

2005: A Synod Joined in Bible Study

God's Word

By Cathy Mannel
Congregational Renewal Team

*The B-I-B-L-E, yes that's the book for me.
I stand alone on the word of God, the B-I-B-L-E.*

In Sunday school, I remember singing that chorus. Today, God's Word is still vital for healthy individual and communal life. Bible Study formats and approaches may vary, but I thought I'd ask some seniors what they appreciated about the Bible studies that they have been involved in.

"It was on my level," "It made me think," "It was practical," "It offered hope," "It helped me in my life" - these were some of their comments. There were common themes in their responses. While content, relevancy, competent and capable leadership is important, hospitality - the study environment - was also important to these people.

The atmosphere of acceptance, generosity, and friendship is reflected in their comments. As people gather to study God's Word, the spirit of Christ in the leader/facilitator meets Christ's spirit in the other participants. There is community. A safe place for people to ask questions, share freely, and receive nourishment for the soul.

This year, as our synod engages in Bible Study, we are challenged. How does what we study become the fabric of who we are as people? These wise seniors reminded me that doctrines can bind, but the Word of God frees!

Building Understanding Through Partner Congregations

We all understand that the Church is worldwide and that we have fellow Christians around the world, but many of us have not had the opportunity to know Christians in other countries and cultures. As much as we might wish it otherwise, we often remain uninformed about their lives, hopes, struggles, and successes.

SEMN Synod has ongoing relationships with two churches that are part of the international Lutheran family - the Lutheran Church of Colombia and the Central

Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania. There is also an opportunity to build ties from your congregation to a Partner Congregation in one of these Companion Synods.

A Partner Congregation partnership allows your congregation to get to know another congregation on another continent. It allows you and your partner to share ideas, hopes, concerns, and - above all - to give each other encouragement and support as each pursue its common mission. While we can never understand all the issues facing all Christians in other countries., we can become richly informed about one. By understanding more deeply one church in one community, we may become generally more sensitive and aware of needs around the world.

Being a Partner Congregation also means some commitments. It means keeping in touch with your Partner on a regular basis. It means taking an active interest in your partner's well-being. It means regularly including them in your prayers and listing them in your bulletins and publications. Because these are poor congregations in very poor countries, it sometimes means being open to their requests for special financial help and assisting them when possible.

It also means expecting your partner to participate with you. Although communication is often difficult, you can expect them to send messages that inform and inspire. Some members of your congregation may travel to the country of your partner. We can assure you from personal experience that the warmth of your welcome will overwhelm you. It will be an unforgettable experience.

We have much to learn from our sisters and brothers around the world. We also have much to offer in return. Participating as a Partner Congregation is a practical and inspiring way to broaden our understanding and enhance our experience of mission. It is a tangible and effective way to be "the Church in the World."

For more information about this great opportunity, please contact us.

Richard or Lois Wintersteen
525 Record Street
Mankato MN 56001
507-625-7807
richard.wintersteen@mnsu.edu

