

PARTNERS IN
the spirit
MAY 2005



The Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod

Come to the Fair!

Come to the Fair!

Companion Churches – Looking Beyond
Our Own Plates

Showing Our Appreciation: Annual
Farm Family Celebration

WELCA Chapter Partners with Local
School to Make School Kits for LWR

Zion's Stone Church – One Body in
Christ

A Nightmare Revisited



You are cordially invited to come to the fair!

Bring your children and your friends. The festival is open to all!

On Friday, June 10, the street in front of the Sovereign Performing Arts Center will be closed to traffic for an International Festival.

Two large tents will be set up on the lawns of Trinity Lutheran Church, next door to the Sovereign Performing Arts Center, so that the festival can proceed rain or shine

The festival will celebrate the relationship of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod with its four companion synods, the South Central Diocese of Tanzania, the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovenia, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Argentina and Uruguay, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saxony. It will also recognize the relationship of the synod to its partner ELCA synod, the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin.

Crafts, games, songs, and other activities related to these countries and areas will be available, along with special music groups. The International Buffet that is included in the registration fee for voting members will feature food from the four countries. Some tickets may be available for purchase at the registration table.

Two of our special guests for the assembly are the Rev. P.



Alan Eldrid, pastor-president (bishop) of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Argentina and Uruguay, and the Rev. Leon Novak, pastor of the Lutheran Parish in Murska Sobota, Slovenia, the largest Lutheran congregation in Slovenia. Pastor Novak will represent Bishop Geza Erniša, who will be attending a gathering of European Lutheran leaders in Iceland.

Come and meet Bishop Eldrid and Pastor Novak. You can also visit with them and learn more about their church bodies during the forum time on Friday morning. Forums are also open to all and are free of charge. They will be held from 9:30 to 10:30 a.m. and from 10:45 to 11:45 a.m.

The Global Mission Committee will provide information about all our companion synods during the first forum time slot. During the second forum period, each of the companion synod committees will introduce you to the church to which they relate.

For a complete schedule of events, check the assembly link on the synod home page (www.godslove.org).

See you there!



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By Deaconess Deborah Matern Graf, Trinity, Reading

Last Christmas I received a heartfelt thank-you letter from the German youth and leaders who visited our synod in October 2004. One of the students, Julianne, wrote, "It's great to know that there are Americans who look beyond their own plates."

One of the greatest gifts of our companion synod programs is creating relationships with Christians of other cultures. Through face-to-face meetings, letters, e-mails, and even sending containers, we are able to connect to our brothers and sisters in Christ, living out the reality that Christ's church extends beyond our own walls and borders.

This coming June 11 fabulous youth from all over the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod will be traveling to our companion churches in Saxony, specifically the church districts of Borna, and Loebau/Zittau. They will be staying in host homes, traveling to historic Lutheran sites, and learning with and from the youth of Germany.

Our synod has also received an invitation to send a delegation of lay and rostered leaders to visit Saxony this fall. The delegation of 14 people will be traveling October 5-14. They will also be staying in host homes, learning about the eastern German church, and experiencing Lutheran history.

Are you interested in experiencing Saxony? More



information and the application to participate in the delegation can be found on the synod website, www.godslove.org. Here is the direct link to the information: <http://www.godslove.org/pdf/saxony05.pdf>.

You and your congregation can also “experience” Saxony by becoming a partner congregation with a congregation in Saxony. Several German congregations have expressed interest in forming partnerships with American congregations.

Partnerships are also possible with congregations from our other companion churches in Argentina/Uruguay, Slovenia, and Tanzania.

You and your congregation have the opportunity to look beyond your own plate—and to allow someone to look beyond theirs into yours.



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By Pastor Mary Gade, Ziegels Lutheran Church, Breinigsville

On Saturday, March 19, we gathered for our annual Farm Family Celebration to show our appreciation to the many farm families who devote their lives to the raising of crops that benefit each and every one of us. This was truly a celebration as more than 900, our largest crowd ever, registered to attend the gathering. Guests came from five different counties.

Once again Big John's capably catered the meal. The ample portions were deliciously prepared and the crowd was served in just over thirty minutes. The band this year was *The Majestics* as we continue to alternate between what the participants distinguish as "Hoe Down" and square dancing. The participation on the dance floor is always a sight to behold. The children are gleeful as they run around the edges of all the action, having their own games and play.

The room was decorated with flowers and each place was set with candy favors and a placemat that shared various farm facts. Little advertising was done this year to make the event known since the maximum of 900 was reached before the planned radio interviews even took place.

This event, which grew out of our synod's attempt to respond to the droughts over the past several years, has come to be a celebration that many put on their calendar a full year in advance. The celebration could not take place without the generous support of sponsors, which include



Diakon, several area banks, many of the local granges, and both the Berks and Lehigh/Northampton Penn State Extension offices.

Our appreciation goes to the capable committee that has led in this very special outreach so that we can let our farm families know they are truly appreciated. In the face of natural disaster, there is little we can do to relieve the devastating effects of rain or lack thereof. But together we can all say a heartfelt "Thank you!" to those who work to put food on our tables. Take time this summer to support our local farm stands and, when you do, let the people know that you appreciate all they do.

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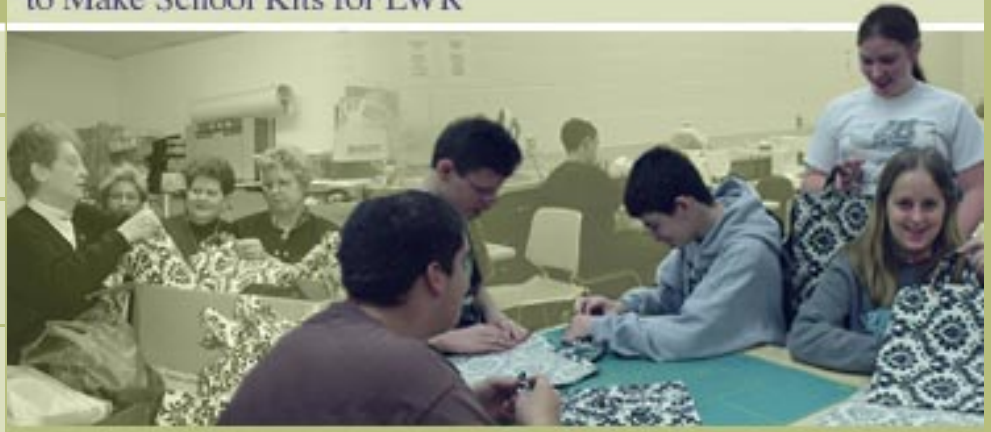
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By Sherry Koehler, Hope Lutheran Church, Tatamy, Pa.

The Women of the ELCA chapter at Hope Lutheran Church in Tatamy, Pa., decided to participate in the “school kits” project for the Lutheran World Relief organization (LWR).

The ingathering of school supplies needed for the kits expanded to include the local chapter of Church Women United, members of various denominations.

The response was overwhelming. It was one thing to collect the items to put into the bags; it was another to *make* all the 12" x14" cloth bags into which the items were to be packed.

Initially, we approached the task of making the bags by having six young girls in our congregation use the three sewing machines at the church (normally used by the quilters group). None of them had any experience using a sewing machine but were eager to learn.

Because of the number of bags needed, other adult members of the congregation began making bags at home as well. It was a lot of work for a handful of people. We needed a way to make more bags more quickly.

In the meantime, we had a setback. Our church basement flooded and many of the school items collected were ruined. We were able to salvage many of the crayons by obtaining new boxes from Binney & Smith Crayola Company (produced locally) and repackaging them. However, we lost the majority of the notebook paper we had collected. We



were able to catch up on “bag making” while we waited to replenish/replace the items lost in the flood.

We recognized an opportunity for a service project in which school students could play an important part. What better group to involve in preparation of “school kits” for world relief? Cathy Schuyler, a teacher of Family and Consumer Science at the Nazareth Area School District Middle School in Nazareth, was contacted to see if this was a project in which the students could participate. The proposal was that materials would be provided to the school, so there would be no financial burden on the school, and bags would be made by students in the classes as time allowed. An individual from Hope Lutheran Church would then pick up the finished bags from the school for packing at the church.

Cathy said that we would need administrative approval to move forward with the project. Jane Callaghan, principal at the Nazareth Area School District Middle School, was receptive to the idea and so the cooperative effort began.

Thus far, 115 tote bags have been completed by the students in Mrs. Barbara Baylor's Family and Consumer Science classes this school year. A special note of thanks goes to Mrs. Baylor, who has pre-cut all of the pieces for the tote bags to be sewn by her students. She would like to see the project continue.

Mrs. Baylor commented that she has had other projects in the past, but never have her students responded so enthusiastically as they have to this one. The students realize their efforts are worthwhile and contribution of time is just as valuable as a monetary gift.

It's wonderful to have our school be a willing partner in such a global "educational" outreach project. We thank the administration, staff, and students of Nazareth Middle School for their efforts in helping others in need.

The school kit project at Hope Lutheran Church began with our WELCA group (an older generation) ingathering of school supplies, continued with the help of middle school students sewing the bags and our youth group filling the bags with the required school items, and finally being boxed up for shipment once again by the WELCA group. This intergenerational effort had been rewarding for all involved.

Our hope is that this article might encourage others to try the

“team” approach to accomplishing a goal that they may not have tackled on their own. For more information, contact Hope Lutheran Church at 610-252-5181.



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Pictured left to right: Charlotte Fritz, Marie Gursky, Pastor Michael Frost,
Audrey Christ, and Barbara Lushia
By Pastor Michael Frost

In what does the unity of the Church of Jesus Christ consist?

For Zion's Stone Church in West Penn Township, Schuylkill County, it means becoming the first *federated* congregation in the synod.

From a long history as a union church, through seven years of shared ministry, and now into the bright future God has for us as one “federated” church affiliated with both the ELCA and the UCC, God has blessed the people of Zion's Stone Church

Once upon a time German immigrants came to the new world and settled in northeastern Pennsylvania in a lovely little valley just north of what we have come to call the Blue Mountain (West Penn Township). They came to America with the faith of the Reformation—some of the Lutheran tradition, others of the Reformed tradition. Frugal in heart and mind, one church building was constructed and the two congregations shared their one church. The Lutherans would gather for Sunday worship one week while the Reformed congregation would gather the next Sunday.

In the late 1700's the Lutheran congregation was part of the Ministerium of Pennsylvania, while the Reformed congregation was originally under the jurisdiction of the Reformed Church of Holland, finally becoming part of the



newly formed Synod of the German Reformed Church. Over the next two hundred years, the Lutheran Ministerium of Pennsylvania and Adjacent States became part of the United Lutheran Church in America (1918), which became part of the Lutheran Church in America (1962), then became part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (1987). Over that same period of history, the Synod of the German Reformed Church became part of the General Synod of the Reformed Church (1863), which entered into a merger that resulted in the formation of the Evangelical and Reformed Church (1934), which itself entered into a further merger that formed the United Church of Christ (1957).

In 1846, the year in which the current stone church was built, a proclamation was adopted naming this church and its congregations "Zion's High German Reformed and German Evangelical Lutheran Church in West Penn." The congregations were part of a four-point parish, in which one Lutheran pastor and one Reformed pastor served four local congregations. Worship alternated weekly between Lutheran and Reformed in each church, with each pastor leading worship and preaching in two of the four churches. In 1966 the Mahoning Lutheran Parish was dissolved and Zion's became part of the West Penn Parish with St. Peter's, Mantzville.

The 1997 Formula of Agreement, which declared full communion among the ELCA, the UCC, the Reformed Church of America, and the Presbyterian Church—USA, made it possible for the sharing of ordained ministers among full communion partner congregations. Under the provisions of the Formula, the two congregations at Zion's entered into "shared ministry" in which one ordained pastor was called to be the pastor of both the Lutheran and the UCC congregations.

The two congregations began holding joint worship services each Sunday and a Joint Board, made up of six Lutheran Council members and six UCC Consistory members, began overseeing the life and ministry of the church. Following two years of interim pastoral ministry, Pastor Michael Frost became the first fully called pastor of Zion's shared ministry in July 2000.

Consideration of yet one more step toward organic unity for Zion's Stone Church began within a brainstorming session by Zion's Long Range Planning Committee in January 2002. The goal for the committee's work and for the life and

ministry of the church was “to grow as one church in the ministry of Christ.”

In the fall of 2003, the committee recommended that the Church Board investigate the possibility of creating one new congregation that would be affiliated with both the UCC and the ELCA. Conversations with Bishop David Strobel of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA, and Conference Minister Alan Miller of the Penn Northeast Conference, UCC, were followed by conversations with members of the congregations.

Overwhelming support from the members encouraged the board, and in early 2004 the Long Range Planning Committee drew up a draft constitution for the new congregation. A final draft was approved in October 2004. Congregational meetings were scheduled for Reformation Day, October 31st, 2004, for a vote on the adoption of the new constitution and approval of the process that would lead to the formation of a newly incorporated congregation. Once again the votes in favor of the proposal were overwhelming.

A charter document was made available for members' signatures and by Christmas Eve, well over 200 signatures had been collected on the charter.

The legal process of getting state approval of the new corporation finally bore fruit with notification on March 14, 2005, that “Zion’s Stone Church of West Penn Township, Inc.” was a corporate reality. Plans are in the works for a massive celebration of this gift of God’s grace on Pentecost Sunday, May 15, 2005.

In what does the unity of the Church of Jesus Christ consist? In John 17 we hear Jesus pray that all who follow him might be one. At Zion’s Stone Church, God has blessed us with unity of spirit and purpose, with a common life and ministry, and the confident understanding that there is far more that unites us in Christ than those things over which we may differ.

Thanks be to God!



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Crew from Zion United, Brodheadsville, Rescues Homes Twice

Excerpted from articles by Mark Staples, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia

For elderly residents of Raubsville, Pa., a small town along the Delaware just south of Easton, April 3, 2005, was a nightmare revisited. Rampaging Delaware River floodwaters immersed their simple bungalows for the second time in six months.

The first flood hit on September 18, 2004.

In mid-October 2004, Mark Staples observed the clean-up in Raubsville and wrote, "In the middle of a dumpster along Route 611 in this community, a volunteer spies a ruined doll, once some child's cherished plaything – now just another piece of flood-contaminated trash. It is a somehow poignant sign of the disaster that has impacted 47 Pennsylvania counties comprised of communities like this one. It was a nasty calling card left by the remnants of Hurricane Ivan. The damage was done in a day. No one knows how long the recovery will take."

Among those whose homes were flooded on September 18 were Ike and Helen Repsher. The basement and part of the living quarters of the Repshers' house along Canal Road was submerged in the flood. "The floor of the main living area is spongy and will need to be replaced along with many of the dwelling's walls," writes Staples. "Ike Repsher invested \$1,300 of his meager savings to purchase a heater to warm his house so he and his wife could continue to live



there. He hopes volunteers and construction helpers can begin to repair his home's interior in a week or two."

That was October 2004. On March 5, 2005, twenty believers, who were among those who worked in the flood muck and mire of Tropical Storm Ivan's aftermath, gathered for a simple service of thanksgiving in the restored bungalow of Ike and Helen Repsher.

The Rev. William Rex, pastor of St. Luke Lutheran Church, Ferndale, Pa., blessed the house with this prayer: "We come together this day to celebrate your blessed protection over those who dwell in your house, seek your continued blessing on this house and those who live within its walls. Also, we want to praise your name for those who heard the call to care for and tend to the needs of those affected by disaster. We lift up those who provided resources and skill to rebuild lives devastated by disaster. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord."

"Next door to the Repshers, evidence remained of how much still needs to be done to fully recover from Ivan's aftermath," writes Staples on that March day. "A dedicated crew of workers led by Kevin Bochantin and Sandi Boyer from Zion United Lutheran Church in Brodheadsville, Pa., has begun to 'turn the corner' in restoring the home of Lou DiNoso, a neighbor of the Repshers. Today they were installing sheetrock to the walls in a back room and making repairs to the damaged kitchen. For Lou DiNoso, a blessing of the house celebration will hopefully come later in the spring."

On April 2, the crew from Zion United, Brodheadsville, completed the work on Lou DiNoso's home. On April 3, all their work—and more—was wiped out by the second flood in six months.

The second flooding was intensified not only by heavy local rains but also by nearly five inches of downpours that fell over the previous weekend upstream in the Pocono Mountains. The Repshers, whose home was again severely damaged, and Lou DiNoso had plenty of company in misery April 3. The second flood was easily the worst in 50 years along the Delaware. Many victims in Riegelsville, just south of Raubsville, lived in properties that had not been impacted this way since 1955.

The stalwart work crew from Brodheadsville began for the

second time to carry out repairs at Lou DiNoso's home along Canal Road in Raubsville. "We're pretty determined," said Kevin Bochantin. He explained that the Zion contracting team has undertaken projects in points as distant as North Carolina and Arkansas. "We go wherever God calls us to serve," Bochantin said. "We've been given so much, and it is a way we respond to what God has given us. It's a way of proclaiming God's love to others.

"This year instead of going out of state we'll be working around here," he added.

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