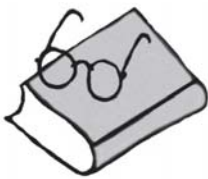


Lay School launches new program

By Pr. Sherry Billberg, synod minister for leadership and development

On October 12-13, 37 people gathered at Trinity Lutheran, Detroit Lakes, to begin a renewed and passionate commitment to lay ministry and leadership development in our synod. Over the past 18 months, the planning committee has worked together to develop a renewed focus on this ministry.



We come from a tradition that inherited the “GIFTS” program, a rich tradition in training laity for work in local congregations. The GIFTS program primarily focused on equipping people to help with pulpit supply and lay visitation and as preparation for accreditation as a synodically authorized minister (SAM).

It is our strong conviction and goal to offer theological learning opportunities to as many people as possible. Students are invited to participate in a program that offers six classes over a two-year period. You are not obligated to enroll for the entire two-year program, and may take only an occasional class if you so choose.

Our first class in October focused on the book of Genesis. Professor Mark Throntveit taught the three lessons on “the plan, the peril and the promise.” Upcoming classes are

- February 8-9 on worship and liturgy
- April 11-12 on pastoral care

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Projected fees are \$25-\$30 for each weekend; \$12-\$15 fee for three meals per weekend, plus housing costs for Friday night. For more information, contact the Northwestern Minnesota Synod office.

About Our Synod

The Northwestern Minnesota Synod is a geographical designation and a Church arrangement for carrying out the Church's mission. We are part of Region 3 of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

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Living out of God's abundance

Abundance. There's a whole theology bound up in that word. “Abundance theology” holds that God knows only one way of giving—generously, lavishly, over-flowingly. The word “stingy” isn't even in God's vocabulary!

Sometimes it doesn't seem that way. “Scarcity theology” is always waiting in the wings, ready to edge out “abundance theology.” The pie is only so big, after all.

God keeps revealing to us a greater abundance. The earth continues to bear good fruit. The right amount of sunlight, rain and warmth finally comes. Even when tragedy strikes some farm family, neighborliness pours forth—and their fields get harvested first.

I appeal to you, dear sisters and brothers in Christ, to live out of God's abundance. You and I belong to a God whose very nature is to “accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine” (Ephesians 3:20).

When scarcity talk seems to be winning the day, consciously step back. Take in the whole, wider picture—not just the tiny corner of reality that seems to suggest God is a Scrooge. When you're trying to divvy up a too-small pie, ask: “Are we sure God hasn't already provided some more pie that we've overlooked?”

Such talk often focuses on stewardship—our cheerful response, with all that we've been given, to all that God has done for us. Right about now individuals are being invited to a greater generosity with their time, their abilities, and their “portable, storable love” (a.k.a. money!)

In all these conversations, let me ask that we begin with a question: Are we operating out of a scarcity mentality or from a theology of abundance? What kind of God do we have—a miser God who only grudgingly parts with his gifts? Or is our God generous beyond all our imagining?

Questions for personal reflection or group discussion

- When have you witnessed signs of God's abundance?
- Why does “scarcity talk” come so naturally for us?
- How would my life be different if I really started living out of God's generosity?

What new things might God accomplish if the disciples in our congregation doubled their offerings in 2008?

Larry Wohlrabe, Bishop, Northwestern Minnesota Synod