

Synod Mission Starts: Being Church Together!

By Pr. Larry Strenge, Director for Evangelical Mission, SW MN Synod, ELCA

This past weekend (Feb 8-9, 2015) Celebration Lutheran Church (CLC) in Sartell—a mission start in 1984--invited our SW MN synod's two newest "mission starts" to be present for worship by inviting Pastors Laura Aase (Saturday) and Kimberly Buffie (Sunday), the mission developers at River of Hope/Hutchinson and House of Grace/Montrose, to be their guest preachers. As your Director for Evangelical mission I attended the services. I'm so glad I did!

What I witnessed was a powerful connection of Christ's Body. It was marvelous! Pastor Elizabeth Strenge had invited each of the "mission developers" to tell a brief part of her story before preaching on the text for the day. Both did it very well, weaving the way the Spirit had called them to ministry! As those stories were told I watched as people connected life in the Spirit in new ways! As they did they connected what God had done at Celebration some 30 years ago and was continuing to do today. When Roger Farley, a "charter member" of CLC back in 1984, made his presentation of a "support check" from the congregation, it included briefly telling how a small member congregation had supported CLC in its early days and given them a boost. When he handed the check from CLC's "mission fund" it was evident that the past and present were coming together. The Spirit was at work. I watched as applause erupted.

But it didn't stop there. People had been invited to give a "love offering" at the door. I watched as council members held boxes for checks or cash. There were many, many, MANY people—including children--who responded! And this is after the giving of regular offering and to "the Joyful Jar" for CLC's "mission of the month"—our Companion synod in Southern Africa!

What I witnessed was, "We are Church Together!" It came as these people gave witness through their encouragement for our mission starts. Good work goes on there. New ideas are tried. They make an intentional effort to reach people with the love of Jesus. But even more importantly what I saw was the partnership in the Gospel. And what I saw was that when we share it like this in story and personal connection, people found JOY in supporting it. No one was "forced" to give at the door. It was part of what they WANTED to do, to be part of supporting God's mission in these new places. And it gave them JOY!

And I get so excited to think of Pastors Laura and Kimberly, returning to their places, telling a story, one of being loved by this part of the Body they had not known before, and now, given this encouragement together. I'm confident it will bolster the work of these hard working mission developers. And I'm confident the Spirit will form a new enthusiasm among those who hear these stories as they are forming new places for worship, community building, faith formation, serving in vocation, fellowship and all the other things that go on as the Spirit helps us to live out our Baptism into the Body of Christ Jesus, our Head. We are Church together in Jesus!

I hope you'll consider having a time to invite either of our mission developers to be at your location. And even if they can't come take time to find out about their ministries. It will bring new life to your setting as the Spirit brings memories, creates partnerships, and grows us to be the Body of Christ together.



Southwestern Minnesota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.