

April 2008

Healthy Congregations Focus on Strengths

"I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me."
Philippians 4:12-13

During 12 years of service on the staff of a neighboring synod I witnessed congregations that endured catastrophic losses. I think of the rural Grove City congregation whose building was destroyed in a fire in the early 1990s. Or I recall the two Comfrey congregations whose buildings were severely damaged by an "F-5" tornado a decade ago.

Either of these parishes could have tossed in the towel. But instead both rebounded from tragedy and wound up in a better place. The Grove City folks invested their insurance settlement in forming (along with two other small congregations) a new, merged congregation that continues to thrive. And in Comfrey, the two congregations joined forces, replacing their two aged, inaccessible buildings with one modern mission center.

This is the second in a series of articles on the marks of healthy congregations. Bishop Larry encourages congregation councils or other parish leadership groups to use these articles for their opening devotions.

In both instances, tragic loss led to congregations being renewed in God's mission. Why? Because these congregations focused on their strengths. They kept their eyes peeled, not on what they had lost, but on what they still had. They acted in the confidence that, with God's help, their assets always outweighed their liabilities.

Peter Steinke, a Lutheran pastor and counselor, puts it this way:

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Join us at the **2008 Synod Assembly** on Friday and Saturday, May 16 – 17, 2008 in the Memorial Auditorium of Concordia College, Moorhead.

Theme:
Extreme Makeover: Renewing Church Edition

Registration begins at 7 a.m. on Friday, May 16 with opening worship beginning at 9 a.m.

Pre-registration deadline is April 15. Watch for assembly materials the last week in April.

Learn more about our assembly speakers on page 3

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The Bishop's Letter

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Northwestern Minnesota Synod
Concordia College Grant Center
Moorhead, MN 56562
(218) 299-3019 800-452-3692
www.nwmnsynod.org
Comments? Suggestions?
Contact Synod Communications
Director Michael Stein, stein@cord.edu

Synod office move: A short saga of a long process

By Michael Stein

Who enjoys moving? Don't everyone raise your hand at once. Okay, we hate the very thought of breaking camp, taking down the tents and moving—even if it's only across the street, which is a task the synod office recently undertook.

Our headquarters for many years, the Concordia College Outreach Center, will be remodeled into a new enrollment center. Our new office will be located in the college's Riverside Center a few blocks off campus, but that space won't be ready until late summer. Until that happens we're entrenched in temporary digs at Concordia's Grant Center.



Reception area of our temporary office.

Like my teenage children who don't want to get up at 7 a.m. but know they must, I accepted the fact that I must pore through mountains of accumulated material, bent paper clips, obsolete floppy disks, scribbled notes to pick up milk, knickknacks, flummery and whatnots. Those of us with packrat syndrome, found ourselves repeatedly muttering, "So, what was I saving THIS for?" I quickly formed a close personal relationship with the dumpster.

With patience, perseverance and an optimum sense of humor and purpose, we set up shop the first week of March. And those we serve patiently understood our plight during downtimes in phone and email service. To those innumerable folks who helped us through it all, we thank you.

And now that we have practiced this drill, the move to our permanent offices should be a piece of cake!

Bishop's message, continued from page 1

"God has given us everything we need to be about God's mission."

"When a congregation focuses on strength, it will look to the future and increase the potential for change or renewal. Focusing on strengths, a congregation will

- Look at options
- Take stock of resources
- Seek out support
- Ask a variety of questions
- Affirm the ability to reach goals
- Make clear, thoughtful decisions."

We've all seen individuals and groups that fail to follow this path. Congregations can become obsessed by what they don't have, how much they have lost. They can start to see themselves as weak, ineffective, unlikely to flourish—and soon, their assessment becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Like Winnie the Pooh's glum friend, Eeyore, their favorite song is: "Always look on the *dark* side of life."

The Apostle Paul, however, knew the deeper truth of the matter when he wrote to the Philippian church about how he could "do all things in [Christ] who strengthens me." It's as if Paul were reminding us that we and God always are a majority.

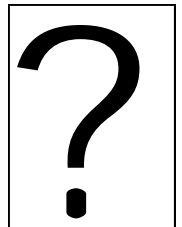
As congregations focus on their strengths rather than their weaknesses, several wondrous things start to happen:

- They see themselves as flexible, not brittle—able to **learn** something from each new situation
- They are able to **reorient and reorganize** themselves after experiencing a significant loss
- They live in God's grace—**exhibiting graciousness** in their dealings with one another and with those outside their church.

As in every aspect of congregational life, leadership is significant. Leaders—pastors, staff, officers, council members—set a mood and tone that says, "God has given us everything we need to be about God's mission." Their confidence is catching. As Dr. Steinke likes to say, "Morale always flows down."

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Think back over the history of your congregation. When did a time of grief or loss lead to renewal in God's mission?
2. What strengths or assets do you see in your congregation? How are you building on these strengths? What assets could be utilized even better?
3. Recall a leader you have known whose confidence was catching. What effect did this leader have on the congregation or organization he/she served?



Meet our 2008 Assembly speakers

Rev. Dr. Kathryn Love serves on staff at the Churchwide office in Chicago as the assistant director for Evangelism and director for Prayer and Renewal. Love began her career in the real estate business, and while working as a real estate broker completed her bachelor of science degree at Chicago State University. Some years later, she graduated from Chicago Theological Seminary with a master of divinity, then attended Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago to complete the requirements to become a Lutheran pastor.



While serving as associate pastor in Ohio and later senior pastor in Mobile, Ala., she received a Doctor of Ministry degree from United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. In 2002 she began as assistant director for Evangelism at Churchwide, and was recently promoted to the additional position of director for Prayer and Renewal.

Love is an energetic speaker who is unapologetically influenced by members willing to “Make Christ Known for the Healing of the World.”

Rev. Dr. Dave Daubert is the former director for Renewal of Congregations of the ELCA. Rev. Daubert is currently affiliated with A.R.E. – A Renewal Enterprise. Daubert attended Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, Ohio, where he received a Master of Divinity and a Master of Sacred Theology.



His work in the church has included serving in parish ministry in Columbus, serving as the assistant to the bishop for Urban and Multicultural Ministries in Omaha, Neb., and then as the director for Renewal of Congregations of the ELCA. Along the way he earned a Doctor of Ministry in Preaching from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, a Doctor of Philosophy in Theological Studies from the Graduate Theological Foundation in South Bend, Ind., and a Certificate of Excellence in Non-Profit Organizational Management from Michigan State University.

Daubert has published several articles, written or contributed to a few books, including “Living Lutheran: Renewing Your Congregation.” He is a frequent keynote speaker and teacher for conferences and in seminaries across the United States, Canada and the Caribbean.

The Northwestern Minnesota Bishop's Letter

Roster updates

Prayers and sympathy to

Pr. Wade and Holly Dutton and family in the death of his mother, Barbara, on February 16. Pastor Dutton serves First Lutheran Church, Detroit Lakes.

Pr. Greg and Jennifer Anderson and family in the death of his father, Ted, on March 6. Pastor Anderson serves Richwood, Bakke and Lund Lutheran Churches, rural Detroit Lakes.

The family of Jean Fingalson, retired associate in ministry, who died on March 14.

Congratulations to:

Pr. Nathan & Jennifer Baker-Trinity on the birth of their son, Luke.

Resignations

- Pr. Sandra Hollands, pastor, Tonseth Lutheran Church, Pelican Rapids, effective March 1, 2008.
- Pr. Jennifer Herrmann, pastor, First & Immanuel Lutheran Churches, Warren, effective March 30, 2008.

Transfers

- Pr. Laurie Natwick from Western North Dakota Synod
- Pr. Lauren Youngdale from Central States Synod
- Pr. Luther Peterson to Southeastern Minnesota Synod
- Kristin Johnson, associate in ministry, to Southeastern Iowa Synod

Congregations in Study/Interims/Seeking Pastors:

Akeley, **First** (part-time) pastor resigned, interviewing

Alexandria, **Calvary**, call accepted

Alexandria, **First**, 2nd associate pastor, in self-study

Audubon, **First**, interviewing, interim, Pr. Rolf Aanestad

Barrett, **Peace**, pastor resigned; part-time interim contract Prs. Cordell & Mary Carol Strug

Blackduck, **Zion**, pastor resigned, interim Pr. Melody Kirkpatrick

Meet our new assistants to the bishop

By Michael Stein, Synod Communications Director

In March our three new assistants to Bishop Larry Wohlrabe officially began their duties—all in the midst of the chaos of moving the synod offices to temporary quarters! Below and continuing on pages 5-6, we introduce Pr. Laurie Natwick, Pr. Steve Peterson and Erin Anderson.

Pr. Laurie Natwick

From parish worker to traveling Christian clown troupe to ordination, Pastor Laurie Natwick brings a broad range of skills and experience to her new synod position, including what she refers to as a “sense of radical hospitality.”



Growing up in a home where faith was central and church an important place, Laurie’s early faith mentors included her family, a “wonderful” Sunday school teacher, her confirmation pastor and her Godparents. As a student at the University of North Dakota, campus ministry became an important part of her spiritual journey. “I also did banquet waitressing,” Laurie said. “And it was during this time I learned that ministry went beyond the four walls of the church and where I started to make sense of my vocation.”

Beginning her ministerial career as a parish worker at Ascension Lutheran Church, Emerado, N.D., Laurie called on families at the Grand Forks Air Force Base, inviting them to worship. She then served for 10 years as campus minister at Christus Lutheran Campus Ministry at UND as well as serving the synod, churchwide and university in various capacities.

While at UND, Laurie started a traveling clown troupe, “Fools for Christ,” which focused on leading creative worship. She also worked with Deacons, a group of students who study Lutheran theology, Bible and worship leadership to prepare them for various ministries.

“(UND) is a delightful place for campus ministry,” Laurie said. “It was a wonderful experience where I was influenced by everyone from the president to students.”

Laurie received a Bachelor of Arts degree from UND and began her seminary studies while continuing to serve Christus Rex. When she received her Master of Divinity degree from Luther Seminary her first call as an ordained pastor was at Sharon Lutheran, Grand Forks, where she served for seven years. Laurie was then called to be assistant to the bishop in the Western North Dakota Synod, where she worked with congregational life, youth and communications.

Roster updates

Clearbrook, **Good Shepherd and Our Savior’s**, pastor resigned, interim Synodically Authorize Minister Michael Sculley

East Grand Forks, **Family of God**, call out, interim Synodically Authorized Minister Jo Gast

Erhard, **Tonseth**, pastor resigned

Fergus Falls, **Zion & Hedemarken** (part-time), associate pastor, interviewing

Gatzke, **Our Savior’s & United**, call out, interim Synodically Authorized Minister Katie Keller Koch,

Halstad, **Halstad & Augustana**, interviewing, interim Pr. Marsha Burt

Hines, **First**, pastor resigned

Kelliher/Waskish, **Bethlehem & Our Savior** (part-time), pastor resigned; interim Associate in Minister/Synodically Authorized Minister Jill Torgerson

Lake Bronson, **Zion & Kennedy, Maria**, interim resigned

Lake Park, **Cormorant**, in self-study, interim Pr. Gary VanHunnik

Lancaster, **Sion**, call out, interim Pr. Mark Rittmann

Lowry, **St. Paul’s**, interim, Pr. Sherry Billberg

McIntosh, **Our Savior & Vernes**, call out, interim contract Pr. Aage Carlsen

Miltona, **Faith**, pastor resigned, interviewing, interim Pr. Donald Reisig,

Moorhead, **Bethesda**, pastor resigned, interim Pr. Cheryl Berg

Moorhead, **Concordia College**, campus pastor, interviewing

Moorhead, **Our Savior’s**, senior pastor resigned, interviewing, interim Pr. Glenn Leaf

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Meet our new assistants...

Pr. Steve Peterson

The rich and diverse gifts Pastor Steve Peterson brings to his new position as assistant to the bishop were born and nurtured as he grew up in a single parent family. "My father died when I was three," he said. "And what kept my mother going was the belief that Christ was the center of our family life and everything else flows from that belief."



Steve's grandfather, a Lutheran pastor, was another major influence. "He worked in rural congregations," Steve said. "There was an aura of wisdom and caring about him." Despite those early influences, Steve said he went through a period of typical teenage searching. "I never left the faith, but just started questioning things. I had a life-changing experience at a church camp and became aware with great clarity what a Christ-centered community can be. This sharing in common service was an awakening moment where I saw what was possible through Christ."

A graduate of Augustana College and Wartburg Seminary, Steve began his ordained ministry as pastor of two open country congregations in eastern South Dakota. After a short stint with Holden Village, he was named executive director of Good Earth Village Bible Camp in southeast Minnesota as well as pastor of a small congregation near the camp. Steve next served in interim ministry in a large rural parish near Albert Lea, Minn. He then served for six years as director of Outlaw Ranch and Atlantic Mountain Ranch Bible Camps in the Black Hills of South Dakota.

Steve was director of the North Star Mission Cluster and pastor of New Salem Lutheran when he accepted the synod position. Through his experience, Steve brings a wide range of leadership skills, which include mission development, congregational leadership, mission and renewal, and team leadership.

"I bring a varied background in a number of different settings," Steve said. "I feel I have a profound sense of God's grace in my life. I want to share that with others as they are called to discipleship and embraced by God's love. Grace is an incredible gift that includes a call to joyful servant living. In my experience this all opens up through listening to God in prayer, in the word and in the lives of people. It involves paying attention to how God is present and living into that graceful presence."

Other recent influences include a certificate program in spiritual formation for congregational leadership, involvement with Peoples Church, Bemidji, Natural Church Development, and experience with the church in China and Scotland. "I value diversity," Steve said. "One of the most exciting aspects of being the church is when a diverse group comes together for mission. One simple ex-

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Continuing education opportunities with CHARIS

June 16-19, 2008

"Leading from Within: The Spirituality of Leadership" with Roy Oswald

Starts June 16 at 10 a.m. and ends June 19, noon, at the Park Region Lounge in Park Region Hall, Concordia College. Cost: \$439; fee includes breaks only. Early Bird Discount (if paid in full by May 30) \$40 off. On-campus room and/or board available on request. CEUs: 2 (= 20 contact hours) - \$5 admin fee.

June 24-25, 2008

"Leading Change and Living to Tell About It" with Anthony B. Robinson

The focus of this workshop is to explore such transformational leadership—and survive to tell about it.

Starts June 24 from 10 a.m. to noon and 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.; June 25, 9 a.m. to noon and 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. at Jones Conference Room in the Student Center at Concordia College. Cost: \$299; fee includes breaks only. Early Bird Discount (if paid in full by June 6) \$30 off. On-campus room and/or board available on request. CEUs: 1.1 (= 11 contact hours) - \$5 admin fee

July 21, 2008

Skill Enhancement Workshop for Church Secretaries and Office Staff

There will be three 'breakout' sessions, with workshops on computer security, church security, church newsletters and bulletins, website (an overview), archives, office communication, and a motivational workshop. The fee for the day is \$85, which includes lunch and breaks.

For more information on these seminar/workshops, contact Jacki Knapp-Raaen, Coordinator, CHARIS Ecumenical Center, Concordia College, 218.299.3566 or knappraa@cord.edu.

Meet our new assistants...

Erin Anderson

With theological convictions shaped in the promise we have a loving God, full of grace, Erin Anderson brings a broad and diverse range of gifts and experience to his new call in the synod.



Originally from Hawley, Minn., Erin grew up in a home where faith was at the core. “My faith was drawn from my parents as long as I can remember,” he said. “I was always active in youth ministry. One of our youth directors inspired me greatly and became a faith mentor for me.”

Erin’s career path didn’t lead directly to a church ministry. “I wanted to be a physical therapist, so I went to St. Scholastica and found that it really wasn’t my calling, and I pursued a non-denominational degree in youth and family ministry. His first call was to Thanksgiving Lutheran in Bellevue, Neb., where he directed youth and family ministry. During this time, Erin discovered a side path, which has greatly enhanced his calling.

“I had an old guitar with me,” Erin said. “And there was a youth group in Omaha that needed a musical aspect. Out of necessity I learned to play. There were a couple other guys that played well, and I had written a couple songs. So we started playing together and ‘Eyewitness’ was born.” The group has since played at many ELCA gatherings on a local and national level.

After two years in Nebraska, Erin accepted the youth and family ministry directorship at Calvary in Perham, where he served for 12 years before taking the synod call. He has also served as synod representative for national youth gatherings, as regional representative to the ELCA Youth Ministry Network Board and as adult representative on our synod’s LYO Board.

Among his skills, Erin brings an ability to network and connect with people of all ages. He added, “I’m a positive person with a true love for the Gospel. I’m someone who believes that I’ve been saved by grace—I’ve seen it happen. The Gospel works, and I try to be an agent for the Gospel. We have a loving God, full of grace, who calls us to respond to the gift of salvation by sharing this love with others through worship, word and sacrament, service and the way we live out our lives and vocations in relationship to one another.”

Erin and his wife Teresa, an elementary teacher in Perham, have three children: Gunnar, a kindergartner; Soren, a pre-schooler; and Kaia, who joined the family last October.

Lutheran Outdoor Ministry Camps launch new summer choral camps

A new pilot junior high choral camp program will be offered at three Lutheran camps this summer:

- Green Lake Lutheran Ministries in Spicer, Minn., July 27-August 2
- Luther Crest Bible Camp in Alexandria, Minn., August 3-8
- Luther Park Bible Camp in Danbury, Wis., August 12-17

The music camps are designed for area youth in grades 6-8 who are interested in singing and learning more about choral music. Lutheran Music Program (LMP) will provide a conductor and a team of choral faculty to deliver musical instruction for the camp. This summer’s conductor is Zebulon M. “Zeb” Highben who serves as Choirmaster and Associate Musician at Westwood Lutheran Church (St. Louis Park, Minnesota).

Once the 2008 pilot is complete, it is LMP’s hope that the partnership will expand to include more Outdoor Ministry camps and other music ministries. For more information on this exciting new program, contact Sue Olstad at solstad@lutheransummermusic.org or 612.230.3291.

Roster updates...

New York Mills, **St. Peter’s Evangelical**, interviewing, interim Pr. Philip Johnson

Park Rapids, **Calvary**, senior and associate pastors resigned, interims Pr. Kathryn Rothman and Pr. Kenneth Nyhusmoen

Parkers Prairie, **Esther** (part-time), in self-study, interim Pr. Donald Reisig

Pelican Rapids, **Grove Lake**, pastor retired, interim Pr. Darrel Saathoff

Roseau, **Bethel, First Evangelical** (part-time), pastor resigned, contract services Pr. Kristin Osercamp

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Assistant to the Bishop Laurie Natwick

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Moving on to serve as hospitality pastor at Good Shepherd in Bismarck, Laurie learned first-hand that hospitality is, as she puts it, “much more than making sure the coffee pot is on. Radical hospitality is having our hearts stretched and our minds opened in new ways; it is that strong sense of ministry of all God’s people.

You’re never ‘just’ a lay person. All are called to ministry; and in that all are called to be about radical hospitality that welcomes in the most outside outsider. It then becomes a matter of how we are going to live that out. We are called to celebrate it. Jesus is the greatest role model for hospitality; look at who it is that Jesus invites to the table...those feeling they had no place.”

In ministering to the disengaged, Laurie encourages us to ask, “What are your gifts?” She added, “God has gifted us all. Every day we keep living those gifts and as we live out our gifts, our hearts become stretched, our minds become open, and our lives become whole.

Although single, Laurie said family is core to who she is. Surrounded by family, she said, “Family is what you make it.” Laurie enjoys reading, engaging in conversation over coffee, traveling, cooking and entertaining.

Assistant to the Bishop Steve Peterson

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ample of that is when women’s groups from rural congregations in the North Star Mission Cluster came and cooked for our day camps at their partner congregation, Peoples Church. Through that connection they got to know kids and parents from another church whose life experience and experience of church was different from theirs in a number of important ways, yet they discovered a bond in common humanity and faith and mission. I think Christ especially smiles at times like that and I think people involved in something like that have a sense that Christ is present in that kind of experience.

Another core belief that Steve brings to the synod is “the idea that you can do more by working together. No matter where we are, we can bring out the value of Christ’s reign. Christ’s mission has a church and it is all over the place; rural, urban, all kinds of colors and shapes and sizes. This church is sometimes within the walls of a church building but more often it is sharing of its diverse gifts for being Christ’s presence in the world. To do this the church needs all kinds of people working together and supporting one another.”

Steve’s wife Enid is an elementary school teacher who in recent years has worked as a preschool teacher. Their children, Sarah and Luke, are in college. He enjoys reading, hiking, canoeing, biking, gardening, sports, music, hunting and fishing and blueberry pie. “Enid and I love to travel, ride bike, and have coffee shop conversations—even though she doesn’t like coffee.”

“The Benefits of 50 Years of Jewish-Christian Dialogue”

On May 15 a forum for pastors and parish educators will be held in the Fellowship Hall at Mt. Olivet Lutheran Church, 5025 Knox Avenue South in Minneapolis. It is co-sponsored by the ELCA Region 3 Task Force on Lutheran-Jewish Relations. Under the title of “The Benefits of 50 Years of Jewish-Christian Dialogue,” the forum will focus on a newly released book from Fortress Press, *Covenantal Conversations: Christians in Dialogue with Jews and Judaism*, edited by Darrell Jodock.

Coffee and registration will begin at 8:30 a.m. The forum will run from 9 a.m. to 12 noon, and there will be an opportunity to have lunch with the presenters from 12 to 1. Pre-registration is required by May 5. The registration fee is \$20.00. A copy of the book will be available for purchase at a discounted price of \$16.50 plus tax. Lunch will be available without cost for those who register in advance. Registration is being handled by Marilyn Beyer, the Office of Church Relations, Gustavus Adolphus College, 800 West College Avenue, St. Peter, MN 56082. Her phone number is 507-933-7001.

Roster updates...

Roseau, **First of Salol** (part-time), Bonnie Nordvall, Synodically Authorized Minister

Turtle River, **New Salem**, pastor resigned, interim Pr. William Beyer

Ulen, **Bethlehem**, interviewing, interim Pr. John Martinson

Wadena, **Immanuel**, interviewing, associate pastor; part-time interim Pr. Steven Dahl

Warren, **First & Immanuel**, pastor resigned

2008 mission trip to Camp Victor

Spring Stewardship Events

Are you interested in turning stewardship into more than “paying the bills”? Would you like stewardship ministry in your congregation to be a way for people to grow as disciples? Do you think stewardship should be more than just a three-week exercise in the fall? Are you curious as to what new stewardship resources are available?

Assistant to the Bishop, Pr. Steve Peterson, along with Pr. Charles Lane, ELCA Stewardship Key Leader Director and author of “Ask, Thank, Tell: Improving Stewardship Ministry in Your Congregation,” will be leading workshops that can help. They will be held

- Monday, April 14, 7-8:30 p.m. at Redeemer Lutheran, Thief River Falls
- Tuesday, April 15, 7-8:30 p.m. Trinity Lutheran, Detroit Lakes

There is no charge for this event.

For more information, contact Steve at the synod office, 218-299-3019 or speterso@cord.edu.

Fond farewells

About 100 people from around the synod turned out for a farewell event for our outgoing assistants to the bishop. Right: Pr. Jill Steichen visits with a well wisher.



Pr. John Lee accepts a gift created and presented by Pr. Phil Holtan.

Pastors Sherry Billberg and Karol Hendricks-McCracken.



Our group of volunteers who traveled to Camp Victor, Ocean Springs, Miss., to assist with the ongoing rehabilitation in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.



Tom Harper working to rehab a home damaged by Katrina.



Dorothy Hoover painting a home in Biloxi.

