



*Holy Child within a manger, long ago yet ever near
Come as friend to every stranger, come as hope for every fear.
As you lived to heal the broken, greet the outcast, free the bound
As you taught us love unspoken, teach us now where you are found.**

Gloria Strickert

In Advent hope and Christmas assurance, God is with us

It had been nearly ten years since I last walked the streets of Bethlehem and worshiped at Christmas Lutheran Church.

I knew the massive cement separation wall coils its way through and around Bethlehem and throughout the occupied territories. I knew of the watch towers and check points with armed guards. I knew about long lines that daily form at the check point "cattle stalls," delaying workers, students and those in need of medical care.

To "know" in a different, more personal way, I traveled to Bethlehem by bus and on foot.

The beautiful view of Bethlehem and its hills is gone, hidden from sight. The hardship of occupation and injustice sits heavy on the people.



The massive cement separation wall coils its way through and around Bethlehem and throughout the occupied territories.

Today, as long ago, the people live in Advent hope, watching and waiting with deep longing for a just peace and a better life. Today, as long ago, the people live with the Christmas assurance of Immanuel. Jesus Christ the Savior, the flesh and bones of God's love, was born. God is with us.

ELCA missionaries Gloria Strickert and her husband, the Rev. Fred Strickert, began their "service" in Jerusalem in 2010.



*"Carol at the Manger" by Marty Haugen

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Epiphany geography mapped our hearts

Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt (Matthew 2:14).

It is not hard for me to imagine the pride I would feel if it were written in Holy Scriptures that the Holy Family had fled to my native North Dakota to be safe from the governor of

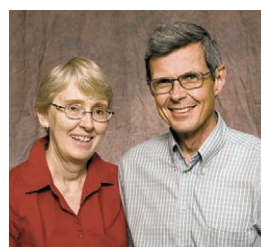


The Rev. Mark Nygard traveled by donkey on a recent Egyptian preaching trip.

Minnesota. I would make sure everybody I knew understood the importance my state had played in the salvation of the world. North Dakotans could do their part and fill in the parts of the story that Matthew left out. For example, Mary, Joseph and little Jesus probably crossed the Red River at what is now Fargo, stopped in Valley City for water after the long trek over the prairie, probably blessed St. John Lutheran Church in Jamestown as they moved west, and so forth and so on. It would make perfect sense to me.

The Christians here in Egypt are basically very much like North Dakotans (*simil justis et peccator*, actually). Everybody and her brother, Muslim and Christian, know that Egypt was host to Jesus and his family during a time of danger. At least 20 towns and monasteries from Rafah to Assiut, almost halfway to Sudan, are convinced they were blessed by the family's visit. The Egyptian Ministry of Tourism, no less, has published the fruit of their convictions in a glossy publication personally approved by the head of the Coptic Orthodox Church here. While historians might scratch their heads, Egyptians have no doubt. It makes perfect sense to them, too.

All of us, North Dakotans and Egyptians and others alike, live together on a small planet, Earth, and the astonished conviction among many of us is that God has actually visited our little place in the universe. But we don't have to depend on our imagination to piece together something of the visit. Our Christian forebears were good enough to write what they had seen and heard. It happened at Bethlehem, Luke says. He grew up in Nazareth, they all agree. He died on Golgotha, the stories say. He rose triumphant, the songs all sing. Not our pride, but our salvation. Not our boast, but our life.



The Rev. Mark Nygard served two parishes in North Dakota and two parishes in West Africa before coming to Egypt with his wife, Linda Nygard, to serve as graduate studies director at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo.

“Arise, shine; for your light has come” (Isaiah 60:1).

Myk Snider



Ivana Šabanošová

My heart nearly burst with pride as I stood in a classroom at the Evanjelické Lýceum in Bratislava, Slovakia, watching Ivana Šabanošová teach. I was transported back to 1995 when I stood in that same classroom as a missionary pastor and Ivana was my student.

“The American missionary teachers shined a light on our church for us back then,” reflected Ivana. “Today I am happy to serve our church as you once did.”

Her words were humbling and a source of pride for both of us, as we both knew that the light of which she spoke is Christ’s light.

Epiphany, the season of light, is traditionally the season to celebrate Christ’s manifestation to the world. This Epiphany, I invite you to remember and celebrate the ELCA

missionaries who, hand in hand with global companions, shine Christ’s light around the world through preaching, teaching, healing, building, developing and peace making.

This season, I invite you to help shine the light! Join hands with our missionaries and neighbors around the world. Light candles as you highlight our church’s missionaries and hold them in prayer. Lift up a different continent each Sunday in worship: Sing hymns and try communion bread from other lands. Turn up the lights on missionaries and global mission in Sunday school classes and Bible study. Offer thanks for those who support missionaries with prayer, encouraging communication and financial gifts. These gifts make a lasting world of difference.

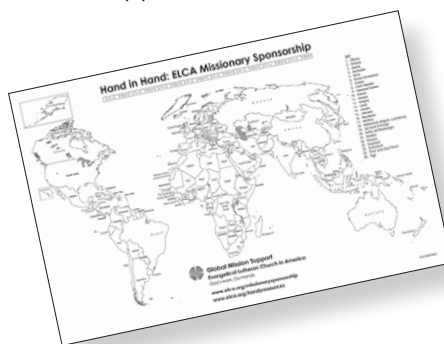
Twila

The Rev. Twila Schock is director for Global Mission Support.

A HANDY IDEA

The new **world map** from ELCA Missionary Sponsorship invites you to find your missionary’s country of service, locate and pray for countries in the news, learn world geography (How many African countries can you name?), make a Missionary Sponsorship bulletin-board display and spend some relaxing time coloring. Request up to a dozen maps (One for every Sunday school classroom?) by contacting Global Mission Support.

This resource has a nick-name: the **placeMAP**, because its size is just right to use as a placemat. Consider ordering a pad of 100 maps to use at meal events with a Global Mission emphasis. Call 800-638-3522, ext. 2580, and reference ELCADS1025 (free, plus shipping and handling).



Jon Randolph



Forty-four Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM) volunteers have taken the plunge into a life-changing journey for the 2010–2011 year. These young adults, ranging in age from 19–29, are living and serving in communities in Argentina/Uruguay, Jerusalem/West Bank, Mexico, Slovakia/Hungary, South Africa and the United Kingdom.

HOW TO GIVE

1. To give through your congregation, write “ELCA Missionary Sponsorship” on the check’s memo line.
2. To give online, visit www.elca.org/4missionaries.
3. To donate directly, make your check out to “ELCA Missionary Sponsorship” and mail to: **ELCA Global Mission Support, 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4101.**
4. Give a gift that says “you mean the world to me.” Call 800-638-3522 to donate and to request a Global Mission Support gift card (“Thanking,” “Celebrating,” “Honoring,” or “Remembering”).
5. For assistance including ELCA Missionary Sponsorship in your will or estate plan, contact the Rev. Twila Schock by e-mailing globalmissionsupport@elca.org or calling 800-638-3522, ext. 2641.



Global Mission Support
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