

## Story Time

by Pastor Helga Jansons Director for Evangelical Mission

### Once upon a time...

Aren't those beautiful words! What happens to you when you hear them? I immediately relax and get excited about what I am about to hear. In a story anything is possible. I can imagine being in the story and can identify with the characters; their joy, fear, sense of injustice, triumph and gratitude. I try to anticipate what will happen. I can remember and retell the story if it was interesting enough.



At our Synod Assembly we are never short on people who want to tell their stories of faith in action. There is a lineup of people wanting to share “Synod Shorts” that is, short stories of what God is up to in the life of their church. It is not gloating. We are just so thrilled to tell people about the good news.

When we hear a story we can feel inspired, we get some new ideas and it can act as a catalyst to stir our own imaginations. We can also learn how others went about doing things and some of the obstacles along the way. A good story has a conflict and a resolution to it. Nothing new and exciting is without some tension. When we hear about the difference that a church can make in a community, or how even one person's passion can lead to something that a whole church gets excited about, it draws us out too. What could I do? What could our church try?

If we tell a story well, those listening may feel their hearts burning within them. Whether we tell our own story or retell the story of others, it is good to think it through ahead of time. Just as a pastor thinks through how to share what God is up to in a sermon, it is good to have an outline of what we will say and to practice. Telling stories does not come naturally to everyone. I joined Toastmasters International to learn how to tell stories better. There is a part in the meeting where people are chosen, on the spot, to talk on a topic for one minute. Meanwhile someone is listening for content, another for the “uhms”, and another is timekeeper. Fabulous practice! It is amazing how much we can share in one minute.

When we hear stories of what other churches are up to, we can feel more connected to each other. Sometimes congregations forget they are one body with other Lutheran churches across town, across the synod and across the country. The word “synod” means to walk alongside each other. As we journey together as part the wider church, we can recognize Jesus in our midst. We are not alone.

On our synod website [www.ewidsynod.org](http://www.ewidsynod.org) is a link called Mission Interpreter Story and there you will find stories about ministries and individuals whose lives have been changed. You do not need to be a Mission Interpreter for your church in order to share the stories of ministry in our synod. A pastor can use these as sermon illustrations, and others can share them freely. You can read about Campus Ministry, how a church is using technology to “boost” their presence in the community, and how Latino people from different traditions have come to be part of Lutheran ministry; in Spanish and English.

You can send in a story from your church also, or your own story. Just send it to me and I will forward it onto the synod office – that way I can ask you some questions or perhaps suggest some edits. Email it to [helga.jansons@elca.org](mailto:helga.jansons@elca.org) It can include photos or even a video clip. Wouldn't it be great if we had a story from every congregation!!! A Net-Work of God's ministry.

