



Gospel Seeds...June 2011

A Monthly Update from the
Western North Dakota Synod Office

All about the Central African Republic...

April 14-27, my son Tyler and I visited the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Central African Republic, our companion synod. We were invited by Rev. Andre Golike, the church's president. You may remember that President Golike visited our synod about 14 months ago.

This issue of Gospel Seeds is intended to help you get a glance of this beautiful country, its faithful people and the important ministries undertaken there by our brothers and sisters in Christ.

What we can learn?

This was the question I took with me. We, the ELCA, send plenty to C.A.R. We send missionaries, we send money and sometimes we send supplies. But I have always had a hunch that there is much that we can receive from our partners.

Worship is joy filled!

Our visit to CAR took place over Holy Week. It is a strange experience worshipping in an unfamiliar language. Still, I could recognize when we were sharing the Apostle's Creed and the Lord's Prayer. I knew where I was in the liturgy. Listening closely I could sing the refrain of songs. There was a familiarity to worship even in these unfamiliar places and language.

What struck me most about worship was people's joy. The music was simple, a set of drums and maybe another rhythm instrument. Singing was led by one person, joined by a choir and in the midst everyone present sang and loudly.

Offering was spirit filled. Palm Sunday the women of the church danced forward covered dishes of food that would be served after worship. Each was brought to the altar, a symbol that all we have is an offering to God. When it came time for the offering of money – once again singing and dancing broke out. Easter Sunday the offering took 20 minutes. Those present may not have had much to place in the offering box, but what they did bring forward they brought with great joy. I was moved by their celebration.

Worship was packed...

The church we worshipped in on Easter Sunday was about 20 feet wide by about 65 feet long. In that space 1,440 people gathered to celebrate the resurrection. Outside it was around 85 to 90 degrees under a hot sun. Inside the space was crammed, with young and old alike. In those cramped quarters, Christ's resurrection was celebrated with deep joy.

As we worshipped with singing, dancing, and praying I knew we had lots to learn from these brothers and sisters in Christ. Their worship structures are very modest. They are small, there is no electricity, no fellowship halls, only benches and floors for seating yet worship is faithful, joy filled and Christ centered.

Sharing the Gospel is Central...

Proclaiming Christ's life giving death and resurrection is central to the work of the Lutheran Church in C.A.R. Programs are in place to teach pastors, catechists and evangelists. A pastor may be responsible for up to 20 churches. They travel to each at least once a month providing Holy Communion, presiding at Baptisms and leading worship. Catechists lead the congregation the rest of the time, providing visitation ministry, leading Bible Studies, and presiding at worship when a pastor is not present. Evangelists are trained to start new congregations, connect with those outside the church and work with new converts.

The Church takes seriously Service to the neighbor...

In C.A.R. we saw a church that lives a servant existence. In a country where 1 out of 5 children die before the age of 5 from diarrhea type illness the church is teaching about sanitation and providing safe drinking water through spring boxes. In a country where public education is non-existent, the church runs the Village Education project in 19 villages. In a country where medical facilities are primitive at best, the church has stepped in to provide doctors, medicine and facilities to care for the sick. These are just a few of the examples of the church at work, serving in Jesus' name.

Thanks for your support of their ministry. These are a people who have things to teach us.

God Bless... Mark Narum, serving as Bishop



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.