



February 2008

Healthy congregations accept differences

By Bishop Lawrence Wohlrabe

Perhaps you've seen these *Signs of a Healthy Church* in a church newsletter:

- People are constantly expressing disagreement, and they do it right out in the open.
- New groups keep cropping up and bumping into each other over schedules and competing over volunteers.
- The kids are noisy and all over the place, including during worship.
- The hymnals are wearing out, the coffee hour is crowded and noisy, and the electric bill is over budget.

Is that how you'd describe a *healthy* church? Most of us want our congregation to be safe, secure, serene. A good annual meeting is short and sweet—without any tensions or disagreements. “No problems here,” we say. “We never have any differences of opinion.”

This is the first in a year-long series on **the marks of a healthy congregation**. Bishop Wohlrabe encourages congregation councils and other parish leadership groups to use these articles for devotions or board-development times.

But does that really describe congregational health? No! A church without differences of opinion has probably lost its passion for the gospel. A congregation that never has squabbles may well be a community whose zeal for Christ's mission has been slowly extinguished.

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Have You Taken the Health Assessment?

So far, 40 percent of our synod's members have taken the ELCA Board of Pensions online

health assessment



Board of Pensions
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

survey. Not

bad when compared with other synods, but it's still far short of our goal of at least 75 percent of all plan members and covered spouses taking the online health assessment at

www20.mayoclinicembodyshealth.com/index.cfm?redirect=1

If we meet that goal, all congregations of the synod will be able to shave 2 percent off their payments for health coverage to the Board of Pensions during 2008. If you're a member and haven't taken the assessment, please do so as soon as possible and encourage all members of your church staff (and covered spouses) to take the health assessment.

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Please share the information in "Connections," a congregational newsletter/bulletin insert.

The Bishop's Letter

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Comments? Suggestions?

Contact Synod Communications

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Join us as we say farewell to our synod's faithful servants

Jill Steichen, Sherry Billberg,
Karol Hendricks-McCracken and John Lee

Tuesday, February 26
2-4 p.m.

Lutheran Church of Christ the King
1900 14th St. S., Moorhead




The Northwestern Minnesota Bishop's Letter



Multi-Synod Senior High Gathering

NWMN, SEMN, SWMN and South Dakota

"People judge others by what they look like,
but I judge people by what is in their hearts"
1 Samuel 16:7 (CEV)

March 28-30, 2008

Arrowwood Resort & Conference Center
Alexandria, Minn.

Registration ends March 6

(or with the first 750 registrants
Registration available online
www.nwmnsynod.org/lyo
Synod office: 218-299-3019
Watts: 800-452-3692
Email: hegg@cord.edu



LSS Seeks Nominations for Servant of Christ Award

Each year, Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota selects one congregation from each of the six ELCA synods in Minnesota to receive the Servant of Christ Award. The award is presented at the respective synod assemblies. Nominations for the award come from a variety of sources – mostly from LSS staff around the state. This year, LSS is seeking nominations from the congregations.

Nominations can be emailed directly to Alan Loose, Director LSS Congregational Partnership & Advocacy, aloose@lssmn.org or done online http://www.lssmn.org/church/servant_of_christ.htm. Deadline for nominations is March 3, 2008.

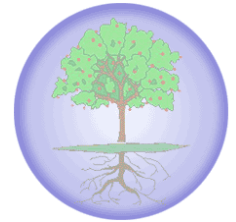
News from the Mission Investment Fund, ELCA

In the midst of economic uncertainty, the Mission Investment Fund (MIF) still offers competitive investment rates. Investments not only yield attractive rates, but mortgages to build Lutheran ministries--and buildings and fellowship halls and classrooms and offices. MIF is featuring a 2-year Mission Term Select fixed investment yielding 5.2%. with a minimum investment of \$100; and a 2-year Mission Term Select Grand investment yielding 5.35%, with a minimum investment of \$250,000. For more information about investments or loans contact Pr. Dan Carlson: 651-649-0454 ext 223 or Daniel.Carlson@elca.org For building concerns contact building consultant Phil Roe: 651-649-0454 ext. 225 or Philip.Roe@elca.org.

Bishop's message, continued

"In a healthy church, people constantly express disagreement"

Peter Steinke, a pastor and counselor who has studied how congregations are like family systems, declares that the first mark of a healthy congregation is not the absence of differences, but rather *the ability to accept differences*. In a healthy church people constantly express disagreement, and they do it right out in the open—without allowing their differences to separate them from one another.



The Book of Acts and Paul's epistles (especially the letters to the Corinthians) hint that right from the start Christians have had differences with one another—differences expressed rather openly. How should we care for our widows? How can we best welcome and receive the gifts of Gentiles, slaves, women and other marginalized folks? What's the proper way to worship and celebrate the Lord's Supper?

Sometimes our differences concern central matters of faith. The gospel itself may be imperiled. But most of the time our differences have to do with lesser things—and we can too easily get drawn into destructive, distracting conflict.

Pete Steinke urges us to reflect on the *source* of our differences with one another. He believes that many of our differences arise because of the tension between our need for *separateness* and our need for *closeness*. We're always trying to balance these needs in our life in the church. We need to identify ourselves, to be clear on what makes us unique wondrous creatures of God (separateness). But we also need to be in relationship with one another as God's children (closeness).

Steinke also encourages us to be aware of the emotions that get stirred up when we become aware of our differences—especially *anxiety*. Anxiety is unavoidable, especially when differences are being expressed. But we can refuse to let our anxieties run amok. We can control our anxieties; we don't need to let anxiety control us.

So what does it look like when a healthy congregation accepts differences?

- Church members don't paper over or smooth off the differences that are there.
- Disciples recognize how the natural tension between our needs for separateness and closeness bring differences to the surface.
- In times of disagreement persons speak for themselves—openly, directly, and respectfully. They define themselves *while* remaining connected to all their brothers and sisters in Christ.

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Reflections of service to the synod

By Michael Stein

This month we will say farewell to four bishop's assistants who have served our synod over the past two to six years. In this article, they look back on their service to the synod and look forward to new opportunities to serve God and God's people.

Jill Steichen

Pr. Jill Steichen's assistantship goes back to the beginning of Bishop Wangberg's term. "I felt very called to synodical work," she said.

"Helping people discern their call has been my main focus, and it's been a great source of satisfaction."



When Jill started, the synod had 45 vacancies. There are now 19 full-time openings. Many calls to small congregations that couldn't afford full-time pastors, were filled through a variety of means, such as Synodically Authorized Ministers or parish realignments. Teen ministry has also been a new focus in the last few years.

The candidacy process has also blossomed. Last year, the synod had only five seminary candidates. This year we have 15. "Many of them are from northern Minnesota," Jill said. "So that gives me great confidence that we'll have some new pastors in rural areas."

Jill's mix of duties also included conflict resolution. "Last year we set up the Bridgebuilder program with Peter Steinke and trained 15 people who will help congregations resolve conflict before it escalates."

On leave from call as of March 1, Jill has no plans to move from Dilworth, where she resides with her husband David and four children. Meantime, she's taking a graduate level class in counseling and hopes to find a call in the area. "My work with the synod has been a very positive experience," Jill concluded. "And I'll leave knowing the synod's in good hands."

John Lee

"I look back with fondness," said Pr. John Lee as he leaves the synod. "One of the highlights was working with first-call pastors in our synod, seeing their enthusiasm and hearing their new ideas. And within that enthusiasm you make some mistakes along the way, but you learn by those mistakes. I've looked at first call pastors as dedicated new leaders with a willingness to walk with commitment and faith. And I've grown in the process as well."



Until Pr. Sherry Billberg came on board and assumed the duties, John worked with SAMs. "It was a wonderful experience helping to develop this program and set up the guidelines and application

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The Northwestern Minnesota Bishop's Letter

Roster updates

Prayers and sympathy to:

- Pr. Tom and Mary Oberg on the death of Tom's mother, Eleanor, at the age of 92. Pr. Oberg serves Bethany Lutheran, Williams and Mt. Carmel, Roosevelt.
- Family of Lucille Van Hunnik, who died January 21, 2008. Her funeral service was held January 29 in the Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, Moorhead. She was the widow of Pr. Gerrit Van Hunnik. Her son, Pr. Gary Van Hunnik, serves as interim pastor at Cormorant Lutheran, rural Lake Park.

Resignations

- Pr. Ken Vollmers, pastor, Grove Lake Lutheran, Pelican Rapids, effective February 3, 2008 (retirement).
- Pr. Stephen Peterson, pastor, New Salem Lutheran, Turtle River, effective February 29, 2008.

Installations

- Pr. Dale Olson, senior pastor, Calvary Lutheran, Alexandria, January 20, 2008
- Pr. Jeffrey Teeple, senior pastor, Hawley Lutheran, Hawley, January 27, 2008.
- Pr. Paul Huso, pastor, New Life Lutheran, Rothsay, February 3, 2008

Transfers

- Pr. Rolf Wangberg to SE Minnesota Synod
- Pr. Clark Kilgard to Florida-Bahamas Synod
- Pr. Theresa Kraft to SW Minnesota Synod
- Pr. Dale Olson from Grand Canyon Synod

Congregations in Study/Interims/Seeking Pastors:

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

Alexandria, **Calvary**, call accepted

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

Barrett, **Peace**, pastor resigned

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

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

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

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

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

Breaking barriers: Congregations assist the hearing impaired

By Michael Stein

With our aging population (including millions of us baby boomers!), churches are among the countless institutions that face accessibility issues; in particular, hearing and physical impairments. While congregations in our synod are finding a variety of solutions, accessibility issues will most likely be around for a long time.

“I agree that this is a huge problem,” said Pr. Jennifer Rose, Bethel, Herman. “We have the small hand-held devices that people can have individually in the pews. They work just fine - but the problem that we’ve run into is that those that are hearing impaired are too embarrassed to use these devices! We have settled (for now) to having a fairly loud PA system.”

Pr. Matt Philaya concurred that the hand-held devices are probably the best option. He added, “One of our sound operators is hearing impaired. Because of his poor hearing and his age he’s not the best sound operator, but he is sensitive to the needs of people who can’t hear very well.”

Oscar Lake Lutheran Church, rural Farwell, uses a device called a Soundmate, manufactured by Telex. “We have four hand-held boxes with ear phones or a headset,” said member Sara Rensink. “They work off an FM radio signal from the speaker unit. We are an older congregation and have several people who are hard of hearing. The ones who use the listening devices are satisfied.”

First Lutheran, Alexandria, uses “Personal PA” by Williams Sound. “It is a battery operated personal use device individuals can carry with them that simply amplifies the sound and is user-adjustable,” Pr. John Peshek said.

Pr. Harald Bringsjord said the two congregations of the Baudette Lutheran Parish utilize the TELEX AAR-10 Sound Mate Personal Listening System. “A number of individuals use these and appreciate them,” he said.

Trinity Lutheran, Thief River Falls, uses a similar system, but, said Pr. John Voelker, “We have other hearing-impaired members who either watch the worship service cable broadcast at home for this reason, or listen to the radio broadcast of the same service.”

A number of folks at Zion Lutheran, Amor, also use the Sound Mate system. Pr. Jim Gronbeck said visitors are made aware of the devices with signage placed near the guest book.

The Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, Moorhead,



also uses the Telex Sound Mate system, according to staff member Ona May Brunsvold. And, like many congregations, they also offer large print bulletins. “They are simply enlarged in the same format as the regular bulletin, so they are able to see,” she said. “We also mail out bulletins every week to our homebound, so they can follow along while they listen to the radio broadcast.”

Another option for assisting the hearing impaired is a visual interpreter. Pr. Grant Aaseng, Shalom Lutheran, Alexandria, said his congregation has been blessed to have access to an excellent sign-language interpreter. “She comes about once a month to our late service to interpret for one of our members who is deaf,” he said. “In addition, we recently installed a new hearing-assist system with individual receivers, which seems to work for those who have tried it.”

Along with electronic devices, New Life Lutheran, Rothsay, has a congregational member who is a certified sign language translator. “In recent months, she translated at a baptismal service where several of the participants in the baptismal party were hearing impaired,” said Pr. Paul Huso. “It was a beautiful gift of service that she offered to our members on that day as their child was baptized.”

Pr. Linda Tenneson, Clearwater and Solway, Shevlin, said her congregations use a variety of methods to assist the hearing impaired. “One of my parishioners uses a hearing device that is advertised on television,” she said. “An ear piece is connected to a small box that picks up the sound. It seems to work quite well. Tenneson added that lectionary readers are often afraid to get close enough to the microphone so their voices reach optimum volume. “We have tried telling them to pretend that it is an ice cream cone that they are about to lick, but with limited success. I also give printed copies of the sermon to two parishioners with extreme hearing problems. They read the sermon while I preach it to everyone else.”

For more information

Ilene Olson, spouse of Pr. Larry Olson, Pelican Rapids, once worked for the State of Minnesota’s Deaf and Hard of Hearing office. She said this is an excellent starting point for people who need information and advice about hearing loss and hearing devices. DHHS also offers Telephone Equipment Distribution, or TED, in which individuals can apply to receive a free amplified phone if their income qualifies. There are two offices in our synod area: Family Service Center building, 715 11th Street North, Moorhead, 1-800-456-7589; and DHHS, 616 America Ave. NW, Suite 320, Bemidji, 218-333-8283.

Breaking barriers: Congregations take access to a higher level

By Michael Stein

Churches are among the many institutions in this country that face the challenges of breaking down barriers to people with special needs. New churches are being built on one level and older church buildings are being refurbished to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The congregations currently served by Pr. Theresa Kraft are just one example of one-level access. She also observed other buildings where the basement is not fully underground, “they have dug out space for a ramp to the lower level, added a retaining wall, pavement and a door, and at least the lower level (and bathrooms) can be accessed by those who cannot climb steps. It’s much less expensive than an elevator.”

Pr. Kristen Larsen-Schmidt, First Lutheran, Mahanomen, learned from visitors that small changes can make a big difference. “We have an elevator,” she said. “But it took a visitor to point out that there was no sign outside letting people know about the elevator entrance. We took out a short pew to accommodate wheel chairs. Then someone who was visiting for a wedding (in a wheelchair) wrote to us to mention that she thought it was lonely sitting there by herself, she couldn’t sit by her family. So then we ordered chairs in the color of our pew to put in that same spot so a handicapped person would not be sitting by themselves.”

Accessibility is an issue that goes deeper than we often see. “After having a baby a year after I started here,” Larsen-Schmidt said, “I learned that we needed changing tables. We installed them in both the women’s and men’s bathrooms, as well as putting stools in all the bathrooms for children to be able to reach. It is also gracious to provide a place where moms can nurse their babies.”

In 1993, members at Nazareth Lutheran, Holt, moved from an old multi-level church into a new one-level church. “People really appreciate how easy it is to get in and out of this building,” Pr. Nancy Hanson said. “It was designed with accessibility in mind. People are able to drive right up to the front door, there is a covered area, so it is really nice to get in and out of the church.”

Zion Lutheran, Battle Lake is also built on one level so wheelchairs are fully accessible. Pr. Jim Gronbeck added, “We also have the automated opening devices on the main doors which open the doors for wheelchairs.”

Samhold Lutheran, Gonvick, met the challenge of accessibility when, according to Pr. Tom Jacobson, “one tenacious individual sent an appeal for funds to almost everyone who had a connection with the congregation. To the surprise of many, the money came rolling in.” After five years of operation, the elevator has proved its value. Jacobson said they’ve added a maintenance contract to keep the unit in proper running order.

The Northwestern Minnesota
Bishop’s Letter

Immanuel Lutheran turns need into success



From left, project manager Cindy Todd, Assistant to the Bishop Pastor Jill Steichen, and Immanuel Lutheran Pastor Heidi Mann.

By Michael Stein

As the social hub of Hendrum with many older adults, Immanuel Lutheran had a critical need for an elevator—or vertical lift. “There were plenty of strong men who offered to carry people up or down stairs, but that’s not very dignified,” said member and project manager Cindy Todd. A pledge drive for an elevator resulted in funds from the congregation as well as people with past ties to the community.

Taking a conservative approach to the project, Todd said they did not go ahead with the council vote or order the elevator unit until pledges and donations totaled 75 percent. “The route we took was very affordable,” she said. “The pre-installation work was all volunteer labor. A home builder in our congregation interviewed three vendors. And we accomplished our goal for under \$30,000.”

The vertical lift holds three people or one wheelchair with an attendant. “It goes much slower than a conventional elevator,” Todd said. “But there was significantly less red tape and less cost.”

Todd offers this advice for other congregations contemplating a similar project: “Don’t underestimate yourselves or the power of God and prayer. Don’t assume your church can’t afford the project. There are many options to explore.”

Roster updates...

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**, in ministry/synodically authorized minister resigned

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

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

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

Moorhead, **Concordia**, associate campus pastor

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

New York Mills, **St. Peter's Evangelical**, in self-study, 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), pastor resigned, interim Pr. Donald Reisig

Pelican Rapids, **Grove Lake**, pastor retired

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

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

Turtle River, **New Salem**, pastor resigned

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

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

Warroad, **Zion**, pastor resigned, interim Pr. Jeanne Dahl

Reflections... Continued from page 4

process. I was gratified to nurture this program and work with gifted lay people and help fit them with congregations.”

Another highlight for John was a trip to India, working with our companion synod, the Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church. “As a kid I saw missionaries visit our church and talk about their experiences, so I dreamed of doing that someday. It was a privilege to preach in India and see people filled with expectations to hear the Good News.”

The mission trips to assist hurricane victims’ recovery was another rewarding experience. “I loved working with people from our synod who were willing to give their time and talents to help others in another part of the country. We had a part in helping people get through their hardships and rebuild their lives.”

Taking over the stewardship portfolio from Chick Lane, John said he learned a lot and met many inspiring people in passing along new attitudes and approaches to stewardship. “It’s a major part of our discipleship,” John said. “It’s everything we do after we say we believe.”

Woven into those daily activities were opportunities to celebrate anniversaries and dedications, see new ministries form and install new pastors. “I also had the pleasure to work with a dedicated staff.”

While waiting and discerning his next call, John will enjoy being with family, including his son Carl, who recently returned from duty in Iraq. “It’s been a privilege to serve over the last four-plus years—even through the hard times, which have given us all an opportunity for growth and learning.”

Karol Hendricks-McCracken

“The greatest privilege of my time here has been the opportunity to witness the youth of our synod being the church and taking it seriously in many ways,” Pr. Karol Hendricks-McCracken said. “I used to be concerned about the future of our church. Now I’m confident that in the years ahead, our youth will be there because they feel very deeply for the church. I appreciate the gifts they bring to the church. I’ve watched the national LYO board take on issues of the larger church that some congregations don’t care to tackle, such as sexuality and poverty. They want to make the church accessible to all and embrace all people within the church.”



Starting her synod duties in a time of difficult transition, Karol said the youth have been very mature and able to put the past behind them. “We’ve done some things with the LYO board that has helped bring new energy and excitement and love. I’m genuinely

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Reflections... Continued from page 4

excited to see Erin Anderson come on board because he'll continue to generate and nurture that energy."

Karol said the LYO is in transition nationally as they find new ways of being the church. "I think that gives us hope for our synod. I'd like to see family ministry raised up so that families are not segregated when they do ministry—that the family will study scripture together and all people will be woven together through the Gospel."

Our church was born in 1987 and those born that year are turning 21 this year. "There's something mystical about that," Karol said. "I know a lot of those young people, and I see their love for the ELCA. That's important for what our church will be in the coming years. One of my hopes is that at the 2009 Synod Assembly, we'll have at least 50 youth attending as voting members, bringing their joy and energy into that body of believers."

Of course, Karol is open to God's next call to ministry. "It could be a ministry that hasn't existed before, which would be exciting," she said. "I know I was called into the position with the synod, so I know God has a place for me. It's been a privilege and a blessing to walk with the LYO as their advisor for these two years. I feel it's two years that I have lived life to the fullest and with a great amount of joy."

Sherry Billberg

Several years ago, Pr. Sherry Billberg turned down an opportunity to be a mission developer, a position that would have meant nights away from her young family. "I always wanted to be part of a synod staff," she said. And in looking back at more than two years with our synod, Sherry added, "This time it was the right fit. I'm thankful that God honored my desire."



Sherry's synod portfolio included worship, hunger, SAMS and the Gifts program and the lay school. "It was a little frustrating that I couldn't do everything I wanted to do in in the hunger area," she said. "But I became much better informed about the efforts to end hunger in our state. I think we can be proud as a synod that there's a strong core of support in congregations for hunger issues. We can also be proud that we have 25 people trained to lead Hunger 101."

Growing up in a small congregation near Ada that was served by interns or lay preachers gave Sherry empathy for rural congregations with limited funds. "The church councils I worked with quickly found that I know what it means to struggle," she said. "I felt like a bridge in helping them find the right people to do ministry. Going into these rural churches felt like 'going home' to me."

The Northwestern Minnesota Bishop's Letter

Sensitivity a critical issue when addressing accessibility

By Michael Stein

Jo Johnson's 17-year-old son has had a disability since birth, "so we have encountered many experiences, both pleasant and challenging, in building accessibility throughout many communities." Johnson is a staff member at Trinity Lutheran, Crookston, which recently added on to its existing building with accessibility issues fully covered.

"We had a great team working on those kinds of things on our building committee," Johnson said. "Our construction crew was certainly up to speed on ADA regulations and suggestions beyond regulations. However, our issues have to do with accommodations in the sanctuary (the older part of the building). There's only one spot—in front—where people in chairs/scooters are able to sit. For many people, sitting in the front is not very comfortable. And we run into difficulty if we have more than one person in a wheelchair/scooter attending the same worship service."

Johnson's son can transfer to a pew from his chair, but not everyone can do that. "When we have visitors or special events, we often run into that struggle of accessibility for chairs," she said. "We are in the process of deciding where we need to cut out a few more pew spots for chairs. We want to make sure that, if we do this, these spots are in areas where individuals can make seating choices. We also want to make sure that there is easy access to those spots."

Johnson added that people in wheelchairs don't want to make a scene while finding a place in church. "We also want to make sure our signage is hospitable to assist them to get to those spots. As an employee of the church and a parent of a child with accessibility issues as well, I believe we have a huge responsibility to ensure these things are dealt with promptly and with sensitivity."

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Fergus Falls famine effort

In March of 2007, 210 youth and adults from 22 churches in and around Fergus Falls raised \$30,000 and packaged 207,000 meals and 104 AIDS caregiver kits, while fasting for 30 hours. This year, on Leap Day, the 2nd annual Famine is taking over the YMCA. 300 people from 30 churches will raise \$60,000 and package 300,000 meals and 300 AIDS caregiver kits.

If you want to be a part of this community-wide effort, please contact Pastor Matthew Martin at Bethlehem (218-736-5614 x14). Children as young as kindergarten can package Kids Against Hunger meals, starting at 8 a.m. on Fri, Feb 29. Comedian Daren Streblow will kick off the event at 7:30 p.m. Fasters (6th grade and up) will stay overnight, continuing to learn about hunger and have lots of fun. At 2 p.m. on Sat, March 1, they will break the fast by "eating how the world eats" with senior high youth gathering favorite, Agape, performing. A Kids Against Hunger satellite will be launched in the Fergus Falls mall that day, so meals can be packaged throughout the year.

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The synod's school for lay ministry has taken a lot of work, but is much stronger because of those efforts. "We're in the middle of the first-year cycle with a good core group," Sherry said. "We're offering top-of-the-line teaching and a great site in Detroit Lakes. I would like to see this synod strive to achieve a reputation where lay people can grow and be seen as a resource for ministry. I believe ministry is at its healthiest when there's a balance of clergy and lay people."

This month, Sherry begins a half-time interim position at Lowry and continues to serve part time at First Lutheran, Alexandria, where her husband Greg is pastor.

"To be a part of this synod at this time has been a challenge," Sherry said. "But I consider it an honor to have been a part of this fine group of people. There's not one person on this staff who's not a beacon of light and strength. I'm grateful for every single one."

Joined by the spirit



From left: Roberta Ouse, outgoing president of Hamar; New Life Lutheran Church Pastor Paul Huso; Pastor Curt Tillerias, who convened the constituting meeting of New Life Lutheran Church; and Jim Boyce, outgoing president of Our Savior's.

Sunday, January 6, 2008 was a big day in the lives of the members from Hamar Lutheran and Our Savior's Lutheran Churches in Rothsay, Minn., when a vote passed at their annual meetings to become New Life Lutheran Church and move forward as one congregation.

The decision was made after more than 125 years of being individual churches across the street from each other. In less than 10 years of steady progress, both church's members realized working and worshipping together could accomplish good things for not only the churches but also the community. Goals were set in November 2005 to be one church by January 2008, and the goals became a reality last month. The positive votes from both churches were followed by the constituting meeting of New Life Lutheran Church with the approval of the constitution, resolutions, budget and election of officers.

Bishop's message, continued

Dealing with differences

- Church members understand *anxiety*. They find ways to respond thoughtfully rather than simply reacting automatically when anxiety rears its head.

The first mark of a healthy church is that *people are constantly expressing disagreement, and they do it right out in the open*. But what else would you expect from a community whose life is centered in the reconciling Cross and future-opening Resurrection of Jesus the Christ?

Some questions for reflection and discussion:

- How does your congregation deal with differences?
- Think of someone you know who is good at dealing patiently and creatively with anxiety. What does this person do to help keep anxiety in check?
- What could you do to help your congregation grow in its ability to accept differences?