

Northwest Passages

The newsletter of the Northwestern Minnesota Synod



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.



book of faith

Open Scripture. Join the Conversation.

This month's theme

The Book of Faith, an initiative of the ELCA, invites the whole church to become more fluent in the first language of faith, the language of Scripture, in order that we might live into our calling as a people renewed, enlivened, and empowered by the Word. As a book of faith, the Bible is the written Word of God that creates and nurtures faith through the work of the Holy Spirit and points us to Christ, the incarnate Word and center of our faith. The Bible invites us into a relationship with God, making demands on our lives and promising us life in Christ. The Bible tells the stories of people living their faith over the centuries and, through its demands and promises, forms us as a people of faith.

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April 2009

CURRENT WEB TOPICS

2009 Flood Recovery

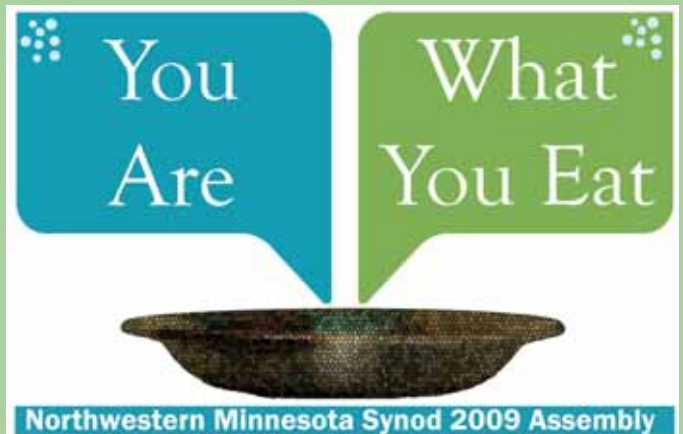


Bigwoods Church, Olso, surrounded by water.

Photo by David Willis

2009

Synod Assembly, May 16-17



For regular updates on these and many other topics, go to:
WWW.NWMNSYNOD.ORG

In Healthy Congregations, people develop caring relationships and empower others

"We now want to return to the gospel, which gives guidance and help against sin in more than one way, because God is extravagantly rich in his grace: first, through the spoken word...second, through baptism; third, through the holy Sacrament of the Altar; fourth, through the power of the keys and also through the mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters." Martin Luther, Smalcald Articles, III:4.



When Luther wrote these words in 1537 he came close—very close—to placing our relationships within the Body of Christ on a par with Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. Caring relationships and loving conversations with other Christians are almost sacramental in the life of the church.

A Network of Connections

In itself the church is a gathering together of God's people—a sharing of goodwill, energy, and gifts of the Spirit. It's not far-fetched to define the congregation as a "network of connections." This tracks with the language of the New Testament, which consistently favors *organic*—not mechanistic—images for describing the church, most notably as "the Body of Christ and individually, members one of another." (I Corinthians 12:27).

Yet even within this lovely image there is place both for differentiation and togetherness. God doesn't fuse us into a formless "blob." The Body of Christ consists of *members* who are wonderfully diverse, but also *connected* inextricably, one to another.

Our challenge is to find balance between our identities as members of one another and the relationships that give us life. "How can a separate self relate with others in a healthy way?"

This is the final in an 11-part series of articles, based on the *Healthy Congregations* training materials by Dr. Peter Steinke. Bishop Larry encourages church councils and other leadership groups to use these articles for devotions/discussion as they meet together. All eleven articles are available for download on the Northwestern Minnesota Synod website: www.nwmnsynod.org

asks Dr. Peter Steinke, in his *Healthy Congregations* training materials.

Steinke points to four ways that *members* of the Body of Christ relate to one another:

- ♦ **Playing together.** "If you cannot get connected to others through relaxation, spontaneity, and letting go," notes Steinke, "the only alternative is to connect through hostility or 'dead seriousness.'"
- ♦ **Touching one another**, verbally as well as physically. Words we share are "touching" when they convey support, care, and comfort.
- ♦ **Mirroring**—simply looking into one another's faces so we can tell whether we regard one another as important, noticed, and valued. How vital it is for us to know one another's names and call each other by name!
- ♦ **Nurturing** connects people. There's a reason why church suppers are so popular. "Half of Jesus' parables," observes Steinke, "are about food, feasts or farming."

The Difficult Business of Helping

Helping one another, though, isn't always as simple as you'd think. There are ways of "helping" that wind up hindering the growth of both the helper and the one being helped.

If our helping of one another always takes the form of fixing or rescuing someone, we could be tending to our own needs more than to the needs of the one being helped. Ask yourself: Am I driven by compassion or by my own anxiety at seeing someone who is hurt?

There is a kind of helping that dis-empowers the one being helped. Some helpers have a sick "need to be needed." Their tendency to over-function can foster an unhealthy dependency in the one being "helped."

It's important to watch for this sort of behavior in our congregations. Peter Steinke suggests that overly-needy helpers can be spotted by their tendency to

- ♦ Listen *ad infinitum* to a friend's problems
- ♦ Volunteer for every job that needs doing

Continued back page

This Month's Theme

By Michael Stein

The Book of Faith is catching on in our Northwestern Minnesota congregations. We asked congregations around the synod how they're using BOF.

Wannaska Parish

The Wannaska Lutheran Parish—Bethesda, Pine Grove and Riverside--has agreed to become a Book of Faith parish. "Our first BOF project is to encourage members to read the Bible and pray at home," said Pastor Paul Koch. "I created a menu of options that people could order. By ordering an item (a Bible verse a day or Luther's morning and evening prayers) they were committing to doing that each day."

Tables in each church are set up to look like a restaurant table, with tablecloth, plates and silverware. The tables featured a larger version of the menu and items to assist them in their home devotions, such as a Bible verse-a-day booklet. The First Sunday in Lent, people placed their orders. "We collected all the menus," Paul said, "and I'll be following up with a mailing to encourage people with their commitments."

Calvary Lutheran, Perham

Calvary Lutheran, Perham, started the year by asking members to make a New Year's "resolution" to read the Bible in 2009. Currently, 42 members have committed.

"We have a Calvary group on the Book of Faith website that has many conversations going. It is really very interesting and exciting," said Education Ministry Coordinator Tracy Bieger. "We also presented the study 'Rediscovering the Book of Faith' to help get people who had never read the Bible before from feeling so intimidated. We will present this again when our snowbirds return!"

One of the teenagers involved in this initiative, Amber Kalina,

wrote a blog about her experience:

The Book of Faith website has helped a lot on my journey. The Calvary group really gets into the Bible by discussing the confusing parts and coming to a plausible conclusion, which is never really concluded because others are always adding more input.

We ask questions such as "Why did God want to kill Moses?" or "Should we take Noah's ark literally?" or even "Why did the Israelites take so much gold and not bread during the Exodus?"

My belief is that all of us should take the time to get in touch with God, to ask questions and get in touch with fellow believers. Crack open a Bible and come join us on the Book of Faith, we could use your input!

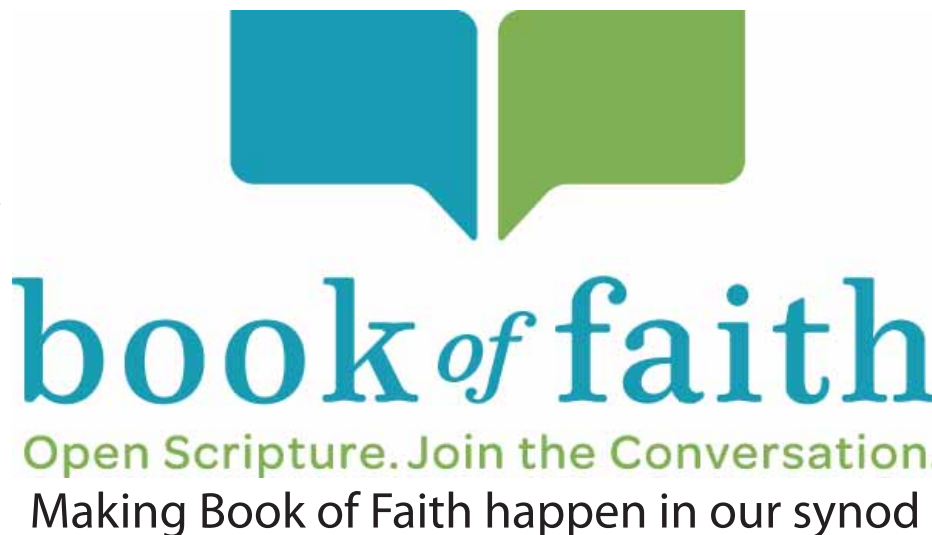
Calvary also has a small group that gets together every two-three weeks between services and has a discussion/ Q & A about their readings. They are also using Book of Faith as a 40-day guide to Bible reading during Lent.

Good Shepherd, Henning

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Henning, runs several different Bible studies, one using the Book of Faith material from the ELCA, the others are specific Biblical books and Crossways (Harry Wendt). Pastor Roger Johnson said, "We run four different Bible studies during the week at various times and on different days."

New Life Lutheran, Rothsay

Through the winter, New Life Lutheran Church, Rothsay, has done the video course, "How Lutherans Study the Bible" with Mark Allen Powell, and also a seven-week study of the book of Hebrews.



Continued next page

This Month's Theme

First Lutheran, Fergus Falls

First Lutheran, Fergus Falls, has acquired the Book of Faith leader kit with the leader guide, book and CD. "After looking through the material, I decided not to use the guide or the CD, but rather to just go through the book with my groups little by little," said Pastor Matt Philaya. "We purchased about 25 copies of the book and loaned them to two groups, a senior bible study and a men's breakfast bible study. Both are groups that I lead during the week. I gave them the option to just bring along the book each time without pressure to have to read ahead for the next session."

Both groups read through the book page by page and discuss each chapter. "I

have not used the leader guide at all," Matt said. "But we have had some very interesting discussions simply through questions that have come up in the book. I find that doing it this way gives many opportunities to 'side track' with the group and discuss certain Bible passages or talk about the actual book itself and its history."

"To be honest, we haven't actually gotten to the four bible studies in the book yet. I was able to spend several weeks on the first 50 pages and there have been many opportunities to look into our Bibles and check out the examples. Some areas of specific interest were Lutheran insights into the Bible, especially the three legged stool."

Matt added that they've really enjoyed using this resource, and he would be happy to talk with anyone who would like to know more.

First Lutheran, Fergus Falls

In September 2008, Dilworth Lutheran began a weekly Book of Faith study group that worked through the "Opening of the Book of Faith." During the last four sessions the study focuses on the four prepared Bible studies. "From the end of October to December we used those four Bible studies as a blueprint for approaching various favorite passages suggested by the

group," said Pastor Mark Asleson. "After a short Christmas break, the group returned in January and decided to work through the 40-day Lenten book on the Lord's Prayer entitled, 'Book of Faith, Lenten Journey,'"

This book presents a series of six-day devotionals based on the Lord's Prayer. The group met weekly and discussed the devotionals and the question at the end of each reading. "During the 2009 Lenten season many in the group wanted to go through the materials a second time and asked if we could offer it on a Wednesday for others," Mark added. "I would highly recommend this study on the Lord's Prayer, which could easily be taught any time. Our weekly Book of Faith is now looking for what we want to begin studying after Lent."



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Join the
Book of Faith Forum at
<http://bookoffaith.ning.com/>

Peace and Grue, Ashby, have a task force of lay people who are seeking ways to help people use and appreciate the Bible in their daily lives. "We have used the surveys from 'Opening the Book

of Faith,' which stimulated some good discussion," said Pastor Carol Olson. "It seems to be our men who are the most hesitant because the women have been studying and the men sometimes feel inadequate. I've been writing an abbreviated introduction to the different ways to read the Bible in the monthly newsletter. The biggest discussion has been about whether having pew Bibles would help or encouraging people to carry a Bible to church."

Shalom Lutheran Church in Alexandria just completed the Augsburg Fortress study, "Rediscovering the Book of Faith," which encourages members to take a fresh look at scripture. "Although this is a three-session study," said Pastor Grant Aaseng, "we added an additional session up front to discuss 'why people don't know (or read) the Bible' and 'what could we do to change this?' I think it's important to make it clear why this Book of Faith initiative is needed in the first place. The three sessions in the course only skim the surface of what the Bible contains, but our hope is that it whets a few appetites."

Hitting the road to learn about Book of Faith initiatives

The Book of Faith, an initiative of the ELCA, invites the whole church to become more fluent in the first language of faith, the language of Scripture, in order that we might live into our calling as a people renewed, enlivened, and empowered by the Word. As a book of faith, the Bible is the written Word of God that creates and nurtures faith through the work of the Holy Spirit and points us to Christ, the incarnate Word and center of our faith. The Bible invites us into a relationship with God, making demands on our lives and promising us life in Christ. The Bible tells the stories of people living their faith over the centuries and, through its demands and promises, forms us as a people of faith.

The Book of Faith initiative encourages Lutherans to open the Bible and discover anew the many ways the Bible is the source of our faith. It encourages us to make a commitment as individuals, congregations, and institutions to talk together, to join in Bible-centered conversations. It helps us increase Bible literacy and fluency in the church. It deepens our understanding of the Lutheran insights that ground our faith and shape our approach to the Bible. It renews and enlivens the whole church through a deeper engagement with the Bible.

Pastor Kate Bruns, Bethlehem Lutheran, Fergus Falls, was granted the opportunity to take a sabbatical to learn more about the Book of Faith and how other congregations were using the initiative. Spending a month visiting congregations in Arizona, Kate discovered many creative and spiritually uplifting ways that congregations are using the Book of Faith.

"I truly found out how important context is," Kate said. "Who are the people? What are they seeking? What are the pieces

that help keep (this initiative) together and growing? I found that people are excited and eager to get involved in this. They are hungry for Bible studies that have a Lutheran voice. Lifting up and encouraging lay leaders is an important piece."



A member at Spirit of Joy, Cottonwood, Ariz., made this comment about the Book of Faith: "Our Bible class has come a long way since we started this series. It wasn't easy at first to get the idea across that a Biblical text could or should be studied in various ways. We are now studying John 8:31-36, and for the next two weeks each class member will read aloud their prepared one-minute devotion on the text. As the leader, I am excited already in anticipation of what will be shared. We are all growing!"

Of course, Arizona is a long way from Northwestern Minnesota, geographically and culturally. Although there are fewer ELCA congregations in the state compared with Minnesota, they are often very large in membership. Kate visited a congregation with multiple buildings that serve various functions, including adult education. "I went to a women's Bible study group that met on Thursday morning," she said. "I was amazed to see 150 of all ages in attendance."

Along with Assistant to the Bishop Erin Anderson, Kate will take what she's learned about the Book of Faith throughout our synod. It's just the beginning.

Project F-M moves ahead to spread young adult ministry

The Project F-M moves ahead with young adult ministry in Fargo-Moorhead. The Project is a collaboration of several area congregations, both area synods and the campus ministries working together to bring about a unique new mission for and by the many young adults who have not found a home in our established churches. Its core team has been setting the scene this spring for a large-scale engagement with young adults this summer and fall: Several new congregations have committed to partnership in various ways.

A quarter-time position was created to facilitate the logistics and communications of the collaboration, filled by Paul Miller, Interim Pastor at Glyndon Lutheran

Church, Glyndon, Minn. The new website went online at www.theprojectfm.org, with many avenues built in for user-generated content. And the fundraising continues to progress, so that soon the core team will be able to hire a full-time community organizer to facilitate the next stage of the process: an intense period of listening and relationship-building among the young adults of Fargo-Moorhead.

There are many ways to find out more about The Project and to get involved: visit the website, email the coordinator at info@theprojectfm.org, and attend the growth group at the Synod Assembly.

Synod Roster Updates

Prayers and sympathy to

Pr. Elmer Anhalt (retired) and family in the death of his wife Lillian. Her funeral was held February 21 at Bethesda Lutheran, Alexandria where Pr. Anhalt resides.

Pr. Robert and Bev Possehl and family in the death of Robert's mother Lucia on February 22 at the age of 94. Her funeral was held at Berea Lutheran, Richfield, on February 26. Pr. Possehl is retired and resides in Audubon.

Pr. Terri Cuppett in the death of her father James on February 24. His funeral was held February 28 at Redeemer Lutheran, Thief River Falls. Pr. Cuppett serves Calvary and St. Pauli Lutheran Churches, St. Hilaire.

Karen Erickson and family on the death of Pr. Harold Erickson of Alexandria on April 2. Pr. Erickson's most recent call was as associate pastor to Calvary Lutheran, Alexandria.

Installations

Pr. Karol Hendricks-McCracken, New Salem Lutheran, Turtle River March 1
Pr. Christine Iverson, Halstad and Augustana Lutheran Churches, Halstad March 22

Vicki Marthaler, associate in ministry, April 30, chaplain Emmanuel Nursing Home & Community, Detroit Lakes

Resignations

Pr. Steven Trandem, senior pastor, Calvary Lutheran, Bemidji effective January 25

Pr. Kenneth Bowman, pastor, First Evangelical Lutheran, Parkers Prairie effective February 28

Pr. Nancy Monke, associate pastor, Our Savior's Lutheran, Moorhead effective March 21

Pr. Paul Hadland, pastor, Augustana Lutheran, Fergus Falls effective March 31

Pr. Marsha Smith, associate pastor, Trinity Lutheran, Crookston, effective April 12

Pr. D. Rolf Aanestad, pastor, Bethlehem Lutheran, Ulen, effective June 30

Transfers

Beth Anderson, diaconal minister, to Western North Dakota Synod

Pr. Paul Hadland to Northeastern Minnesota Synod

Pr. James Hulberg to Eastern North Dakota Synod

Pr. Marsha Smith to Western Iowa Synod

Pr. John Golv from Saint Paul Area Synod

Pr. Christine Iverson from Central States Synod

Retirement

Pr. George Dahl effective October 11, 2008

Congregations in Call Process

Ada, Grace, senior and associate pastors resigned, ready for candidates, interim Pr. Cheryl Berg and part-time visitation contract Pr. Don Walker

Alexandria, Bethesda, interim Pr. Don Reisig

Audubon, St. Peter's & Detroit Lakes, Augustana, ready for candidates, interim Pr. Jill Steichen

Badger, Faith & Our Redeemer's, pastor resigned

Barnesville, Our Savior's, new associate pastor position, in self study

Barrett, Peace, call out, part-time interim contract Prs. Cordell & Mary Carol Strug

Battle Lake, First, ready for candidates, interim Pr. John Martinson

Bemidji, Aardahl & Guthrie, Malvik, interim Pr. Linda Tenneson

Bemidji, Calvary, senior pastor resigned

Cimax, Climax, Grue, Sand Hill, in self study, interim Synodically Authorized Minister Joy Grainger

Crookston, Trinity, senior and associate pastors resigned, interim Pr. Paul Svingen

Fergus Falls, Augustana, pastor resigned

Glyndon, Glyndon, in self study, interim Pr. Paul Miller

Greenbush, Bethel, pastor resigned, interim Pastor Nancy Jewell

Halstad, Halstad & Augustana, call accepted

Hawley, Hawley, new associate pastor position, in self-study

Hitterdal, Salem, ready for candidates, interim Pr. Sandra Hollands

Kelliher, Our Savior & Waskish, Bethlehem (part-time), pastor resigned

Lake Bronson, Zion & Kennedy, Maria, interim Synodically Authorized Minister Kathy Levenhagen

Mahnomen, First, interim Pr. John Lee

Newfolden, Bethlehem & Holt, Nazareth, ready for candidates, interim Pr. John Golv

Moorhead, Our Savior's, associate pastor resigned, ready for candidates

Osage, Immanuel, ready for candidates, interim Pr. Phil Johnson

Park Rapids, Calvary, receiving nominees, interim Prs. Kenneth Nyhusmoen & Matthew Williams

Parkers Prairie, First Evangelical, pastor resigned

Pelican Rapids, Grove Lake, call accepted

Roseau/Ross, Concordia & Pin creek, pastor resigned

Shevlin, Clearwater & Solway, Solway, interim Pr. Melody Kirkpatrick

Thief River Falls, Redeemer & Black River, associate pastor, in self-study

Ulen, Bethlehem, pastor resigned

Warren, First & Immanuel, interim Pr. Mark Rittmann

Reflections on Region 3 gathering

By Tara L. Ulrich

As I hopped in my car to head home after the Region 3 Word and Service Gathering at Luther Crest Bible Camp, I couldn't help but chuckle when the song playing in my car was Matthew West's song, "Something to Say."

You got something to say, If you're livin', if you're breathin', You got something to say, And you know if your heart is beatin', You got something to say, And no one can say it like you do, God is love and love speaks through, You got it, you got it, You got something to say.



Back row (L to R): Nick Cordray, Krista Lind, Kris Perry, Suzanne Hansen, Sandy Hammerlind, Jodi Hanson and Laurie Beckman-Yetzer
Middle row (L to R): Tammy Devine, Susan Marone, Myrna Hanson, Signe Gray, Diane Kaufman, Lauren Wendt, Kirsten Kessel, and Deb Olson
Front Row (L to R): Brenda Bauer, Janet Schauer, Tara Ulrich, Deb Robinson, Rachel Johnson, Pat Eidsness, and Beth Anderson,

All of a sudden the song had taken on a new meaning for me. Now I wasn't laughing because it was funny but rather I was laughing at the irony of the situation. Here I was leaving a gathering of leaders who have often felt like they had something to say yet they too often than not felt like they were not being heard. However, the beauty of this gathering is that it had allowed each of us to be heard as we continued the conversations that were begun in 2007 in Florida.

The three rosters of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Associates in Ministry, Diaconal Ministers and Deaconesses, had gathered in a room to listen to each other. We listened to each other's fears. We listened to each other's concerns. In small groups, we simply listened as each member took their turn to speak and tell their story. And as we listened to each other's stories, it seemed to me that each of us

finally felt like they were being heard as we worked to articulate a new language in which each of us might feel included and heard yet still keep true to our own callings.

As those conversations took place, it was simply amazing to me as I watched and listened. We easily could be open and honest with each other without hesitation. Those conversations were absolutely astounding. But more than that, I truly believe our conversations together were a gift and a blessing to each of the 25 individuals gathered together for a day and a half. But our hope is that this conversation will continue beyond each of us to also become a blessing to bishops, synods, congregations and others as they become more educated about these rosters and listen to our voices as they become a part of the conversations.

And so, with the conversation continuing beyond each of us, I leave you with a poem that I wrote following our gathering. I truly feel these words capture how many of us felt as we gathered in prayer, community, and conversation together. May these words also help you engage in the conversation.

Voices

By Tara L. Ulrich

Voices gathered in a room
Sharing common concerns
Wanting to be heard

Voices gathered in a room
Listening to the stories
Of those around them
Hearing each yearn for new language

Voices gathered in a room
Articulating their thoughts
Hoping to no longer be ignored
But simply, to be claimed for their gifts;
Proclaiming Christ's mission to the world

Voices gathered in a room
Blessed to hear each story,
Blessed to hear each concern,
Blessed to know they are not on this journey alone

Now
Voices once gathered in a room,
Live out their ministries of Word and Service,
Trusting in the promise and hope
That the conversation will continue
Beyond each of them.

Connecting people in your congregation

- Do others' work for them
- Try to provide the perfect environment
- Please others at the expense of their own well-being



Another example of unhealthy helpfulness is when leaders of a congregation adapt to the weakest or most disgruntled members of the

church. When such leaders try to appease or satisfy the chronically anxious or complaining, the whole congregation usually suffers. Writes Steinke: "Healthier functioning on the part of leaders involves keeping their focus on a goal, a direction, not the noise of the needy."

So what should be our goal in helping others? The founder of the modern servant leadership movement, Robert Greenleaf,

has provided this helpful test: "Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?"

Bishop Larry Wohlrabe

For reflection and discussion

1. How well does your congregation play? Touch? Mirror? Nurture?
2. What connects people in your congregation?
3. How can you tell if your desire to help someone is motivated more by compassion than by your own anxiety?
4. Recall a time when leaders (perhaps in an attempt to be "helpful") adapted to the weakest or most unhappy members of your congregation. How did this affect the whole congregation?

Free Adult Bible Study Webinars

by *Beth A. Lewis, Augsburg Fortress*

One of the most frequent requests that I hear from pastors, bishops, Christian education directors, adult small group leaders and others throughout the ELCA, the ELCIC and other denominations is for excellent, accessible adult Bible study resources.

I can't wait for you to learn about the array of forthcoming resources that we are publishing in the next few months in support of the Book of Faith Initiative!

To learn more about these resources, I encourage you to sign up for one of our free one-hour adult Bible study webinars. Here are a few things I think you might want to know:

Who Should Attend? Christian Ed directors, Bible study and small group leaders, and pastors will want to attend.

What Will be Covered on the Webinar? AF staff will introduce you to each new series (there are 4 of them!) and provide advice for how to choose the one that is right for your group. You will have an opportunity to look at sample content. And, depending on how much time we have in the session, we will try to review one lesson from one of the Bible studies.

How Long will the Webinar Last? Each webinar will be one hour in length.

When Will the Webinars Be Scheduled? We have six webinars at various day and evening times scheduled between April 16 and April 30.

How Do I Sign Up? Go to the AF webinar page and click on the date and time of your choice. It's easy to sign up and it's FREE!

All you need is a phone to listen and a computer connected to the Internet and one hour. It will be worth your time to learn more about these marvelous Book of Faith adult Bible study resources!

Blessings,
Beth

<http://twitter.com/bethalewis>

Beth A. Lewis, President & CEO
Augsburg Fortress