use it to generate income.

St. Paul Lutheran Church in Tower City brought 110 boxes of supplies weighing more than 1,000 pounds, for Mang'Oto Lutheran Church in Njombe.

Congregation member Marie Rodichok of Tower City said the idea of children having to raise their siblings because they lost parents to AIDS touched people's hearts.

“ It really makes me feel good that our church has taken this on as a project,” she said.



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The success of the sea container project owes much to the generosity of Albert R. Boscov, chairman of Boscov's, Inc., and the entire network of Boscov's personnel and providers. Here is an overview of the services Boscov's provided:

Arranged with its shipper, Worldlink Logistics, Inc., to coordinate the shipping of the Tanzania Sea Container, including —

- the purchase of a used container at its cost, which was lower than if we had purchased the same container; and arranged the ground transportation to and from Reading;
- the booking of sea passage from the Port of New York to Dar Es Salaam, which included a transfer in Haifa, and waving some of the required transfer fees.

Provided the use of the Reading Distribution Center in Exeter for loading the container. The value of this was underscored when it was raining in the early morning. With the quantity of boxes received, it would have been a logistical nightmare to stage the boxes at a street location as was previously planned.

Provided access to Boscov's employees who were paid by the company while supporting the project. This included the shipping department, security, logistics, public relations and other personnel.

The initial contact was through Alex Miller, manager of the Coventry Mall (Pottstown) Boscov's, a former member of



Trinity, Reading, and neighbor of synod vice president Priscilla Schlenker Kinney and husband Pastor George Kinney.

Special thanks also go to Guy Ehler, member of St. Paul Third, Easton, who oversaw the project, and to the volunteers who packed all 21,000 pounds of goods onto the container.

Thank you, all!

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By

the Rev. Edith Roberts, pastor, St. Peter, Bethlehem

It was a circus spectacular!

At least it was at St. Peter Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bethlehem, Pa., from June 19-23, as we celebrated circus life during vacation Bible school.

Through the Augsburg Fortress vacation Bible school curriculum, children, youth, and adults celebrated together as we grew in our understanding of sharing God's love and welcoming others to be a part of the family of faith.

The theme song for this year's VBS proclaimed that "clowns are hopping! Acrobats are dancing! And the troupers are all showing their stuff! The people of God all have gifts to share, so step right up!"

Indeed the Circus Spectacular was an amazing opportunity for many people to share a variety of gifts. We had a puppet stage, an animal cage, a food cart, bleachers, a circus backdrop, and more – all created by dedicated members of St. Peter's.

We had the hopping clown, the dancing acrobats, Davey and Goliath puppeteers, and guitar players.

There were caring teachers, meal and snack "caterers," arts and crafts designers, "Mr. Science," and children and adults



who were eager to learn and grow in the faith.

Thanks to all these folks, our 2005 vacation Bible school was, indeed, spectacular!



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by Lily R. Wu

(This article is reprinted from the Multicultural Mission Resource Center pages on the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia Web site at [www.ltsp.edu/mmrc](http://www.ltsp.edu/mmrc))

Anyone who lives, works or visits New York City knows that space is a precious commodity. Community organizations, church groups that don't have facilities and programs of all kinds need to ask "Where will we meet (where we can afford the rent)?"

Redeemer Lutheran Church in Queens Village, New York, is a spirit-filled example of how a church is not meant to exist for itself, but for Christ and others, seven days a week. They found ways to use their building for outreach, as opposed to just collecting fees. And this has led to a vibrant, thriving, ongoing ministry with the neighbors of this now predominantly Hindu and Muslim neighborhood.

### **Outreach = Relationships, Not Rentals**

"We don't rent the space," Pastor Peggy Wuertele explains. "We take donations. The people know we need money, and they give. In short, you can sell your space, or you can build relationships, by being present."

At the start of the school year, for example, when parents drop their youngsters off at Redeemer's nursery, Pastor Wuertele is there to greet them. "I'll talk with them about their first day at school," she adds. "They can see we are



church, and that's so important."

The YMCA afterschool program at the church is another opportunity to build relationships. "It's a community, and everybody here is a part of it," she says. "There's no separation between 'church members' and 'non church members.' In Jesus Christ, God crossed every barrier, and we're called to do that too, to experience a glimpse of the kingdom."

With the Alcoholics Anonymous group that meets five nights a week at Redeemer, Pastor Wuertele and church members have sought to be welcoming and respectful. As a result, the group has invited the pastor to say opening prayers at their anniversary celebrations and even lead a Bible study.

Redeemer also offers free legal counseling once a week, as a community service, for clients referred by local politicians. NY1 and Newsday covered the story of the opening of this new program in February 2005.

The church is also the worship site for a local Korean Evangelical Church congregation that was looking for a place to gather.

### **Word and Sacrament Care**

Strong outreach does not mean that Lutheran Word and Sacrament ministry is neglected at Redeemer. In fact, outreach is an expression of that strong faith. As Pastor Wuertele describes it, "Word and Sacrament is the heart and soul of who we are, and what this congregation has been about for 81 years!"

Redeemer is a multi-ethnic church that reflects both the neighborhood's diversity and God's broad definition of family. Members come not only from Christian but also from Hindu, Muslim and Jewish backgrounds; and the largest ethnic group of church membership is Guyanese. Teenagers whose parents are not church members as well as young adults in their 20s are among the worshipers. In fact, 20% of the congregation is 25 years old or younger, and "they are highly active in all aspects of our ministry," their pastor says.

