

'Seeds' Money: Strawberry Point-based Growing Initiative Helps Fight Hunger Worldwide

By: Karris Golden

Farmers and churchgoers in Strawberry Point have found another way to illustrate their direct role in feeding the world.

While farmers can't always make large financial contributions, said Beverly Ager of Strawberry Point, a national program offers a way for them to make a big difference.

"Seeds of Hope," a Strawberry Point-based growing project, lets farmers temporarily donate a small portion of their land for crop growing, said Ager, Seeds secretary. The group then pays to plant, fertilize, spray, harvest, and sell crops that benefit Foods Resource Bank (FRB), a national hunger-fighting organization.

The goal of FRB is to engage U.S. farmers in alleviating the global food shortage. At one FRB informational

session, a farmer raised his hand and told the Iowa-Illinois regional director, "This is neat; they're finally giving farmers something to do besides usher."

FRB's membership includes 15 members representing mainline Christian denominations and agencies, such as Lutheran World Relief. Together, the consortium supports smallholder agricultural food security programs in some of the world's poorest villages. This work is funded through a network of community growing projects throughout the United States.

These growing projects raise a crop or another marketable resource, sell it, and make the proceeds available to FRB. Some projects raise corn, pumpkins, fruit, or even livestock for sale.

The money is then distributed to FRB-member organizations, which in turn work with partners worldwide to support programs that help communities in developing nations become self-sufficient and food-secure. The goal is to help such communities produce enough to feed everyone, with particular emphasis on orphans, AIDS patients, the elderly, women, and children. Any surplus can be shared, bartered, or sold to purchase basic medicines and staple items and educate children.

The various FRB programs throughout the state have drawn the attention of U.S. Sen. Charles Grassley (R-Iowa), who farms near New Hartford.

>> *Continued on page 2*



Volunteers pitch in to harvest the crops grown by Seeds of Hope, a food-growing ministry based in the Strawberry Point area.

IN THIS ISSUE



- 1 'Seeds' Money
- 3 Be a Peacemaker to the World
- 4 ELCA Health Plan Participants
- 4 Graduates Awarded Certificates
- 5 Forums
- 6-8 Education, Events, Congregations, Calendar

'Seeds' Money
<< Continued from page 1

"Millions of people around the world struggle with hunger on a daily basis," said Grassley. "The Foods Resource Bank projects across Iowa are an innovative way to involve people at the grassroots to help make an impact on a very serious problem."

"This is not a long-term program for the villages FRB helps," said Ager. "These programs don't last forever. The goal is to go in for a short, specific period of time and create simple programs that can be taught and then maintained by the people themselves."

Interested groups apply to FRB for short-term grants, explained Harry Blobaum of Strawberry Point. "It doesn't become a food handout. FRB gives people the tools and knowledge — without the use of a lot of high-tech equipment — to grow their own crops and hopefully become self-sustaining."

There are several FRB-affiliated growing projects throughout the

Midwest, including Seeds. This coalition of churches started in spring 2004 and includes Emmanuel Lutheran in Strawberry Point, St. Sebald Lutheran and the local United Methodist and Catholic churches. This year, Seeds has two urban partners as well: First Lutheran in Cedar Rapids and Zion Lutheran in Iowa City.

"Urban partners complete the equation," said Blobaum. If "urban church" contributes \$250, it funds the input for one acre. Some growing projects also ask contributors to fund rows. "We ask for cash contributions, which go toward the final input for all the land," he said.

Through FRB, Seeds helps farmers in underdeveloped countries by providing funding for advice in food and livestock production, home gardening, storage facilities, and infrastructure that will help villages become self-sufficient.

To date, Seeds has raised and donated \$38,000 to FRB, said Blobaum. In the past, Seeds' funds have been designated to help certain

There are several ways to form your own growing project.

For more information:
Foods Resource Bank
1-888-276-4372
www.foodsresourcebank.org.

Harry & Elle Blobaum
39393 Hwy 410
Strawberry Point, IA 52076-8218

Seeds of Hope will host its annual Harvest Festival Nov. 18. The event begins at noon with a potluck at Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Strawberry Point, followed by a 1 p.m. Harvest Service.

projects, such as a growing project in Angola, a well-digging cooperative, a steer-feeding project in Kenya, and most recently, a sweet potato growing project in Tanzania. Seeds coordinators have now decided to designate the funds raised this year for the FRB general fund.

"Establishing and maintaining food security is integral," said Blobaum. According to FRB, food security is achieved "when all persons at all times have the physical and economic access to enough food to provide the nutrients they need for productive, active, and healthy lives."

Seeds and other growing projects generally support FRB in the



Seeds of Hope participants look on as the first seeds are planted.

>>> Continued on page 3

Be a Peacemaker to the World

"Though I have no fear of God and no respect for any one, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out."

Luke 18:4-5

It is the persistent voice that has most often changed me for the better. Never has the angriest or loudest, the most violent or contemptuous. Not even the pressure from the masses. But the one voice—the steady, committed, unflinching, persistent, bothersome one who never gives up has deepened my faith and broadened my experience of life.

This is also true in world history. Who are the ones that we remember for changing the world, for transforming the human experience

to be life-giving? History records and remembers the violent, the mass movements, the destructive forces of this world. However, the lasting accolades, even sainthood, are reserved for those who create a better, safer world by persistent acts of love and self-sacrifice.

The world's great religions are a testimony to this reality. Not one major religion is centered on the violence imposed on others by a powerful leader. Peace and the service of others, particularly "the least", are at the core. Hebrew scripture reveals one God who blesses Israel in order for Israel to be a blessing. The Arabic root word for "Islam" is "salaam", meaning peace. Jesus is the Prince of Peace who kneels at the feet of the disciples to wash their feet as a servant and then sacrifices himself for the sins of the world.

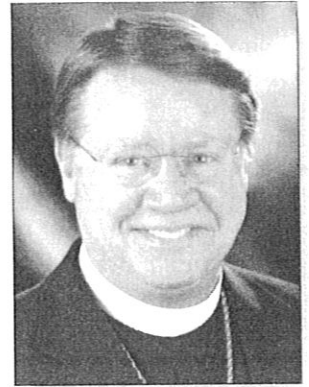
Too often the culture of our country and partisan politics defines, rather misdefines and misinterprets, the church's witness of reconciliation

and peace-making by labeling it "politics" and then dismissing it.

Scripture is clear, however. The ministry of reconciliation has been entrusted to us. Peacemakers are blessed by Jesus. There is only one strategy for effectively conquering our enemies: love our enemies, pray for them, forgive them and do good things for them.

This is the testimony of scripture. Our persistent calling is to live this witness each day.

— Steven L. Ullestad
Bishop, Northeastern Iowa Synod



Seeds' Money
<< *Continued from page 2*

following manner: Volunteers procure land and enlist laborers, raise crops, sell the crops, and finally send the proceeds to FRB.

Since its beginning, Seeds has doubled its acreage each year: in 2007 volunteers grew crops on nearly 50 acres of land. According to Elle Blobaum, Harry's wife, all of the land is within a 5-mile radius of Strawberry Point.

"It's usually not the same farmer who farms all the acres --- it's a variety,"



An important part of the Seeds of Hope ministry involves educating area congregations about global issues of poverty, hunger and food security.

she explained. "It's often the person next door (to the donated land). The farmers on the committee get people to farm the land." Seeds typically grows corn and beans for sale.

In addition, coordinators have helped other groups start growing projects in Aurora, Monona, Maquoketa, Dubuque and Decorah. (Maquoketa and Dubuque growing project coordinators were Seeds' first urban partners.)

>> *Continued on page 6*



Life-Long Learning for Lutherans Winter 2008

Class: "Biblical Studies: The Prophets and Writings"
Where: Zion Lutheran of West Union with AIM Susan Friedrich, Facilitator
Dates: Sundays - January 27, February 3, 10, 17 & 24, 7-9 pm

Class: "How to Read the Book of Revelation" & "The Rapture Racket"
Where: St. Paul Lutheran of Hampton with Pastor David Sorenson, Facilitator
Dates: Sundays - January 27, February 3, 10, 17 & 24, 7-9 pm

*All Registrations due
 January 11, 2008*

Class: "The American Religious Experience"
Where: Trinity Lutheran of Mason City with Pastor Steve Palo, Facilitator
Dates: Saturdays - January 26 & February 2, 9 am - 4:30 pm

Class: "Biblical Studies: The Epistles"
Where: Sojourn Way of Harpers Ferry with Pastor Helen Beth Kuhens, Facilitator
Dates: Friday & Saturday - January 25 & 26, 6 pm - 4:30 pm

For registration and questions contact:
 Rev. Helen Beth Kuhens
 658 Sojourn Lane, Harpers Ferry, IA 52146
 e-mail: sojourn@acegroup.cc

*'Seeds' Money
 << Continued from page 3*

"Things have gone so fast in Decorah, they've kind of passed us up," said Blobaum. "As enthusiastic as they are, they really just needed a boost to get going. Now, they're flying."

Volunteers are integral to the work of Seeds. "Volunteering can mean just about anything a person wants it to mean," said Ager, noting that anyone can attend meetings and help with decision making.

The growing project also benefits from those who donate a portion of land to grow crops. "That's been a vital thing," said Ager.

Camp EWALU, 3 miles west of Strawberry Point, offered Seeds its first plot. Dale Goodman, EWALU executive director, heard Joan Fumetti, FRB regional organizer for Eastern Iowa, speak at an event.

Goodman realized EWALU had 14 acres to offer a growing project. Upon returning to Strawberry Point, he organized a group of individuals he believed would be interested in starting a local growing project and invited Fumetti to speak.

"Many of us were won over completely, except the farmers," said Harry Blobaum, noting their extensive knowledge of various farm programs and questions about how FRB fits. "By the time 45 minutes or an hour had passed, they were completely sold.

"That's what makes this program work: you have your 'city people' who ... can do the publicity, check writing, bookkeeping, etc. Then you have your farm types who are experienced farmers. They can obtain what we can



Camp EWALU offers 14 acres to the Seeds of Hope growing project. Each summer, campers spend time at the plot and learn about Foods Resource Bank and are encouraged to pray for the villages helped by the organization.

get for free: fertilizer and labor. They also take care of harvesting the crop."

Another unifying concept, said Blobaum, is that Seeds is an ecumenical project, with its core group representing four of Strawberry Point's five churches.

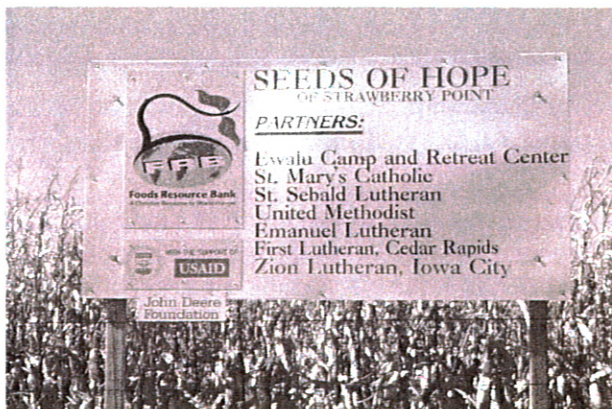
The connection with EWALU is also key, added Blobaum. Each summer,

>>> Continued on page 5

NOVEMBER 2007

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
				Revs. Michael R. Blair, Decorah; and Leo E. Combs-Lay, Oelwein 1	Rev. Helen Beth Kuhens, Harpers Ferry 2	Rev. Raymond A. Martin, Dubuque 3
Rev. A. Thomas Kraabel, Decorah 4	Helen M. Streng, Minneapolis, Minnesota; Ellen Ward, Decorah 5	Immanuel, Earlville 6	Rev. Thomas H. Walker, Sioux City 7	Peace, Ryan 8	Betty M. Huebner, Independence; Rev. Dr. Robert W. Wallace Jr., Cedar Falls 9	Rev. Ole Winter, Decorah 10
Rev. Dr. Jennifer E. Edinger, Nora Springs 11	St. John, Dundee 12	St. Peter, Lamont 13	Revs. Robert L. Edwards, Dows; and Rev. William P. Thalacker, Waterloo 14	Rev. Benjamin H. Coltvet, Berlin, Germany 15	First, St. Ansgar 16	Middle East Peace; Rev. Martha D. Halls, Cedar Falls; Leta Judt, Strawberry Point 17
Immanuel, Scarville 18	Gracia Harms, Waverly 19	Rev. Sarah L. Stadler-Ammon, Denver 20	Rev. Gary G. Hatcher, Greene; and Rev. Donald Loots, Waverly; Lillian A. Jahr, Waverly 21	Rev. Robin M. Ramos, Waverly 22	Zion St. John, Sheffield 23	Rev. Ramon A. Runkel, Des Moines 24
Revs. Arthur F. Roepke, Oelwein; Rev. Deanna L. Langle, Fort Worth, Texas; and Rev. Curtis C. Schneider, Waverly 25	Rev. Dr. Kathryn A. Kleinhans, Waverly 26	Rev. Marvin J. Schumacher, Clarksville 27	Phyllis Burri, Decorah; Joan G. Tange, Cedar Falls 28	Faith, Shell Rock 29	St. Paul (Balltown), Dubuque 30	

'Seeds' Money
<< Continued from page 6



A sign on a portion of the 50 acres farmed by Seeds of Hope lists that Strawberry Point-area churches and Camp EWALU support the ministry.

campers now spend time at the plot and learn about FRB. They are also encouraged to pray for FRB and the villages helped by the organization. Campers and staffers are also encouraged to forgo soda and candy at the canteen and instead donate the funds to FRB. In 2006, those donations totaled \$3,000. This year, the total of what Goodman calls "candy and pop not consumed" reached \$2,300.

In 2008, a group from Manchester with 20 acres will partner with Seeds, said Blobaum. "We'll work with them for about a year, do their books, etc. Then they will probably go out on their own."

Ager and her husband, Chuck, were both raised on farms and view the work of Seeds as the fulfillment of a calling: "We see it as such a commonsense approach to fighting hunger."

— Karris Golden is a freelance writer and a member of Trinity American Lutheran Church in Waterloo.