

Hospitality in a hungry world

By the Rev. Wm. Chris Boerger, bishop



Dr. Amy G. Oden will be the keynote speaker at this year's Northwest Washington Synod Assembly. She is the author of *God's Welcome: Hospitality for a Gospel-Hungry World*. I must confess that I wasn't impressed when I heard this title. Hospitality is

one of those often-discussed, yet seldom-experienced words the church has been throwing around lately.

I was wrong. Her approach to understanding God's welcome is challenging. For her, hospitality is about God and what God is up to, not about us and our friendliness. Certainly friendly people are needed in hospitality. She identifies that hospitality takes readiness, risk, repentance and recognition. The stance of the church and of individual Christians is about our new life in Christ. The stance

is one of hospitality to the stranger and the friend.

This approach believes that God will use those who I know and those who I have not yet met to change me. Hospitality is about receiving a gift from God in the form of the one I am meeting for the first time. It is a stance of humility that says: I can receive something that I need in the act of recognizing God's work in the other person.

I have experienced our hospitality as a welcome to those who will not challenge us. We grew as a church body in America by welcoming those who were ethnically and culturally like us. We are in many parts of this church still welcoming those who grew up in communities like ours. Welcoming the stranger often requires the stranger to become more like us.

God becomes one of us in order to welcome us into the body of Christ. The incarnation is about God's welcome in spite of our rebellion. We are called to share this welcome with those who we know and those who we have yet to meet.

Oden has written a thought-provoking and challenging book. I look forward to hearing more from her at the assembly. I invite your engagement with her and with her book as we continue to be welcomed by God and as we seek to serve with God's hospitality in the world. □

A time to gather for worship and business

The 2010 Northwest Washington Synod Assembly will take place on Friday, May 14, and Saturday, May 15, at the Everett Events Center. The churchwide representative is the Rev. Ruben Duran.

As Bishop Boerger mentioned in the above article, our keynote speaker for the assembly is Dr. Amy G. Oden, dean and professor of history of Christianity at Wesley Theological College in Washington, D.C. Pursuing her interests in the history of Christianity and hospitality, she recently finished a book: *God's Welcome: Hospitality for a Gospel-Hungry World*. The assembly theme is based on

the message Oden shares in the book: "Living the Good News of God's Welcome."

Voting members will elect a vice president, secretary, roughly half of the positions on synod council, and voting members who will represent the Northwest Washington Synod at the 2011 ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

Documents will not be mailed to congregations this year. All documents will be posted to www.lutheransnw.org/assembly. The synod assembly committee will be using online registration again this year. Please check the synod's Web site for information as it becomes available.



Community develops when people of faith gather for a common meal. Here members of Grace Chinese and Sammamish Hills Lutheran churches gather for a common meal of American and Chinese food.

The word that shall not be spoken

By the Rev. John LaMunyon

Some years ago I was asked to lead an “evangelism” workshop in the central Idaho panhandle. Knowing there would be competition for attention that day, I gave the workshop the title, “The Word That Shall Not Be Spoken.” More than 50 people attended. Attention and participation remained high throughout the day. At the end of the event, one grizzled old fellow asked, “So what’s the word that can’t be spoken?”

“Evangelism,” I said.

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” he responded. “You mean I’ve wasted my whole day here talking about evangelism?”

I’ve never used the word since, except under great protest. What is happening at Sammamish Hills Lutheran these days isn’t evangelism in the traditional sense. There are no

training programs, no “invite your friends to church” posters on the wall. Instead, we’re striving to discover the answer to an age-old question, “How did Jesus do this?”

Along the way the congregation has stopped doing some things and has started three seemingly simple things or, at least, strengthened and continually emphasized them. The cost of the “stops” has been both financial and numeric. In worship we’ve stopped believing the quality of the performance is more important than the character of the worship leaders. In programmatic ministries, we’ve stopped making sure every ministry reports to a pastor’s office.

The most important “stop” is that the pastors, including myself, have stopped trying to meet everyone’s needs or, the opposite, to discover and use their gifts. This is also where we come to the “starts.” We are now

most often involved in replicating our ministries by training other leaders. Those other leaders then, in turn, train and work with others.

What is this training? There are three primary aspects: 1) To encourage leaders and members of the congregation to develop a devotional life of Bible study, prayer and meditation, in addition to the corporate disciplines of word and sacrament. 2) To encourage members to share that devotional life with others on a regular basis in homes for meals and study. 3) To go beyond the bounds of their congregation by living and talking about their faith in their daily life and service.

Although it sounds fairly straightforward, there are stumbling blocks. In the area of deepening one’s devotional life, the congregation has realized that there are always excuses. But those who have taken the challenge have found that their life of faith has deepened. As resources for daily devotions we encourage the Faith Five (www.faithink.com) or the Daily Text materials (www.moravian.org/daily_texts).

Mike Breen of 3D Ministries (www.3dministries.com) is fond of saying, “If you take meals and mountains out of the Bible, all that’s left is 50 pages of genealogies and Leviticus.” In truth, once folks are gathered around a table, incredible things happen. Stories of joy and sorrow are shared, laughter abounds and friendships deepen. Along the way, faith is deepened as well.

Perhaps the greatest enemy of shared meals is an acronym that

LaMunyon is pastor of Sammamish Hills Lutheran Church in Issaquah.

What are they doing

At the Church of the Beloved?

It might feel like a living room because it is a living room. Church of the Beloved gathers every Sunday evening in a historic Edmonds mansion. Rosewood Manor is also home to an intentional Christian community that I started in 2002. Ten community members/residents live in the 8,500-square-foot manor. They offer hospitality and keep a weekly rhythm of meal and prayer. Some have called it a “mini-Holden Village,” possessing a similar sense of community, sustainability and rootedness in the grace of Jesus (but without the mountainous seclusion).

Church of the Beloved hopes to purchase Rosewood Manor and renovate the landmark to better reach out to the surrounding neighborhoods.

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Pastor Will Sappington penned: CHAOS: “Can’t Have Anyone Over Syndrome.” Why? The carpet is dirty, the house is a mess, the furniture needs replacing, etc. To counter CHAOS, Cheri and I have hosted many gatherings at our home. Even though our house is in the middle of a remodeling project, we’ve hosted formal dinners with as many as 100 people (some even sitting on the stairs) or as few as five.

It doesn’t matter what the setting is. As soon as the food comes out, the backdrop is forgotten and you find the sort of deep community that always develops when people of faith gather together for a common meal.

The final “start” is a natural progression of the other two. If someone

Already the congregation hosts benefit concerts, craft markets, films, garden workshops, book clubs and classes for emerging leaders. Leaders desire to be a center of renewal for the immediate community as well as for churches looking for imaginative ways to proclaim God’s good news in Jesus Christ in an increasingly “post-Christian” climate. So here’s your invitation. Visit us online at www.belovedschurch.org and/or in person at 5 p.m. on Sundays at 8104 220th St. SW in Edmonds.

Are you up for an incarnational adventure? Every great idea has a back story: After eucharist one evening some Beloveds got to wondering, “How might we better pray for our neighbors?” Someone said,

is excited about what’s happening in their life, they will tell their friends. No evangelism program is needed.

After several years of declining worship attendance, Sammamish Hills Lutheran saw a small uptick in worship attendance in 2009. Of greater importance is the character of folks walking in the door. It wasn’t very long ago that newcomers would ask, “What can this church do for me?” Without exception, that question has been replaced by: “How can I serve through this church?”

The members of Sammamish Hills Lutheran Church are actively engaged in training and sending out hundreds of disciples, who also carry with them the gift of, and aptitude for, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with others. □

“Well, let’s just ask them!” Another said, “Yeah! We could give out self-addressed, postmarked postcards that say: ‘We were wondering how to pray for our neighbors and thought we’d ask you. Write, draw or collage your prayer on the back of this postcard and pop it in the mail.’ We could designate a wall in our worship space to post all the postal prayers and pray for our neighbors’ specific needs each week.” We looked around the table and realized we were on to something.

We thought this idea was too good to keep to ourselves. This incarnational adventure has the potential to give you a clearer sense of your neighbor’s spirituality, needs and concerns—all important information with which to better love your neighbors. It gives you a creative way to engage your neighbor’s hearts in a nonthreatening and public way. And, lastly, it gives you a unique chance to inform and stimulate your prayers for God’s mission in your local neighborhood.

Let’s try this together and see what happens. Call me at 206-356-7976 or e-mail ryan@belovedschurch.org. Let’s dream about what God is up to in your neck of the woods. □

Ryan Marsh

Marsh is a synodically authorized minister.

Rosewood Manor in Edmonds.

