

August 2008

Healthy congregations manage conflict

"So, how many conflicted congregations have we got in the synod right now?"

If I were asked this question, I'd probably respond: *"About 270 of them!"*

What? How can that be? Are things that bad?

Not at all! Rather, we have 270 congregations that are dealing all the time with various and sundry disagreements about things that matter. Garden variety conflicts aren't signs of ill health. Rather, they indicate that our congregations are alive, seeking to be faithful in God's mission. Members of the congregation are able to manage the conflicts that are part of the fabric of parish life.

This is the fifth 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.

If I'm asked how many conflicted congregations we have in the synod, what the questioner really wants to know is: How many churches aren't managing their conflict well? For how many congregations has conflict become a problem?

On any given day the Northwestern Minnesota Synod does have some congregations that have, for a time, lost the ability to manage conflict in their midst. Conflict is thwarting God's mission.

How can you tell if your congregation is no longer managing a conflict well? Here are some symptoms:

- People vehemently deny that any conflict exists
- Members stop listening carefully to one another
- Persons withdraw their presence, withhold their support, issue ultimatums.

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Two versions of "Connections" are included in this issue. To conserve paper, we've used one two-sided sheet for both versions.

Connections is also available on our website. Please share the information in this newsletter/bulletin insert with your congregation.

The Bishop's Letter

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**Annual Synod Retreat
at Fair Hills Resort
September
14-17
See article on page 2**

Theme set for 2008 Synod Retreat

“Preaching and ‘Doing Church’ at the Post-modern Turn,” is the theme for the synod's annual Theology for Ministry Retreat for pastors, lay ministers and their spouses.

The event will take place September 15-17 at Fair Hills Resort. Speakers will be Dr. Terri Elton and the Rev. Dr. Jeff Sorenson. Elton is director of the Center for Children, Youth and Family Ministry at Luther Seminary, St. Paul. Sorenson served on the staff of the South Dakota Synod and is currently doing interim ministry in South Dakota.

A mailing with more details is going out to all pastors and lay ministers of the synod.

Renewing church “sampler” events

The Northwestern Minnesota Synod will hold renewing church “sampler” events. Events are scheduled for Tuesday, August 19, at Bethlehem in Fergus Falls and Thursday, August 21, at St. Paul's in Crookston. Each event will run from 6-9 p.m. and include large group sessions and breakout sessions for the purpose of giving people the opportunity to sample some renewing church opportunities.

Synod staff members, including Bishop Wohlraabe and assistants to the bishop, and Keith Zeh from ELCA Division for Outreach will be among the group facilitators. Contact the synod office or check the website for more information.

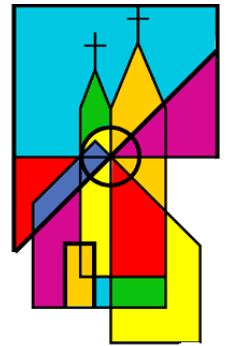
Churches planting churches conference

“Growing God's Way: Churches Planting Churches” second annual conference will be held October 23-24, Peace Lutheran Church, Sioux Falls, S.D. This event will help you learn more about the various approaches for churches planting churches from those “turning the soil.” It's an opportunity to do some dreaming out loud and ask “what if?” and “why not?” You'll hear inspiring speakers and find resources available for church planting. The conference is hosted by the South Dakota Synod and the ELCA's Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission. Watch for more information or contact Keith Zeh at keith.zeh@elca.org.

Bishop's message, continued

Meaningfulness, comprehensibility, manageability

- Blame gets focused on a scapegoat, often the pastor
- People think less reflectively, less imaginatively
- Folks start choosing up sides
- Secrets are kept, clandestine meetings are held, anonymous letters are written, communication breaks down
- People stop taking responsibility for themselves
- Quick fixes are sought
- Members gossip about one another or “triangulate”—bringing in a third party rather than going directly to the person who troubles them



Conflict run amok damages relationships within the Body of Christ, and that in itself is tragic enough. What's even worse is that unmanaged conflict derails the congregation's ability to move forward in God's mission. Rather than walking faithfully and purposefully behind their Lord toward God's gracious future, members of the church get sidetracked.

Fortunately, the vast majority of our congregations are not paralyzed by unmanaged conflict. Most churches have learned how to deal with conflict in the course of their common life. How do they do it?

Peter Steinke, in his *Creating Healthy Congregations* study guide, speaks of three characteristics shared by churches that possess a sense of coherence that allows them to manage conflict.

- **Meaningfulness.** Church members have a sense of purpose and are committed to it. They take up the challenges that come to them and shape their destiny under God.
- **Comprehensibility.** Folks have a framework for making sense of what is happening. Healthy interaction and clear communication are taken for granted. People see change as natural. Decisions are made on the basis of clarity, not necessarily certainty.
- **Manageability.** Church folk don't act like victims or complain about how unfairly they have been treated. They recognize the gifts and tools available to them, and they respond thoughtfully to the challenges that confront them.

Let me add two more characteristics of congregations that manage conflicts:

- **Forgiveness.** When we gather weekly to begin our worship, it is not by accident that we start by confessing our sin to one another and to God. We dare to speak these words only because we know God has an answer to offer us: *I declare unto*

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God's mission has a church

By Assistant to the Bishop Stephen Peterson

It has been a great joy these first few months as an assistant to the bishop in our synod to witness signs of life and new life, hope and faithfulness, grace and graciousness proclaimed and lived out among the congregations I have been privileged to have already made some connection with. I have witnessed congregations, in some cases even when struggling, having the capacity to remember, lift up, embrace and celebrate the reality that we have a gracious God, who is with us, showering us with abundant and free love; a God who privileges us with the invitation and opportunity to live into our own expression of being a part of God's mission to bless the world.



I recently had the privilege of attending the ELCA Global Mission Event in La Crosse Wis. It was wonderful to catch glimpses of the amazing breadth and scope and depth of our global participation together as the ELCA in God's mission of blessing the world. It was inspiring to hear stories of love and compassion, stories of witnessing for justice and commitment to God's peace, and stories of healing and hope. Truly, our new tag line as the ELCA, "God's work, our hands," expresses it well. This is who we are in our local congregations and across the globe; we are Lutheran Christians seeking to celebrate, express, and live out, in word and deed, God's mission.



A congregation I have had the privilege of connecting with, in a small way, is Grace Lutheran in Ada. This is a congregation that is taking our synod assembly theme, "Extreme Makeover, Renew-

ing Church," very seriously. They have put together a transformation team that is actively seeking to discern how their congregation might be called to live into God's mission for them more fully and deeply in changing times. They invited me and regional ELCA mission director Keith Zeh to listen and converse with them. We learned that a part of this process of discerning their part in living out God's mission has been to engage in a sermon and conversation series based on the book, "Living Lutheran – Renewing your Congregation," by Dave Daubert, one of the keynote speakers at our assembly. Here are some discussion questions from one of the Sundays in this series.

The Church – God Prefers Not to Walk Alone

Read Acts 1:6-8 and Acts 2:38-47. As you read these passages, what do you understand about the purpose of the church?

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The Northwestern Minnesota Bishop's Letter

Roster updates

Prayers and sympathy to:

Pr. Allyne Holz in the death of her mother, June Holz, who died July 9. Her funeral was held July 14 at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, New Hope, Minn. Pr. Holz serves on the Northwestern Minnesota Synod Council.

Ordination

Pr. Joshua Graber, July 27

Installation

Pr. Melodi Hagen, pastor, Sion Lutheran Church, Lancaster, August 17

Resignation

Pr. Randy Smith, senior pastor, Trinity Lutheran Church, Crookston, effective June 30.

Retirement

Pr. George Dahl, effective August 1.

Transfers

Pr. Tessa Leiseth from Minneapolis Area Synod
Pr. David (Josh) Nelson to Saint Paul Area Synod

Congregations in Study/Interims/Seeking Pastors:

Alexandria, **First**, call accepted

Audubon, **First**, call accepted

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

Battle Lake, **First**, in self study, interim Pr. John Martinson

Battle Lake, **Trefoldighed**, in self study

Blackduck, **Zion**, ready for nominees, interim Pr. Melody Kirkpatrick

Clearbrook, **Good Shepherd & Leonard, Our Savior's**, call out, interim Synodically Authorized Minister Michael Sculley

Climax, **Climax, Grue, Sand Hill**, in self study

Crookston, **Trinity**, senior pastor resigned, interim Pr. Paul Svingen

Erhard, **Tonseth**, pastor resigned

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Roster updates

Fergus Falls, **Hope**, part-time associate pastor resigned

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

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

Hines, **First**, pastor resigned

Hitterdal, **Salem**, in self study, Pr. Jim Hulberg, interim

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

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

Lake Park, **Cormorant**, interviewing, interim Pr. Gary VanHunnik

Lancaster, **Sion**, call accepted

Lowry, **St. Paul's**, call accepted

McIntosh, **Our Savior & Vernes**, call accepted

Miltona, **Faith**, call accepted

Moorhead, **Bethesda**, interviewing, interim Pr. Cheryl Berg

Moorhead, **Our Savior's**, call out for senior pastor, interim Pr. Glenn Leaf

New York Mills, **St. Peter's Evangelical**, call accepted

Osage, **Immanuel**, pastor retired, interim Pr. Phil Johnson

Park Rapids, **Calvary**, senior and associate pastors resigned, interim Pr. Kenneth Nyhusmoen

Parkers Prairie, **Esther** (part-time), call pending

Pelican Rapids, **Grove Lake**, pastor retired, ready for nominees, interim contract Pr. Darrel Saathoff

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Theme article

Impacting the unchurched

By Pastor Dale Olson, *Calvary Lutheran, Alexandria*

There is no one simple answer to reach those who do not attend church. However, many of these people who do not attend are very open to the ministry at church. I have found that outreach involves five areas:

- **Inviting.** For many growing churches, inviting friends to church is part of a culture. We intentionally have "Bring-a-Friend Weekend" to emphasize this important ministry. Also, the worship and facilities must be "visitor-friendly." For example, are there signs to restrooms, sanctuary, etc? At your worship, are there screens or bulletins that help people follow the worship? Do you have a set of greeters who are "rovers" to look for visitors?

- **Small Groups.** Our leaders are presently being trained in Christ-Care small groups. People younger than 50 years old are more attracted to small groups and dinner groups. Expanding small groups will grow people in discipleship.



- **Side-Door Ministry.** Often un-churched people first visit a church through another event at the church. For example, an AA meeting, concert or other community meetings acquaint the un-churched with your church. It is not an easy decision to begin coming to a church where everything seems foreign.

- **Communication.** People are visual today. They expect information as timely as they receive it from the media. However, they want communications to look good with pictures and fewer words. We have added color to our newsletter, which has attracted new interest. Also, we create a magazine-type of mailing to highlight ministries of the past six months and upcoming ministries. Our bulletin contains more information about ministries to encourage everyone to find a ministry.

- **Teams.** Moving from a traditional structure of committees to a transforming center of teams is a helpful process for today's church. I recommend the book, "Twelve Dynamic Shifts," by E. Stanley Ott, to guide your governing board and leadership to create a new infrastructure to welcome new people.

New people bring new vibrancy to the church. At the same time, we are fulfilling the Great Commission to "go and make disciples."

Finding and welcoming new members

Extending a welcome hand at Peace Lutheran, Ashby

Peace Lutheran Church of Ashby has been focusing on welcoming new people into its community over the past few years. The committee on Christian Growth encourages everyone in the congregation to extend invitations to worship with us and to attend programs and evening events. “They also ask that anyone knowing of new people get the names to a member of the committee who then takes a welcome basket to the new comer,” said Pastor Carol Olson. “The basket is filled with fresh bread or cookies, depending on the baker, information on the church, the latest newsletter, etc. Visits are brief and an invitation to worship is extended. I will call on these folks if they express an interest in the church, have questions, etc.”



This committee also sponsors several “Bring a Friend” Sundays each year, encouraging members to invite un-churched folks or lapsed members. Praise musicians lead the worship on those Sundays and a potluck brunch or dinner follows.

“We are also making an effort to be conscientious in noticing who is absent,” Pastor Carol added. “If a family is missing from worship for several weeks in a row, a card is sent to tell them they are missed, and I’m informed so I can call or inquire.”

Healing hands at Peoples Church, Bemidji

Peoples Church has received from God the reputation of helping poor people in need. “Whenever we meet someone in need of food, shelter, clothing, healing or a visit in jail, we believe that we are meeting the needs of the suffering Christ among us,” said Pastor Bob Kelly. “We treat our neighbors who are in a rough patch with respect and dignity as we would treat Jesus on the streets of our city. We always sit down with folks when they come to us for assistance.”



Those who seek help from Peoples Church aren’t swamped with income guidelines and paper work. Pastor Bob explained, “We find out where they are from, how many kids they have, how their car is running, how is school going for them and their kids, what folks in the community do we know in common, do they have criminal justice problems, how is their health, are they getting

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Healthy congregations facilitator training

Healthy Congregations is a series of six workshops, each five sessions in length. It was designed by Dr. Peter Steinke to help congregations move forward in their ministry. Healthy Congregations workshops are based on systems theory in their understanding of congregations. This perspective has helped hundreds of congregations understand the dynamics of working together. By participating in this facilitator training event, you will be able to purchase the materials and to lead the workshops in the congregation you serve.

The training event will be held at Luther Seminary on Thursday, November 6, from 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., and on Friday, November 7, from 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Enrollment is limited to 15 participants.

The cost of the training is \$350.00 and includes all materials, meals and fees.

Leaders for the training are Pastor Roger Schwarze and Pastor Bill Strom.

For more information and to register contact Carolyn O’Grady at the Minneapolis Area Synod office at 612-870-3610 or C.ogrady@mpls-synod.org.

Register now for Fall Cert Schools

-September 22 - October 10, 2008, Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa
 -November 3 - 21, 2008, Rainbow Trail Lutheran Camp, Colorado

This is a 15-day certification schools for youth workers that provide Biblical and theological foundations, as well as hundreds of practical ideas for connecting with children, youth, parents, and other caring adults. Continuing education opportunities are available to lay and ordained professionals and volunteers for doing youth and family ministry in congregations. For more information, or to register, please email cym@wartburgseminary.edu.

Welcoming, continued

“You are my friends”

what they need from the health care system, would they like to visit with one of our parish nurses, do they have chemical dependency problems, would they like to come to one of our recovery meetings, do they need safe and sober family activities, do they need information and assistance in getting a driver's license, social security card or birth certificate, can we help them with medical and job search transportation, are they satisfied with their spiritual life and community, would they like to be on our newsletter list, would they like to be picked up for midweek or Sabbath worship, may we pray with them before they leave?”

From Jesus' words, “you are my friends,” Pastor Bob responds, “That is exactly the way we want to relate to people who pay us the honor of expecting our Christian community to be open and compassionate to their needs. We look at everyone who comes through our doors as someone we would want to get to know and expect to receive a blessing from. We have met the majority of our members in

Roster updates

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

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

Shevlin, **Clearwater & Solway, Solway**, pastor resigned

Turtle River, **New Salem**, ready for nominees, interim Pr. William Beyer

Wadena, **Immanuel**, call accepted for associate pastor

Theme article

Love never gives up

By Pastor Jim Hulberg

Each congregation has “inactive members.” Are we sometimes ready to give up on them? Someone on such a list in one of my churches reminds me never to give up on anyone.

Richard had been baptized and confirmed in our church, but he had not seen the inside of the church for decades. In his later years, he'd had a number of serious illnesses and several surgeries and treatments. He was visited in the hospitals by people of the congregation, including me. I realized some kind of response had happened in Richard's life when he and his wife appeared at our door with two large boxes of freshly picked strawberries from their garden.



A few weeks passed, and Carl, an active member of our church, was about to go to Rochester for heart surgery. Knowing that Richard had been there for heart surgery led Carl to visit with him. In the course of the conversation, Richard said to Carl, “I believe in God. I know how God has helped me through all of my illnesses. I know my faith has come alive through all my struggles.” Then Richard turned to Carl and said, “Do *you* have faith in God?” Do you believe that God will go with you through all you will face in Rochester?” Carl replied, “Yes, I believe in God, and I trust Him to help me.” Richard replied, “Good, then I can rest easy about you going to Rochester!”

Carl told me this story with tears of joy in his eyes because of Richard's concern for Carl's spiritual welfare. Richard became a witness to God's love more than some active members might have done. And when Carl was in Rochester for his surgery, Richard came to church and went forward for Holy Communion for the first time in 40 years! Richard's wife, a Roman Catholic, sat in church beside him and later wrote to Carl in Rochester, “I never knew the Lutherans had such a beautiful communion service. I was so proud of my husband when he went up to the altar.” We practiced open communion and later she joined Richard at the altar.

“Love never gives up!” As we recall the ones thought of as being inactive in our churches, it would be well to remember the story of Richard and Carl. God's love never quits and neither should ours.

The Bishop's Letter is
available on our
website:
www.nwmnsynod.org

How beautiful are your feet!

By Erin Anderson, Assistant to the Bishop

I just ran a twelve mile race! Now for some of you that may seem like a long way. For others of you who are runners, twelve miles is a like a walk in the park, especially if you're into marathons. But I just did it...twelve miles...no stopping.



No, I'm not looking for congratulations from you. I'm not looking to find out who among you are runners. Actually, I'm looking at my feet. Yes, my feet. And boy, are they beat up right now. They're tired, a little sore and there's a blister on my fourth toe and one of my toenails is turning blue from getting rubbed in my shoe.

It is not a beautiful thing. But it was worth every mile.

You see I was running for the American Diabetes Association. There was more passion than pain in my feet. There was a purpose behind each mile and every step I took. My wife has been a type-one diabetic since she was in the seventh grade, so I was connected to what this race stood for. My soul seemed more a part of this through the purpose of the race...even if my "soles" are a little beat up right now.

You, brothers and sisters, have some beautiful feet!

Romans 10:15: And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

The verse for this year's LYO theme is *Soul2Sole*. I'm very excited about this as we prepare to meet each other at the youth gatherings and explore how this theme can be lived out in our own faith journeys. This theme is wrapped around knowing the living God in our very *souls* and then living out, by walking the walk (with our *soles*) and, through purpose and passion, proclaiming Christ to our friends, families, neighbors and strangers through justice and grace!

So, start running. Run with this theme. Use it! I encourage you to pepper the verse around your congregation, saturate your youth groups with it and use it in your other ministry groups. Use it as your own theme for the year. We will make more resources on it available. Study it. Play with the words *Soul2Sole*. Let it lead you to find passion and purpose as you journey in faith with one another and with those you are leading in ministry. Talk about how the love of Christ can transform our very *being* and empower our *being* with others...even if we get a blister or two.

Remember, it's worth every mile, this race we run to bring good news! We are connected to it. Our *souls*...and our *soles*... are a part of the purpose! How beautiful are your feet!

The Northwestern Minnesota
Bishop's Letter

Save these dates for your calendar planning

- ***Soul2Sole* Junior High Youth Gathering**, November 21-23, Alerus Center, Grand Forks, N.D.
- ***Soul2Sole* Senior High Youth Gathering**, April 17-19, 2009.

Join the conversation

Is your congregation a Book of Faith congregation yet? It's time to join the conversation! If you'd like to know



more and get connected to more resources, check out the initiative at www.elca.org/bookoffaith. If you'd have an interest in serving on the Book of Faith Initiative Team in our synod, please contact Erin Anderson at the synod office or at eranders@cord.edu.

Swedish Worship set for September 28 in Edina

The Thirteenth Annual Historic Augustana (Swedish) Lutheran Worship will be held Sunday, September 28, 2008 at 2:30 p.m., Normandale Lutheran Church in Edina, Minn.

Hymns and liturgy of the former Augustana Lutheran Church will be used. Rev. Dr. S. Bernhard Erling, retired Professor at Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, Minn., will preach.

The ELCA is strengthened by the nourishment it receives from the traditions of predecessor bodies. This service celebrates anew the multifaceted Swedish Lutheran heritage that Augustana brings to the ELCA. The service will include historic hymns and the celebration of Holy Communion using liturgy from the first half of the 20th century.



Trinity's vacation Bible school extends outreach to community

Trinity Lutheran, Pelican Rapids, extended its outreach to the community with a successful vacation Bible school this summer. Of the 90 enrolled students, 36 were Trinity members. Of the 54 non-members, 20 were from the multicultural community.

"We used the Friendship Trek curriculum from Concordia Publishing because the theme fit best with our outreach ministry," said Pastor Laurie Skow-Anderson. "We sent out two teams of walkers to invite kids to VBS the week before it started. Each team had a translator. We hired two Latino teen aged boys to help with VBS. They were translators and small group leaders for the week."



There were 32 VBS volunteers, some of whom knocked on doors and talked to kids on the playground and handed out registration forms for the program, which was free. "We used money from the ELCA Ministry Adjustment Grant that we received last year," Pastor Laurie said. "We used personal vans to pick up kids from the playground at the trailer courts and bring them home at the end of the day."

This was the largest VBS Trinity has had in the last seven years. Laurie added, "We were pretty excited about the number of Latino/Latina and Vietnamese children (20) that attended!"

Bishop's message, continued

Healthy congregations have conflict management plan in place

you the entire forgiveness of all your sins, for Jesus' sake.

People who live within that confession-absolution rhythm always have the best resource for managing conflict.

- **Preparedness.** Healthy congregations expect that they will occasionally encounter sharp disagreements. Just as they keep their liability insurance up to date and their fire extinguishers recharged, they have a conflict management plan "in place." They cultivate leaders who know how to take stands and stay connected with others. They work with clear guidelines and policies. They have functioning Mutual Ministry Committees. They read and practice Matthew 18:15-20 routinely. They ask their leaders to go through *Healthy Congregations* training.

Larry Wohlrabe, Bishop, NW Minnesota Synod

Questions for reflection and discussion:

1. Why do we avoid thinking that conflict is normal in the life of the church?
2. Recall a time when you or your congregation was involved in "conflict run amok." How did it start? What happened? What resulted from the conflict situation? How did it end? What did you learn?
3. Recall a time when you or your congregation experienced a well-managed conflict situation. Ask yourself the same set of questions under #2 above.

Assistant to the Bishop's message, continued

God's mission has a church

Think back over your congregation's history. What things have happened that have contributed notably to God's dream?

Think back to the last chapter and what you sensed God doing in your community or neighborhood. With which of these things are you most involved? With which of these things could you become involved? Who do you see doing God's work around you (whether they are Christian or not)? How can you partner with them to work together for God's kingdom?

Perhaps your congregation would like to have this conversation as well, and say this prayer together said by those in Ada, a prayer about God's mission having a church:

Pray: *Lord of the church, you have formed us as instruments for you to use in proclaiming your kingdom. We confess that we have missed many opportunities to witness and to serve and ask your forgiveness. Now we come to you and ask, how can you use us now?*