



THE BRIDGE

A MONTHLY PUBLICATION FOR
CONGREGATIONS OF THE
SOUTHEASTERN MINNESOTA SYNOD, ELCA

CONNECTING THE
CONGREGATIONAL, SYNODICAL, AND
CHURCHWIDE EXPRESSIONS OF THE
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN
CHURCH IN AMERICA.

TOGETHER WE GROW THROUGH MISSION

In a March 2010 online town hall forum, ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson reported that the ELCA membership still includes only three percent of people who are not white or whose first language is not English. The ELCA's goal is 10 percent. In the Southeastern Minnesota Synod, that number is lower than one percent.

The winds of change are blowing in the Southeastern Minnesota Synod and the Holy Spirit is finding a place to work in new ways. In 2009, the Synod Assembly welcomed Nile Our Savior's Chapel as the synod's first Sudanese Synodically Authorized Worshipping Community (SAWC).

SAWCs can come in many shapes and sizes, but all are places for people to worship when their community does not yet meet the full qualification of a congregation, including rostered leadership.

Since Nile Our Savior's became an official SAWC, two other Sudanese SAWCs have been formed and two other groups are working with Rev. Peter Reuss, Synod Mission Developer, to begin the process.

These five communities represent three Sudanese tribes - Nuer, Dinka, and Anyuak. The tribes' unique

cultures and languages brought these communities together. Different experiences brought to the ELCA.

Most of the members of these SAWCs are from southern Sudan, which is predominately Christian. The controlling power is in the predominantly Muslim part of northern Sudan. When the northern government exercised its power against the southerners who desired their own government, many southerners fled to refugee camps in neighboring countries.

Although many of the Sudanese who have come to the United States are Christian, they do not all come from the same denominational background.

Kamen Makuer, a lay leader in the Dinka SAWC in Rochester, explains how his community decided to come together as a Lutheran community. Rev. Mawien Ariik, a Dinka and an ELCA pastor in Anoka, Minn., recommended Zumbro Lutheran Church, Rochester, to Makuer. Makuer says, "Even though the majority of Dinkas used to be from the Episcopal church and some from Catholic, but when we came as a group in

Rochester, we left behind our different denominations and we decided to be in one community as Dinkas who is looking for the word of God."

There is great excitement within these new worshipping communities, but also great challenges. Members' work schedules, including those of the leaders, often prevent them from committing to participating, or even staying, in the community.

Most of the groups have identified lay leaders to attend seminary or other theological training to help prepare them to lead. Financial and prayer support could make this training possible and help the communities pay their leaders once they are trained.

Ojoye Akane, a leader in a developing community in Mankato, spoke of his community's hopes for the future, "If we get enough resources...we can reach to more people in our community and bring them towards the church of Christ and that would be our future goal."

Wal Reat, a lay leader of Nile Our Savior's, Faribault, is currently studying at Luther Seminary. He has great appreciation for the support their community has received and clear hope for the future, "In the future we pray to God to give us good vision and to bring our people to God. And also we thank those congregations in Faribault because we share everything with them and they welcome us warmly."

Together as a synod, we can welcome these communities as part of our larger community of faith. If you would like to financially support them, send your personal or congregational gift marked "New Ministry Starts" to: Southeastern Minnesota Synod, ELCA, 1001 14th St. NW, Suite 300, Rochester, MN 55901

FEATURED RESOURCE

- More information on these communities at www.semnsynod.org/newministrystarts.html

ABOUT OUR SYNOD

The Southeastern Minnesota Synod is a faith community of 131,000 baptized people in 182 congregations as well as related institutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Its geographic area includes 15 counties in the southeastern corner of Minnesota.

The Bridge is a monthly publication of the Southeastern Minnesota Synod, ELCA. For more information, contact the synod office:

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