

Thanksgiving Day  
November 24, 2011

Recently, I received the monthly newsletter from my home congregation of Bethesda Lutheran Church in western Iowa. In the pastor's column, she recounts the congregation's story of ministry this past autumn to the people of Clifton, Texas where, as you may have heard, farmers and ranchers endured record-setting drought this past summer.

Pastor Carla Johnsen writes to her congregations at Bethesda and St. John's in Moorhead and Dunlap, Iowa:

“Thanksgiving is just around the corner, and so we pause to give thanks to God for the many blessings [which] have been placed in our lives. These past two months, I have been profoundly touched by the way I've seen God at work in the hearts of this community. Between the communities of Moorhead and Dunlap, three loads of hay will have been shipped to Clifton, Texas by the time this project is [finally] wrapped up. The hay was completely donated, [and] most of the trucking was donated in-full, too. Donations were given to cover the total cost of the project, and just when I think all that might be given has been given, someone else comes up to me

and says, “I’ve been so touched by the ‘hay lift story’ . . . I’d like to give something to help, is it too late?”

Together you've given a huge gift of love. [And] every time I think about it, tears fill my eyes. Below is a “thank you” letter sent from Pastor Ruth Hetland and the congregation of Our Savior's Lutheran [Church] of Clifton. I think the story of Thanksgiving lives in this letter. [For] Thanksgiving Day at its center is the story of God providing for our needs, and people thinking beyond their own needs to the needs of their neighbors; and then, sharing their gifts and talents so that all can eat and survive the winter.

Thanks for being the “Thanksgiving Story” for me this year!  
With love in Christ, and Happy Thanksgiving, Pastor Carla

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Pastor Ruth Hetland writes for her congregation at Our Savior’s in Clifton, Texas:

“Dear Pastor Carla and the Congregations of Bethesda and Saint John's,

“The days that the hay arrived here at our little church were beautiful days. Not only was the weather lovely, and we were pleased with how smoothly the process of receiving and

distributing the hay was, but the spirit around this place was a wonderful thing to behold. I wish I could describe to you how sweet and joyous it was for me to see farmers and ranchers, who have had such a long, difficult summer arrive with their trucks and trailers [to] receive fresh, good hay at no cost to . . . feed their hungry cattle and horses. The mood was light, [and] there was a sense of joy and peace and true kinship in the air. People kept remarking how they could not believe that their Christian brothers and sisters in Iowa—complete strangers—would give them such a gift. During both those days I felt humbled and happy and blessed to be reminded how our God works in such marvelous ways—through some simple bales of hay.

Words fail me to thank you all properly. You probably think it is no big deal what you have done, but I want you to know that we have seen Christ through you in these past weeks. What you have done has been real, tangible, good news for so many, and it has helped this area of Lutherans feel unity with other Lutherans—a connection that has really been missing here for a very long time.

I have been a pastor for twelve years, and I have loved the work God has called me to do here and in the other two churches I have served, but I want you to know that this experience of seeing how you have blessed [these] people here

and allowed God to work through you has been one of the most wonderful things I have witnessed in my years of ministry. How beautiful to see the Spirit of God alive and well and working to bring together Christians from one farming community to another! How inspiring to see Christ at work in such surprising ways!

When my little boys asked me about these big hay trucks arriving and why they were here, I just said, "Boys, some friends in Iowa sent this hay for us [in order] to remind us that Jesus loves us." They shrugged and proceeded to jump up on the hay bales and play; but I knew it was true: these were no ordinary bales of hay because, woven among the strands of grass and alfalfa, was love. Pure love.

Please know that you all are in our hearts and prayers always. In Christ, Ruth E. Hetland, Pastor of Our Savior's Lutheran Church at Norse, Clifton, Texas

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St. Paul writes to the Corinthians in chapter 8 of his second letter: "We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For, as I can testify, they

voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints—and this, not merely as we expected; they gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us. . . Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you—so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking” (I Corinthians 8:1-7).