

Northwest Passages

The newsletter of the Northwestern Minnesota Synod

Northwestern Minnesota and Eastern North Dakota
Synod LYO Senior and Junior High Youth Gatherings!



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

together

Sr. High Gathering (9-12 gr)

October 30-November 1, Cragun's Resort, Brainerd

Middle School Gathering (6-8 gr)

November 20-22, 2009, Arrowwood Resort, Alexandria



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CURRENT WEB TOPICS

Post-Churchwide Assembly Resources

Resources related to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly are available at
www.nwmnsynod.org/2009%20Churchwide%20Assembly%20Resources.htm

And check out the following links:

- + Video, audio, and photo highlights - www.ELCA.org/assembly/multimedia
- + Audio and text from worship - www.ELCA.org/assembly/worship
- + Actions - www.ELCA.org/assembly/actions
- + News stories - www.ELCA.org/news

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

Post-Churchwide Assembly: Talking Points

By Bishop Larry Wohlrabe

If you thought that last month's ELCA Churchwide Assembly (CWA) "settled" all our issues around ministry by partnered gay and lesbian persons in our church—think again. The vote of the Assembly has not put an end to our discussions about human sexuality. Rather, it got the ball rolling in a new direction, opening up a fresh chapter in this continuing discussion.



So, how shall we participate in this conversation? Do we have the fortitude, patience and goodwill to stay connected with one another in the midst of sharp disagreements?

In order to embrace this new chapter of our church's discussion of human sexuality, I propose some "talking points." Specifically, I urge us to "retire" four phrases. And I encourage us to add four other phrases to our vocabulary, so that "speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ..." (Ephesians 4:15).

Four Lines That Need to Go...

Here are four statements that, in my judgment, belong on the ash heap:

1. **"I don't know why we're even talking about this."**
I've heard this one from *both* proponents and opponents of the CWA's ministry policy changes. The implication is that the issue is "settled"—one way or another, so why waste our breath on it? But in fact the issue is not settled in our wider culture—nor have we arrived at a biblical consensus together. Will we ELCA Lutherans contribute to this society-wide discussion, or will we sit on the sidelines?
2. **"Shame on you!"** This is one of those demeaning conversation-stoppers that periodically gets lobbed into discussion like a hand grenade. All it does is to belittle folks—both the one who makes the comment and the one against whom it is aimed.
3. **"You're just a bigoted fundamentalist!"** Some proponents of the CWA's ministry policy changes hurl this charge at traditionalists as a way of side-stepping their heartfelt convictions. "Fundamentalist" has become an all-purpose cuss word in some religious

circles. (By the way, thoughtful students of church history know that while there are varieties of conservative Protestants in North America, true-blue fundamentalists are a rare species.)

4. **"You're ignoring what the Bible clearly teaches!"**
This epithet, usually uttered by opponents of the CWA's ministry policy changes, misses the fact that *both* sides read and study the scriptures—and both claim biblical warrant for their positions. Both treasure and read the same Bible—the distinction is in *how* they each *interpret* the Bible.

Four Phrases That Can Help Us...

If we seek a fuller, richer discussion of the issue of how gay and lesbian persons might serve in ministries of our church, I propose adding the following to our vocabularies:

1. **"The peace of Christ be with you!"** Some Finnish-background Lutherans greet one another—even on the street—with the Peace, offered as a token that we have life only in the forgiveness that Jesus brings. What if we began and ended all our discussions of human sexuality with the passing of the peace?
2. **"I hear you saying _____. Am I describing your viewpoint accurately?"** What a gift it is when we listen to one another so carefully, so deeply, that we can mirror back to our partner the opinion he or she is expressing. We owe one another the gift of such patient, painstaking listening.
3. **"Although we don't agree, here's something I appreciate about your position. And here's something I still struggle with in my own position."** When we cling to our own views with white-knuckled clenched fists we lose our capacity to open up our hands, to learn and to grow. I hold lots of firm convictions, but I also know where my arguments are weak—and where my sparring partner is right (or close to right).
4. **"Wherever this discussion takes us-- let's keep talking, praying and meeting at the foot of the Cross."** Some in our church believe that we've reached a point of no return with respect to human sexuality issues. Others of us—I believe, most of us—aren't so sure. We continue to share our heartfelt

Continued next page

Bishop's Message, continued

God gives us the capacity to hang in there with one another

disagreements in this arena, but we are also mindful of how much more still unites us. We don't see eye-to-eye yet on homosexuality. But we confess Jesus as our only Savior. We confess that "there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:4-6).

These are modest proposals for how we continue this conversation. I have no illusions about how difficult these discussions will be. But I know the One who binds us together and who beckons us into his mission. And I am

confident that God leads us, giving us the capacity to hang in there with one another.

God is with us, and we in the Northwestern Minnesota Synod are also in this together. If you're confused or concerned about *any* actions of the recent Churchwide Assembly, please contact one of our synod's 24 voting members to that assembly, or a member of the synod council, or any of us who serve you on the synod staff. Give us the opportunity to listen, to speak and to walk with you, for Jesus' sake.

Bishop Larry Wohlrahe

Northwestern Minnesota Synod *God's work. Our hands.*

Created and Led by the Spirit: Planting Missional Congregations Friday, Nov. 6 – Saturday, Nov. 7, 2009 at Luther Seminary

The Spirit of God is creating a new future through the planting of missional congregations while inspiring missional leaders, scholars and church planters around the world for a creative new apostolic era. Please consider being part of that work! Your voice and practical wisdom around the work of the Spirit in planting missional congregations could be vital. Visit www.luthersem.edu/missional_consult for complete information and online registration.

Mission Learning Lab

Saturday, Nov. 7 – Monday, Nov. 9, Luther Seminary

Worship at a variety of congregations (you pick from suggested options) in the Twin Cities' area from Saturday evening to Sunday evening, including new mission starts, ethnic-specific ministries, and redeveloping congregations in urban, suburban and small town settings. Following each worship experience there will be a time for conversation with ministry leaders, and the lab will conclude with a conversation

on Monday morning. For more information or to register, contact Susan Tjornehoj, Director for Evangelical Mission, Minneapolis Area Synod (S.Tjornehoj@mpls-synod.org) or Paul Erickson, Assistant to the Bishop for Evangelical Mission, Saint Paul Area Synod (paul.erickson@elca.org). Note: Registration is separate for the consultation and the lab.

If you have any questions or need additional information than already provided here, please let me know. I would be delighted to visit more with you about these opportunities and your possible involvement. Contact me (Keith Zeh, Eastern North Dakota and Northwestern Minnesota Synods Director for Evangelical Mission by calling either synod office or by e-mail keith.zeh@elca.org.

Matters of the Heart Early Fall Meetings

Sunday, Sept. 27

Afternoon, New Salem, Turtle River
Evening, Calvary, Bemidji
Evening, United, Elbow Lake

Sunday, Oct. 4

Afternoon, First, Battle Lake
Evening, Hope, Fergus Falls

Thursday, Oct. 8

Evening, Glyndon Lutheran
Evening, Good Shepherd, Moorhead

Sunday, Oct. 11

Afternoon, St. Paul's, Crookston
Evening, Grace, Erskine

Afternoon mtgs are 2-4 p.m. Evening mtgs. 7-9 p.m.

Sunday, Oct. 18

Afternoon, Shepherd of the Valley,
Clarissa

Evening, Immanuel, Wadena

Thursday, Oct. 22

Evening, Grace, Detroit Lakes

Looking at our future as a missional church

Before our recent "Hearts on Fire" event, we asked a few pastors/members to share their thoughts about seeing the Church's mission in new ways; how discipleship differs from membership; what being a "passionate Jesus community" means; what being a witness to the Resurrection looks like, etc.



Pastor Gretchen Anderson serves five congregations in the Fertile/Beltrami area. The members of this mostly rural parish have begun a process of sharing their gifts and resources.

"There are challenges along the way. We have baggage as well as gifts. But if we speak the truth to each other we'll become stronger.

To be a missional church, connect with the community.

"It's not just about showing up on a particular Sunday. It's about the kingdom of God here and now, which gives us hope for the rest of our days. Membership is showing up. Discipleship is being an active person, seeing the person next to you as your neighbor.

"The Church has much to offer to people not connected; who are looking for meaning, direction. We can provide a purpose. It is there for those who want to have something good and meaningful."

Pastor Chad Peterson serves three congregations in the Twin Valley area that have consolidated many of their ministries.

"This is not the church we grew up with. What does this mean for us today? We don't want to neglect those who've been here the longest. But we have people who want something different, who think differently about church, community and society.

"Membership is paying for religious goods and services. I can have my child baptized because I pay my dues. My children are in Sunday school because I'm a member. It's more like consumerism. Discipleship is the complete opposite of that. It's taking seriously that we follow Christ into the world. It's anything but 'taking.' It's giving. We do that through volunteering with Churches United, youth mission trips, opportunities for people to gather, such as open mike night for people to share their talents. All these things help to make our presence known.

"Passionate Jesus communities means that within our community we see the needs and then do something about them. If there's a need we can fulfill, let's do something about it.

"We are trying to think of our ministries in terms of present and future tense. When I think of the Resurrection, I think in terms of the present tense, the present moving into the future. As a missional pastor, I need to keep asking questions and be encouraging. A missional congregation is excited, has a purpose. A congregation that knows who they are is an excited congregation and is willing to engage the world where it's at. It's a place where people want to go."



Laurie Meyer-Olson was part of a group from Immanuel, Osage, who knocked on doors in their community and extended an invitation to their congregation.

"I found people out there are hungry. We have to be there to extend an invitation and, when

we say we are a welcoming church, truly live it with our

actions as well as our words.

"As a rural congregation, much of what we do is for our own survival. But we can still move forward. We've planted the seeds to become more missional. We can be a beginning to something great. I'm amazed that when we met and talked to people, we found there is a hunger. They want to share their stories. Now we have to keep our connectedness."

Presiding Bishop: 'What Good News We Have to Share'

Members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) should continue to discuss questions about human sexuality, and also talk about how their congregations can grow and how each person can carry out the Gospel of Jesus Christ in their daily lives.

The Rev. Mark S. Hanson, ELCA presiding bishop, made the comments in a video message posted September 4 on a new section on the denomination's Web site at <http://www.ELCA.org/faithfulmission> "Our Faithful Mission Together" contains a variety of resources, including documents and reports from the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly, plus information about how offerings are used, comments from members and church leaders, and ideas for sharing stories and discussion.

Hanson's message refers to actions taken by the assembly last month in Minneapolis. More than 1,000 assembly voting members adopted a social statement on human sexuality by a two-thirds vote, and in separate actions they directed that changes be made to the church's ministry policies to make it possible for people in committed, same-gender relationships to serve as ELCA associates in ministry, clergy, deaconesses and diaconal ministers.

Responses throughout the church have varied regarding the

assembly's decisions, particularly on the ministry policies proposals. Some ELCA members are pleased, while some say they are considering leaving the ELCA or protesting in other ways. In many congregations, members and leaders are sharing different perspectives and asking questions about what the decisions mean for them.

Hanson invited members to continue to discuss human sexuality, "but have conversations about how your congregation can grow as an evangelical center for mission, how you can do in your daily life God's work with your hands (and) how we can stay connected." Hanson's message alluded to "God's work. Our hands," the ELCA's tag line.

The presiding bishop reminded viewers what he asked the churchwide assembly: "What shall be our witness? What stories shall we tell?"

Hanson suggested some possible answers in his message. "We are a church committed to congregations being vital, growing centers of evangelical mission. We are a church that believes every member is set to do God's work with their hands," he said, "for the story we tell is the story of God's love for the whole world in Jesus Christ. What 'Good News' we have to share," the presiding bishop's message concluded.

Be prepared for natural disasters

By Rev. Kevin Massey, Director, Lutheran Disaster Response
September is National Preparedness Month and I encourage you to take this opportunity to prepare yourself, your family, and your home. I invite you to visit ready.gov. This website from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security takes you through the step-by-step process of preparing for an emergency. The site provides supply checklists and instructional videos. It even has information about the types of emergencies to which your community might be more susceptible. When I visited ready.gov, I enjoyed learning some new and helpful ideas like having both a local meeting place and an out-of-town meeting place in case your family is separated when a disaster happens. Or knowing which evacuation shelters can accept cats and dogs and which ones cannot. Or making copies of all your important papers to keep in your kit along with food and a flashlight.

Studies show that the main reason most people do not plan for natural disasters and other emergencies is anxiety. It's just not fun to think about or plan for bad things that may or may

not happen, but natural disasters and other emergencies can happen to anyone in any place and at any time, often without warning. Those who have effectively prepared are not only better equipped to help themselves and others, they also feel a greater sense of calm about things they cannot control. If you already have a personal or family disaster plan in place, great, but remember, an effective disaster plan is one that is reviewed and updated at least once a year. What better way to celebrate national preparedness month than by taking the time to be really prepared.

Visit ready.gov, put together your kit, make your plan, and learn more about disasters and disaster response. While you're at it, talk to your church council about whether your congregation has a disaster plan. It is our job, each and every one of us, to look out for ourselves, our families, and our communities. Next time an emergency happens in my community, I'll be prepared, and I encourage you to be prepared too.

Creating a new vision for mission

Over the past year a new vision for Lutherans in our two synods has been emerging—a vision for how we will collaborate more deeply in vibrant service to God’s great mission of rescue and renewal in Jesus Christ. Disciples from the Eastern North Dakota and Northwestern Minnesota Synods, in partnership with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America’s program unit for Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission (EOCM), are listening to one another, engaging our mission field and exploring new avenues for partnership in the gospel. Today we unveil a new *Evangelizing Congregations Missional Plan* that emphasizes renewed evangelizing congregations, new evangelizing congregations, and missional strategies.

The Rev. Dr. Stephen Bouman, executive director for EOCM, invites us to envision ways whereby “bishops lead as missionary bishops, every baptized person is a missionary, every pastor is a mission developer, and every congregation is a mission station for the sake of the world.”

Foundational to this plan is a staffing presence in each synod, through a newly designed position, the Director for Evangelical Mission (DEM). Each DEM

- provides leadership as an integrated member of the synod staff team;
- engages with local communities; and
- knits together missional relationships that serve new and renewed evangelizing congregations.

Pastor Keith Zeh serves as the Director for Evangelical Mission, working 50% time in each synod. Three missional tables are also being formed. *Note: The image of “table” is like a kitchen table where people gather and are fed and dream and plan, come and go.* Members of these missional tables will stir up, guide and stimulate imagination, vision, and activity in and through all kinds of congregations, ministries and settings. Work teams will be formed in conjunction with each of the three missional tables—made up of disciples with gifts and passions for putting “feet” under specific missional ideas, initiatives and activities.

The three missional tables being imagined and drawn together are:

Missional Imagi-nation Table - This table is a unique and exciting partnership between the Eastern North Dakota and Northwestern Minnesota Synods. Members will provide



People of all ages are feeling the excitement of a new culture for mission as these scenes from the August 30 “Hearts on Fire” event attest. About 130 people attended the event, which was sponsored by the Northwestern and Eastern North Dakota synods



oversight for how the synods’ think creatively about our theology of mission and how we stir up a “culture for mission” in each synod. This table will also articulate the synods’ missional purpose, guiding principles and ways whereby congregations are invited into deeper partnerships with the synods and the churchwide organization. The table will also address unifying strategies and capacity-building for mission.

New and Renewing Congregations and Ministries Table - This table will focus on involving congregations and ministries in specific, intentional processes for renewal and/or mission development—including congregations receiving grants from the ELCA’s program unit for Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission.

Mission Faith Practices Table - This table will invite leaders, congregations and ministries as they facilitate faith practices relating to stewardship of life with God. Among the faith practices that this table will stir up in our two synods are: financial stewardship as individuals and congregations, daily life faith practices, stewardship of creation activities, Bible encounter practices and prayer practices.

Synod Roster Updates

Prayers

- Sympathies to retired pastor Arland and Wilhelmine Jacobson and family in the death of Arland's mother, Ruth, on August 3.
- Sympathies to the family of retired pastor Elmer Anhalt who died August 28 at age 90. His funeral was held September 3 at the Bethesda Lutheran Church, Alexandria.
- Sympathies to the family of Pr. Genelle and Chad Netland on the death of Genelle's father, John Genkinger, September 17.
- Sympathies to the family of Pr. Loren and Karen Mellum on the death of Loren's father, Gordon, September 18.
- Sympathies to the family of Pr. Jim Gustafson on the death of Jim's mother, Edna, September 20.

Ordinations

Dane Skilbred, Salem Lutheran, Hitterdal, August 29
Patrick Loree, First Lutheran, Minot, N.D., August 29

Installations

- Karen Holmberg-Smith, pastor, Concordia & Pinecreek Parish, Roseau, August 16
- Dane Skilbred, pastor, Salem Lutheran, Hitterdal, August 29
- Joy Grainger, pastor, Climax, Sand Hill, Grue Parish, August 30
- Charles "Jake" Dyrhaug, pastor, First Lutheran, Battle Lake, September 20
- Stephen Norby, senior pastor, Calvary Lutheran, Park Rapids, September 27
- Patrick Loree, associate pastor, Our Savior's Lutheran, Moorhead, September 27

Transfers

Paul Miller to Southwestern Texas Synod
Jonathan Sorum from Southwestern Washington Synod
Stephen Norby from Southwestern Minnesota Synod

Call Process Update

All positions are for solo pastors or senior pastors, unless otherwise noted. Interim ministers are listed where possible.

In Self-Study

- Alexandria, Bethesda (Don Reisig, interim)
- Badger, Faith and Our Redeemer's (Louis Hermansen, interim)
- Comstock, Comstock and Rustad, Hoff (Interim pending)
- Crookston, Trinity (Paul Svingen, interim)
- East Grand Forks, Family of God (Interim pending)
- East Grand Forks, Our Savior's—associate pastor

School for Lay Ministry

Mark your calendars and watch for further details about the next School for Lay Ministry with Professor Fred Gaiser, Luther Seminary. The event will be October 23-24 at First Lutheran Church, Detroit Lakes.

- Fergus Falls, Augustana (Nancy Monke, interim)
- Fisher, Fisher and Bygland (Interim pending)
- Glyndon, Glyndon
- Waskish, Bethlehem
- Lake Bronson, Zion and Kennedy, Maria (Kathy Levenhagen, SAM, interim)
- Mahnomen, First (John Lee, interim)
- Nelson, Fahlun and Our Saviour's (Interim pending)
- Shelly, Peace Lutheran Churches (Valerian Ahles, interim)
- Shevlin, Clearwater and Solway, Solway (Melody Kirkpatrick, interim)
- Ulen, Bethlehem (Steve Dahl, interim)
- Vining, Vining Lutheran Parish (Interim pending)
- Warren, First and Immanuel (Mark Rittmann, interim)

Considering Candidates

- Audubon, St. Peter and Detroit Lakes, Augustana (Jill Steichen, interim)
- Bemidji, Calvary—associate pastor
- Osage, Immanuel (Phil Johnson, interim)
- Thief River Falls, Redeemer and Black River—associate pastor

Calls in Process

- Ada, Grace—**call accepted**
- Barnesville, Our Savior's—new associate pastor position, call accepted
- Bemidji, Aardahl and Guthrie, Malvik (Linda Tenneson, interim) call pending
- Greenbush, Bethel (Nancy Jewel, interim) call pending
- Hitterdal, Salem—**call accepted**
- Kelliher, Our Savior's—moved into contractual arrangement with Zion, Blackduck (Pr. Dan Heath)
- Moorhead, Our Savior's—associate pastor—**call accepted**
- Newfolden, Bethlehem and Holt, Nazareth (Sheila Michaels, SAM)
- Park Rapids, Calvary—**call accepted**
- Parkers Prairie, First Evangelical—**call accepted**

Power and Boundaries Training

IMPORTANT! 2009 Power and Boundaries Training
Join fellow clergy in an ecumenical setting for training on power and boundaries issues in the congregations and faith communities that you serve at one of the following dates/locations:

-Thursday, October 8, in Fergus Falls

-Thursday, October 22, in Hinckley

-Thursday, November 5, in Lakeville

The training will be conducted using lecture, films, and discussion. For more information contact Aundrea at 612-230-3236 or email at Aundrea.billings@mnchurches.org.

The goose that came to worship

By Pastor Harald Bringsjord

For many years the Clementson Lutheran Church congregation has held a worship service at the Frontier Landing. Poor weather has cancelled the service in previous years, but on August 23, the weather was wonderful. This particular Sunday wasn't going to be just a beautiful time of worship outdoors, but was going to be an amazing time of worship with one of God's critters. It was also the day the goose came to worship.

After leading worship at Wabanica, and then at First I headed off with my guitar to the Frontier Landing. I had come a few minutes late, but no one seemed to mind because a goose came to visit and seemed to be interested in worshipping together with us. I pulled out my guitar and we stood singing the opening hymn.

We were amazed when I said, "Please be seated," and the goose sat down with the rest of the congregation right in front of Hank and Carol Rieke. We continued worshipping with people in the congregation reading different portions of the Bible. When it was time for the sermon, the goose had had enough and took a little nap. (Carol Rieke insists that the goose was certainly resting but not completely sleeping.)

Following the sermon we stood and sang another hymn. The goose stood up as well. During the offering, the ushers took the offering plates and I sat down and sang a song accompanying myself on the guitar. When I played the first chord the goose decided that this song should be a duet instead of a solo. The goose came right up to me and honked and honked through the entire song. I even played the refrain one extra time asking, "Do you want to sing it one more time?" The goose answered: "Honk, Honk." So, we played it again. As soon as I finished the song, the goose stopped honking and went back to its spot. The goose stood with me during communion, and came up one more time for the closing hymn.



It's goose hunting season right now. Could it be that the moral of the story is that you may not like every decision people make (like there being a goose hunting season), but you can still worship with them? It's also possible that the goose simply wanted to remind me that my singing is for the birds.

By the way, the goose stayed for pot luck—and it wasn't roast goose that Sunday.