

Northwest Network

Summer 2010

A quarterly newsletter of the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin - ELCA

From the Bishop . . .



At the Synod Assembly in Stevens Point, I announced an important development in our global relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi (ELCM).

This coming October, the ELCM will host a three-week continuing education event for the 50+ pastors of the church, and we will be key partners in making the event happen. We're calling it *Growing Together*.

Many of the Lutheran pastors in Malawi have not had the advantage of extensive theological training. They particularly need support in biblical and confessional studies. Because limited resources prohibit pastors from engaging in **continuing education, the pastors' training portion of *Growing Together* will fill a gaping hole in supporting and equipping Malawi's clergy.**

The first pastor's training will take place in October 2010. It will be taught jointly by Malawian Lutheran leaders and by Pastor Greg Kaufmann and Pastor Todd Iverson of the synod staff. In subsequent years, I will invite other pastors from our synod to teach.

Crucial to this initiative will be the funding to cover the expenses for the pastors to gather and study—educational resources, travel, meals, housing, etc. We are blessed that Norda, Inc. of Ladysmith, owned by Mark and Margaret Stensvold, is providing \$10,000 in matching funds to challenge the entire synod to generously support *Growing Together*. For every \$2 contributed, an additional \$1 will be provided by Norda. The goal? \$30,000 annually. Not only

will these dollars completely fund the **pastors' training, but there is more that** will be accomplished. Because nearly all educational material is in English and not Chichewa, English proficiency courses for the clergy who attend will be taught by bilingual Malawians. The English instruction will be part of *Growing Together*.

But there is more! The \$30,000 will also **fund an Evangelist's School. As many of** you know, lay evangelists are the primary reason the Lutheran church in Malawi is growing rapidly. These lay evangelists preach and teach in outlying areas and develop worshipping communities that become new congregations. Bishop Bvumbwe tells me that the ELCM could immediately use another 30 lay evangelists, but because of the lack of training resources, outreach is hampered. Assuming that we attain our **\$30,000 goal, an Evangelist's School will** be offered sometime in early 2011.

Our support has the potential of moving the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi to an even greater pace of growth. Our profound thanks to the Stensvolds for grasping the vision of what education for both clergy and laity will mean for the Malawian church, and thanks to all of you who respond to the matching fund challenge.

Gifts for *Growing Together* should be made out to the *Northwest Synod of Wisconsin* and designated **"Growing Together."** We are determined to **fully fund the pastors' leadership development/training, English language classes, and the Evangelist's School.** Watch for further information so that you can encourage your congregation to support the effort. Thank you in advance for your gift—encourage others to contribute, too!

The Northwest Synod of Wisconsin

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

PO Box 107
944 24 1/4 Street
Chetek, WI 54728
715-859-6810

For up-to-date information about the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin, visit www.nwswi.org



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

Milestones, Moves & More

Milestones

Congratulations to . . .
Rev. Scott Thalacker on his ordination July 4, 2010, in Rapid City, SD. He will begin serving Our Saviour's in Whitehall August 10.

Moves

Rev. Kathy Pennington called to East Immanuel Lutheran in Amery.
Rev. Julie Brenden called to interim ministry at Grace and Zion in Frederic.
Rev. Arvid Sundet appointed to serve as interim at Calvary in Minong.
Rev. Chet Hoversten appointed to serve as interim at Christ the Servant, in Park Falls.
Rev. Lamoine Jacobs appointed to serve as interim at St. Luke's in Foster.

& More

Our condolences to . . .
The family of Rev. Maynard Midthun, of Menomonie who passed away May 26, 2010.
The family of Rev. Richard Sorenson, of Menomonie who passed away June 12, 2010.
Rev. Lauryl Stockness on the loss of her mother.
Rev. Geoff Scott on the loss of his mother.

In an effort to conserve resources, we will discontinue mailing printed copies of this newsletter beginning in 2011.

If you have provided us with your email address, you will continue to receive an electronic copy quarterly.

If you do not have email, check with your church office to see if they can print a copy for you. As always, the Northwest Network is available on our website: www.nswwi.org.

Mark your calendar . . .



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| August 14 | Hearing on the Draft Social Statement on Genetics
10 a.m. at Our Saviour's, Chippewa Falls |
| September 26-28 | Fall Ministry Retreat
at Heartwood Conference Center, Trego |
| September 30 | Deadline to receive matching funds for your donation to support <i>Growing Together</i> |
| October 10-30 | Pastors' Academy
in Malawi |
| October 12 | Luncheon for Retired Pastors and Spouses
at Turtleback, Rice Lake |
| November 7-10 | First Call Theological Education (FCTE)
at St. Anthony's Retreat Center, Marathon |
| November 12-14 | LAUNCH (Sr. High Youth Gathering)
at The Plaza Hotel, Wausau |
| November 18 | New to Synod and Boundaries Workshops
at Luther Park, Chetek |
| February 13-14 | Winter Theological Event
at The Plaza Hotel, Eau Claire |

Leadership Matters by Pastor Todd Iverson

"If people are lost outside of Christ, and if faith in Jesus Christ is the only avenue of redemption, what could possibly be a higher priority than spreading the gospel as far as we can, as fast as we can?" Dr. David Shibley

What is your gut reaction to that claim? Did you get to the implied "then" of the second half of the quote, or was your mind stuck in the first half "ifs"?

One of the great blessings of the ELCA is that we know there is much to learn from our brothers and sisters in faith, and while I may twitch at the strident exclusivism of the word "only," this Southern Baptist brother reminds me that the twitch is a sign of the old Adam in me.

I have heard some argue that the phrase, "missional church," is just another fad, another catch phrase

that will die away. I hope not. Dr. Shibley reminds us that the good news of Jesus Christ matters—deeply—and that sharing that good news is a matter of life and death, or better: death and life, for our neighbor.

Now, I may disagree with some styles of evangelism, but we leaders of this Church need to be about the hard work of reclaiming the fact that all Christians are messengers of good news—literally, evangelical. And we need to discover a sense of urgency about sharing this good news. This has not been a strong point for us. It's time for a change. Leadership matters.

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."
John 14.6

Pastor Todd Iverson, assistant to the bishop, guides congregations and pastors in the call process and works with the Leadership Support Commission to tend to the gifts of rostered and lay leaders throughout our synod.

Mission Moments

by Pastor Amy Odgren

At a recent meeting, I was treated to a thought-provoking devotion which reminded us of our baptismal identity and call to discipleship—yet pointed to the stark reality of dwindling membership within mainline denominations (including the ELCA). Those in attendance were shaken by the statistic that only about 18 percent of Americans attend church regularly. This puts us where Europe was about 30 years ago. Today only about two percent of Europeans attend church! It sure leads one to wonder what's happening to not only Lutheranism, but to all mainline denominations.

The tough thing to swallow is that those things that many of us in our churches think should be so attractive to others really aren't. When researchers asked non-church goers what keeps them away, responses included: they don't understand the rituals or traditions; the church is too rigid and inflexible; the church doesn't deal with real issues that people live with everyday; it's stagnant and boring, harsh, judgmental and intolerant. Whew! That's tough to take when we love the places that have taught us about God's story and where we've been nurtured in our faith.

What are we to do? How can the church be relevant to folks today? Where is the hope for the church, for our culture? Some would say that there is great hope grounded in the fact that many people are still longing for a positive spiritual experience. After all, it is human to seek meaning for our existence.

It is human to have an urge to do good and live at peace inside ourselves. It is human to want a connection with that which is beyond ourselves. Wow, this is exactly what the church has to offer, isn't it?

But the question remains, how can we do this in a way that is inviting, engaging, and really gets to the core of what we know in our hearts is the Christian message? How can we be a church that is Spirit led, dynamic and interactive with God's world rather than a church that worries only about our own survival and membership numbers? Again, researchers tell us that missional, discipleship-oriented churches are ones that have a primary focus in serving outward, on mission with God, bringing Christ's love alive in its neighborhoods and beyond. The church that exists for the well-being of others and of creation, rather than for self-serving purposes, is a church that is engaged in God's kingdom work on earth. This means that in order to be an engaging and relevant church, we must risk making the gospel message understandable outside of the church walls—at places of work, at ball fields and in gymnasiums, at neighborhood barbeques and at school events, at the hospital and in prisons, in food pantries and in shelters.

Sure, we can invite people to come and attend church, but we also need to hold fast to the concept that all people are both the "subject" and the "object" of God's mission.



That means as we go out from our churches seeking to develop authentic, mutual relationships with those whom we serve and invite to know God's love and grace—wherever they might be—it is also we who are changed and transformed in meeting Jesus in those relationships. We are blessed, even as we are sent to be a blessing.

Serving outward, being engaged with the community, supporting and nurturing one another in mutual relationships, recognizing all people as both the subject and object of God's mission, this is the good stuff of being faithful followers who are open to God's transformative power. May you and your congregation risk this journey toward abundant life and renewal.

Companion Synod News by Diane Kaufmann

Our companions in Sinodo Centro Campanha Sul, Brazil, are looking toward the future as they prepare to gather for their 15th Assembly on August 21. Much of the business they will attend to is familiar to us. The constitution of the national church needs to be adjusted to conform to current laws and regulations now in place. A lively debate will center around the issue of pensions and health insurance for the pastors of the synod. And last, but not least, the business of elections; a new synod pastor (bishop) will be elected as the current synod pastor, Waldir Trebien, retires. Later in the year, on October 19, a new national “pastor president” will be elected as the Rev. Dr. Walter Altmann is also retiring.

Some of the activities of the assembly are also familiar to us. Beyond the synod business that must be taken care of will also be the time spent looking to the future. Current synod vice pastor Bruno Bublitz writes that now is the time to dream about which direction the synod should move, how to choose the person who will help coordinate this dream, and how each member and congregation can also contribute to making the dreams happen.

At both the synod and national church level, a lot of work is going into structuring a Mission Action Plan and equipping church leaders to implement these plans. Sounds familiar? Yes indeed! We are doing the same thing—exploring and figuring out our missional identity and how to move forward. We have much in common to talk about.

In Malawi, preparations are underway for the Pastor’s Academy that will be held in October. Rev. Greg Kaufmann and Rev. Todd Iverson will be part of the faculty during the three-week session. English training will be held prior to the Academy for pastors who feel they need assistance. “Growing Together” is the name of our fundraising campaign to help assist with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi’s leadership development training efforts. We are currently in the midst of a challenge grant being sponsored by Norda, Inc. of Ladysmith. Through the generosity of owners Mark and Margaret Stensvold, one dollar will be donated for every two dollars contributed (up to \$10,000). We can easily reach our goal of \$30,000 if every congregation in our synod donates \$100!

Greg's Resource Connection by Pastor Greg Kaufmann

Your Synod Resource Center (SRC) recently got a face lift! With the emphasis on making sure synod congregations and ministries have helpful websites, the SRC site was completely revamped. Thanks to Tim Fehr for the great work. I want to commend several new features to you. The home page, and each internal page includes a menu bar on the right. It gives you quick links to important websites as well as links to our online catalogue and our SRC blog. You'll want to visit the blog regularly to discover new resources that are available either from your resource center or another trusted source. Take it for a test drive at www.synodresourcecenter.org!

Your Lay School of Ministry (LSM) is preparing to launch its most ambitious year yet! Who from your congregation should be enrolled in the 17th group to begin their two year study of the Biblical story, Lutheran theology, devotional and worship practices, and Spiritual formation disciplines? Registration materials are available on the LSM website: www.layschoolofministry.org.

Our continuing education theme this year brings to us nine of the leading faculty across our ELCA. All nine are experts in the area they will be presenting. Full details, bios, and more are available on our LSM website. If we have any hope to actually regain our missional identity as a synod, then we need to know who we are, and how we got to the point we are today. A study of critical missional issues in the history of the Christian church will do just that. It gets even better. Why should we keep this incredible learning opportunity to ourselves? Your LSM board is experimenting with web-casting the presentations to a group in the Central States Synod this year. If it proves successful, we'll consider broadening our reach next year. You can be part of history in the making!

Two important Book of Faith updates:

A new Survey of the Bible course is due out in September from Augsburg Fortress. It is tied closely to the Lutheran Study Bible. Watch the SRC blog for details.

The second Biennial Book of Faith Jubilee is planned for April 29-May 1, 2011. It will once again be held at Luther Seminary. Two of the four main speakers are confirmed: John Roberto and Nadia Bolz-Weber. Others who have been invited include Craig Koester. And Max Lucado. Once again, watch the SRC blog for details.