

September 2008

## Healthy congregations act flexibly and creatively

Exodus 18 contains one of my favorite leadership stories in the Bible. The children of Israel, having escaped from Egypt, are encamped near Mount Sinai for an extended time. Moses, their God-ordained leader, seems to be in charge of everything—even settling their petty squabbles.

Each day people come to Moses, begging him to settle their disputes with one another. During this time, Moses' father-in-law Jethro (a foreigner, by the way!) comes for a visit. He observes his son-in-law growing wearier by the hour. "What you are doing is not good," Jethro interjects. "You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people with you. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone." (vv. 17-18)

This is the sixth of an 11-part series on the marks of healthy congregations. Bishop Larry encourages congregation councils or other parish leadership groups to use these articles for their opening devotions.



So Jethro proposes a creative solution: Moses needs to share leadership by enlisting others ("able men among all the people, men who fear God, are trustworthy, and hate dishonest gain," v. 21) to help him govern the people. Moses takes Jethro's advice—and it worked beautifully.

But why, I wonder, didn't Moses himself come up with such a solution? Why couldn't Moses be creative enough to generate this idea? The text of Exodus 18 doesn't tell us, but I suspect it's because Moses was so weary and uptight that he had developed tunnel vision; he had become rigid and brittle. Tension robbed him of the vision to see another way of doing things.

Stress and anxiety do that to us as individuals. We feel pain or angst, and we tighten our muscles. Pretty soon a dull, tension head-

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## Old School

Or we should say a remodeled old school is now home to the Northwestern Minnesota Synod. We packed up and moved from our "summer camp" to Concordia College's Riverside Center September 8.

Stop by if you're in the neighborhood. Our new address in Moorhead is 1307 4th St. South.

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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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1307 4th St. S., Riverside Center, Concordia College  
Moorhead, MN 56562  
(218) 299-3019 800-452-3692  
www.nwmnsynod.org  
Comments? Suggestions?  
Contact Communications Director Michael Stein, stein@cord.edu

## Health Fair includes "Coping With Burnout"

Becker-Clay-Otter Tail-Wilkin Adult Mental Health Initiative Education & Training Committee presents the 7th Annual Mental Health Fair, Monday, October 6, Moorhead Courtyard by Marriott Conference Center, 1080 28th Ave. South, Moorhead. There is no cost to attend.

This year's topics include "Coping with Burnout" with R. P. Ascono and "Understanding the Culture of Poverty" with Pat Anderson.

Dr. Ascono provides pastoral care and mission care intervention specifically in the area of "ministry burnout." He provides ministry consultation to several mainline protestant denominations/synods. His presentation will discuss the psychophysiology of compassion fatigue, delineate the symptoms of physical, spiritual and emotional-cognitive burnout, review relevant psychometrics and will also discuss evidence-based intervention.

Anderson has been a teacher, learn center director, regional director for the Minnesota Department of Education and manager of education services for Lake Country Service Cooperative. The presentation will address language, family structure and resources that are often lacking in generational poverty.

Deadline for registration is September 29. To register call Kirstin Wegenast at 218 299-7072 or 1-800-757-3880, or email [kirstin.wegenast@co.clay.mn.us](mailto:kirstin.wegenast@co.clay.mn.us). An informational brochure in PDF form is also available on the synod website, [www.nwmnsynod.org](http://www.nwmnsynod.org).

## 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." 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](mailto:keith.zeh@elca.org).

Bishop's Message, continued

## Flexibility, creativity, sense of humor mark healthy congregations

ache sets in, and a mental fog settles over us. We're sluggish, "stuck," no longer quick on our feet.

The same goes for congregations. Congregations that are highly stressed (by unmanaged conflict) or anxious (about any number of things—including their own survival) grow dull, rigid, and brittle. They lose their capacity for creative thought or nimble action. They lock themselves into tired old routines and fall back on the Seven Last Words of the Church: "but we've always done it that way."

### Healthy congregations are flexible.

They see change as a manageable process—an adventure, even. Rather than blaming or attacking others, people in healthy congregations invest energy in problem solving. They're willing to learn and confident that things can change for the better.



**Healthy congregations are creative.** They make room for exploration, take time for innovation. They bounce back from adversity quicker. Realizing that they don't have all the wisdom in the world, they ask for help—they bring in resource persons from the outside (like Jethro, the foreigner, giving wise advice to his world-weary son-in-law!)

**Healthy congregations are not deadly serious or uptight about everything.** They have a sense of humor and a "lightness of being." You sense it when you walk through their doors. There may even be a little "holy mischief" afoot that keeps folks guessing, on the edge of their seats, wondering what's coming next!

*Bishop Larry Wohlrabe*

### Questions for reflection and discussion:

1. Think about your own experience of stress and anxiety. What bodily symptoms tell you that you're feeling tense? How does tension thwart your own flexibility and creativity?
2. In what areas of your congregation's life do you detect brittleness or rigidity? How is this holding you back from being faithful in God's mission?
3. What is the most creative venture your congregation has tried in the last five years? Recall a time when your church responded nimbly and flexibly to changing circumstances.

# ELCA Board of Pensions continues Wellness Plan

Trustees of the ELCA Board of Pensions voted to continue wellness incentives for health plan sponsors, just as the unit continues its incentives for plan members.



Again in 2009 the ELCA Board of Pensions will offer plan members the opportunity to earn wellness dollars to apply to their medical costs when they take the Mayo Clinic Health Risk Assessment (HRA). Plan members may earn additional dollars by follow-up health improvement activities, including lifestyle coaching programs.

More than 50 percent of plan members had taken the HRA by July 31, and 35 percent of those had earned their maximum reward of \$300, reported Bradley J. Joern, director of health products, ELCA Board of Pensions.

The trustees recommended “that the Board of Pensions continue in 2009 to give a 2 percent discount on health plan contributions to ELCA organizations and sponsoring employers within an organization or a synod when at least 75 percent of plan member employees and spouses in the organization or synod take the Mayo Clinic Health Risk Assessment.”

“We appreciate the decision to extend the incentive to receive the 2 percent discount in premiums to synods, institutions and the churchwide organization into 2009. Our challenge now is to educate and inspire members to take the Health Risk Assessment and to obtain the available savings. This is a stewardship issue for all of us,” said David D. Swartling, ELCA secretary, Chicago.

As of June 30 several of the ELCA's organizations and 65 synods hadn't yet qualified for the 2 percent discount, said David G. Adams, vice president of products and services, ELCA Board of Pensions, but they still have time to earn the discount if 75 percent of plan members and spouses in their area complete the HRA before Sept. 30.

“There is great gratitude for the 2 percent incentive, and it will be exciting news to synods that they have another whack at it in 2009,” said the Rev. James A. Justman, bishop, ELCA East-Central Synod of Wisconsin, Appleton, an advisory member to the board of trustees.

In other action the trustees set the 2009 contribution rates at an average increase of 5 percent for the medical and dental benefits plan. They approved continuing the moratorium through 2009 for the survivor benefits plan and recommended the disability benefits plan remain at 2 percent.

## Roster updates

### Prayers and sympathy to:

Pr. Elaine Leone and family in the death of her husband, Gerald, on August 14 after a long struggle with cancer. His funeral was held August 17 at Osakis Lutheran Church. Pr. Leone serves Nora Lutheran Church, Kensington and St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Lowry.

### Installations

- Pr. David Beety, pastor, First Lutheran Church, Audubon, August 24
- Pr. Kari van Wakeren, pastor, Faith Lutheran Church, Miltoona, August 24
- Pr. Marsha Anderson, assistant pastor, Trinity Lutheran Church, Moorhead, August 31
- Pr. Joshua Graber, assistant pastor, Trinity Lutheran Church, Moorhead, August 31
- Pr. Emmy Isaackson, assistant pastor, Trinity Lutheran Church, Moorhead, August 31
- Pr. Ryan Stout, pastor, St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Church, New York Mills, August 31
- Pr. Emily Meyer, pastor, First Lutheran Church, Akeley, Sept. 14
- Pr. Sherry Billberg, associate pastor, First Lutheran Church, Alexandria, Sept. 14
- Pr. Rachel Stout, associate pastor, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Wadena, Sept. 21
- Pr. Robert Kirchman, pastor, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Clearbrook and Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Leonard, Sept. 21
- Pr. Loren Mellum, senior pastor, Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Moorhead, Sept. 21
- Pr. Ryan Rasmussen, pastor, Our Savior and Vernes Lutheran Churches, McIntosh, Sept. 28

### Resignation

Pr. Allyne Holz, pastor, Glyndon Lutheran Church, Glyndon, effective August 1

### Retirement

Pr. Sandra Hollands, effective April 1

### Transfers

- Pr. Jeremy Walloch to SW Texas Synod
- Pr. Emily Meyer from Eastern Washington-Idaho Synod
- Pr. Lorem Mellum from Saint Paul Area Synod
- Pr. David Beety from Minneapolis Area Synod
- Pr. Robert Kirchman from Greater Milwaukee Synod

### Congregations in Study/Interims/Seeking Pastors:

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

## Roster updates

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

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

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

Clearbrook, **Good Shepherd & Leonard, Our Savior's**, call accepted

Cimax, **Climax, Grue, Sand Hill**, in self study, interim Pr. Donald Reisig

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

Erhard, **Tonseth**, pastor resigned

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

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

Glyndon, **Glyndon**, pastor recently resigned, interim Pr. Paul Miller

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

Hines, **First**, pastor resigned

Hitterdal, **Salem**, in self study, interim Pr. Gretchen Person

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

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

Lake Park, **Cormorant**, interviewing, interim Synodically Authorized Minister Allen Brooks

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

Moorhead, **Our Savior's**, call accepted for senior pastor

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

## Willie Nelson was right

*By Assistant to the Bishop Stephen Peterson*

It seems like everywhere I go and everywhere I look, something is in transition these days. Some of that is the time of year, of course. Summer coming to an end, school starting, Rally Sundays and all of that. Transition.



Then there is the little reality of my wife and I moving to Moorhead: we finally sold the house in Bemidji and moved to Moorhead in the middle of August; packing and moving accomplished; unpacking and settling in a work in progress; wife looking for a job; boxes still everywhere; where to go to church?! (For me it's easy – just go somewhere different, in some different part of the synod every Sunday). Transition.

And then there is the synod office. More to the point, where is the Synod office? It keeps moving! It's been in Grant Center at Concordia which used to be a dining hall, now it's moving to Riverside Center, owned by Concordia and which used to be an elementary school. Transition. And, *another* place in my life where boxes are everywhere. Transition.

And speaking of going to church somewhere different in a different part of the synod every Sunday, now we are really talking TRANSITION! My August and September preaching schedule includes five installations, one parish celebrating the one year anniversary of a new parish alignment and a congregation inviting me to be a part of a consecration Sunday. All of this has to do with TRANSITION: exciting new beginnings of partnerships in God's mission between new pastors and congregations; the forming of a parish, in this case very much not just for survival, but for the sake of a renewed discovery of God's mission; a Consecration Sunday signaling the renewal of less shyness and embarrassment talking about money, and the sharing of money God has given us - for the sake of our own growth in faith and for the sake of God's mission.

Whew! Transition! Change! Stressful! But you know what, exciting; all of it, exciting. My wife and I will miss aspects of our life in Turtle River, but we sense we are responding to God's call here to try and offer something to a synod in transition, and as hard as it is in some ways, it seems that it's time for a change. As they say, it almost does feel like one of those "God things."

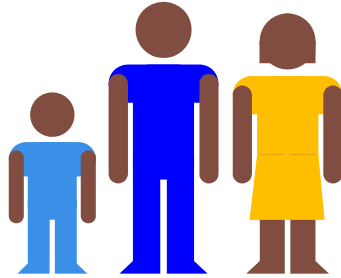
While the temporary space and two complete moves in a six-month period has been a hardship in a number of ways for the synod staff; and while it has been a strange way for some of us to begin our synod ministry, we have gotten to know each other better in less time. And maybe we are a little more aware of being together in Christ with our various gifts and personalities, warts and all, blended together for the sake of the Gospel and the mission and ministry of the congregations of this synod.

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# Synod to host hearing on draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality

The Northwestern Minnesota Synod will host back-to-back hearings for members to comment on the text of the Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality on Thursday, October 23, from 2:30-4:30 p.m. and 7-9 p.m. at in Detroit Lakes. Locations will be announced on the synod website, Northern Lights and the October newsletter.

This hearing is a key part in the development of the social statement. Representatives of both the synod and the Task Force for the ELCA Studies on Sexuality will be present. A synod representative will be present to record all comments made by participants. This record of comments will be submitted to the task force and considered as they revise the text for 2009.



“It is important that we have as many members as possible participating in this step of the process,” said Bishop Larry Wohlrabe. “This participation is part of how we develop social statements in this church. The hearing is a chance to both speak and listen.”

The draft social statement was written by members of the task force. Its content was determined by the standard ELCA social statement process of theological reflection that emphasizes moral deliberation and broad participation. Since 2001, the task force has been involved in discussions, panels, and consultations with individuals, ranging from sociologists to theologians and biblical scholars.

The task force has now published three studies as a means to invite deliberation and response from throughout the ELCA. These studies seek to set forth a Lutheran vision of human sexuality and its meaning for our church and society. The responses to the studies have been tabulated and reported to the task force.

The comments made at the synodical hearing are critical to the task force in the development of the proposed social statement to be brought to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly. Final responsibility for changes to and adoption of the text of the proposed social statement is the responsibility of the churchwide assembly.

A copy of the Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality may be ordered by calling a special resource line at 800-638-3522 ext. 2996. It is also downloadable at [www.elca.org/faithfuljourney](http://www.elca.org/faithfuljourney). Multiple copies for group study will be available from Augsburg Fortress Resource (800-328-4648); ask for Draft of a Social Statement on Human Sexuality, item number 978-6-0002-2079-2, cost is \$0.25 per copy.

## The Northwestern Minnesota Bishop's Letter

### Roster updates

Park Rapids, **Calvary**, senior and associate pastors resigned, interims Pr. Kenneth Nyhusmoen and Pr. Matthew Williams

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

Pelican Rapids, **Grove Lake**, interviewing, interim contract Pr. Darrel Saathoff

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**, interviewing, interim Pr. William Beyer

Warren, **First & Immanuel**, pastor resigned, interim Pr. Mark Rittmann

Assistant to the Bishop's message, continued

### Embracing transition

And what about these congregations I am being honored to visit? (And each of the synod pastoral staff has their own similar stories.) Congratulations to Glyndon Lutheran, Sion in Lancaster, First in Audubon, First in Akeley, Good Shepherd in Clearbrook and Our Savior in Gonvick. You have been on quite a journey of transition and God is now calling you on the road again of new beginning, pastor and congregation sharing leadership and together in ministry and mission. And congratulations to the new Wild Rice Parish (Wild Rice, Aspelund and Trinity in Waubun)! You are courageous and spirit led and crazy enough to band together not just for survival but for adventure in mission! God-blessed transitions!

Maybe this is really living as God's people, always in transition, because, in one sense, transition is reality, so we may as well try and embrace it and even have *some* fun with it. In a more profound sense, transition is the gospel, it is Jesus calling us to change, calling us on the road again. What are the transitions in your life, ministry and experience of God's mission? Is there something there, along with the likely struggles, to embrace and celebrate?

## Minnesota Council Of Churches Power And Boundaries Workshops

All sessions are from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Wednesday, October 8, 2008 at St. Alphonsus Catholic Church, 7025 Halifax Avenue N, Brooklyn Center. Early bird registrations due in MCC office by September 24. Registrations due to judicatory any time before September 24 and all registrations to MCC any time before October 1.

Thursday, October 30, 2008, at Trinity Lutheran Church, 210 S 7th Street, Moorhead. Early bird registrations due in MCC office October 16. Registrations due to judicatory any time before October 16 and all registrations to MCC anytime before October 23.

Thursday, November 13, 2008 at Christ United Methodist Church 5th Ave. SW, Rochester. Early bird registrations due in MCC office by October 30. Registrations due to judicatory any time before October 30 and all registrations to MCC any time before November 6.

The training includes:

- theological, sociological and psychological context
- power and gender issues in the pastoral role
- appropriate boundaries in the pastoral role
- prevention: vulnerability and self-care
- implications to clergy of Minnesota criminal and civil laws

Lunch and materials included in registration fee.

Request registration forms from the Minnesota Council of Churches or your judicatory. Detailed information, maps and registration forms are also available on the synod website: [www.nwmnsynod.org](http://www.nwmnsynod.org).

The Bishop's Letter is  
available on our  
website:  
[www.nwmnsynod.org](http://www.nwmnsynod.org)

## Something is stirring

By Erin Anderson, Assistant to the Bishop  
"Blow, Spirit, blow, set our hearts on fire!"



These words from the song *Shine Jesus Shine* have been rolling through my mind lately. As the tune dances in my head, I'm remembering the scene from the movie *Castaway* where Tom Hank's character finally figures out that the air needs to get to the flame before the fire can begin to blaze.

I think there's some embers stirring in our church and in our lives, catching some air, feeling the wind of the Spirit blow it ablaze.

I'm thinking specifically about the Book of Faith Initiative and just what the Spirit might be up to with this. I was just recently in Chicago at the ELCA Churchwide office for some briefing on just what this initiative is shaping into and what the hopes, goals, dreams and prayers of this initiative are. It was both exciting and frustrating to be a part of that briefing.

It's exciting to see that this is truly a "grass roots" initiative. It's exciting to hear some of the visions from the leadership behind the scenes. Visions that show, as Presiding Bishop Hanson said, "This is not something we are controlling but *contributing* to."

It's exciting to hear that by increasing our fluency in the first language of faith, the scriptures, we are inviting the Holy Spirit to renew this church and its people. It's exciting to see this initiative remind us that by getting in the Word and engaging more fully and creatively in it, we can see this as the Word of God engaging us. Again, from Bishop Hanson, "The Bible is God's living address to us as God speaks to God's people."

It's exciting to understand that we are calling for a cultural shift with this initiative. And as I sat there, I found it also very frustrating to understand that we are calling for a cultural shift with this initiative.

You see, we are a church and a community used to programs. We like having an end to the means. I always like getting the curriculum and knowing where to start and how many lessons it will be and how I can plot it out on my calendar. This initiative is not a program. It's a culture shift. *It's a way of faith.*

The goal of the Book of Faith Initiative is to have 75 percent of the congregations within each synod sign on as "Book of Faith" congregations. What does this mean? Well, it means you as a congregation take seriously the challenge to enter into these discussions and dialogues about creatively becoming more fluent in the scriptures. It means you read up on the initiative. It maybe means you talk as a congregation and as a council to sign on and claim your-

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# Immersed in the waters of grace



Jill Torgerson performs full immersion baptism at Red Lake. Assisting is Mike Jorgensen, who is the father of two of those baptized and worship leader at Bethlehem Lutheran.

By Michael Stein

It wasn't the River Jordan, but Upper Red Lake served the purpose quite well as two yoked congregations celebrated the Festival of Baptism for six youth and one infant August 3.

The full immersion baptism was a first-time event for the congregations—Our Savior's of Kelliher and Bethlehem of Waskish. Synodically Authorized Minister Jill Torgerson performed the baptism, which also included a joint worship service and picnic. "It was a wonderful setting for a most important event in the lives of these young people, their families and friends." Three of the youth were confirmation students who had not yet been baptized.

"I like the immersion," Jill continued. "It's part of our Lutheran heritage\*, but it's just not done very often. We followed the order of baptism, which included the anointing with oil after the immersion. This was a family affair with parents, grandparents and sponsors. We gathered as part of the family of God."

A side benefit of the immersion event was starting a dialogue about baptism. "It helped people realize that baptism is more than a once-in-a-lifetime experience," Jill said. "It's part of our everyday experience. It gets us back to the basics of the Lutheran faith. I've had some adults ask about doing a re-dedication of their baptism with immersion."

Jill said she would be more than happy to perform the immersion service again. "The people here are so alive in their faith, which makes my work an utter joy."

\*"Baptism is a Greek word, and may be translated 'Immerse.' I would have those who are to be baptized to be altogether dipped."  
-Martin Luther

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## Assistant to the Bishop's message, continued "Share what's working in your congregation"

selves committed to helping fan the flame. It means you network with other Book of Faith congregations and share good ideas with one another about what's working in your congregations and your households as you engage the scriptures. Maybe it means that, along with committing to 75 percent of our congregations, we also challenge each congregation to get 75 percent of their households to sign on and make a commitment. Where could the response to that challenge take us as a church?

Certainly, there are good resources, even though it's not a program. A congregation or household could begin by using the current book, *Opening the Book of Faith*, as a tool to explore how Lutherans engage the Word of God. This seven-session course outlines the purposes and goals of the Book of Faith for small group leaders, education committees, synod teams, and others. *The Lutheran Study Bible* is on the way (available February 1 and with significant savings on orders before December!) and will be a wonderful tool, full of great commentary and notes from strong Lutheran contributors. There will be a few devotional course kits including a 40-day Lenten Journey with preaching and worship ideas. You can check out information about all the resources being offered through Augsburg Fortress at [www.augsburgfortress.org](http://www.augsburgfortress.org).

Something is stirring.

## 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

  
**book of faith**  
Open Scripture. Join the Conversation.

[www.elca.org/bookoffaith](http://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](mailto:eranders@cord.edu).

# Mission trip to Alaska “reveals Jesus to the children”

By Michael Stein

Shungnak, Alaska, is not a site you’d choose for a summer vacation. But the Inupait Eskimo village, located in the Northwest Arctic Borough, was an ideal place for a summer mission trip led by Pastor Tim Lundeen, who said their vision in going there, “was to reveal Jesus to the children.”

This was the seventh mission trip to Alaska for Lundeen, who serves as pastor at Grace Lutheran, Erskine. “Every time we go we feel more and more welcome,” he said. “This year was a little different because we were invited to participate in new activities, like being invited to people’s homes.”

Those homes and families are part of a culture in flux, according to Lundeen. An extreme generation gap exists in the village, with the elders holding on tight to the old ways, while the younger members long for a 21st century lifestyle. In the early 1900s, the Eskimo people began discovering Christ through Quaker missionaries; today the majority of Christians in the area are Quakers. Some villages in the northwest are served by Baptist lay missions, which are reaching out to the younger families.



Pastor Tim works with a group of Bible school children.

Like most villages in the area, Shungnak has electricity, along with modern schools and clinics. Household incomes average around \$40,000, but the cost of goods is much higher. “Heating oil and gas runs about \$8 a gallon,” Lundeen said. “A pack of Crayola colored pencils costs \$16.”

Little wonder that the mission group was mobbed when they handed out pencils and cards to the children.”Giving these small gifts helped us to establish our presence in the village,” Lundeen said. “The children knew we were coming, so they were at our door when we arrived. Our focus was on the younger people. They came to us and were eager to tell the stories of their lives, which include many hardships.”



From left are Pr. Tim Lundeen, Suzanne Weik, Lynn Jacobson, Deb Rhode and Marilyn Malmanger.

During the week, the group held what might resemble a vacation Bible school for the children. After moving to the village of Selawik, Lundeen was invited to preach at Sunday evening services (the mornings are generally reserved for Bible studies). “The scripture was about forgiveness, and I prepared my sermon much as I normally would,” he said. “But they like personal testimony, so I included a personal story of forgiveness.”

Lundeen views his mission trips as an opportunity to share the gospel of Christ in other places. “For me, it’s part of our calling—to be tellers of the Gospel, as we learned in Romans Chapter 10. This falls in line with our Great Commission. And it makes us better tellers of the story when we come home. It also allows us to experience another culture.”



With the extreme location and little access to the rest of the world, the Inupait Eskimo culture offers limited opportunities to the young. “I visited with a member of the school board, who said it’s sad that so many young people don’t have a vision for their future,” Lundeen said.

The mission trips leave something of spiritual value behind. Lundeen related this example from the 2007 trip: “We had a 13-year-old boy named Teddy in our Bible class. The kids made a banner that included handprints of every child in the class. Two weeks later, Teddy committed suicide. They displayed the banner at Teddy’s funeral service, which gave comfort to his family and friends.”

The mission trip was assisted by the Lutheran Association of Missionaries & Pilots and included Suzanne Weik and Deb Rhode from Faith Lutheran in Mentor, Lynn Jacobson from Little Norway Lutheran in Fertile and Marilyn Malmanger from Zion in Fosston.