

ELCA Macedonia Project **An Adventure in Growing Holistic Stewards**

By the Rev. Susan Miller, assistant to the bishop for congregational life and mission

In September 2010, Bishop Craig Johnson, Minneapolis Area Synod, and Bishop Peter Rogness, Saint Paul Area Synod, issued a joint statement on the stewardship of God's abundance and issued three invitations to congregations: to be generous, to be missional and to be the body of Christ in the world. The congregational cohort model of the Macedonia Project is a process designed to help congregations answer those invitations through deepening their congregational stewardship and mission support.

In June 2011, 18 congregations (eight from the Saint Paul Area Synod and 10 from the Minneapolis Area Synod) became engaged in a 17-month initiative to increase congregational stewardship and Mission Support through education and cooperative learning. The project began when congregational teams came together at Central Lutheran, Minneapolis, to hear the Rev. Stephen Bouman, executive director of Congregational and Synodical Mission of the ELCA, lead a Bible study on 2 Corinthians.

The Macedonia Project is designed to help congregations renew themselves through focusing on stewardship education. During the course of the project, congregational teams meet monthly and focus on four aspects of stewardship in their congregations, including the biblical and theological foundations for stewardship, mission and vision for stewardship, development of stewarding leaders and how to communicate the importance of being stewards, and best practices. Every cycle begins with a large group meeting in which everyone gathers to hear a speaker, followed by two monthly meetings as a congregational team — one of those includes meeting with a stewardship coach. Each cycle ends in a meeting with groups of two or three congregations in a "cohort" to share ideas and what they are learning.

Opportunity for reflection

The Rev. Ryan Brodin, pastor at Abiding Savior Lutheran in Mounds View, Minn., reflected on the process so far. "A very powerful moment for Abiding Savior's team came as they shared their personal money autobiographies and spoke freely together about their history of giving."

"It was delightful to meet with other congregations in a cohort group where they could share ideas, struggles and triumphs with each other," said Pastor Brodin.