

# *Meeting the Needs of a Hungry World:* Nourished and More at God's Table!

by Julie K. Ageson

Synod assemblies are a lot of work. Planning committees, speakers, worship and workshop leaders, voting members, synod council members and synod staff prepare for months for this annual event. It's a bit like a very large Sunday dinner gathering with all the family around the table—voting members, visitors and others from all the congregations of the Eastern North Dakota Synod family. It's a place for learning and growing, for doing synod business, for thinking more intentionally about what it means to be the church. It's also a place, perhaps even a table, where all are fed and nourished. If you were fortunate enough to be part of this year's assembly, you are no doubt still reflecting on all that took place May 14-15. Share your experiences with your congregation! Encourage others to consider coming next year as voting members!

These are the ways we were fed and nourished:

- Friday evening conversation at Trinity Lutheran Church in Moorhead with Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson—an evening for asking questions, hearing about the hopes and dreams of a changing church, listening to a wise and articulate bishop who deeply respects difference and diversity, knowing God's grace is for all. The house was packed!
- Assembly goers were welcomed to beautiful space adorned by a stunning textile hanging called "Women of Hope", challenging viewers to consider what it means to meet the needs of a hungry world. Displays around the convention center featured resources for helping congregations address the needs of a hungry world.
- The assembly began with worship both on Saturday and Sunday. In word and song and actions, God's word was preached and Holy Communion was celebrated.
- The Rev. Stephen Bouman, ELCA Director of Congregational and Synodical Mission, led two bible studies centered on the ways God comes to us at table: in the Eucharist, at the tables where we gather in our own congregations, in our homes. Connecting the kitchen table where stories of faith are often learned first to the Table of the Lord, Bouman reminded assembly participants that we are called to share bread with all, that no one is left out. In his State of the ELCA address, Bouman's grace-filled words described congregations as centers for mission focused on the poor, the hungry, and those who often are excluded. Bouman's passionate invitation to share God's boundless love with the world was a highpoint of the assembly.
- Bishop Bill Rindy led plenary sessions where nine resolutions were considered and discussed. Among them: increasing congregational giving to ELCA World Hunger; calling the church to speak and act to prevent bullying, harassment, and related violence; and a call to maximize sustainable food production. A resolution calling for the ELCA Churchwide Assembly to withdraw the proposed social statement "Genetics, Faith, and Responsibility" failed. By a vote of 289 to 65, voting members chose not to consider a resolution asking to rescind the roster policy change adopted by the 2009 Churchwide Assembly.
- A panel of local and global leaders addressed issues of hunger and led workshops related to alleviating world hunger.
- Attendees at the Global Mission breakfast heard current information about the Central African Republic, our companion synod.
- Dakota Road, a musical group from Sioux Falls, led the assembly in song.
- A banquet and celebration of "Milestones in Ministry" honored pastors and other rostered leaders for their years of ministry. Churches celebrating special anniversaries, 2010-11 interns, and newly assigned seminarians to our synod were also recognized.

- Ministry milestones were shared by three synod leaders who recently returned from the Central African Republic, our partner synod.
- The synod's 2012 Mission Plan was adopted after thoughtful conversation about cuts to Campus Ministry, seminaries, and bible camps. As one way to help support these ministries, an amendment to the budget was passed to create an Extra Mile Fund for regional ministries.
- The "Shoebox Offering" totaled \$17,720.42 which is designated to ELCA World Hunger (Acreage Project); Sunday worship offering is divided equally between the Central African Republic's water project and Great Plains Food Bank was \$11,617 (as of 5-16-11); and a basket (initial) offering for the regional Extra Mile totaled \$6,881.
- 563 voting members and visitors shared a rich variety of experiences as they participated in plenary debate, worship, bible study, and workshops

Thank you to all who helped make this gathering of God's people in the Eastern North Dakota Synod deeply meaningful and worthwhile!