

LUTHERANS ON THE LOOSE – ELCA

This came about after a productive conference meeting of the Appleton Conference, at which we discussed ways to get the ELCA (and our congregations) out in the public realm. We had watched a video clip of a flash dance in Budapest that happened last Easter. That sparked the conversation that led us to choosing the Fox Valley Mall as one location that all of us frequented at one time or another, that was not so closely linked with just one community, which led us to joining up with Macy's for their Shop for a Cause day. Macy's day of community outreach is through the offering of coupons to organizations who want to sell them to raise funds, plus offering those same organizations a 'platform' for a public performance or exhibition of some sort. We didn't go into this as a fund raiser, but a few of our congregations gained a bit financially along the way. Our goal was to raise public awareness (in a positive way!) of the ELCA, who we are and how much fun we have alongside our purposeful side!

A group of about thirty people joined together to practice singing in four-part harmony a group of six hymns, plus to learn the dance routine for a flash dance (flash mob) sequence. We presented our "performance" at 1 pm in front of the escalators at Macy's, on Saturday, August 27, in the midst of mid-day shoppers! We started with a traditional hymn, from which we only sang one verse. Almost as soon as it ended (within seconds!) a CD starting playing and we heard a few beats of drums, to which we added our voices, "Five, six, seven, eight!" and then the dance began! Following the first song and dance, I spoke to the crowd a bit (giving myself and the others a few extra moments to catch our breath) and then we started again! We sang six different hymns, each followed closely by our 'flash dance' routine, which was done to a contemporary Christian song, that many of us also joined our voices to the voices on the CD and sang along.

The crowd responded with laughter, with BIG smiles, with applause, with singing along, although not so much dancing along with us! We achieved our goal, or at least we made a great start. The ELCA congregations who joined together for this (about six or seven) were out in a public place, singing and dancing and praising God, without being pushy, but showing people that we are serious about what we do, but we have a lot of fun doing it together. I hope to spread this idea to other conferences and I hope that the Appleton Conference (joined by St. Andrew's of Oshkosh!) will do this or other things like it again..... soon! I can't say when I've received as many positive 'strokes' as I did on this project! Mission lives in the East Central Synod and as one Neenah pastor said, "Watch out! Lutherans are on the loose! We're taking the gospel to the public!"