



# In the world

*By the Rev. Kirby Unti, bishop*

**M**y earliest memory of learning about God's love took place when I was just a little boy living in Jamestown, N.D.

It was from my mother that I learned: "God so loved the world that he gave us his only son." For me, God has always been a loving God who cares deeply for people. Because God loved me I, in turn, was encouraged to love other people. This became my vocation.

I also saw my father put these words into action. He spent his career advocating for children and adults who were faced with added physical and mental challenges. He was widening the circle of who deserves friendship and respect. It didn't take long for me to discover that the people I was most at home with were those outside the four walls of the church. They seemed to be more accepting of others.

When I interviewed for the call at St. Matthew's Lutheran Church, Renton, Wash., I spent a day with members of the call committee, meeting people in the community. I was introduced to the mayor, the superintendent of public schools and the president of the technical college. This congregation wanted their pastor to be connected to the people in the community.

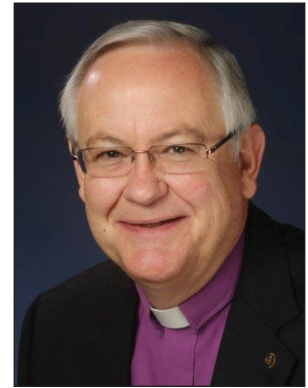
I would spend the next 33 years building wonderful friendships with community people, the large majority of whom never darkened the door of any church or temple. They often asked me questions about God or invited me into their lives when they faced challenges. It was a great privilege. I stood in awe of them for how generous and caring they could be. For me the line between sacred and secular was being erased.

I became fascinated with where I discovered Jesus in the Bible. He was almost always in the community, going from village to village. His encounters were with people who were most often considered unacceptable by the religious community. In turn he often commented on their faithfulness. This is why I am so at home with a movement that is stirring among the church today.

This movement has a variety of names: emerging, missional or "back to the neighborhood." It calls upon congregations to move beyond the comfort of their four walls and to enter into a relationship with the communities they find themselves in. It is a movement that encourages collaboration and partnerships where the church is not in charge but an equal partner. It is about responding to the cries of the community. It is a movement that proclaims that God is present in the community, entering into its brokenness and offering healing and hope.

This movement doesn't appear to increase attendance or add to the offering plate. It isn't about growing the church as much as it is about being the church. It's an unsettling movement because there is no road map or experts to call upon.

I think we need to continue to find ways to be the church gathered within our walls, and to be a church that is very much in, but not of, the world. □



**Bishop Kirby Unti**

# Northwest Washington



**Kitchen crew and members of Ebenezer Lutheran Church, Lake Stevens, Wash.:** Rob Dutcher (left), JoAnn Cross, Irma Gross, Dotty and Harold Ronnestad, and Virg Nunes.

## Community serving community

By Susan Berg

Each Thursday “community serving community” is the phrase that is repeated and celebrated by JoAnn Cross, Lake Stevens’ Community Supper coordinator and long-time member of Ebenezer Lutheran Church, Lake Stevens, Wash.

It all began when two Ebenezer Lutheran Preschool parents observed kids playing in the courtyard while their folks waited in line for the church-housed Community Food Bank distribution. The women, Mary Fish and Liz Whitham, decided to offer coffee to the adults and asked if they could share candy with the kids. The parents responded: “Not until they have had their supper.”

The light bulb went on: Why not provide a free supper? “Loving our neighbors by sharing a meal” was something people craved—both the congregation and community at large.

After receiving encouragement from their pastors and the council, they began providing a free simple soup dinner once a month. Soon it became twice a month, then weekly. It grew from a modest meal made by a few parishioners to a nutritionally balanced meal supported by the community and open to all. Food and monetary donations come from individuals and groups in the community. Government commodities are also used. “I have found that this community is very generous with each other,” Cross said.

Next year the program will celebrate 20 years of community serving community.

In addition to clients of the Lake Stevens Food Bank, there are a variety of community folks at the tables. “There are several adult group homes that bring their residents to enjoy an outing, share a meal and practice their social skills,” said volunteer veteran Irma Gross. “There are families for whom this is the only way to take the family ‘out to dinner’ in this tough economic time.” Seniors also gather before the serving begins and stay until the vacuuming is done—just for the opportunity to be with one another.

This night eight ninth-graders from the leadership program at Cavelero Mid High School volunteered to serve and clean up. Two students, Scout and Adama, shared their reasons for helping: “It feels good to give back to the community” and “it’s really fun to chat with the people who come to eat.” Another student, Geri, shared that, among the 30 leadership students, this program is the “most popular one to volunteer for because the people who come for dinner are so happy and fun and grateful.”

Other volunteer groups include the Boy Scouts, Lions and Rotarians, Ebenezer members, City of Lake Stevens employees, and folks from the Lake Stevens Family and Senior Centers.

People interested in helping at the Lake Stevens Community Supper or who want to start a community-based supper, can contact Cross at [supper@ebenezerlakestevens.org](mailto:supper@ebenezerlakestevens.org). □

*Berg is NWWA Synod relations administrator.*

B [www.thelutheran.org](http://www.thelutheran.org)

# Bringing warmth & comfort

By Bud Alkire

Each Wednesday morning, quilters at Faith Lutheran Church, Everett, Wash., join together in cutting, tying and sewing as they create quilts to warm God's people. In its 10 years, the team has made more than 1,400 quilts that have been given to families in need throughout the world.

For the past year the team has been busy working on a special project. Domestic Violence Services of Snohomish County (DVS) opened a shelter for women and children fleeing abuse within their homes. This shelter, which was dedicated Nov. 6, 2013, increases the number of emergency beds available for domestic violence victims in the county from 15 to 52. Each of these 52 beds welcomed their first guest with a colorful quilt "made with love" by the Faith quilters.

The incidence of in-home violence is staggering. The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence reports that 1.3 million women are physically assaulted by their partner each year. And 16,800 homicides are committed annually against women in the U.S. by their intimate partners. Closer to home, more than 35 Washington state women are murdered each year by a family member or dating abuser. The state's police and sheriff departments respond to more than 50,000 domestic violence calls annually.

The new shelter is located in North Everett on the site of a former Army Reserve armory that was declared to be surplus by the Department of Defense in 2009. Under federal law, homeless programs have first priority to receive the surplus property at no cost, as long as it remains committed to serving the homeless. The 3.3-acre site included a well-maintained training structure that DVS remodeled to provide the 52 emergency beds, a 24-hour crisis call center, space for legal and employment counseling, and the agency's administrative operations.

Vicci Hilty, DVS executive director, said, "This new shelter represents the fulfillment of a dream our agency has had for over a decade. While we provide emergency shelter for 220 individuals in a typical year, we have to turn away four times that number. One in four women will experience domestic violence in her lifetime. This new shelter reflects the commitment by our community—public, private, business and faith—to provide a safe place for those whose homes are no longer safe."

The second phase of the development broke ground in October when the Everett Housing Authority began construction of a 20-unit subsidized apartment complex adjacent to the emergency shelter. Lower-income families leaving the emergency shelter will be able to move into the apartments as they continue to stabilize their situation at affordable rents.

Many families fleeing violence are able to take little, if anything, with them. Helping them get together the clothing, furniture and personal items they need to start their lives anew is one of DVS' big tasks. This task will be made a little easier as each family member will have a new warm quilt that will go with them. And the hands of Faith's quilters are already working to provide other quilts for the next family, each bearing the inscription "Faith Lutheran Church—Made with Love."

Joining her fellow quilters at the shelter's dedication, Faith council member Ethel Briggs said, "We are blessed to be able to make quilts that will bring warmth and comfort to a child only a few hours removed from the horror of family violence. We thank Jesus for letting us help him provide that comfort." □

*Alkire is a member of Faith Lutheran Church, Everett, Wash.*

## **The quilters of Faith Lutheran Church, Everett, Wash.:**

Diane Kinch (left), Ella Tuininga, Marian Green, Marie Whitaker, Verna Randall, Ethel Briggs and Winnie Atkinson





## 'Together Emphasizing Alaska's Mission'

By the Rev. Shelley Wickstrom, bishop



**Bishop Shelley Wickstrom**

If you have an idea for a new project or event but are stubbing your congregational toe over funding, will you let your synod partners help?

The Alaska Synod has a fund to help congregations who have the vision and energy to do new things. *Together Emphasizing Alaska's Mission* or TEAM is that fund.

When TEAM began in 1997, we had little idea how the Spirit would take this ministry forward. Over the last 27 years, congregations and individuals have continued to donate to this synod fund to make grants available to other congregations for new ministry initiatives that haven't been funded through congregational or synod budgets.

To receive a grant, your congregation's project or event should address one of the synod's goals:

- We will celebrate and empower all the baptized to proclaim the gospel in our communities, disciple new leaders, form steward leaders, and grow ministries throughout the synod.
- We will witness to and serve Christ's mission by renewing and creating partnerships and networks that extend our capacity and collaboration within clusters and the synod with ecumenical partners and others with common interest.

- We will live out our gratitude for God's gracious abundance—despite the challenges of limited resources, demonstrating the resilience and adaptability of doing the work of God's kingdom of serving, inviting, reconciling and connecting.

- We will work to help assure that the young and the poor will thrive and be nurtured in the Christian faith while empowering them to seek voice and justice in our communities.

*Fire Starter Grants* are awarded for \$3,000 or less. Applications for more than \$3,001 in funding are *Large Grants*. Applications are available on the Alaska Synod website ([www.elcaalaska.net](http://www.elcaalaska.net)). A synod committee reviews applications quarterly so there's a fairly quick turnaround.

The congregation awarded a grant agrees to assume the following responsibilities:

- Provide a report to the TEAM Committee at the conclusion of the portion of the event, project or new ministry for which the grant was obtained.
- Provide a written report and an oral report to the synod at the first assembly after the receipt of the funds.
- Return any unused funds at the completion of the project to the synod office.

The two most recent grant recipients include partial funding for fencing for the community garden on Trinity Lutheran Church property in Palmer, and raised garden beds for the summer feeding program for kids at Shepherd of the Valley in Juneau. Both of these congregations have also received ELCA Domestic Hunger Grants to help fund these projects. □