



Northwest Washington

Synod supplement

A Lutheran potluck

By Kim Unti and Pam Kluth

Lutheran potlucks are magical. How can that be when we don't assign what to bring? In the end, the potluck always has enough main dishes, salads and desserts to feed the crowd. On a good day, there is even enough for seconds. You can always count on someone pursuing someone else's recipe. A Lutheran potluck is a real life experience of what happens when God's people are willing to bring their gift to the party.

We had the wonderful opportunity to visit each of the congregations in our synod in preparation for this year's assembly in May. This gave us the chance to sample gifts that congregations bring to "God's Party." It didn't take us long to realize that every congregation, regardless of size, location or resources, has a unique gift that adds real zest to the party.

Let's sample a Northwest Washington Synod potluck:

Whatcom Cluster—Christ Lutheran Church, Ferndale, cooperates with The Other Bank. This service is like a food bank but it also provides nonfood items. Personal hygiene items are primarily what fill the shelves. These are essential things food stamps and food banks don't offer. People from the community and church donate funds and items throughout the year. School staffs work with The Other Bank to identify clients.

Skagit Cluster—Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Sedro Woolley, combines two ministries in one. *Quilting Through the Bible* offers a midweek opportunity for those who like to quilt with Bible study. The pastor prepares a Bible study and quilt squares are designed as a representation of the study. This ministry draws many from the community.

Stillaguamish Cluster—Faith Lutheran Church, North Lakewood, offers a Friday

night event for 4-year-olds through fifth-graders. The 6-8 p.m. ministry begins with a meal and moves on to fun activities.

Faith sends mailers out to the community and places a

sign in front of the church building. But the most effective promotion for the event occurs as children and parents tell their friends.

Sno-Isle Cluster—Faith Lutheran Church, Everett, hosts Lunch Bunch on the second Tuesday of every month. Congregation members prepare a meal for all in the community to enjoy. About half of the participants come from the community looking for fellowship and a hot meal. The meal is scheduled to begin when the preschool ends for the day. Many families from the preschool attend the lunch, creating a wonderful multigenerational experience.

Sno-King Cluster—Members of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Alderwood Manor, are champion volunteers. They are encouraged to make a difference in both community and church-related organizations. The list of places where Gloria Dei offers assistance is extensive. As a way of honoring the time given by members, a large thermometer is placed in the narthex for people to fill in the hours they offer. This is hands-on leadership.

NE Seattle Cluster—Bethel Chinese



Sarah France (left), pastor of Morning Star Lutheran Church, Monroe, with Joy Johnson, Monroe Congregational United Church of Christ, at one of the gatherings to assemble food for the Brown Bag Brigade.

Continued on page B

Northwest Washington

Continued from page A

Lutheran Church, Seattle, has a unique mission of preparing missionaries. Many of those who come to their church are grandparents who are here to care for grandchildren. They will return to China when the children grow older. The congregation takes seriously the ministry of preparing these adults to go back to China with the word of God and the gift of sharing their faith with those in their home country.

NW Seattle Cluster—Ballard First Lutheran Church, Seattle, hosts a Turkey Trot the day after Thanksgiving. The day has a threefold focus: to resist the “buy, buy, buy” for the holidays, to give the congregation a way of getting into the community, and to help raise funds for the ELCA World Hunger Appeal. The “trot” takes place at Greenlake with check-in stations around the lake staffed by congregation members and Lutheran Volunteer Corps. Others join in as they see the walkers and runners circle the lake.

Central Seattle Cluster—Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Seattle, has hosted a Summer Academy in the past. It’s a four-week, all-day experience that is open to kids in the community. The academy focuses on the arts, with workshops in drama, art, music and even opera. The building was alive with activity as young people from the community came to the church. By the end of the academy, the youth performed a full length opera for parents and friends.

East King Cluster—Cross of Christ Lutheran Church, Bellevue, has Sunday school on Sunday afternoons. What?! Families were polled and Sunday afternoon was the most popular time to offer something for children. From 4-6:30 p.m. the congregation holds classes in a room that



Mr. Zhenchuan Liu, Lutheran Chinese Campus Ministry at the University of Washington in Seattle, and the Rev. Jimmy Hao, Grace Chinese in Seattle.

has a large map of the Holy Land on a wall. The kids (and adults too) have enjoyed following the Bible stories and finding the places in the stories on the map. Since the change, the Sunday school has quadrupled in size and more friends come along.

Seatac Cluster—Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Seatac, listened to the community and opened their building for Kids Place Playland. This grew from two young mothers who wanted a safe place for children to play during the school year. The fellowship hall is made available, a sign is placed outside and neighbors are invited to come and play. This is not a drop-off program—parents and caregivers stay to play and meet other parents. Great friendships have developed. This is a no-cost opportunity that just requires space and a few toys.

South King County Cluster—Nativity Lutheran Church, Renton, offers an intergenerational vacation Bible school every summer. The unique piece is that they write their

own curriculum around topics that would be interesting to all ages. One year the focus was on health and fitness. They offered health screening for the community and had fitness instructors teaching too. This ministry is free. Neighborhood families watch for the sign to be posted and sign up early!

Cascadia Cluster—Morning Star Lutheran, Monroe, is the Brown Bag Brigade church. Members started the program with a grant and now assemble more than 100 lunches (complete with homemade cookies) every Wednesday morning, delivering them to three sites in Monroe and Sultan. One site is an alternative high school where kids weren’t eating all day. Every month the congregation takes a special offering, with pew envelopes, for this ministry. They call this “Doing small things with great love.” □

Unti and Kluth were co-chairs of the 2009 synod assembly. Unti is a member of St. Matthew’s Lutheran Church, Renton, and Kluth is member of Trinity Lutheran Church, Everett.

Gifts God is giving us

By The Rev. Wm Chris Boerger, bishop

One of the great joys of this office is to see the variety of gifts God has given the church through its members and its congregational communities. Those who work for the synod or the churchwide organization are faced with the diversity of gifts and opportunities that are presented to us as the people of God.

Too often at the congregational expression of the ELCA we are so familiar with each other that we fail to recognize the unique gifts that are present around us or in us. We know the person who does the specific function, like providing hospitality, sending greetings to the hurting, providing just the leadership skill we needed. They are just being themselves and we know them. That is the point I am trying to make. We know each other so well, we fail to see the gifts God is giving through each other to the whole body of Christ.

Our recent synod assembly had as its theme “Bringing our gifts to God’s Party.” Kim Unti and Pam Kluth attempted to interview leaders of each congregational community. The results of those interviews give us a quick snapshot of the variety of gifts we have in this church.

Kim and Pam saw what those of us in the synod office see on a regular basis. We are a gifted people.

The challenge for us congregationally and synodically is to use these gifts in ways that build up the body of Christ and that bring God’s compassion and love to the communities in which we serve. We extend that work beyond our communities and through the churchwide expression of the church to the whole world. □



What makes a better gift?

Choosing the “right” gift can be a challenge. When you love someone, choosing a gift that offers you joy in giving and the recipient joy in receiving isn’t always as easy as it seems. If you have a clue, choosing that gift may not be so difficult. But sometimes it may require a little investigative work on your part. You may ask some leading questions, seek the help of others or pointedly ask, “Is there something you really need or would like to have?”

When you consider charitable giving you or your estate may benefit more by choosing a particular asset for a charitable gift while you use other assets for loved ones.

Sally Wise considered a gift for

her favorite ministry. When she weighed the advantages and disadvantages she ended up choosing to donate two IRAs to her selected ministry, payable upon death. At the same time her children will receive a distribution from the remainder of her estate. The IRAs, which would have created a taxable event for her children, aren’t taxable when given to charity. In this example her children receive more (by avoiding taxes on the IRAs) and she has joy in knowing how her well-thought-out plan will work. When all is said and done, she greatly benefits a ministry she has supported throughout her life.

A taxable asset, therefore, may offer a better choice for you than a

charitable gift. Planning takes time. But in the long run it’s worthwhile and potentially preserves hundreds if not thousands of dollars that could benefit others.

I would be pleased to help you create a gift plan that addresses your needs and goals. My time is a gift to you, at no cost or obligation, and is provided to all individuals and ELCA congregations in Western Washington by The Lutheran Planned Giving Consortium of Western Washington. You can reach me at 206-280-7328 or at jim.leistikow@elca.org. □

The Rev. Jim Leistikow
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