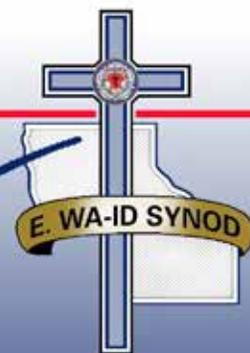


CROSS

Connection



The *Cross Connection* is a monthly publication of the Eastern Washington-Idaho Synod published for its clergy, associates in ministry, lay leadership and ecumenical partners.

From the Bishop

December 2013

God's beloved people,

This can be a melancholy time of year for me, the change of seasons to dormancy, decay, and December, and it can be an anxious time of year given the workload, the expectations related to the holidays, and another year's passing. The feeling is reflected in a hymn I'd not sung before Sunday: "How Small our Span of Life," (ELW 636), text by Herman Stuempfle Jr, and set to the well-known tune "Kingsfold." Read and absorb these compact lines:

"How small our span of life, O God, our years from birth till death; a single beat within the heart, the catching of a breath, a drop within the ocean's deep, a grain upon the shore, a flash of light before we sleep to see the sun no more."

Perhaps I'm vulnerable after a trip to the Gettysburg Battlefield, part of a seminary visit to the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg (LTSG). Mercy! The carnage was horrible and the sacrifice clear. A breathtaking visit in advance of Veteran's Day. Thank God the hymn text writer offers a benevolent (lit. "well-wishing") and ultimate perspective:

"And yet our speck of life is spanned by your infinity; our tick of time on earth is caught in your eternity. While suns and stars spin endlessly through depths of cosmic space, while aeons roll and ages pass, you hold us in your grace."

I think of seeds pregnant with life, held in protective soil, inert for now, but ready to bulge with new growth; suspended and ready.

"O Christ, you left eternity to plunge in time's swift stream, to share the shortness of our span, our mortal lives redeem. You filled your cross-closed years with love; you loved us to the end and touch us with your risen life that ours may time transcend."

Here comes Advent and the anticipation and celebration of divinely-crossed life. Jesus will be with us, not distant or aloof, but an in-the-flesh companion baptized into the Jordan, that is, baptized into the River of Life, into winter's present, our lives, lived in faith of the sun's return. Finally,

"We thank you, God, for kindling faith that lights our transient years, illumining our pilgrimage through mists of doubt and fears; for hope that sees a life beyond the swiftly passing days; for love, both human and divine, that lifts our hearts to praise."

We pray: Lord, kindle our faith so that we bear Light to walk our path, and then for others who do not know what or who to trust in the dark. Sustain us in our fear of the dark to know that buried in life is love enough, love to sustain us and others, love enough to await and receive the Prince of Peace. AMEN

We lean in, sing in, this hope!

Pastor Martin Wells, Bishop



The spiritual journey of loving our Latino neighbors.

Pastor Helga Jansons

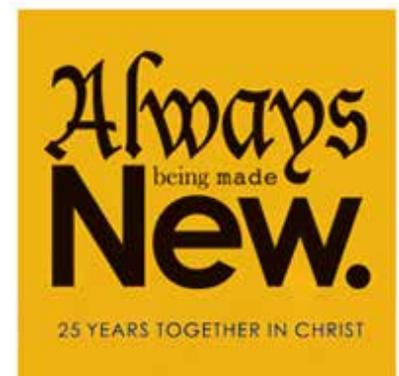
Four years ago I began the work of Director for Evangelical Mission. My first task was to work with the people of Tree of Life Lutheran in Yakima to help complete their process of employing a Mission Developer from Mexico. I knew almost nothing about Latino people, let alone Latino ministry. In Australia, New Jersey and Spokane I rarely came across Latinos from Mexico. Even when I moved to the Tri-Cities where there is a large Latino population, I did not connect with many Latino people. While encouraging my children not to have an “us and them” attitude at school or during soccer practices, I barely knew any Latinos personally. Not only that, I had many questions, assumptions and prejudices.

No matter how I felt or what I thought, as a staff member of the EWAID synod our context for ministry consists of Latino neighbors, and as Christians we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. So the gospel imperative was there. In order to be better equipped I tried to learn Spanish. That attempt shattered one prejudice immediately; learning another language at 50 was really tough. I understood why older people often don't learn English when they come to the US. Next, I went to Mexico to meet Abiut and Dora and enjoyed them even though we could hardly communicate with words. In Mexico I developed a cultural appreciation and some envy: grandparents are included in every outing with the family, children were joyful in spite of their physical poverty, and daily people spent hours over meals together talking about their neighbors and community. Back at home reading books like *Uncomfortable Neighbors* by Jim and Rosemary Tiffany helped. So did the formation of the synod wide Hispanic/Latino Ministry Table where lay and clergy alike could discuss ministry among and with Latino people across our synod, ask questions and learn. My questions started to come from a different place; out of curiosity.

The greatest shift came, of course, as I entered relationships with Latino people. I respected the longstanding ministry of Mo Garcia at Tree of Life and learned from the presentations that he and his wife Judy offer at churches that invite them to talk about how to do Latino ministry. I valued the lay leaders at Tree of Life and then at Celebration in East Wenatchee. Increasingly I have been aware of the Latino people around me and have conversations with Latino people to the point where I really connect.

Then, our synod wide Latino Table birthed two new ministries. Misael Fajardo (son of Abiut and Dora) is our new Mission Developer in the Wenatchee Valley. He is a young, smart, community minded, musical and highly relational. This is our synod's “glocal” mission (an ELCA term meaning global mission in the local community). Since smaller Latino communities cannot sustain ministries financially their need provides opportunities for partnerships across the synod. Meanwhile, in Pasco Donna Kary is a 70 year old Anglo lay woman who learned Spanish with the Peace Corps. She is there to explore whether our Latino neighbors would like to build a faith community, “walking together in God's love.” She has gone “door knocking” to 450 homes where she has been graciously welcomed.

Nationwide, Latino people are in our neighborhoods. As a church body the ELCA has a commitment to ethnic diversity and racial justice. In our synod there are pastors who speak Spanish and offer education about prejudice and racism. There are congregations ministering among Latino people. Our ELCA, synod and congregations are builders of bridges and of relationships. This is what Jesus did.



Please join us in prayers of celebration for these people celebrating anniversaries of ordination and commissioning . . .

12/13/08	Rev. Tammy Heimgartner	Grace - Mountain Home, ID	5 years
12/26/73	Marilyn Ostegaard, AIM	Retired	40 years
12/15/68	Rev. Stan Hoobing	Retired - Boise, ID	45 years

Save the Date!

Wednesday, January 29th

Let's "Pack the Civic"

in support of Lutheran Campus Ministry - Eastern Washington University
and Lutheran Community Services Northwest

Come and See the Gershwin ***Musical Crazy for You***
and enjoy an evening of Wine and Cheese among auction items
at Spokane's Civic Theatre
(more information to follow soon at www.ewidsynod.org)

Now Available

Synod Directories are now available in paper form and on disk in PDF format.
Please call us at 509-838-9871 to get your copy

Installations

Rev. James Aalgaard was installed at Grace Lutheran Church, Wenatchee, WA on October 27, 2013

Join us on Facebook!

<https://www.facebook.com/EasternWashingtonIdahoSynodELCA>



Call Process Status

A Process beginning/congregational study	I Interim	AP Associate/Assistant Pastor
B Names received or on-site visits in process	P Pastor	VP Visitation Pastor
C Call in process/issued	CP Co-Pastor	AIM Associate in Ministry
NV New Vacancy	LP Lead Pastor	L Lay Position
TC Term call	SP Supply Pastor	TM Transition Minister (available for the open-ended call)

POS	LOCATION/CONGREGATION	STATUS	PASTORAL CARE
P	Boise, ID – King of Glory	NV	Kari Sansgaard LP
P	Bonnars Ferry, ID – Trinity	NV	Kimberly Meinecke I
P	Chewelah, WA – St. Paul	NV	Betty Krafft SP
P	Coeur d’Alene, ID – Trinity	NV	Tom Inch I
P	Gifford, ID – Good Hope	A	Valerie Beesley TEEM
P	Kamiah, ID -- Faith Lutheran	A	Art Finney I
P	Moses Lake, WA – Immanuel Lutheran	A	Phylis Stromme I
P	Pocatello, ID – Church of the Good Shepherd	A	Barbara Harrison-Condon I
P	Sandpoint, ID – First Lutheran	A	Bob Chenault I
P	Spokane, WA—Bethlehem Lutheran	NV	Steve Wee SP
P	Terrace Heights, WA—Tree of Life	NV	Mo Garcia L
P	Thayne, WY—Star Valley United Church	NV	Al Schoonover SP

Synod Mission Support Update Fiscal Year ~ February 1, 2013 - January 31, 2014

2012	October	\$69,795	Year to Date	\$515,186
2013	October	\$80,506	Year to Date	\$551,796

Where in the synod is that?

November's photo was taken of Lake Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, from Camp Lutherhaven. Please send us your photos for use in an upcoming newsletter.

Save the Date!

The 2015 Eastern Washington-Idaho Synod Assembly
will be held April 24 - 26, 2015 in Pasco, Washington

Our Church in Action

We ask that you keep the ministry of the church, our synod, and the whole world as well as those listed below in your prayers . . .

We Pray

Rev. Laura Lynn as she faces health concerns.

Rev. Rick Evenson (Medical Lake, WA) as he continues treatment for multiple myeloma.

Individuals and families that struggle with aging, and loss, and their search for hope, comfort and renewal.

Those effected by floods and fire, earthquakes and storms.

Judy Webb (Region I FSO) for a full and speedy recovery from recent health concerns

Rev. Tammy Heimgartner, Rev. Stan Hoobing and Marilyn Ostegaard, AIM on the anniversaries of their ministry.

The leaders of our country, and our world, that they have the wisdom and the courage to do the work of their people and their God.

Prayer Requests . . . to be included or removed from the Synod Prayer Request list, please send your request to the synod office@ewidsynod.org, or call 509-838-9871.



SMALL BUSINESS
SATURDAY

★ NOV 30 ★

OPEN 10am - 2pm

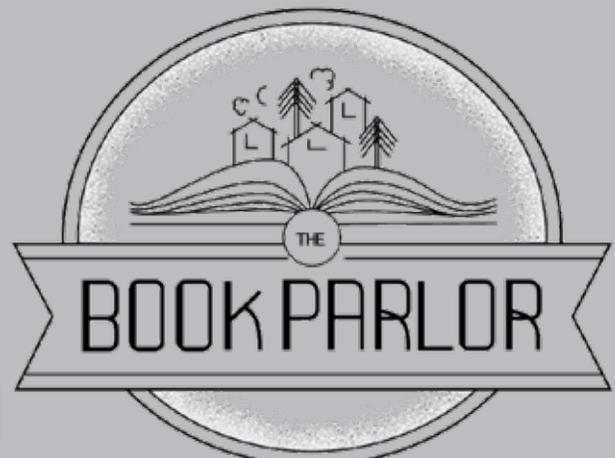
15% OFF ALL ITEMS, ONE DAY ONLY

1425 W. Broadway Ave

Spokane, WA 99201

509-328-6527 or info@TheBookParlor.com

www.TheBookParlor.com



Can't make it in to the store? Shop on our website and enter coupon code "Small" to receive 15% off your entire order. Coupon code is valid through 12/02/2013

Continuing Professional Education Opportunities

American and Lutheran Evangelicalism

Dr. Paul Seastrand — Pastor at Zion Lutheran in Lewistown

Lutherans who are comfortable being called “evangelical” are often curious about Christians called “Evangelicals” with a capital E. While Lutherans see themselves as evangelicals committed to infant baptism, liturgical worship, and a Bible infallible in matters of faith and salvation, Evangelicals see themselves committed to believer’s baptism, experimental worship, and a Bible infallible in nearly all matters. At the same time, many Lutherans are hard-pressed to distinguish the origins and deep differences between these two ways of being evangelical.

This class outlines the history of Evangelicalism in America, along with the theology of believer’s baptism, the role of experience, the interpretation of the Bible, the understanding of ordained ministry, and the engagement with culture and politics. These, in turn, are compared to Lutheran teachings. We hope to gain additional perspective and depth on some of the enormous changes affecting Christianity today.

December 3 First English, Great Falls, MT 9am-3pm

December 5 Bethlehem, Billings, MT 9am-3pm

February 25 Bethlehem, Billings, MT 9am-3pm

5 Contact Hours

\$65 Clergy and Rostered Leaders

\$30 LPA and lay ministers

Revelation

Midwinter Theological Conference

Izaak Walton Inn, Essex, MT

January 27-29, 2014

Dr. Craig Koester

Revelation is a book that has generated both fear and hope. People inside and outside the church have been intrigued with its vivid word pictures of the Lamb and Beast, Babylon and New Jerusalem. Popular media features attempt to turn the book into a timeline of cosmic destruction, even as people in our pews experience the book in their worship and hymnody—often without knowing it. In these sessions we will explore Revelation’s compelling witness to the Creator and the Lamb, and ask how the book might continue to speak through preaching, teaching and worship in our congregations.

Cost includes 2 nights lodging, 2 breakfasts, and full suppers

Staying in a single: Regular \$418/New to Ministry, LPA, lay \$408

Staying in a double: Regular \$299/New to ministry, LPA, lay \$289/Spouse not attending sessions \$219

Commuters: Clergy \$80/New to ministry, LPA \$70

Scholarship funds available to help with cost.

Save the Date!

**The 2014 Eastern Washington-Idaho Synod Assembly
will be held May 16-18, 2014 in Spokane, Washington**



Reach Out!

2014 Lutheran Staff Association Conference

March 9-12, 2014

“I reach out for your commands, which I love, that I may meditate on your decrees.” - Psalm 119:48

Speaker: Rev. Mark Nelson

Coordinator for Missional Leadership
Region I, ELCA

2014 Lutheran Staff Association Conference

Cannon Beach, Oregon

Cannon Beach Christian Conference Center

March 9-12, 2014

Workshops and Leaders

Ecumenism at Work in Alaska - Pr. Diane Krauszer, Mat-Su P.L.U.M.E. Outreach, Alaska

How to make PowerPoint Worshipful and not distracting - Laura Lease, LSA Board Member

Social Media - we've not yet settled on the speaker for this

Telecommuting - We all do it! How do you do it? - A Peer Discussion Group

Please visit us on Facebook If you have any questions please email us at lutheranstaff@gmail.com

Don't Forget!

The Open Enrollment period for Portico Members ends November 22

You will be able to purchase Term Life Insurance at that time
with no physical required



Where in the synod is that?

Spanish Language and Hispanic Ministry Intensive

On the campus of
the Seminary of the Southwest
Austin, Texas

Beginning Sunday, May 25th, 2014
Ending Friday, May 30th, 2014

Contact
Consuelo E. Reid at lsps@lsps.edu

See what's happening at
Luther Heights
<http://www.lutherheights.org>



Byberg Preaching Workshop | *Developing skills of ELCA preachers*

January 13-15, 2014
Cannon Beach, Oregon

Our Speaker | Anna Carter Florence

Preaching the Verbs | So what happens when we read scripture and let the verbs lead? In this conference, Anna puts a twist on dramatic theory and invites us to read the biblical "script" by focusing on the verbs that are given and chosen by the characters. What new things will we see and hear in both our sacred text and our human drama when we connect the verbs? How can that, in turn, change and renew our preaching?

About Anna Carter Florence | Anna is interested in historical, theological, aesthetic, and performative dimensions of preaching and the ways preaching engages other fields and different traditions. Her research focuses on testimony, feminist theology, the role of experience in preaching, and the history of preaching women. She is the Peter Marshall Associate Professor of Preaching at Columbia Theological Seminary and author of *Preaching as Testimony*.

Monday Night Lecture | Viticulture, Winemaking, the Gospels, Wine and Spirituality

About Barry Rogge | Barry received his B.A. from Valparaiso University and his M.Div from Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary. He holds the Certificate in Fund Raising Management from The Fund Raising School, Indiana University. He served many congregations in Washington and Oregon. Since his retirement in 2007, he has served as a fund raising consultant, ski instructor at Timberline Lodge and in guest relations and sales at Archery Summit Winery in Dayton, Oregon. He and his wife, Carole Ann, live in West Linn.

Chaplain | Terry Kylo

About Terry Kylo | Terry is developing The Catacomb Churches as a way to equip and support people in their baptismal ministry of leadership in partnership with Jesus Christ, in whom God is healing and creating the world. In addition, he serves as the Pastor of St. Philip's Episcopal Church in Marysville, WA. He is author of two books, *Being Human* (2004) and *Apprenticeship* (2011). Terry lives in Anacortes, WA, with his wife Sheryl and their two college age children. Terry does not live by bread alone.

Registration, Suggested Reading and Media Archives | We are beginning our transition to electronic communications this year. Please download, print out and mail in the registration form found at www.bybergpreaching.org.

www.bybergpreaching.org

A Port of Call

Life in San Juan, Puerto Rico, depends on the cargo ships that come in and out of port daily. Shipping food, building materials, fuel and other necessities by air is expensive, so the island relies on boats from the mainland United States and other countries to get the supplies needed for daily living.

Pier Ten is home to seven cargo boats whose job is to bring these important supplies to the island: Mogolly Hawk, VI Pride, Water Spirit, Sabre Spirit, Norma H II, Star Seal and Midnight Coast. It is also home to the Church under the Tree — a ministry of a new congregation called the Ministry with Mariners and Fishers, a joint worshipping community of the ELCA and one of its eight full communion partners, the Episcopal Church.

“I started a church at Pier Ten about two years ago because the seafarers would not go with me to a church outside the pier,” says Jesse Sargent, who serves as a chaplain at Pier Ten and founded the new ministry. “The reason we call it the Church under the Tree is because it is under a tree. We sit on concrete pillions or whatever is handy.”

The Church under the Tree meets every Sunday for worship and communion. A rotation of ELCA, Episcopal and nondenominational pastors visits each week to lead worship and give a brief sermon. And while the chance to worship with fellow mariners is important, it’s the community Jesse is building among the seafarers that is transforming life at the pier.

Life on the water can be tough, Jesse shares. The men and women who work on these ships are often far from home for six months to a year at a time, and they rely on the owners of the ships they work on to keep them safe. Jesse has often been called in to serve as a counselor in tense situations — like when a ship owner recently abandoned his ship and crew. “The Coast Guard called me at church on Saturday afternoon and told me there were two ferry ships that carry people, vehicles and cargo abandoned at the port in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, with 45 souls on board, and they did not have food, water or fuel.” Jesse contacted the owner of the ship who said he had turned the matter over to his lawyer and had no intention of paying or feeding the people on the ships any time soon. “I contacted the Coast Guard the next day and negotiated fuel for the ships,” Jesse remembers. “It was over 100 degrees on the ships without fuel to run the air conditioning.”

Jesse worked with a maritime-law attorney to get the workers their wages and money to return to their home countries. In the meantime, Jesse says he “visited often with the mariners and took them food, water and supplies, and prayed and counseled them as they wanted to jump ship being super angry, and rightfully so.”

There was also the time that the Coast Guard called about a ship from Moscow with 17 Russian workers on board who did not have the documentation to set foot onto Puerto Rican soil. Jesse called a friend in Washington, D.C., and promised the workers they’d be back in Russia for the Orthodox Christmas on Jan. 6.

“I arrived at the pier as their ship was sailing away, and they all stood on the deck and gave me a cheer and put their fists over their hearts and pointed toward me,” he says. “I cried right then and there,” he continues. “You become very close in a short period of time when there is no one to help and the ole’ chaplain shows up. Thanks and glory to our Lord Jesus Christ.”

For many of the people to whom Jesse ministers, the Ministry with Mariners and Fishers is the only place they can turn to when they come into port and need someone to advocate for them. “God uses me to help with pastoral care and also advocacy help for all the mariners,” says Jesse. Now he’s working to expand the ministry to other ports.

“God has called us to grow and develop our ministry to mariners and fishers at Pier Nine — a larger port than the one we are ministering to now to spread the ‘Good News of Jesus Christ with words and actions.’”

Martin Luther and Christmas

Martin Luther, one of the most influential players in the Protestant Reformation, had a lot to say about 16th century Christianity. It should come as no surprise, then, that he also made some contributions to how we celebrate Christmas. Check out these Christmas traditions that Luther himself may have had a hand in starting.

Luther's Christmas tree — There are reports of people decorating trees during the winter solstice dating all the way back to ancient Rome, but it was in 15th century Germany that historians claim the first Christmas trees began being sold as decorations.

Some people credit Martin Luther with being the first to decorate an indoor Christmas tree. Legend has it that after walking through the woods on a snowy Christmas Eve, Luther was awestruck by the beauty of the stars shining on the snowy branches of evergreen trees. When he returned home, he brought with him a small fir tree and decorated it with candles so he could share the outdoor experience with his family.

"Away in a Manger" — Some sources attribute the Christmas hymn "Away in a Manger" to Luther, though this is likely only a fable. The author of the hymn's first two verses is unknown, and so some have suggested that the song was based off of one Luther wrote for his own children.

The hymn itself was first published in 1885 in the *Little Children's Book for Schools and Families* by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America. Two years later composer James Murray republished the hymn as "Luther's Cradle Hymn" in the book *Dainty Songs for Lads and Lasses*.

In his book *Best-Loved Christmas Carols: The Millennia Collection*, Ronald M. Clancy writes that the lyrics for "Away in a Manger" may have come from a poem written for the 400th anniversary of Luther's birth, which took place in 1883.

Christkind (Christ Child) — During the Protestant Reformation, Luther sought to shift the church's focus in December from the gift-giving St. Nicholas on Dec. 6 to the coming of Christ at Christmas. To do so, he invented the Christkind, or the Christ Child, a gold-crowned, angelic figure in a white robe who came bearing gifts on Christmas Eve. Luther's intention was that "das Christkindl" resemble Christ and thus influence people to anticipate Jesus' birth during the Advent season. Eventually, though das Christkindl would merge with other Santa Claus myths. In fact, the name Kris Kringle actually is a derivation of Christkind.

Change

It's inevitable. It's constant. It can be so subtle you hardly notice it, and it can be swift and drastic, taking to the form of an unexpected death. We all face change every day. Right now, many of us are facing the change of seasons, cleaning up yards as they go to a dormant state. We're also facing that we have less daylight every day, to get these tasks done. Some of us are facing life anew, life without a parent who has recently passed, or life without children living at home, after they've left for college. Do you notice the changes that take place - every day? Have you ever held a conversation with your child, and noticed that something has changed? Their tone has changed, they're growing up, they're maturing and this conversation will never be the same again.

We are sold change. We're sold change that will make us smarter, change that will help us be more efficient, make us more appealing - make our lives better. If you notice, and if you believe all of the tiny details in advertising, you'll be made to believe that you'll be happier if you buy the product and the change it will bring. Is anybody ever not smiling in the "After" picture. I'm just not so sure why any vendor would want to sell their product as an agent of change. We get change without having to purchase anything - it's always there. It occurs to me that when change gets sold, it's promoted as the change that we think we want, when in all actuality, it's the change that's being sold to us.

I've been described as cynical, and I think it comes from having seen a lot of change. But I also know that it comes from how I've learned to look at things. Through those experiences of change, I've learned that not all change is good. And I've learned that to find the good (it's almost always there) you have to look at things from a different perspective - a further away perspective - a bigger picture. Sometimes you have to look at things from a hundred and eighty degrees. That flip side is often the only place the good can be found. I always try to find the good, whether it's because I'm an optimist or because I just have faith that the good is there. I have the faith that there is a bigger picture. It's the picture that God paints, with hands that are big enough to paint all of our big pictures. When the picture of change laid out before you isn't what you think it should be, remember to have faith, do your best to understand it, and make the most of it. Change is just change, it's up to us to make the most of it.

Best Practices for Amending your Congregation Constitution

1. Decide who from the congregation is going to work on the amendment process
 - If the decision is made that a committee would be most beneficial refer to C13.06 of your constitution for guidance.
2. Notify the Synod Office as soon as the decision to make amendments is made
 - Designating an individual to communicate with the Synod will help create a working relationship with the Synod committee member and remove potentially confusing overlap from conversations and communication with multiple members of your team. The Synod Office will put you into contact with a member of the Synod Constitution Committee. Ideally, the same person will work with you throughout the entire amendment process.
3. Begin making draft changes to your congregation's constitution.
 - Be sure to refer to the Model Constitution for Congregations and use your Synod contact as a helpful resource.
4. Submit your proposed changes in full to your Synod Constitution Committee contact for review and approval.
 - Allowing the Synod to review your changes before asking the congregation to vote will likely benefit everyone involved.
5. Follow the procedures outlined in *C17.01 and *C17.02 for the approval of proposed amendments by the congregation.
 - Take note of the date requirements in *C17.01. Many congregations unwittingly violate those time constraints. It would be demoralizing to have hours of work nullified by something so trivial.
6. Your Congregation Secretary must now submit the approved and dated copy of your newly amended constitution to the Synod Office (*C17.03).
 - Electronic submission of the amended and current constitution is preferred. Copies of the minutes from the meeting(s) and a statement certifying the attached documents from the Secretary are helpful.
7. The Synod will notify the congregation of receipt and approval.
 - REMEMBER! Your changes will not be effective until you have received approval (*C17.03).

Ability Works

What We Do

For People with Disabilities:

We provide information and support for qualifying individuals with disabilities to attain their employment goals.

For Businesses:

At Ability Works we provide tools to businesses that will assist them in working with individuals with disabilities.

For State and Local Governments:

We provide support and services for agencies looking to assist individuals with disabilities in obtaining and retaining employment.

208-292-0149

or toll free at: 877-439-4837

www.abilityworks.org

**EASTERN
WASHINGTON
IDAHO SYNOD**

of the
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

314 S. Spruce St., Suite A
Spokane, WA 99201-5823



December 2013 Newsletter

Let Down the Nets

Lifting Our Vision

Jesus First, Last, Always

God's Grace, Our Gratitude

The Spirit Powers Us

No Fear! Transformation

Connections Multiply Miracles

Go, Tell & Serve

Please reproduce any and all articles for publication in congregational newsletters or bulletins.

The **Cross Connection** is also available on the synod website at www.ewaidsynod.org.

Deadline for articles is the 5th of each month.



God's Work. Our Hands.

Synod Calendar

November

- 18-21 First Call Theological Education (Auburn, WA)
- 23 Ventures Training (Central - Yakima)
- 28-29 Synod Office Closed - Thanksgiving

December

- 11-13 Synod office closed, attending Region I All Staff Meeting (Federal Way, WA)
- 23-27 Synod Office Closed - Christmas

January 2014

- 24-25 Synod Council Meeting (Prince of Peace - Spokane)



Eastern Washington-Idaho Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our Hands

Staff

- Bishop The Rev. Martin Wells
- Director for Evangelical Missions .. The Rev. Helga Jansons
- Program Administrator Cathy Steiner
- Assembly Manager Karla Olson
- Communication Director Gib Dominguez

THE PARISH PAPER

IDEAS AND INSIGHTS FOR ACTIVE CONGREGATIONS

Coeditors: Herb Miller and Cynthia Woolever - www.TheParishPaper.com

December 2013 - Volume 21, Number 12

Copyright © 2013 by Cynthia Woolever

Why a Sense of Belonging Matters

With our cultural emphasis on individuality, too many people are lonely and feel disconnected from others in their community. Because a sense of belonging can be linked to economic development, city planners and community organizers attempt to create environments where residents can enjoy a sense of belonging. Local churches also provide some of the fiber that weaves people together by offering them a place to belong and to be known.

Strong congregations organize in ways that help people feel close as they worship together, disclose life's joys and sorrows, and share their deepest beliefs. Strong congregations find approaches to encourage emotional attachment because having a sense of belonging is a basic human need. Psychologist Abraham Maslow, who wrote about the hierarchy of human needs, cited belonging as the third most important, coming after only physiological and safety needs. For worshipers, the sense of belonging is how individuals *experience* community. Intentionally fostering a sense of belonging among members is one of the weight-bearing walls in the structure of strong congregations.¹

What Creates a Sense of Belonging?

Focusing on members' vertical relationship with God alone—with little attention to their horizontal relationships with other worshipers—slowly unravels the community's overall health. What exercises increase the congregation's heart rate?

Offering friendship. Close friendships generate feelings of belonging. One of the most important resources a congregation can offer to people is friendship. People flourish when we give them our time, attention, and acceptance. Unfortunately, congregations too often offer "help" to those in need without also offering friendship.² Likewise, worship services may be experienced in the same space, but the opportunity to make friends is not part of the equation. Strong churches create many avenues for people to learn the names and interests of others as well as group social time. Intentionally practicing multiple means for long-term members as well as newcomers to be known and to know

others is sacred work. As John O'Donohue asserts: "Friendship is the nature of God."³

The size of the congregation doesn't make a difference in whether people have close friends within the church or whether their participation is increasing or decreasing. Both large and small churches must engage in practices to address this fundamental human need.

Helping worshipers grow spiritually. When congregations help worshipers grow spiritually, they are also creating stronger bonds with others. Worshipers who are spiritually connected are also emotionally connected. The venue for spiritual growth varies but most people need to devote time to private devotional activities, seek to grow through worship service participation, learn from and with others in a small-group setting, and discover new truths through service and leadership. Frederick Buechner shares the conviction that "when faith stops changing and growing, it dies on its feet."⁴ Congregations that fail to meet these needs of their members place them at spiritual risk.

Creating opportunities for participation and service. Worshiper involvement and participation that grows over time signal that the sense of attachment and belonging is also rising. People gain a sense of



satisfaction from contributing to the congregation's ministries and feel part of a team.

Typically, a sizable percentage show up at worship but sit in the bleachers during other church activities. In the average congregation, only one-third of the worshipers engage in at least four of these ways: attending services; joining a small group; holding a leadership position; being a part of church decision making; and regularly giving money. Some churches believe that they lose members because new attendees drift away not long after joining. But in truth, these newcomers never formed meaningful attachments. Effective congregations build assimilation bridges by which newcomers quickly bond to new friends, groups, and service opportunities.

Meeting age and life cycle needs. Congregations with a healthy heart—those with a high percentage of worshipers feeling a strong sense of belonging—recognize how younger worshipers connect to places (e.g., through sports teams or mission activities). Worshipers younger than forty-four years of age count on being emotionally attached to their congregation as a key ingredient for their commitment and involvement. At the same time, congregations cannot take older worshipers' attachment for granted. In fact, congregations with an older age profile tend to have lower overall scores on sense of belonging measures.

Building positive engagement in the congregation's future vision. When a congregation captures worshipers' imagination about the church's future ministry possibilities, worshipers also have a greater sense of belonging. They are able to envision what the faith community working together can accomplish with God's help. Further, they have been offered a stake in that future by committing to share their time and talents to make it happen. Everyone acts on the shared belief that the best years of the church's ministry lie ahead.

When Being Friendly Is Not Enough

A true congregational strength consistently operates whether or not the worshipers or leadership are aware of it. Further, a real strength is embedded in the behaviors, beliefs, and values of the majority of worshipers. As a result, a number of worshipers can leave without diminishing this strength nor does it depend on a few key leaders. A genuine congregational strength gains momentum and muscle when it becomes central to the conscious identity of the congregation.

Without routine maintenance and regular exercise, the strength of a healthy sense of belonging among church members and the experience of community

quickly deteriorate. Strong congregations demonstrate four pathways to generating feelings of belonging. They:

- Develop groups that help people feel loved and give them the opportunity to express love for others.
- Promote friendships that give newcomers feelings of acceptance and self-esteem.
- Offer service or leadership roles and responsibilities that give people a sense of purpose, meaning, and positive self-identity.
- Present spiritual-growth experiences that deepen members' life-shaping values.

Each of these pathways are like load-bearing walls. Remove one or more of the walls and the structure is weaker and more vulnerable to mission failure.

The Bottom Line

“The hunger to belong is not merely a desire to be attached to something. It is rather sensing that great transformation and discovery become possible when belonging is sheltered and true.”⁵ This description underscores why strong churches make possible the greatest individual transformations and discoveries of all. With the significance of belonging in mind, review the structure, practices, and rituals present in your current worship services, educational programs, small groups, ministry outreach, and decision-making processes.

- Does participation give people the chance to make friends and deepen their relationships with others?
- Does involvement foster greater spiritual growth and understanding?
- Does participation help people to learn more about the congregation's ministry vision and help them find a place to use their gifts toward that purpose?

1. Cynthia Woolever and Deborah Bruce, *Beyond the Ordinary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004).
2. Christine Pohl, *Living into Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 170.
3. John O'Donohue, *Anam Cara* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 15.
4. Frederick Buechner, *Secrets in the Dark* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 173.
5. John O'Donohue, *Eternal Echoes* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 22.

Copyright © 2013 by Cynthia Woolever
www.TheParishPaper.com