

THE REV. DR. APRIL ULRING LARSON

BISHOP EMERITUS

The La Crosse Area Synod of the ELCA made history by electing the Rev. April Ulring Larson to be their bishop on June 12, 1996, making her the first woman bishop in the ELCA and the second Lutheran woman bishop in the world. In 1996 and 2002 she was re-elected and served 16 years as bishop. Her passion as a synodical bishop was strengthening pastors and congregations. Her priorities were personal visitation of pastors and congregations, evangelism, youth, prayer, stewardship, global mission, and a vision of the wider church.

Rev. Dr. Larson, a native of Decorah, Iowa, studied music at Luther College and at the University of Iowa, graduating from the latter with a bachelor's degree in vocal music in 1972. Upon graduation she married Jud Larson and taught music for two years in a Roman Catholic school. Hearing a call to ordained ministry, in 1974 she and her husband entered Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa. They were the first married couple to begin and finish Wartburg seminary together, and in 1977 Rev. Dr. Larson was among the first 10 women to graduate from that seminary. The Larsons then served as co-pastors of three successive parishes in Iowa. As a parish pastor she served on the Northeastern Iowa Transition Team, was the Iowa District trainer of the Search Bible Study congregational lecturers, and was a member of the Iowa District Theological Task Force that authorized "Evangelism Guidelines for Congregations." In 1989, she accepted a call as Assistant to the Bishop of the Southeastern Minnesota Synod.

Throughout her ministry, Bishop Larson has been a leader in ecumenism and strengthening our relationship with the global church. She traveled with then ELCA presiding Bishop H. George Anderson to the major European ecumenical centers in Rome, Geneva, Canterbury, and Istanbul (1998). Bishop Larson led a La Crosse Area Synod delegation to its companion Synod, the Central Synod of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (1997). In 1997 Bishop Larson was the Lutheran World Federation Bible study presenter at the conference of African Lutheran Women Theologians in Moshi, Tanzania, and in 1994 the Bible study presenter for the conference of national presidents and presiding bishops from across the LWF. Bishop Larson also served as the U.S. Advisory Board President for the Strasbourg Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg, France. As a churchwide choral director and song leader, including three ELCA Global Mission Events and a national ALC women's convention featuring numerous

global women delegates, she was a pioneer in introducing global music to our church. In 1997 she also was a delegate to the 50th Anniversary of the Lutheran World Federation in Hong Kong, where she presided at the Eucharist that officially marked the Federation's 50th anniversary.

Service to both Church and community distinguish Bishop Larson's career. She was a member of the Executive Committee and Chair of the Agenda Committee of the Conference of Bishops of the ELCA. She completed service as a member of the Lutheran World Relief Board and the Luther College Board of Regents. She served two years as President of the Wisconsin Council of Churches, and served from 1988-1993 as a member of the ELCA Task Force on the Study of Ministry. She has written several chapters in Augsburg/Fortress books, was a writer for Word & World, and was featured on the McNeil Leher News Hour. She was the choral director for the La Crosse Area Synod All Saints Choral Fest in 1996 and served as preacher, presider, or Bible Study leader at three of the ELCA's Triennial Women's Conventions. Bishop Larson was the runner up in the 1995 ELCA churchwide election for Presiding Bishop and a finalist for presiding Bishop in 2001. She was honored to be the preacher at the churchwide installation of Bishop H. George Anderson in 1995, and a commencement preacher at five of our ELCA seminaries, as well as the Yost Lecturer at Southern Seminary. Honorary Doctor of Divinity degrees from Wartburg Theological Seminary and Luther College have been presented to Bishop Larson, as well as the Wittenberg Award from the Luther Institute in Washington, D.C. and the Distinguished Service Award from California Lutheran University.

With a passion for parish ministry, Rev. Dr. Larson has been serving as the senior pastor for First Lutheran Church in Duluth Minnesota since 2008. Her husband, Rev. Judd Larson was called to be the associate pastor at First Lutheran in February 2010. The Larsons' twin daughters are both specialist physicians. Their daughter, Katie and her husband Seth, have two children, Paul and Rebecca and currently reside in Iowa City, Iowa. Amy and her husband Peter, and daughters Rachel and Elizabeth reside in the Twin Cities. Pastors April and Judd's youngest child, Ben and his wife Renee were in Haiti in January 2010 on a mission trip. Ben died as a result of the earthquake in Haiti on January 12, 2010. Ben was a fourth year seminary student at Wartburg Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa.