

Assembling and Growing. Thanks Be to God.

Bishop Shelley Wickstrom

Synod Assemblies bring members of each of our congregations together to tend our shared ministry through the synod, to share in worship and biblical work, and to learn. Focusing on hunger at our last assembly, we learned from state and local leaders the reality of food insecurity in our resource-rich state and were given hands-on gardening encouragement by our Mat-Su extension agent.

Two of our congregations expanded their food ministry by building raised bed gardens after that assembly. Joy Lutheran built beds that provided lettuce, carrots and potatoes for the Eagle River Food Bank. Lutheran Church of Hope-Anchorage members cleared a portion of their lot for their garden to benefit the Lutheran Social Services of Alaska Food Bank. Project Manager Don Bladow is making bowls from the trees they harvested as a fundraiser for future garden development. Thanks be to God and to those with dirty hands.

These congregations join the people of Trinity –Palmer, River of Life-Chugiak, and Shepherd of the Valley-Juneau who offer community gardens on their properties. These congregations received Fire Starter Grants from the Alaska Synod to jump-start their new food ministries. Thanks be to God and for your generosity that makes those grants available.

Kevin and Yvonne Temple of Christ Lutheran-Fairbanks reminded us last spring of the precarious and precious gift of fresh water. After the earthquake and typhoon in the Philippines, they felt called to provide expertise and material to address the lack of fresh water in villages. Their work continues with the support of their congregation and Fairbanks Host Lions Club, Rotary and others who are eager to make a difference through clean water. Christ Lutheran is sending a group with them this spring to deliver materials and train local technicians. See [Fresh Water for the Philippines](#) on Facebook for the latest updates. Thanks be to God for the prompting and response through the Spirit.

In Alaska villages without water systems, there is a public source of water. In my experience, the water often smells and tastes of chemical treatment, and many folks refuse to drink it. The system developed and used by Fresh Water for the Philippines is now being used in Kivalina, Alaska. Thanks be to God for fresh water at home.

The Kuwaa Mission is a partnership of the Lutheran Church in Liberia and ELCA and LCMS congregations, groups, and individuals who want to help the Kuwaa people in Liberia, West Africa. Members of Central-Anchorage, St. Mark-Anchorage, Lord of Life-North Pole serve as board members. Stan Olsen of Central serves as CEO and project manager of wells and training as well as the building of a new medical clinic. www.wheatridge.org/bringing-health-and-hope-to-kuwaa-through-the-gift-of-water

The people of Resurrection-Juneau live in a rain forest so they never lack for fresh water; giving thanks for abundant water was not often in their prayers until they heard of the need of the people of Kithiana, Kenya. Daniel Mutunga and Pastor Sue Bahleda were Wartburg Seminary classmates. A professor at Daystar University in Nairobi, Daniel told Sue of his home village's need for a water system. Through individual donations, concerts, and gifts from community members, the congregation raised the \$15,000 needed to complete the water system. The funds are on the way. Clean water will flow. Thanks be to God for the delight this congregation knows in making a difference in Kithiana.

Our assembly in 2016 will focus on discipleship. Being *Rooted in Christ* means that growth in faith reflects our life in him. We aren't the authors of our faith. The Rev. Dr. Stephen Bouman who directs domestic mission for the ELCA and The Rev. Ruben Duran who directs new mission starts will lead our study and work at this assembly. Meeting at St. Mark in Anchorage, April 22-24, we'll focus on the oversight work of the assembly on Friday, then launch into discipleship training on Saturday. The public is invited and asked to register on the synod website. Assembly voting members will worship in area congregations Sunday morning with guest preachers from outside of Anchorage.

What will spring forth in new life from this assembly? Looks like we have a track record of people making use of assembly learning. May our life in Christ reflect that! Thanks be to God.