

Northwest Network

Summer 2009

A quarterly newsletter of the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin - ELCA

From the Bishop . . .



A brief article in the May 25, 2009, issue of *Newsweek* caught my attention.

Entitled, "Going to Extremes," it is based upon a book by Cass Sunstein and talks about how polemic thinking can feed upon itself. In other

words, like-minded people reinforce preconceived notions such that soft views harden, and openness to critique, new perspectives, and revised thinking are resisted. Four findings that I found both interesting and troubling include:

1. Conservatives and liberals were asked to write down their views to various hot-button social issues. They were then split into like-minded groups for 15 minutes. Almost all became more dogmatic in their views in what is called "group polarization."
2. Those promoting terrorism or cults are most effective when their members are separated from society, fed information of one particular view, and steeped with suspicion regarding anyone with a differing perspective.
3. Students played "prisoners" and "guards" in a mock jail exercise. The guards gradually became more brutal, and appeals to reason often backfired, "demonstrating a tendency to become more entrenched when challenged, not less."
4. The World Wide Web unites, but it also polarizes. Those who choose to filter news can receive information that only reinforces a previously held position. All around me I can see this being played

out. There are those who listen to "talking heads" only on MSNBC (or only on FOX) and no others, who bookmark internet sites that inform only their particular perspective, who read only specific kinds of books by a limited number of authors, or who listen to only select TV evangelists, etc. "Group polarization" is at work, and it occurs in politics, religion, sports, education, and every other arena in life. I, too, find myself gravitating to that which reinforces opinions I already hold, and I have to push myself to broaden my perspective and learn from those who differ from me.

It is my contention that the body of Christ is best served and strengthened when people listen to and value one another – *especially* if they hold different perspectives. It is the entire community of faith that prevents individual opinions from becoming gods which reinforce and feed upon themselves. The church, the *whole* church, has always tested what it means to be faithful to the Word in every age and context. The whole church, grounded in prayer, study, worship, and careful reflection upon faith and life, trusts that the Spirit guides and sustains, corrects and inspires, and leads and directs in both the known and the unknown. This is a significant part of what it means to be joined to one another as sisters and brothers in the Christian community.

I am deeply grateful for the extensive variety within the body of Christ. *All* parts of the body are needed and treasured – including those who are different from me and with whom I disagree. I need to hear all the varying voices of the church as I pray and ponder and discern the direction that God is leading us. I need the wisdom and faithfulness of the whole church.

The Northwest Synod of Wisconsin

Walking together for the sake of mission in God's world

For up-to-date information about the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin, visit

www.nwswi.org

"... the body of Christ is best served and strengthened when people listen to and value one another – especially if they hold different perspectives."

Bishop Duane Pederson

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Walking together † for the sake of mission † in God's world

Milestones, Moves & More

Milestones

Congratulations to . . .

Rev. Jordan Scott and Rev. Bob Schoenknecht on their ordinations! Rev. Scott will serve Grace Lutheran in Marshfield. Rev. Schoenknecht will serve the rural Colfax parishes. Rev. Gerd Bents and his wife, Gina, on their recent marriage.

Moves

Rev. Victor St. George called to Faith Lutheran in Grantsburg.
Rev. James Bump called to First Lutheran in New Richmond.
Rev. William Wilson called to Svea and Tabor Lutheran in Hager City.
Rev. Mary Strom called to Long Lake Lutheran in Sarona.
Rev. Mark Hall called to Ezekiel Lutheran in River Falls.
Rev. Art Bruning, retired, called to interim ministry at Bethlehem and Eidsvold Lutheran in Bay City.
Rev. Lowell Bolstad called to interim ministry at Our Savior's and Stanfold Lutheran in Rice Lake.
Rev. Mark Hendrickson called to interim ministry at Hope Lutheran in River Falls.
Rev. Mark Hillmer, retired, called to interim ministry at Pilgrim Lutheran in Superior.
Rev. Christine (Schneewind) Engstrom transferred to the Southeast Minnesota Synod.
Revs. Michael and Kari Sue Pancoast transferred to the Western North Dakota Synod.
Rev. Lowell Halvorson, retired, transferred into our synod from the Northeastern Iowa Synod.

& More

Our condolences to . . .

The family of Rev. Ted Berkland, who passed away June 20, 2009.

Mark your calendar . . .



August 14-16
August 17-23

Sept. 27-29
Oct. 13

Book of Faith Jubilee at Luther Seminary, St. Paul
Churchwide Assembly at Minneapolis Convention Center

Fall Ministry Retreat at Telemark Lodge, Cable
Luncheon for Retired Pastors & Spouses at Turtleback Golf & Conference Center, Rice Lake

Poymane and Pais

by Pastor Todd Iverson



"Pastors are called to lead their flock. Just take care not to get so far out in front of them that you begin to look like the enemy." These are some wise words from my mentor pastor.

Leadership can be a tricky business. It can be so tempting to lead from a position of power. Coercive or dominating power can be an effective way to get things done in the short term, but it is not the way of self-emptying love (Phil. 2.7). Sometimes really smart people can be tempted to trust in their knowledge and book-learning. Anyone who knows me knows that I am a major bibliophile and no anti-intellectual, but knowledge is no substitute for God's grace—in fact God's grace is sufficient (2 Cor. 12.9). Charismatic leaders can fall into having faith in their own cult of personality. However, a leader's greatness is not measured by abilities or skills, but by the willingness to serve (Luke 22.26). And there are about 34,000 other ways that leaders can be seduced into trusting in themselves or their techniques rather than God.

Leadership is not so much about power or knowledge or skills; leadership is about relationships. Jesus came to reestablish right relationship between us and God. Reflecting God's love, both leaders and those being led need to be in a trusting and mutually up-building relationship.

An article in the *Wall Street Journal* points out "two countervailing trends" that pose a real problem for clergy today. "For one

thing, ministers are commanding greater salaries because they are better educated and take on more responsibilities than ever before At the same time, ministers no longer command the respect that they once did. 'In the 19th and even in the 20th century, clergy had real moral authority, not only in the congregation but in the community as well, but that isn't the case anymore,' said the Rev. Randall Balmer, professor, Episcopal priest and author of several books on church history. 'Today they are regarded as hired help.'"

Greater salaries and more responsibilities haven't translated into more respect or prestige. They have resulted in a strained relationship with those whom we have been charged with tending.

Which brings us back to the cryptic, yet Biblical, title to this article: "*poymane* and *pais*" or "shepherd and servant." Both the Greek pair and the English pair satisfy our American love for alliteration, but more importantly, they get at the relationship that we need to work on in the church. Pastor and parish are not bitter enemies, locked in an eternal battle over salary and honor. Just pay for demanding work and mutual respect are important, but at the core of every congregation is our mission, the purpose for which God has formed us. Pastor and people, shepherd and sheep, are partners in the gospel, joined together in the community of faith, which is the body of Christ, in order to be fed and nourished for God's work with our hands in this world.

Leadership is about relationships.

Mission Moments

by Pastor Amy Odgren

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The ELCA is bigger than you might think! With 4.8 million members in almost 10,500 congregations, organized into 65 synods, and one churchwide organization, it is the largest Lutheran body and the fifth largest Protestant denomination in the United States. There are countless effective ELCA ministries carrying on God's mission to people all over the globe. We're all connected to those ministries through our baptisms into Christ, through our shared call—being sent into the world for the sake of God's mission—and through our generosity in sharing our financial resources for God's work. But I'd like to ask you—how connected do you feel? How many stories of these ministries can you tell to bring to life the importance of our work together in the world?

Communication in sharing these stories is the bridge that gives each one of us a better understanding of how God transforms our prayers, tithes, offerings, volunteer efforts, and special gifts into ministries that bring hope and healing to people in need in several places. **Mission Interpretation** is what this communication and storytelling is all about. When someone reminds us of our connection to one another and can tell us about what our partnership is doing within the wider church, then we're all strengthened in seeing how God is active and at work through us and through God's people. **Mission Interpretation is telling the story of how God is changing lives through our living and in our giving.**

The Northwest Synod of Wisconsin, through the Synod Council, has made a commitment to the importance of Mission Interpretation by naming Mr. Al Arndt, from Fristad Lutheran Church in Centuria, as the Synod's Mission Interpretation Coordinator. It is our goal that every congregation have a resident Mission Interpreter to collect and tell stories of our shared faith in action within our own communities, across the ELCA, and across the globe. The Coordinator will assist in training and providing resources that will give every Interpreter all that they need to inform their congregation of who we are as the ELCA, what we do in ministry together, and how we fund it.

We have a story to tell! It's a story about powerful ministry and how God is active and at work through God's people. Start thinking about who can tell that story within your congregation. Start thinking about who you will name as your Mission Interpreter. Start thinking about stories that could be shared regarding what you have seen God doing in your life, in your community, and beyond. Watch for further information from the Synod Mission Interpretation Coordinator regarding upcoming training sessions. Call Pastor Odgren (715-234-3373 or email aodgren@nswwi.org) with any questions or with names of interested Mission Interpreters in your congregation. Let's tell this great story together!



Greg's Resource Connection

by Pastor Greg Kaufmann

Lay School of Ministry begins 17th year

Are you seeking an opportunity to become more fluent in the first language of faith, the language of the Bible? Would you like to revisit the central beliefs we hold as Lutherans in a safe learning environment? Do you have questions about the Bible and how it shapes everything we do in our lives? Has it been a few years since you actually sat with other Lutherans and seriously wrestled with questions you have about the Bible and your faith?

The Lay School of Ministry is the right place to address these types of questions.

Begun in 1993, your Lay School of Ministry has become the premier synodically based lay theological education program in the ELCA. Dr. Jonathan Strandjord, representing the ELCA Churchwide offices at our synod assembly praised our synod for providing the very best lifelong learning opportunity for lay persons. Bishop Pederson referred to our lay school as a shining star in the synod.

The lay school is now taking registrations for its 16th group. Here

is a quick summary of what you'll experience in the 18 sessions spread across two years. You'll study the Biblical material with Dr. Roy Harrisville III or Pastor Greg Kaufmann; you'll explore our Lutheran heritage with Professor Gary Simpson, Luther Seminary; you'll discover why Lutherans worship the way we do with Pastor David Anderson; and you'll experience a variety of faith practices that have shaped the spiritual formation of Christians throughout the history of the church with Pastor Natalie Leske.

Complete registration information and forms, as well as a history of the lay school, are available at: www.layschoolofministry.org.

To view a short video of our lay school, filmed by Tim Frakes for the ELCA's Book of Faith Initiative, go to: <http://bookoffaith.ning.com/video/lay-school>

You've already attended our lay school? Then don't miss the continuing education topic for 2009-10. We will be looking at the Old Testament Prophets with nine of the top ELCA teaching faculty from across the country.



Visit us on the web:

www.nswwi.org

Include in your prayers: the 37,000+ young people and adults who will attend the **ELCA Youth Gathering, "Jesus, Justice, Jazz," in New Orleans July 22-26**

Companion Synod News by Diane Kaufmann

May and June saw extensive activity within our Companion Synod relationships in both Brazil and Malawi. In May, nine women traveled to Brazil and through a variety of experiences, which culminated in attendance at the synod women's gathering, were able to connect with many women's groups. The desire to match congregations, as we have been doing with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi, surfaced, and we are now in conversation with several congregations about that possibility.

Bishop Pederson traveled to Malawi in early June, primarily to take part in a Pastor's Retreat. He had the opportunity to present the new Lutheran Study Bible to the pastors. The bibles were a gift from the students of our Lay School of Ministry, which is matched with the Training Department of the ELCM, just as congregations are matched. There was great excitement as the pastors had the opportunity to look at the contents of the Bible and realize what a great tool this will be for their ministry. In another session, Bishop Pederson led a study of the book of Jonah using the LSB. Perhaps the most rewarding part of the retreat was the session led by both Bishops on expectations and guidelines for our companionship. With nearly all (but not all yet!) parishes matched, there is a lot of momentum growing to more fully develop the relationships. We learned of a number of parishes that have formed a committee to make sure that communication is happening with their companions. I would encourage the same to happen here! These sessions were recorded and will soon be on the synod website as mp3 files so everyone can hear the discussions.

Following Bishop Pederson's trip, a group of 10 travelers joined me to visit their companion parishes in the northern third of Malawi. It is hard to describe the emotional impact of finally meeting people that you have been praying for. It is an intense experience that seems to be duplicated at each parish visit. Check out the blog at www.nazulu.org for pictures and video.



Face-to-face connections are a key component of our companion synod relationships. Here, companion synod coordinator, Diane Kaufmann, delivers mail from a matched parish (Bethany-Siren) to Pastor Gama of Mponela Parish, Malawi.