



“We are Church for the Sake of the World”

By Bishop Rodger Prois

In 2013, ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton stated to the ELCA Church Council: “We are a church first. And at the heart of what we do is worship, and the heart of that is Jesus Christ. We are church for the sake of the world. We weren’t redeemed to just think good thoughts of Jesus Christ. We’re supposed to be out there, helping to bring about the abundant life.”

With the 2018 Western Iowa Synod Assembly (June 8-10), we begin a year of living with the concept of “We are Church for the Sake of the World.” The obvious question is: “How can we do that?”

A common theme throughout Scripture is the need for God’s people to care for the neighbor, regardless of creed, ethnicity or anything else. In both the Old and New Testaments, the message is clear: love God and love your neighbor as yourself. Our task is to figure out, and implement, ways to be the church for the sake of the world.

I sense that much of this can be centered on Martin Luther’s teachings on vocation. My simple understanding of vocation is that God calls us to leave behind the sinful ways of the “old Adam” and the effects of a law-based relationship and move to a new relationship with God as we are “called by the gospel and enlightened by the Holy Spirit.” In this new relationship—the “new Adam”—we are freed to serve the other, which includes all of creation, not only the human next door or across the world. The calling is to various activities in life (vocations)—family, work, civil service—and is more than merely about occupation. As people with callings, we move beyond the individualistic attitude and consider what we as a church can be about.

Luther speaks to this in his “What does this mean?” response to the third article of the Apostles’ Creed: “Just as he calls, gathers, enlight-

ens, and makes holy the whole Christian Church on earth” (Small Catechism).

The realignment from an occupational understanding of vocation to one that pushes us out of our navel-gazing posture to one where we engage Jesus’ favorites—the poor and marginalized—is dif-

ficult. We have started the “Changing Hearts in the Heartland” movement to help us make this change of orientation. Though not perfect, it’s an attempt to start conversations centered on God’s call to care for and aid others without the human tendency to look for what we will get out of it.

Can we agree that Jesus’ commands to go, do, feed, tend, love and others are the basics of life in the world as followers of Christ and intrinsic to our calling? If so, then we return to my earlier question: “How can we be the church for the sake of the world?” Much of this year’s assembly presentations and reports will lift up what we have done or already are about. I firmly believe it’s important that we also engage in holy dreaming of what else God would have us do. Our primary work is to proclaim the gospel in word and deed and expand the kingdom by inviting others to join.



Bishop Rodger Prois



The synod’s Mission Team Leadership (aka: synod staff) reworked our purpose statement to reflect our understanding of what we are to be about. It begins with a small portion of Paul’s letter to the Corinthians: “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth” (1 Corinthians 3:6). We then state: Cultivating change

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Assembly 2018 offering recipients

Assembly 2018 is just around the corner and members of the Western Iowa Synod (WIS) will gather under the theme “We are Church for the Sake of the World.” Each year congregations are invited to take a special offering or designate monies that their voting members will bring to the assembly. Offerings will be collected at the opening worship on Friday and the closing worship on Sunday, June 10. This year’s beneficiaries of the offering will be The Campaign for the ELCA (Leadership: ELCA Fund for Leaders and Youth and Young Adults); the WIS Fund for Leaders (TEEM, Theological Education for Emerging Ministries); and Tanzanian SACCOS. Let us join together to make a difference in these important ministries! Learn more about them here:

Campaign for the ELCA: Leadership

This church’s future depends on its future leaders. Good, strong leadership matters in a church that is called to live and serve in a world full of complexities and ambiguities. We need leaders who will ground us in God’s love and forgiveness and send us out to do God’s work in the world. By accompanying youth and young adults on their faith journeys, and supporting talented, gifted students as they prepare to begin a life of ministry, we invest in the ELCA’s future. You can help by growing the permanent endowment fund so that, for generations to come, hundreds more of the most promising leaders can respond to the call to serve our congregations. Your offering can also help expand the ELCA’s ministries to cultivate young leaders, lift up the importance of diversity and inclusion, and build a robust network of support for youth and young adults in our church.

WIS Fund for Leaders (TEEM)

We call you to exercise among us the ministry of Word and Sacrament which God has established ... to preach and teach the Word of God in accordance with the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions: to administer Holy Baptism and Holy Communion; to lead worship; to proclaim the forgiveness of sins; to provide pastoral care; to speak for justice on behalf of the poor and oppressed; to

encourage persons to prepare for the ministry of the Gospel; to impart knowledge of the ELCA and its wider ministry; to endeavor to increase support given by our congregation to the work of our whole church; to equip us for witness and service; and guide us in proclaiming God’s love through word and deed.

—Letter of call to an ordained ELCA minister



This is the work to which a pastor is called. This is the ministry for which seminaries prepare students.

The church has always valued education for its leaders. Martin Luther was concerned that pastors know Hebrew and Greek, the languages of the Old and New Testaments. In addition, all candidates preparing for ordination are expected to be firmly grounded in knowledge of the Scriptures and the Lutheran traditions, and to adhere to this church’s confession of faith.

To meet these education expectations along with the changing ministry needs of congregations, the ELCA’s seminaries continue to adapt. Gone are the days when all seminarians moved to live on campus for two years of study, moved again for a one-year internship, and moved back to campus for a final year at seminary in preparation for ordination.

Today theological education at ELCA seminaries includes four options:

- 1. Residential Master of Divinity Degree.**
- 2. Distributive Learning.**
Online learning for a Master of Divinity degree.
- 3. TEEM: Theological Education for Emerging Ministries.**
Specialized ministry certificate granted to

students serving in specific congregational ministry sites

4. Collaborative Master of Divinity.

Students are placed in a congregation for four years while taking courses online to complete the Master of Divinity degree.

Raising up new leaders is a partnership between a student, congregation, synod, seminary, the ELCA and the Spirit. We will celebrate this partnership at the 2018 WIS Assembly with the theme “We are Church for the Sake of the World.” One-third of worship offerings will go to support seminarians who are serving in congregations while attending seminary.

Thank you for your gifts, prayers and support of these students as they prepare for ordained ministry in the ELCA.

SACCOS: Savings And Credit Co-Operative Societies

Most Tanzanians have little access to desired credit that would make it possible for them to adopt improved agricultural practices or begin or expand a small business. A SACCOS can provide a small, short-term loan that enables Tanzanian smallholder farmers and small businesses to invest in new opportunities.

The SACCOS groups have been successful because they require members to have “skin in the game” by investing their own savings to help provide capital for loans. SACCOS members are often able to collectively purchase quality inputs at a reduced cost. Most importantly, they give families the dignity of making their own decisions on how to use the funds from the loans and profits.

Funds raised by WIS will finance new SACCOS groups in villages across southern Tanzania. The SACCOS that have already been organized have greatly proven their effectiveness. These loans enable individuals and families to increase their income, often tripling what they can earn and dramatically improving their standard of living.

Profits most typically enhance family housing and nutrition, children’s education, community development and church tithing.

The WIS Companion Synod Network seeks to start at least eight SACCOS groups. Each group requires an initial investment of \$8,000 to register and supply the SACCOS, to provide ongoing training for its leaders and to boost the base of capital for loans. Since the loans are repaid within three to six months, the pool of capital grows to make new loans on an ongoing basis—*it’s a win-win for everyone!*

Individuals, church groups and congregations can all participate in the effort to create SACCOS groups. Contributions can be made via a matching funds drive (up to \$15,000) or via online crowdsourcing currently going on in our synod. See **wisynod.org** and other synod communications for more information on these matching and online giving options. Assembly offerings afforded to SACCOS will be applied to the program accordingly.

Asante sana (Thank you very much) and *Mungu awabariki* (God bless you all)! 𐄂

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in the “heartland” for the sake of the world! Our thoughts are rooted (bad pun) in the horticulture cycle that begins with preparing the soil, then planting seeds, watering, tending the new shoots, and standing back to watch God do amazing things through growth. Who plants and who tends is less important than the planting and tending. Our process of writing the statement began by reaffirming that our primary contacts are congregations and their leaders. But we didn’t stop there. The ultimate audience must be those outside the church who have yet to hear and come to believe.

I am excited to continue our journey together as we discover just how we can be the church for the sake of the world. 𐄂

How are you living out our theme?

To implement this year's assembly theme, "We are Church for the Sake of the World," the planning committee is inviting and encouraging the congregations of the Western Iowa Synod to highlight a ministry or ministries that they implement or are part of for the sake of the world—a ministry fair per se. Each congregation will be allotted an 8-foot table for a display in the assembly hall or somewhere nearby. We encourage displays that are creative and engaging, and that tell the story of the congregation's ministry.

There will be a designated time during the assembly schedule (a one-hour time slot) in which attendees will be encouraged to visit the displays to learn about the various ministries happening around the synod and around the world. During this time, we encourage your congregation to appoint someone, possibly a voting member, to be available at your display to answer questions and tell the story of your ministry/ministries.

For example, one congregation has a food pantry, makes flood buckets, and mixes and distributes laundry detergent for those in need. Their display may contain some approved food items for a pantry and tell about the hours it's open and who can access it. They can display a completed flood bucket along with a list of the cleaning supplies so others can borrow the idea and know how to distribute the donations. Laundry soap is one of those products we don't often think about, yet it's essential for clean clothes. The congregation may choose to have a completed container of detergent on display along with the recipe and how this is distributed. Maybe a game is used to learn more about their ministry.

Use your imaginations! There just may be a prize for the most unique display!



We would like all participating congregations to reserve a table at wisynod.org/assembly-2018.

How does your congregation live out Acts 1:8—“You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”? This is your congregation's opportunity to uplift, share with others and celebrate the ministry you do for the sake of the world!

We are all in this together—“We are Church for the Sake of the World”! ✚

Submitted by Lynn Egesdal, a deacon and assembly planning coordinator.