

## Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor

Health is central to our well-being, vital to relationships, and helps us live out our vocations in family, work, and community. Caring for one's own health is a matter of human necessity and good stewardship. Caring for the health of others expresses both love for our neighbor and responsibility for a just society. As a personal and social responsibility, health care is a shared endeavor.

— Introduction to the new ELCA social statement on health, healing and health care, approved at the 2003 Churchwide Assembly

## In this issue

**Holy Land pilgrimage set for late May**

Read all about it on p. 7



Santa came early to kids in the LSS programs. See p. 7

# Here's to your health

## Synod joins ELCA initiative for wellness in 2004

In August 2003, the Churchwide Assembly adopted the ELCA's eighth social statement, *Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor* – that focuses on health, healing and health care. It encourages rostered leaders and staff to check their stress levels and congregations to begin health-related ministries. In 2004, each issue of *The Lutheran Link* will highlight congregations and leaders who are focusing on self-care and healing ministries. Copies of the new social statement are available on-line at [www.nesynod.org](http://www.nesynod.org) or from the Synod House. Also available is a bulletin insert with a litany and suggestions for using the social statement in congregations. We wish you a happy and healthy new year!



## Health and Wholeness: A renewed opportunity for ministry

By the Rev. Dr. Howard Mathisen  
Director, Synod Ministry Assistance Program

Recently, we have been reading and hearing a great deal about health. Is this emphasis just the latest fad? Or is it an opportunity for the Christian church to reclaim part of a ministry that was ours historically?

Over the centuries of western civilization, the church has been the leading provider of care for the total person. Today, however, other than Christian social service agencies, the church has all but been replaced in its healthcare ministry.

At the same time, studies increasingly demonstrate the role of faith in healing, and the medical community is more open to partnership with religious organizations than it has been for decades. Denominations are emphasizing the need for healthy pastors and other leaders, and congregations are beginning to develop a variety of healthcare ministries to their parishioners and communities.

There are many ways the church can reclaim a

Continues on page 7



Are you sure I can do this? Clawdia Stampi, a tabby kitten, gets ready to do some "chin ups" at her kitchen window in Baldwinville, Mass.

# From the Bishop

## Deferred Maintenance: The Importance of Sabbaticals

Most of us have experienced the familiar tug between the need for preventive maintenance and the longing to spend money on decorative projects. What shall we do?

The roof could use repair, but it sure would be nice to have a new sofa-bed for the family room in time for the holidays. The cellar walls need to be water-proofed again, but if we don't have another bad rain it should be OK, and then we could spend the money to redecorate the dining room. True, the wiring upstairs is old, but maybe it will last one more year and we can spend the money on new kitchen cabinets.

The reasons to defer maintenance are endless and compelling. There is always the hope that the roof will do its job a little longer, the heavy rains won't come and the wiring won't start a fire. We know that to defer maintenance is to court disaster, but there are so many reasons to spend time and money otherwise that it is tempting to set maintenance aside with crossed fingers and a quick prayer.

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*"... the real secret of a vibrant congregation and the basis for a healthy, long-term partnership in the gospel is the periodic granting of a sabbatical."*

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So it is with sabbaticals. There are endless and compelling reasons why it is inconvenient and costly to grant a sabbatical to your pastor. What if there is a terrible emergency and we need our pastor during that time? Wouldn't the money needed to pay for supply preachers be better spent on social ministry programs? Why should s/he get all that time off when I don't? Who will visit the shut-ins and plan worship? How will we navigate without our spiritual leader?

The pastor is an important working part of the house of faith whose maintenance is critical if the house is to remain strong. The primary calling of a pastor is to provide Word and Sacrament, wisdom, visionary leadership for mission and pastoral care. The strength needed for those tasks, and countless others, is steadily depleted by week after week of work with no significant time for study and renewal. The expectation of being on call 24/7, the usual six-day work week and the expectation of pastoral care during the endless



*Bishop Payne*

crises and conflicts of human community eventually wear out even the most faithful and energetic pastor. Vacations are absolutely critical for basic survival, and time for continuing education helps sharpen pastoral skills. But the real secret of a vibrant congregation and the basis for a healthy, long-term partnership in the gospel is the periodic granting of a sabbatical.

Last June, the Synod Assembly passed a resolution approving a new sabbatical policy and challenging congregational leadership to use that sabbatical time to forge a new vision that will be implemented together when the pastor returns. Please encourage your leaders to review that resolution and look ahead to a time when you and your pastor can embark on this important ministry of maintenance instead of deferring it. ■

### Free health risk assessment

All synod leaders and staff have access from Jan. 6 through Feb. 24 to the Mayo Clinic Health Risk Assessment at [www.elcaforwellness.org](http://www.elcaforwellness.org). This interactive self-assessment takes about 20 minutes to complete and provides a personal health report summarizing the medical and lifestyle risk factors to which the participant should be paying attention. The report also includes links to helpful resources available on the wellness web site. Another reward: a free copy of the Mayo Clinic's "Guide to Self-Care," a \$30 value! Do it now.



Healthy Leaders  
Enhance Lives

*The Lutheran Link* is published bi-monthly by the New England Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 20 Upland Street, Worcester, MA 01607-1624. Phone: 508-791-1530. Fax: 508-797-9295. Email: [new.english.synod@ecunet.org](mailto:new.english.synod@ecunet.org). Website: [www.nesynod.org](http://www.nesynod.org). Editor: Sister Virginia E. Strahan. Editorial Board: Bishop Margaret G. Payne, the Rev. Rebecca J. Bourret, Martha Lindberg Mann and Sister Virginia E. Strahan.

**Deadline for the March 2004 issue: Jan. 26**

## Bishop Payne leads the way for sabbaticals

In connection with the New England Synod's new sabbatical policy, the Synod Council recently approved a three-month sabbatical for Bishop Margaret G. Payne that will run from June 22 through Sept. 22.

The leave was recommended by the Synod's Health and Wholeness Team to encourage congregations to provide a sabbatical for their pastors and staff. Bishop Payne will have served four years of her six-year term as of June.

Bishop Payne's decision to ask for a sabbatical is "not really about me, but more deeply, a decision about implementing a policy," she said.

"I believe that the main reason we should go forward with the implementation of the plan is to provide a strong support for the pastors of the Synod, many of whom have worked such long hours for so many years that they do not even realize how deeply exhausted they are," she told the Synod Council.

"We must help the entire synod understand the strain inherent in the call of pastor, and to encourage the self-care and programs of renewal that will not only help the pastors, but revitalize the congregations."

Bishop Payne will begin her sabbatical with a retreat. Her sabbatical also will include reading, writing and traveling as she reflects on the theology of the cross, especially as it is communicated and used in worship and community building. She plans to visit the Taizé Community in France, an international community focused on reconciliation, as well as Holden Village, an ecumenical Christian center for renewal in the Cascade Mountains near Chelan, Wash.

She also will spend quality time with her family on their farm.

The Bishop also hopes to use her sabbatical for significant rest, spiritual strengthening and renewal before the months leading up to the 2005 Churchwide Assembly. ■

## Living with asthma is a spiritual discipline for Gloucester pastor

By Pastor Anne Deneen, St. Paul, Gloucester, Mass.

One day, about 20 years ago, I was teaching a five-year-old girl about prayer.

She asked me how she could know she was praying, and I said, "Sometimes praying is just like breathing. You might not even be thinking about it." She looked up at me, and replied with all the gravity of a child wise beyond her five years, "I always know when I'm breathing," she said, "because of my asthma."

She had been asthmatic since infancy. Breathing was something conscious for her, something to be thought about, something she couldn't take for granted.

At that time, I had never had an asthma attack, and I didn't really know what she meant. Now I do. I had my first asthma crisis 12 years ago, and it forced me to reevaluate much of what I had taken for granted about living a healthy life.

Breathing is a blessing, a grace, a gift.

Part of learning to live with asthma involved learning to "have it," but not "suffer" from it. Adult onset asthma is not unusual. What may prove difficult is the life style change required to live with it.

The first step was getting good information, a project in itself. Second, my husband and I made many physical changes – getting rid of rugs, certain foods, certain materials, perfumes, hair spray, moving out of the city. Unlike many asthma patients, we were fortunate to have access to good health care, and we could read – we knew where to go for help. Asthma has social and political dimensions. More poor people suffer from it, more people from the cities, more people of color. Finding clean air and clean and non-toxic environments are life or death concerns

for people who have trouble breathing.

Every asthma patient is different. To manage my own illness, I had to pay more attention to my own health than I ever had. Full time ministry pushes us to forget about our own needs; there's always so much to be done, so much more to do. Asthma doesn't let me forget the needs of my body. It's a gift that keeps me accountable to stewardship of health. I had been doing Yoga for years, and I began to practice again seriously because of the health benefits to breathing. Walking and swimming both increase lung capacity, and give me time to ponder knotty parish concerns.

Over the years, living with asthma has become a spiritual discipline. So here are some spiritual breathing lessons I learned from this disease:

### Spiritual lesson #1:

We are unique. Asthma is a disease of particularities. We all breathe differently. If spirit is breath and breath is spirit, we all

"spirit" differently.

**Spiritual lesson #2:** Every breath is a gift. Breathing is like praying, *especially* when you have to think about it.

**Spiritual lesson #3:** Paying attention to breathing grounds the body, centers the mind, quiets the emotions, rests the soul. Breath and body are one.

**Spiritual lesson #4:** Never push "through" crises. Pushing makes them worse. Asthma has helped me to sit quietly with discomfort; it teaches patience and careful attention. Toughing out an asthma attack doesn't work. I have to rest when I'm tired, ask for help when I need it, leave toxic environments, even when it seems rude. (This is perhaps the hardest thing to learn).

**Spiritual lesson #5:** The Lord is near. Asthma helps me pray in the here and now, helps me remember the closeness of God – just one breath away.



# Health-conscious leaders guide R



*"I love it!" says Pastor Julie Bergdahl (above), Redeemer, Plattsburgh, N.Y., about the workouts with free weights that she's been doing for almost two years now. She lifts two times a week and appreciates the body strength she has developed. Pastor Julie has had to order new clerics because she's busted out the sleeve buttons with her new biceps! She's also "thoroughly addicted" to coaching soccer, which she's done for 24 years. "It's a game of surprise and creativity that really makes you think," she says. Pastor Julie, who was called to Redeemer in 2000, attended a one-week Soccer Academy in Maryland last summer for adults who love soccer and can't get enough time to play.*

## We need your story

In 2004, each issue of "The Lutheran Link" will feature stories of New England Lutherans seeking to live healthier lives and congregations involved in health care ministries. Is there someone in your congregation who has lost a significant amount of weight, or relaxes through Christian yoga, or is active in sports, or who loves to "trip the light fantastic" on the sidewalks of New Hampshire? Contact Sister Virginia Strahan, editor, at the Synod House, (508) 791-1530. Here's to your health in 2004! ■



"My heart is still on the dance floor," says June Weiskotten, general dispenser of cheer and hospitality at Redeemer's worship services. June took up ballroom dancing when she moved to Plattsburgh in 1986 after the death of her husband, the Rev. Richard Herbert Weiskotten. She took both ballroom and tap dancing lessons for seven years. After that, she did 10 years of line dancing, often three nights a week. "Give me music to move to, and I'll move!" she says. June says she'd take up dancing again in an instant if she could find a regular partner. ■



Starting at age 12, Ron Wilson (above and at right) labored 40 years to achieve the coveted title of "46'er," someone who has climbed all of the 46 High Peaks in the Adirondacks. When he retired from work as a high school principal in 1997, he did them all over again in just three years! He hikes almost every week and has discovered that he actually prefers hiking in the winter with snowshoes and crampons. "The crowds and the bugs are gone, and the roots are covered by snow so it's smoother." He kayaks all the time, at least every other day, until about Christmas, when the lake becomes covered with ice. Ron is immediate past president of the congregation council. ■



# Redeemer toward the big 'Five-O'



*Don West*

**B**arb West and her husband Don began running in 1969 when they bought Ken Cooper's book on aerobics and discovered they weren't in as good shape as they thought. They've been running and biking together ever since. Even though she does not consider herself very athletic and is not a fast runner, Barb found that "If you keep at it, you end up better than most people around you who are this age." In good weather, Barb runs about 10 miles a week and bikes two to three times a week, averaging about 15 miles a trip. Don is the oldest active ski jumper in the United States. ■



*Barb West – team leader of Redeemer's worship team*



*Not having played since they were in high school, Diana Cron (left) and Mary Dossin, president of the congregation council, took up tennis last summer at the age of 60. They play two or three times a week, finding it a wonderful workout that is actually fun. "Learning tennis at this stage in life is invigorating, rejuvenating, and humorous. Laughing at ourselves is an essential part of our game. It is also a humbling experience to be reminded of the effort and persistence required to improve a skill. Since tennis requires other players, it is an opportunity to be reminded of God's gift of friends in our lives."*

Redeemer, Plattsburgh, N.Y., founded in 1958, has experienced rapid growth in the last three years. As it looks ahead to its 50th anniversary in 2008, Redeemer has appointed a task force termed "Redeemer Five-O" to plan for the kind of church it wants to be in five years. The task force is considering six factors: space, staff, structure, assimilation, involvement and nourishment. ■

## Calumet's CIT program helps shape future leaders

The Counselor-in-Training (CIT) program at Calumet Lutheran Camp and Conference Center prepares 16-year-olds not only to be counselors, but also to be leaders in New England congregations. At the end of the eight weeks, which include training to become certified lifeguards, participants go home physically and spiritually fit.

Calumet, located in West Ossipee, N.H., is the outdoor ministry center of the New England Synod.



*John Christianson in action as one of the "Guys" from Calumet*

"I know that when I returned from my CIT summer, although physically exhausted, I was spiritually charged," says **John Christianson**, Holy Trinity, Newington, N.H., one of the "Guys" who recorded the "Take a Breath" CD in 2003 to fight world hunger. "Looking back, I became more involved in my church choir and in leading church activities using the leadership skills I learned at Calumet."

His words are echoed again and again by former CITs.

**Nicole Gaudette**, Bethel, Auburn, Mass., was a CIT in the summer of 1994. "My experience in this program truly changed my life," says Gaudette. "It's absolutely amazing what a different person you can become over an eight-week period. My CIT summer was the first time I had spent good quality time with Christians my own age. Not only were we building friendships, leadership skills and a sense of belonging, we also were building an understanding of our faith. I would never trade that summer for anything in the world," adds Gaudette.

**Sara Wilson**, a student at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, Penn., calls her CIT summer a turning point in her ministry.

"I was a Roman Catholic in the beginning stages of discerning a call to ordained ministry," explains Wilson. "Calumet allowed me the room to grow, to question and to explore my faith. While my CIT group and I worked hard to build muscle strength and endurance – swimming and training in the lake for our lifeguard certification – we spent hours on the beach in conversation, conversation that stretched my thoughts on God and religion. We prayed together, and our faith grew. My time at Calumet – specifically those eight weeks in the CIT program – gave me the tools and the opportunity for life-long spiritual growth and exploration."

These are just three of the hundreds of stories about lives changed over the years through the CIT program at Calumet.

– Paula Kent

## So very much alone

*By Chaplain Dave Buehler  
SouthCoast Hospice*

As we were cleaning up after our annual hospice memorial service last December, Father Ed got a call from the police.

They reported that one of his parishioners had been found dead and very much alone in her little apartment. She had been there since that first huge blizzard passed over the Northeast.

It was yet another startling example of something that has become more and more commonplace: too many older folks are living in isolation due to age, economics or sheer alienation.

Oddly enough, I also notice that many Americans are saving up precisely in order to move into private "gated" retirement zones. So pervasive is this idea, that one young musician, John Mayer, referred to his music as existing in a "gated community" (NY Times, 9/16/03). That same day, France said it would budget \$45 million for elderly citizens harmed by the huge heat wave during the summer of 2002 that took 15,000 lives – mostly among the elderly.

France will spend billions on health care in coming years, but what can we who dare to be "rooted for life" learn from this tragedy? Americans have positioned for a similar disaster for a long time. Witness the partial collapse of our electrical grid last August. Had that breakdown occurred during a transcontinental heat wave, the loss of life would have been catastrophic. To better understand this dilemma, I commend to you Eric Klinenberg's fine book, *Heat Wave* (University of Chicago, 2002). He shows in great detail why such events are not merely "natural disasters" or unpredictable "acts of God".... and how the church might intervene.

Indeed, what Klinenberg's book points out bluntly is that the USA has allowed itself to become a nation often living in fear, behind closed doors. Back on July 13, 1995, Chicago's temperature rose to a sweltering 106 degrees. In the weeks that followed, more than 700 people succumbed to heat, dehydration, power outage and – ultimately – isolation. Just as in Europe last summer, most who died in Chicago's 1995 heat wave were elderly adults living alone. Sadly, many also died alone, and all creation cries out (Romans 8:22).

A stewardship of life rooted in the Gospel calls upon us to be *semper paratus* – always ready for the next wave coming our way in this life we share together.

*The Rev. David Buehler is chaplain at SouthCoast Hospital, Fairhaven, Mass., and teaches ethics at Providence (R.I.) College.*

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"The Lutheran Link" for free!

**A RENEWED OPPORTUNITY**, *continued from page 1*  
ministry of healthcare.

The ELCA Division for Ministry and the Board of Pensions are engaged in an extensive effort under the theme **Healthy Leaders Enhance Lives**. This emphasis involves promoting health and well-being in all aspects of the lives of our leaders and staff: spiritual, emotional, physical, intellectual, interpersonal, and vocational.

The ELCA has enlisted the assistance of the Mayo Clinic in its effort to educate and encourage our pastors and other leaders to become intentional about improving their health. A monthly guide to healthier living entitled **HealthQuest**, a Web site – [www.elcaforwellness.org](http://www.elcaforwellness.org), full of helpful information, and a weekly e-newsletter are among the resources now available.

Surveys and studies have revealed that a large number of our clergy have had serious problems with stress – especially job-related stress. Many of our pastors are significantly overweight. A large number experience depression.

Another way the church can reenter the field of healthcare is for congregations to offer such services as:

- ◆ Parish health ministry – a broadening and expansion of parish nurse programs that have become valuable assets in many of our congregations. This utilizes an interdisciplinary team of healthcare workers in a congregation: physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses, dietitians, pharmacists, psychologists, social workers, and other health professionals.

- ◆ Proactive health education programs focusing on preventative care.

- ◆ Healing liturgies.

As we explore various aspects of health and wholeness in 2004, pray for openness to God's Spirit leading you and your congregation in a renewed emphasis on healthy leaders and on a renewed and expanded healing ministry.

Check out these resources on healthcare available at the Synod Resource Center:

- 1) **Building Healthy Communities through Medical-Religious Partnerships** (Hale & Bennett, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000);
- 2) **Healing Bodies and Souls: A Practical Guide for Congregations** (Hale & Koenig, Fortress Press, 2003, B492); and
- 3) **Renewing Worship 4 – Life Passages: Marriage, Healing** (AF, 2002, B394).

**The two essential reasons for extending the parish as a primary health place are these:**

- 1) **we are called to do so – to preach, teach, and heal; and**
- 2) **there is desperate and compelling need.**

– James K. Struve, M.D., “The Church's Role in Health Care,”  
*Lutheran Partners*, July/August 2003

## LSS urgently needs foster parents

**S**anta came early for kids in therapeutic foster care programs operated by Lutheran Social Services (LSS) in Concord, N.H., and Brockton, Mass. In Brockton, children of Ruth House mothers were included in the party held at Prince of Peace, where some folks noted a strong resemblance between Santa and LSS South's chief financial officer, Ron Holman—but those rumors have been discounted. The LSS North party at the Marriott in Concord included a festive buffet luncheon. **LSS continues to experience an urgent need for foster parents.** Contact Marty Mann, director of public relations, at either: [Mann@LSSNE.org](mailto:Mann@LSSNE.org) or (508) 318-1664 for details.

## Post-Easter pilgrimage to ELCJ set for May

The New England Synod is planning its third pilgrimage to our companion synod – the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jerusalem and Jordan (ELCJ), in late May.

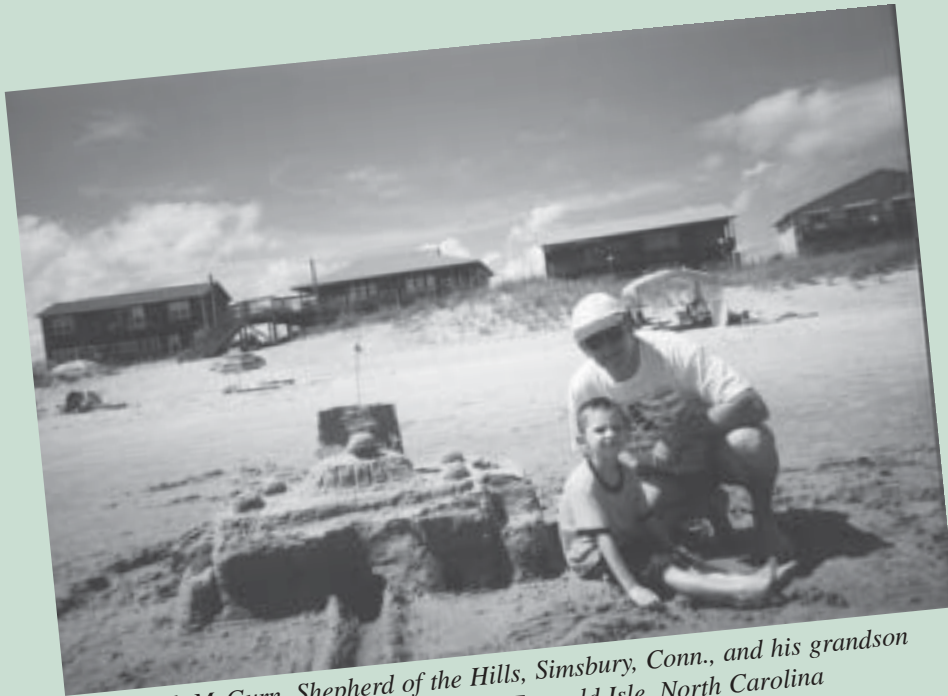
This 10-day journey to the Holy Land, “Holy Places, Holy People,” is being organized by the synod's Global Mission Team. The schedule includes meeting with Bishop Munib Younan, visiting ELCJ congregations and schools, and touring holy sites. An optional day trip to Hebron to meet with the Christian Peacemakers Team and learn about their work may be offered.

“Holy Places, Holy People” is an opportunity to travel behind the headlines and to meet Palestinian Lutherans living faithfully in a difficult situation. Individuals who know the area well and are current on the situation will accompany the group.

Space is limited to 12 participants. Contact Wendell Beckman, chair of the Synod's Global Mission Team, at [wbeckman@vermontel.net](mailto:wbeckman@vermontel.net) or the Rev. Hans Arnesen, (603) 673-7075, for more information. ■



*Palestinian father in front of his home demolished by Israeli soldiers because it was too close to a new Israeli settlement*



*Pastor Bob McGurn, Shepherd of the Hills, Simsbury, Conn., and his grandson Brian build a sand castle last summer at Emerald Isle, North Carolina*

According to  
Proverbs,  
"Pleasant words are  
like a honeycomb,  
sweetness to the  
soul and health to  
the body" (16:24).  
So are "pleasant  
thoughts."  
We leave you with  
this restful image of  
Pastor Bob McGurn  
building a sand castle  
last summer  
with his grandson.

# the Lutheran Link

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