



Northwest Washington

Synod supplement

Evangelism that costs

By the Rev. Kirby Unti

Over a decade the congregation of St. Matthew Lutheran, Renton, experienced significant growth, followed by a period of living on the plateau. Plateau ministry isn't easy. We were working harder and harder, providing more and more programs—and going nowhere. What worked yesterday no longer drew a vital response. Slowly it dawned on us: we were missing a new way of perceiving what ministry we should be involved in.

Rather than creating programs that would attract people from the community, we realized that we needed to look at where God was already leading the parade. Our first big clue came when we were invited to join another community ministry.

The Rev. Paul Cheung invited us to serve as a partner and host for a ministry designed for Chinese immigrants (the area's fastest growing immigrant population). Cheung is an evangelist at heart and St. Matthew members knew we had more to learn and receive than we had to offer in return. This partnership led to launching a satellite ministry and calling Mike and Rowena Wang as pastors.

Grace Chinese Church, South King County, is now being planted. Grace Chinese worships in Chinese, while St. Matthew worships in English. Our children jointly participate in an English-speaking Sunday school. Grace Chinese isn't likely to grow like a typical Anglo church plant. It will

rely far more on home Bible studies, exploration classes and gatherings at the nearby Tea Palace Restaurant.

A second ministry fell into our lap: Luther's Table. This came about because of the life-giving vision of Renton Lutheran as the church entered into its own death. The church's former site, assessed at about \$1 million, is being leveraged into a \$20 million mixed-use project. It will provide up to 50 units of transitional housing for veterans, space for classes in English as a second language and vocational training, as well as Luther's Table.

Luther's Table, with the look and feel of a coffee shop during the day and a wine bar/pub at night, is dedicated to reaching those unlikely to grace the doors of St. Matthew—or any other church, for that matter.

Opening the door

The third ministry opportunity has knocked on our door for more than a decade. We finally had the courage to open that door and begin a before- and after-school program. On Tuesdays, the bell rings at McKnight Middle School (across the street from the church) and kids make their way to St. Matthew. We provide food, arts and crafts, video games and friendship. Starting at 7:30 Friday mornings, children have a hot breakfast, homework help and a warm place to be until the school opens at 9 a.m.

The 300 children who participated in this program last year don't look

at all like those who attend Sunday morning worship. They are far more ethnically rich, speak nearly 80 languages, and reflect the fact that more than 50 percent of kids in our school district receive free or reduced lunch. They may never attend worship or participate in the St. Matthew youth group. Yet plenty of anecdotal evidence shows they are experiencing the love of God and know they are being impacted by the church.

Each of these ministries comes with significant financial cost and involvement for St. Matthew staff and members. None of the ministries produce income or are adequately reflected in traditional parochial reports. It may be a stretch for most to even call this evangelism. We argue that we are at least planting seeds.

So how can we do this kind of ministry? Because our people believe in what we are doing. The old adage "money follows mission" is true. Our ministry attracts others who believe in what we are doing. It helps people to see the gospel they hear on Sunday put into practice during the week.

Members frequently say: "The reason I belong to St. Matthew is because the congregation is involved in the community." High-cost evangelism is restoring St. Matthew's vitality and establishing our church as a valued community partner. □

Unti is pastor of St. Matthew Lutheran, Renton.

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Let us love

By Debbie Trafton O'Neal

Let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action (1 John 3:18).

What happens when you add together 10 months of planning, 550 volunteers and enormous community needs?

For members of Grace Lutheran Church, Des Moines, this added up to a chance to put their “faith in action.” When the Faith in Action Leadership Team first began exploring a campaign to involve the entire congregation in community service, some people were skeptical.

Could they really locate enough projects for 550 volunteers to tackle?

Could the congregation really grasp the concept of stepping outside church walls to “be the church”?

Should they even consider canceling Sunday morning worship services for one Sunday, so the congregation could send members out into the community to work?

Yes. Yes. And yes.

Sunday, Oct. 12, 2008, was the culmination of a four-week



Faith in Action volunteers repackage corn for Northwest Harvest food bank.

congregation-wide campaign that included small-group study and involvement with more than 400 people, weekly adult and children’s classes focused on the book of Luke, and Sunday worship where sermons and music tied together living out faith and daily life.

The buzz in the church building, as well as around the community, was the result of myriad projects. Those not as physically able to travel beyond church walls helped tie 30 quilts for the Graceful Quilters’ Lutheran World Relief project. Others filled 248 LWR school kits with much-needed supplies and packed materials into 184 backpacks for the local school district. The Des Moines Food Bank wasn’t

left out as volunteers packaged rice, oats, diapers and other food items.

Volunteers traveled in the church van to downtown Seattle to work

Carrying tools they will need, Faith in Action volunteers get ready to tackle invasive blackberry bushes.

at St. Martin de Porres, a shelter for homeless men. (St. Martin de Porres is connected to Grace, which serves as a satellite overnight shelter for six months of the year.)

Approximately 150 people went to the Des Moines Creek Parks and Beaches to fight back invasive blackberry bushes, pull weeds, and plant trees and other plants.

Northwest Harvest, a central food bank distribution warehouse, welcomed 121 volunteers (more than had signed up) to repackage and pack onions, apples, corn and more than 10,000 pounds of rice.

Hospitality House, a transitional home for women in nearby Burien, was filled with the sounds of saws, hammers and swishing paintbrushes. There, volunteers painted, cleaned and built a three-computer workstation for residents.

A large team descended on a Federal Way Multi-Service Center apartment complex to paint hallways and a fence that never seemed to end.

The Youth and Children’s Ministry teams spearheaded a soccer clinic for kids in the community, with 10 skill stations and interactive scrimmages.

Every project was rewarding, but perhaps none were as challenging to arrange or as meaningful to the members who served as efforts to



help needy families in the community. Although 20 families were identified as needing some kind of assistance, Grace volunteers could only complete 13 home projects that Sunday. But as campaign director Becky Grall continually reminded the Faith in Action Leadership Team before Oct. 12: "This day will be awesome, but what happens after Oct. 12 is when we really put our faith in action."

Needless to say, the planning has already begun. □

Trafton O'Neal is a member of Grace Lutheran Church, Des Moines.

Engaging in conversation

How can we engage in deep conversation with "churchy" folk? Or how can we evaluate and overcome what perceived obstacles may be in the way of such fellowship?

Celebration Lutheran Church in Anacortes formed an outreach team to begin conversations with others in the community about:

- How to respond to the view that Christianity is best represented by "media Christianity."
- How to expose the values and beliefs held by a Christianity both deeply rooted in Lutheran/Christian tradition.
- How to engage friends and neighbors (in our spiritual-but-not-religious Northwest culture) in dialogue about common concerns so as to strengthen relationships and learn from one another.
- How to attempt to reconcile age-old tradition with contemporary knowledge and worldviews.

To begin the conversation, Celebration invited the public to events/

'Go, make disciples'

By the Rev. Wm Chris Boerger, bishop

The Rev. Jan Nesse, assistant to the bishop, regularly tells me that every congregation in the Northwest Washington Synod should be growing in members and service. Often the congregation's response is that faithfulness is not measured in numbers. The other common response is that there aren't people like us living in our neighborhoods anymore. Both are true, but both miss the point of the comment.

Jesus' last command to the disciples in Matthew is to "Go, make disciples" This is not about numbers. But it is about our view of our work and the church's mission. The church is not here for us. The church is the people whom God has gathered for the sake of the world. It is not my church or the pastor's church, we are Christ's church. If our goal is to be the church as we were when we joined, then we miss the point.

discussions, the first of which was held in fall 2007.

That first discussion focused on a Marcus Borg lecture delivered at the "Mysticism, Empowerment & Resistance ... Today" seminar. More than 30 people attended and—with Borg's focus on advocacy and active nonviolent resistance—voiced views including deeply felt tensions about how to go about this public activity without being or appearing judgmental.

The second presentation, held in fall 2008, centered on *Beyond Theology*, a public television series in which 25 leaders of diverse religious,

It's true that the local congregation did do something to encourage us to join in that ministry. The fact is that our programs are not what make us disciples. It's the Spirit using the word and the sacraments. But the proclamation of the word and the study of the word are not just for us. We are always looking at ways to make that word available to those to whom we have been sent by God.

We have confused the institutional church with the body of Christ. We are to be the body of Christ in the world. We will grow in faith and in numbers as we hear the call to discipleship. Jan is right. Every congregation in this synod should and can grow. Growing is not about staying the same. It's about reaching out to the neighbor and to the friend with the truth that Jesus is God for them. Go, make disciples of all nations, including neighbors and friends.

spiritual and academic backgrounds discuss "the evolution of consciousness in a critical period of global convergence and environmental challenges."

Each step we take in conversation with our spiritual-but-not-religious friends helps to inform the next. This ministry is not so much a program but a commitment to explore connection with our Northwest friends. We look forward to seeing where it leads. □

By Chara Prater
Prater is a member of Celebration Lutheran Church, Anacortes.

