

# Alaska Synod



The Rev. Mark Allred

## The Good Shepherd

In the last half of Mark 6, we find Christ and his disciples seeking a deserted place for some rest. There was a lot of activity, and it seems that Christ recognized that setting aside some time for the disciples

to rest their bodies and restore their souls was in order. But the crowds kept coming. Even in that deserted place, a crowd was waiting for Christ and his disciples. Scripture tells us that Christ had compassion on them. He looked out and saw that the people were like sheep without a shepherd.

The beautiful imagery found in Psalm 23 brings comfort to so many. Many of the very attributes of our Lord and how he cares for each one of us can be found there: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.”

Rest and comfort are important if we allow the Good Shepherd to use us to minister to the many that are all around us—the ones without someone to guide them through the dark valleys that we, as humankind, must inevitably face. But ministry must go on: the feeding of the 5,000, the ministry to the sick, and the message of wisdom and challenge to an American society that has placed its priorities in wrong places. The Good Shepherd is still on the move bringing the lost close and whispering those words of peace. □

The Rev. Mark Allred

*Allred is director for evangelical mission in Alaska.*

## Alaska’s new bishop installed

The Rev. Shelley Wickstrom was elected to serve as bishop of the Alaska Synod at the 2012 Alaska Synod Assembly at Joy Lutheran Church in Eagle River. She was installed Sept. 1, by Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson at Central Lutheran Church in Anchorage, Alaska.

Prior to her election, Wickstrom had been the Region 1 coordinator for missional leadership, Seattle.

Wickstrom was pastor-developer of Dillingham Trinity Lutheran in Dillingham, Alaska, from 1987 to 1994. She was pastor of Lord of Life Lutheran Church in North Pole, Alaska; American Lutheran in Billings, Mont.; and Christ the King Lutheran in Bozeman, Mont. She

also served as camp staff at Lutheran in Coeur-d’Alene, Idaho, from 1976 to 1980.

In 1981, Wickstrom earned a bachelor’s degree in philosophy and religion at California Lutheran University, Thousand Oaks, and in 1986 earned a Master of Divinity degree at Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa. CLU is one of 26 ELCA colleges and universities; Wartburg is one of eight ELCA seminaries.

The bishop was born in Glendive, Mont., and baptized Feb. 17. She was raised in Opportunity, Wash., and confirmed at Christ Lutheran Church there (Opportunity is now Spokane Valley; Christ Lutheran is now Advent Lutheran). □



Bishop Shelley Wickstrom

# Imagine!

By the Rev. Wm Chris Boerger, bishop



**Boerger**

Imagine more than 30,000 Lutherans in the Mercedes-Benz Superdome in New Orleans. The 2012 Youth Gathering was one of

the largest gatherings of members of this church. The youth, with their mentors and advisers, filled the dome with noise, color and enthusiasm.

This was my fourth gathering as bishop. These events have been a high point for me in this office.

The sound of a saxophone softly playing “Jesus Loves Me” moved the assembled throng to fill the dome with song and with feeling. The speakers challenged the youth to trust in Jesus and, in that faith, to change the world. This was not a theoretical challenge. It was lived out as the youth practiced peacemaking, justice and discipleship.

I accompanied the youth from Holy Spirit Lutheran Church, Kirkland, Wash., and Messiah Lutheran Church, Houston, as they led a literacy project at an elementary school in Jefferson Parish. The looks on the children’s faces was contagious as they played, wrote stories, acted out skits and engaged in art projects.

While thunder and rain made the outside unwelcoming, the inside of the school was safe, warm and welcoming.

The ELCA youth, wearing orange T-shirts, once again left a welcome mark on New Orleans.

## What participants ‘raised’ while at the Youth Gathering

- ✦ Donated 1,193 pints of blood
- ✦ Donated 509 “heads” of hair
- ✦ Gave \$256,000 during Sunday offering
- ✦ Raised more than \$400,000 toward the 100 Wells Challenge

We had more than 250 members of the Northwest Washington Synod at this year’s gathering. These leaders of the church had an experience that will be with them for a lifetime. At a time when the church and its youth are being challenged in so many ways, it’s good to see the quality and quantity of the leaders who are serving the church now and into the future.

“Citizens with the Saints,” based

on Ephesians 2:14-20, was the theme for the 2012 gathering. Called to service the youth of this church danced, sang and served in New Orleans. Now they are home to continue that service. Join them in this life of faith, active in love.

In 2015 the ELCA youth will again gather—this time in Detroit. I encourage our synod congregations to be part of that gathering. □



**Susan Berg, First Lutheran Church in Bothell, Wash., cleans up debris with the youth as part of the 2012 Youth Gathering session called “practicing justice.” Berg was also the Youth Gathering coordinator for our synod.**

## Planning ahead

The 2013 Northwest Washington Synod Assembly will be held Thursday, May 16-Saturday, May 18, at the Lynnwood [Wash.] Convention Center. Watch for details in synod emails and on the synod website at [www.lutheransnw.org](http://www.lutheransnw.org). Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson will be attending.

# Go, be the light in the darkness

*Editor's note: Following are a few reflections from Northwest Washington Synod youth who attended the 2012 ELCA Youth Gathering in New Orleans.*

### **Paige Rinnert, Holy Spirit Lutheran Church in Kirkland**

The most exciting part of the 2012 ELCA Youth Gathering was the overwhelming energy of 33,000 Lutheran youth ready to become citizens with the saints with the people of New Orleans. The gathering included three full days: Practice Peacemaking, Practice Justice and Practice Discipleship.

In Practice Peacemaking our group was given free rein in the mile-long Convention Center, which was packed with group activities. I did the Wi-Fi Hot Spot Challenge, where one of the tasks was to buy a soda for a stranger. The lady we gave the soda to was so grateful for a cold drink. As a church, we did a team-building activity involving cups, rubber bands and string.

In Practice Justice each church did a service project around the city. My church and a congregation from Houston helped with a day camp's literacy program at an elementary school. I read to children or had them read to me. It really felt like we were making a difference in the kids' lives.

In Practice Discipleship we spent the day with just the Northwest Washington Synod. I got the opportunity to read at the morning worship service presided over by Bishop Wm Chris Boerger. After worship, synod members met in small groups to discuss faith practices.

The main message of the gathering, as shown by the theme song



**Lynne Eide (clockwise from left), an adult leader; the Rev. Scott Brents; Jessica James; Anna Eide; and Patrick Williamson from Camano Lutheran Church, Camano Island, put their \$1,900 offering in the well toward the 100 Wells Challenge.**

“Make a Difference” by Rachel Kurtz, was to take what we learned this week out into the world. It wasn't just, “Hey, we're all Lutherans here together, isn't this great?” It was “Go be the light of the world, the light in the darkness, the light in your community and make a difference.”

### **Taylor Usselman, Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Issaquah**

The Youth Gathering in New Orleans was really inspiring and motivational. I was amazed by how many youth joined together to help out in so many ways.

Watching the speakers with 33,000-plus people really changes you. I loved the Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber's speech the first night at the Superdome explaining how her life was changed. She described Lutherans as “unicorns,” and I think that stuck in everyone's head. Her speech told me it's OK to be different and

God will use you no matter who you are. I was also moved by another speaker who said he was arrested for feeding the homeless and sleeping in parks at night.

Not only were the speakers amazing, but I loved the songs we got to sing. They made me want to get up and dance with everyone and savor every moment of it.

One of the last things that really surprised me was the youth. I remember waiting in line to exit the Superdome. Our group was lined up next to a covered fence that stood randomly in the hall, with other church groups lined up on the other side. Suddenly people started sticking their hands up over the fence for a high-five. You didn't know who was there, but it didn't matter. We high-fived each other and gave one another little gifts like change, key rings, mints, etc. No one cared who was on the other side. I was really happy to see that everyone

## Rediscover Macedonian passions

**H**ave you heard of cash mobs? People join together and shop all at once at a locally owned small business or give all at once to a nonprofit that they support. They put their money behind their passions. Maybe what happens at worship when we pass the offering plates needs a new name: offering mob or mission mob.

Passions aren't new. Paul picked up on the passions of the Macedonian Christians, describing them with the words abundant joy, overflowing generosity, begging for the privilege (2 Corinthians 8:2, 4). Is there some underlying passion coming through in their joy, generosity and insistence on joining the relief effort for poor Christians in Jerusalem?

What are you passionate about? There's a good chance some of your passions are being supported by the work of your congregation, our synod or churchwide. All three expressions of the church help the poor receive food and shel-

joined together, even if we were complete strangers.

The whole trip has made me want to do more in my community, and it has helped me find out more about the person I am.

### Anna Eide, Camano Lutheran Church, Camano Island

Vacation is always a time of escape from life's daily demands. Going to New Orleans was more than just an escape for me, more than just a vacation. It was a time to replace a hectic schedule with time centered on God and doing his will with fellow Christians.

Many of the small group discussions and worship sessions made me focus on how important it is to be

ter. The ELCA's global efforts go way beyond relief, helping people develop sustainable farming and other business practices.

In the Pacific Northwest, people are passionate about fair trade and coffee, and our church supports this effort for coffee workers and other tradespeople in many developing countries.

When tsunamis and earthquakes devastate parts of the world, or droughts, floods and tornadoes hit the Midwest, we are passionate about providing assistance. Our mission support offerings pay for a network called Lutheran Disaster Response. Because that network is in place, 100 percent of the funds given for a particular disaster go to direct assistance.

Why are we so committed to these things? Do we have an underlying passion that might be in common with the Macedonian Christians?

A hint at the underlying Macedonian passion comes through in the

still and let God lead you. I often get so caught up in doing the next step "required" in life that I forget to let him take control.

Touring the beautiful city also gave me a new appreciation for the gifts he has placed in our lives.

The Southern culture, creole food, humidity, architecture and people of New Orleans put me in awe of the diverse world God has created. Especially for someone coming from the Pacific Northwest, the city seemed to sing with colorful voices and was full of joy despite all the hardships of life.

It was incredible to spend a week praising and serving God, taking time to live for him and be a witness to the city of New Orleans. □

bolded words in this version of the 2 Corinthians passage:

"We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the **grace** of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege (**grace**) of sharing in this ministry to the saints—and this, not merely as we expected; they gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us, so that we might urge Titus that, as he had already made a beginning, so he should also complete this generous undertaking (**grace**) among you.

"Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you—so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking (**grace**)."

The word *charis* in Greek is used four times, not just once (it only gets translated "grace" in the first verse). The first passion is God's passionate grace for the Macedonians experienced by them in the grace of Jesus. That grace can't be contained, but flows through the Macedonians in generous giving and sharing for ministry. I wonder if grace is not the underlying passion at work in us too.

What passions do you see getting expressed through the mission of your congregation? Tell those stories, and watch them draw out even more gracious acts among you. □

The Rev. Jerry Buss  
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