

PARTNERS IN  
*the spirit*  
FEBRUARY 2004



The Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod

**Ecumenical Venture**  
Brings Free Community Health Care to Needy

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Grace Smiles: An Inclusive Youth Group

Faith and Art Are Linked in Growing  
Festival

Woman's Place

Blessed to Be A Blessing



*Dr. Michalene Torbik meets with patient*

By Lois Myers

Mindful of the many biblical examples of the healing ministry of Jesus Christ, two neighboring downtown churches in Wilkes-Barre, Pa., came together to provide a place of healing for both members of their congregations and for needy members of the surrounding urban community.

Early in 2002, health professionals who are members of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church discovered that seed money was available to establish a local free medical clinic. A similar clinic was already operating through St. Paul's Lutheran Church in the Mountaintop area. St. Paul's provided the impetus and helped with the initial funding for Good Shepherd to launch the project.

Fueled by the enthusiastic support of the co-pastors at Good Shepherd, Janell Wigen and Peter Kuritz, the congregation council quickly agreed to make free clinic space available in the Good Shepherd Center, an annex to the church.

Contact with several nurses who are members of the Roman Catholic Church of St. Nicholas, just one block away from Good Shepherd, revealed that there were many doctors and nurses among the members of the St. Nicholas congregation; they too immediately endorsed the idea. Through the efforts of Msgr. Joseph Rauscher and Sister Nancy Lydon at St. Nicholas, and Lois Myers, Parish Nurse at Good Shepherd, the joint project took shape quickly. Health professionals, physicians and nurses from both congregations volunteered their time.

**Scope of Service**

The stated mission of the Wilkes-Barre Free Medical Clinic is to provide free, non-emergency medical care to people who are uninsured, under-insured or who simply cannot afford basic health care because of



unemployment or for any of a variety of other reasons.

The clinic operates every Tuesday evening from 6 p.m. until 8 p.m. A group of dedicated volunteer physicians and nurses from both churches, and from the area faith community, staff the clinic on a rotating basis. More than a dozen clients come to the clinic each week, and children are also seen periodically. The clinic was also a key source for free flu shots and was literally overwhelmed by the need and response for this service.

The Wilkes-Barre Free Medical Clinic has received its share of publicity in the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton media, as television and newspaper professionals have visited to tell the story of how two churches are working together to bring this valuable service to people in the community. They have highlighted stories of people who had nowhere else to turn for medical care for problems such as cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure, and asthma.

Financial support for the clinic has come from the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; the Diocese of Scranton; and private contributions. Wilkes University School of Pharmacy also supports the program.

Presently, the physicians and nurses are planning a series of health promotion programs in an effort to educate the public about the debilitating complications that arise from certain chronic conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, osteoporosis and cancer. Community health education programs can help in making available the essential information people need to lead a healthy lifestyle.

### **Spiritually Uplifting Experience**

In the telling of the miracles performed by Jesus Christ in his brief ministry on earth, the Gospels tell us that Jesus not only urged his disciples to teach and preach his good news, but to go into the world and heal as well. As Lois Myers explains, being part of the clinic is a moving and enriching experience. "For all of us who have given our time and talents to carry out that healing mission, this experience has been spiritually uplifting," she says. "We know that by putting to use our health-care skills we are meeting the challenge of serving God's people.

"It is a wonderful feeling to know that we provide help to people who have nowhere to turn. Clinic physicians, nurses and staff all share in the health concerns of our patients; we celebrate with them when they tell us they now are better able to manage their own medical problems thanks to the care and education we provide.

"We especially celebrate with patients who tell us they no longer need our services because they have found employment with an employer who provides health benefits. We're sorry to see them leave us, but we rejoice knowing that we were in part able to make life more bearable during their period of unemployment.

"Through caring for people in our community, we are carrying out the work that God expects us to do: offering a better quality of life to needy people in our community."





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By Pastor William Maxon

School districts are doing a better job of identifying children with a variety of disabilities. These children with disabilities are coming to church and entering Sunday school, confirmation and youth groups. At Grace Lutheran Church, Macungie, we were faced with the challenge of providing a place where kids with disabilities could find friends and participate in activities.

Instead of retooling the existing youth group, we decided to create a new youth group made up of children with and without disabilities. The group was named Grace Smiles. We recruited youth who were interested in being in a group that was diverse in ability. The leader is a young person with a disability. For the foreseeable future, the group will be led by children with disabilities.

The goals of Grace Smiles are to build self esteem and to help group members make friends and feel a part of the congregation. The activities we pick for the group have to be ones that can be performed by everyone in the group. This means adapting activities around mobility and cognitive concerns. Lots of resources are available and we also use our own creativity to modify activities that have been successful with other groups.

Generally, meetings begin with a student-led devotion, followed by an activity to make sure everyone knows everyone. This is a good first step into group participation. For some children, this is as far as they will go, and the group has learned to accept a variety of levels of involvement. The get-acquainted time is followed by the "activity of the day," which ranges from games to modified physical activities.

The most popular event of the meeting is the snack. This has been modified to be an activity. We have made rice crispy snack sculptures and faces and have built gum drop and toothpick buildings. We enjoy eating what we have created.

The group meets once a month for an hour and a half. We tried a variety of



time lengths for meetings and this seems to work best.

A goal from the beginning was to do joint activities with our existing youth group. Our Christmas Party and Caroling is one of our joint events. If a child wants to attend a meeting of the existing youth group, that is fine. We do not encourage crossover, but rather we try to let each child find the group where he or she is the most comfortable.

Grace Smiles has been an unexpected outcome of the new accessibility entrance we added to the church last year. We thought that we would be making the church building accessible for older members. We discovered that, in making the church building accessible, we also needed to make groups in our church accessible too.

Accessibility has provided our congregation with the gift of talents and treasures in people with disabilities that we never knew existed. We are a richer congregation because we have opened our doors to all people regardless of ability.

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Faith through the Arts



SPIRITUAL  
WATERS

By Susan Haas

*[Ed. note: This article appeared in the October 19, 2003, issue of The Morning Call and is used by permission.]*

When minister of music Janice Butz arrived at St. John's Lutheran Church in Nazareth four years ago, she saw a room with beautiful woodwork and stained glass windows off the sanctuary, an expansion space opened only when the congregation ballooned on religious holidays.

"I felt it ought to be used more," says Ms. Butz. "It's a great space for art."

Two years ago, Butz's impulse became "Faith through the Arts," the church's first community festival linking music, drama, art and religion.

In October the church kicked off its second month-long festival with a juried exhibition of 37 works by 13 artists on the theme "Spiritual Waters."

Spiritual waters can include waters of creation, exodus, baptism, invitation, salvation, and eternal life, such as Dianne Dockery's quilted fiber hanging, "Abundant Waters." They can include Old and New Testament stories like Noah's Ark, and Christ washing Peter's feet at the Last Supper. They can include Nena Bryans' polyester resin sculpture, "Even the Wind and Wave Obey Him!" or Elizabeth Doddy's "Trinity" of fish circling the head of a Celtic drum. Or, simply, the connection between nature and the spiritual, as in Karen Amelia Brown's painted "Rivers of Prayer" scrolls.

In 2001, Butz's sister, a United Church of Christ minister in Philadelphia, put her in touch with that city's 100-member Association for Uniting Religion and Art. AURA, a nondenominational nonprofit founded 14 years earlier by Bryans and other artists to re-establish the historic connection between the fine arts and religious faith, offered works for the church's first exhibition. This year's juried show, advertised more widely through arts groups, AURA and newspaper ads, drew more than 70 entries.

Bryans, 73, of Devon, arrived at sculpture after a career as a Presbyterian



religious educator, entering classes at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in her 50s. A few years ago, plagued by physical symptoms that remained undiagnosed, she sat at the kitchen table with a lump of wax and sculpted the story of Jesus awakened by his disciples in a boat during a storm on a lake. Jesus raised his hand and calmed the waves, prompting a disciple's wonder: "Even the Wind and Rain Obey Him!"

Bryans later made five rubber molds to cast the piece in polyester resin.

"I felt better after I sculpted it," says Bryans, whose symptoms have since abated.

Her relationship with the festival at St. John's prompted an AURA member to loan four prints by the late Japanese Christian artist Sadao Watanabe, including "Footwashing" (1979) and "Noah's Ark" (1989).

Berks County's Dianne Dockery, 59, turned to fiber arts after a degenerative disc disease forced her to resign from the Communication Design faculty at Kutztown University.

"I am in continuous pain. This is what drives me."

Dockery creates art quilts like "Abundant Waters," a restatement of the creation story in Genesis, using free-form cut, machine-pieced, hand-dyed cotton sateen and hand-stamped silk georgette. She then hand-quilts, adding crystal beads.

"It's a form of therapy; it helps me remain focused."

Elizabeth Doddy, too, drew inspiration from illness. The artist, whose Christmas-character ornaments have been exhibited at the American Folk Art Museum in New York, painted a trinity of fish on a brightly colored Celtic bodhran last year as a celebration of her recovery from breast cancer.

"I was just happy to be here," says Doddy, 50. The drumhead's goatskin surface excited her. "I don't want to stifle the instrument, I want it to be played."

Butz credits former Nazareth High School teacher Bob Lichner with the transformation of the expansion room at St. John's into a temporary gallery.

"When you study Biblical stories, and you see an artist's interpretation or hear music based on the stories, they become more alive," says Butz. "We hope this festival will inspire others to use their talents."

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By Pastor Rebecca Knox

In 4th grade I wrote a paper entitled "The Indians of North America." Ever since, I have dreamed of living on a reservation among these people. In the meantime I have read books, watched Native dancing, and seen the politically correct term for Native Americans come full circle, back to "Indian."

In the summer of 2000, more than 20 years after writing that first paper, my dream finally came true. I lived among the Chippewa/Cree people on Rocky Boy Reservation, learning their stories and their ways first-hand.

When I called before going out to the reservation to find out what tools to pack, the coordinator was silent. I tried again, "Should I bring a hammer? Crowbar? Sander? Drill?"

He finally found his voice, "Well, we have some work in the kitchen you might do." I had forgotten my place as a woman in a society where gender-specific roles still permeate daily life. I wondered, "Am I traveling 1600 miles, using an airplane ticket that could have been a vacation for my husband and me, to wash dishes, pick berries and mop floors for eight days?"

**Woman's Place: Day 1**

Yes, I traveled to Montana to work in a kitchen. Our first meal together was hearty elk stew, prepared by women of the tribe who are hired to cook for the many groups who come to this intersection of cultures and ways of life. I didn't have much time to reflect on the differences between "us" and "them." Soon after the meal, the group coordinator politely encouraged us, the newly arrived females of the group, to help clean up the dishes.

I had the privilege of getting to know Ruby (the matriarch) and many of her female progeny who helped with the meal. Since they didn't eat at the same table with us, working in the kitchen opened the door to the woman's world of relationships for me at Rocky Boy.



I tried to enjoy the wonderful new female bonds created in suds and laughter; but I was still jealous as I watched a teenage boy in our group accept the honor of an invitation to prepare the sweat lodge for our inaugural sweat that evening.

### **Woman's Lib: Day 2**

A new day, a brave new world! I was greeted by the white missionary who worked as the construction foreman. He allowed a teenage girl from Telford and me to work side-by-side on a roof, laying tarpaper and shingles. Later we joined the men who were cutting and placing pinewood siding on what would be retreat cabins.

I didn't have to guess how the Indians would react to our assignment. We worked with male Chippewa-Cree construction workers, who were wonderfully friendly and full of funny stories to pass the hours in the 90-degree sun. I did notice that the male children of these workers were allowed to help since it was their summer vacation from school. The younger children and girls seemed to have a little more freedom to play and stay with their mothers. An exception was Crystal, Ruby's granddaughter, who acted as our tour guide and teacher on hikes through the mountains and to waterfalls throughout our stay.

### **Real Strides: Day 5**

I had acquired a few blisters and an equally small number of Cree vocabulary words. Cree has no derogatory terms or negative phrases, so my first phrases were 'TON-say' and 'me-AH-sin' — the equivalent of "What's up? How are you?" and "Good."

Roy and Ruby's family have built a new sweat lodge and we were invited to participate in the blessing of the lodge and its first sweat. I and a few other women were "invited" to gather wood for the picnic dinner fires. Here again women are 'equal and separate.' The men were invited to share the pipe in the first round of the sweat. Normally, unless made "impure" by a menstrual cycle, women are welcome in the sweat. After the pipe round, Ruby was one of the leaders of the remaining special sweat. Leaders must be tribal elders, or equally respected experienced leaders in the tribe. This shows the equally high level of respect for women and men; still, woman can't be elders.

### **Different but Part of the Circle: Day 8**

Chippewa, or Ojibway as they are sometimes called, see life as a circle. I was welcomed into the circle through song, dance, prayer, hammering, cooking, and cleaning. Now, the last night of my visit, my friend Vanessa and her cousin Jaylene came to visit the room where I was staying. We walked outside to talk, like girls at a slumber party. I wanted to ask Vanessa what it was like to be a divorced, single woman. She had mentioned it was easier to live with her parents while waiting her turn for her own place in the tribe's house lottery. Getting financial assistance, food, and recognition in the reservation community seemed to be a little easier with a male household-head.

My questions weren't answered that night. Vanessa's brother interrupted us, impatiently telling us to follow him to the rarely used tepees in the field next to us. We fell into line behind the respectable man who will one day likely

be an elder like his father.

In front of one of the teepees, he told the ancient story about the cyclical symbolism of a teepee. The Great Spirit, elders, fathers, mothers, children, food, fire and sleep — all have their places in the circle of life. This is symbolized in the form of the home.

A shiver ran up my spine as he told the story. I had dreamed about hearing these stories first-hand for decades; now a few morsels of ancient stories were being entrusted to my care.

What did I bring back home? I brought something that the men in our group didn't. As a woman, I was taught some rituals only for women. These rites, accompanied by prayer and special herbs, braided a tight bond between us females that defies cultural boundaries. I was given an artist's sketch, fine beadwork, a stole for my ministry, and religiously significant grass and herbs. The greatest gifts were stories, mutual memories, and friendship.

Gender roles may not change much across cultural lines, but thankfully the unity of the female experience is also stable across these lines. I guess the gift of females' friendship is as ancient as these time-honored female-only rituals.

People ask me when "they" will catch on to equal rights. Maybe "we" need to catch on. The reservation is a place for tribes to maintain their culture, traditions and values. All enrolled residents at Rocky Boy, men and women, have equal rights to education through the junior college level. They also have "equal rights" to 75% unemployment, local job discrimination, and harsh, beautifully infertile land from which to try and scrape a living. Maybe gender-specific traditions offering stability aren't so bad after all. I admit I'm glad I traveled 1600 miles to do equal amounts of roofing and cooking.

I am deeply grateful to my Chippewa/Cree hosts for their hospitality and friendship before, during and since my stay at Rocky Boy. Thankfully in the Cree language there is no word for good-bye, only "I'll see you again." I do hope that we will dance in the circle again before another 20 years passes.



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I will bless you ... so that you will be a blessing.

How has God blessed you? If you were to make a list of all the ways God has blessed you, how long would your list be?

And how long would be the list of ways in which you have shared those blessings with others?

Members of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod will explore these questions and more at the 2004 synod assembly.

The assembly will be held at the **Sovereign Performing Arts Center** (the former Rajah Theater, which has undergone extensive renovations) June 4-5, 2004. It will begin at 1:00 p.m. on Friday, June 4, and end by 4:30 p.m. on Saturday, June 5.

### **Celebrating Blessings: A Tanzanian Festival and Special Guests**

On Friday evening, the entire assembly will participate in a festival celebrating and acknowledging our companion synod in Tanzania, the **South Central Diocese of Tanzania**.

The bishop of the diocese, Shadrack Manyewa, and his wife have been invited to attend the assembly.

People from the delegation that visited our companion synod in September 2003 will be on hand to tell about the visit and to share pictures and materials from the trip.

Other guests at the assembly will be members of our companion synod in Argentina, a yet-to-be-named representative of the ELCA, and others.

### **Sharing Blessings: Forums and Displays**

On Friday morning, before the assembly begins, participants and visitors will have two opportunities to attend forums. These forums will be held both in

the Sovereign Performing Arts Center and Trinity Lutheran Church, whose property adjoins the center. A wide variety of forums will be presented, highlighting the many ways in which congregations, organizations, and groups of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod share their blessings with others.

Throughout the assembly, visitors and delegates may visit the displays of synod and churchwide organizations and groups. The displays will be in the lobby and on the open mezzanine above the lobby.

### **Meals and Housing**

Assembly-goers will be on their own for some meals (at this writing, the dinner Friday evening and the lunch on Saturday are included in the registration fee). Downtown Reading offers an extensive variety of cuisine at a wide range of prices. In addition, participants may purchase food and beverages from vendors in the Sovereign Performing Arts Center.

As they have with past assemblies, congregations need to make their own arrangements for housing. To date, four hotels in the area have set aside rooms for assembly voting members and visitors. The hotels are the Lincoln Plaza (800-372-3710; rate is \$88 single/double, plus tax), the Sheraton (610-376-381; limited number available at \$139 single/double, plus tax; includes continental breakfast), the Days Inn (610-777-7888; \$89 single/double, plus tax) and the Ramada Inn (610-929-4741; limited number available for \$75). Many other hotels are available in the area. For information, check out this Web site: <http://www.readingberkspa.com/lodging/index.asp>. Those making reservations should identify themselves as attending the Lutheran synod assembly at the Sovereign Performing Arts Center.

Watch for more information and registration materials in early March.

