S T O R Y T E L L I N G

April 2025

Bethany Lutheran and Lay Leaders of Lower Columbia Conference

"It only takes a handful of people to experience abundance"
–Pastor Susan Dollinger, Bethany Lutheran Longview

Bethany Lutheran in Longview is part of a collaboration between local ELCA churches to get together and do cooperative projects. The exciting part of this collaboration is that the intention is for the projects to be congregation driven rather than clergy driven.
This collaboration started just before Covid in 2019. The hope and dream was simply to get churches together and connect as a larger community in one conference. There were a few reasons for this – first and foremost to be able to do bigger things than they could do alone, but included was an honest assessment that mergers between some of these small churches might be part of their futures. If congregations could build relationships together that were already positive and mission-based, that possibility could also be positive and mission-based.

The most recent project was a collaboration between Bethany and Stella Lutheran Chapel. Both churches have strong lay leadership and a desire to serve their community. They pooled resources to create winter vacation bags of food for families that relied on school meals.

They planned to pack 50 bags together during an Advent worship service – but Stella Lutheran brought a TRUCKLOAD of food. Together they filled the fifty bags and packed another car with an over the top, extravagant amount of food to bring to "Resource Closets" throughout the Kelso and Longview school districts.

Pastor Susan describes the experience as an amazing abundance of loaves and fishes in many different ways. They started with no idea how much food there would be or what level of participation – but decided to give and do what they could, trusting that it would be an important thing for whatever individuals they were able to serve.

They hoped for a group of eight – ended up a group of thirty. Fifty bags became a truckload. "The hope for the future," Pastor Susan says, "is that the heartbreak of separation left over from the Covid era can be healed and that a small group of committed people, continuing to meet and see where the Holy Spirit leads, can move mountains together."

~ by Chavaleh Forgey, Synod Storyteller