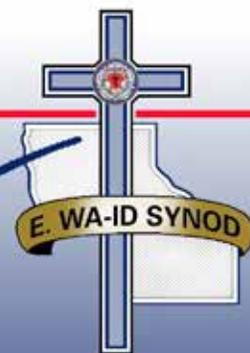


CROSS

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

November 2013

God's Beloved People,

This month there are lots of "Bits and Pieces:"

The fall Conference of Bishops meeting has now passed along with the wonderful installation for our new Presiding Bishop, Elizabeth Eaton. I hope some of you were able to see the live-streaming of the worship service. For those of you who would like to see more, please go to www.elca.org.

The Conference meeting was about celebrating the future and the past. Thick and very dear thanks were offered Bishop Mark Hanson and our Secretary, David Swartling. David is heading back to our country (Bainbridge Island) and will, I'm sure, continue to be active in the Region. Mark and Ione are buying a house in St Paul, MN, and the future is still unknown. Both Mark and David expressed deep thanks to the church for the opportunity to serve.

Otherwise, the Conference meeting was business as usual with lots of reports and new conversation about a 25th Anniversary Campaign for the ELCA as passed by the Churchwide Assembly. Our synod is considering whether this might be an opportune time to do a parallel campaign that would address synod and Churchwide ministries.

Bishop's Convocation is around the corner and I'm deeply grateful for the participation of our rostered leaders. Coming out of this event I expect we will be better prepared for the roller-coaster future that is the challenge of our day. Keeping our congregations focused and centered during days of change is a challenge for all our leaders. Some of "The Way Forward" goals have to do with deeper leadership training for church councils so I look forward to sharing what we learn with congregations.

This month we will give thanks for the excellent leadership of Dr. Phylis Anderson at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary. Phylis has been a sturdy partner during her whole career as an academic and pastor. We wish her well as she moves into the next phase of life and as the seminary begins a wonderful new chapter associated with California Lutheran University.

A yearly part of my work is a visit to one of our eight seminaries to talk with faculty members and senior students getting ready for their first assignment in the church. I have been to the campus of our Gettysburg seminary before and look forward to a free half-day to soak in the American history, the new Civil War museum on campus (a dorm that was used as a hospital during the battle), and to acknowledge the 150th Anniversary of President Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. The important work is with anxious seniors who have lots of questions about assignment and the call process, the health of congregations, and their own goals in ministry. We will be seeking one or two new candidates for our congregations.

Life is good and I pray the fall has started well for you! Our singular opportunity is to share the confidence we have in life because of the love poured into us by Jesus Christ. God bless and keep you!



Pastor Martin Wells, Bishop

From Grace to Gracious

Pastor Helga Jansons

“Undeserved love” is a definition of “grace” given by a young woman in jail who was well aware of her drug-related crime. She knew God’s love was undeserved. She knew God’s grace.

Another way to talk about grace is to be “held” by God. God holds us like a parent, a friend or a lover, especially when we are vulnerable. We may not recognize it at the time; we may not see it. But believing is seeing, not the other way around. It is when reflecting upon our faith journey that we may see where God has held us with God’s grace.

Recently I was at the WELCA retreat in Boise. There, 50 women shared their stories of how God held them when they lost a mother, a home or their health. Many shared how God’s presence was particularly close in those times. Others shared times when they could not see God in their lives as the other women listened lovingly and held them in prayer. It is in the moment of sharing our vulnerability that we are open to God’s grace over again.

God’s holding grace can come through circumstances, in a tangible form, a conversation or a relationship. At other times God’s power is at work within us. God’s grace is sufficient; it is enough to get us through this journey of life. The resilience and courage that many people of faith find when struck by adversity is remarkable. A big part of it is accepting our vulnerability, as well as our need for God’s grace. It is hard to be that open. It is hard not to reach out for something to numb our pain; whether it be from the fridge or the bottle.

Our prayerful imagination can help us to see God’s grace in our lives. Imagine God holding you when you feel all alone. Imagine that God will equip you with all you need when life’s journey takes you down the slope. God’s word in Ephesians 3:20 assures us that God can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. Believe. Be on the lookout for what God is up to: glimmers of hope.

I often hear the saying “God has a plan for me” which is comforting to be sure. Yet, I think God has even more in store for us. A purpose; something to live for, something to give.

In 1 Peter 4:10 we read that we are to be “good stewards of the manifold grace of God, and serve one another with whatever gift each of us has received”. We are to be gracious. God’s purpose for us is something that can benefit others as well as ourselves. We participate in God’s purposes to love others even when we don’t think they deserve it. This kind of stewardship we can all be part of.

In this month where there is so much focus on stewardship it is important to remember that we are stewards of God’s grace, of our faith and even our Lutheran heritage. Our heritage speaks of how God’s grace comes down to hold us when we are undeserving and vulnerable. Our faith trusts that God provides us with all that we need both outside ourselves and strength within. This is a faith to share generously.



We recently received a thank you letter from the staff at the ELCA Malaria Campaign thanking us for our 2013 gifts totaling \$73,800.89. With our help, this campaign has reached more than 1.7 million people, implementing life saving malaria campaigns.

SAVE THE DATE!

*Lutheran Campus Ministry
at the University of Idaho*

7th Annual Dessert Auction
November 10th beginning at 2:30pm
at Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church, Lewiston ID

2:30pm - music and light refreshments
with an opportunity to peruse the desserts for auction.

Live Auction begins at 3pm

Just a Reminder

We will publish an updated Synod Directory in late October
Please email office@ewaidsynod to note any changes/corrections
you would like to make to the information we are currently using

Thank you.

Roster Changes

Calls Accepted

Rev. James Aalgaard has accepted the call to Grace Lutheran - Wenatchee, Washington

Rev. Steve Crittenden has accepted the call to Our Savior - Twin Falls, Idaho

Rev. Ann Frerks has accepted the call to Holy Trinity - Eprata, Washington and St. Paul - Quincy, Washington

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 I 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	
P	Thayne, WY—Star Valley United Church	NV	

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

2012	September	\$61,786	Year to Date	\$445,249
2013	September	\$51,297	Year to Date	\$471,073

Anniversaries of Ordination

Please join us in congratulating and celebrating the anniversaries of the following pastors

11/30 Rev. Jim Grant Retired Medical Lake, WA 55 years

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. Steve Crittenden and Our Savior Lutheran Church (Twin Falls, ID) as they continue ministry together

Rev. Ann Frerks, St. Paul Lutheran Church (Quincy, WA) and Holy Trinity Lutheran Church (Ephrata, WA) as they continue their ministries together

Rev. James Aalgaard and Grace Lutheran Church (Wenatchee, WA) as they continue ministry together

Sharon Hickman and the family of Rev. Gerry Hickman. Pastor Hickman passed away September twenty-first

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

Salem Lutheran Church (Spokane, WA) as they celebrate 125 years as a congregation on November 3, 2013

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

Those effected by floods and fire and other natural disasters

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@ewaidssynod.org, or call 509-838-9871.

Hello to all our Lutheran partners in ministry in the Spokane area!

This year Salem is celebrating 125 years of ministry on this corner of Broadway and Walnut in Spokane, Washington. Our big celebration weekend is scheduled for November 1-3. We are extending a big welcome to any and all brothers and sisters who might have a history at Salem to celebrate with us in our Sunday morning worship, November 3, at 10:15am.

If you are able to put something in your Sunday bulletin and/or upcoming newsletter to let people know, that would be awesome, and greatly appreciated. Anyone who would be interested in the other scheduled festivities for the weekend may contact the church office: either call 328-6280 or email to salemcongregation@gmail.com

Thanks for your help in spreading the word!

If you have any questions, please be in touch with me. Thank you!!

Cheri Nelson,
Community Minister



Where in the synod is that?

Answer in next month's newsletter. September's photo was taken at St. John Lutheran Church - American Falls, Idaho. Please send us your photos for use in an upcoming newsletter.

Lutefisk & Meatballs on the Palouse



November 2nd

4pm or 6pm seating

Trinity Lutheran Church
1300 NE Lybecker St
Pullman, WA 99163

A Scandinavian dinner benefiting the Palouse-area Family Promise and the ECLA Malaria Project..

Menu

Lutefisk, white sauce, butter
Swedish meatballs & gravy
Norwegian potato lefse
Red new potatoes
Danish braised cabbage
Cucumber and dill salad
Lingonberries
Finnish rye bread
Krumkake, Kransekake, &
other Scandinavian cookies

Ticket Orders

Online at eventbrite.com as
"Lutefisk & Meatballs on
the Palouse"

OR

Send a check payable to
"Trinity Lutheran Church"
c/o Mary Lopes
820 SW Alcora Drive
Pullman, WA 99163

Ticket Prices

\$22 Lutefisk & meatballs \$15 Meatballs only \$10 Age 4 thru College
Tickets must be purchased in advance by October 18; no tickets at the door.

Ages 3 & Under Free
Questions: 425-652-6618

MISSION INTERPRETER Training Dates

October 5th 10-noon, Immanuel, Moses Lake

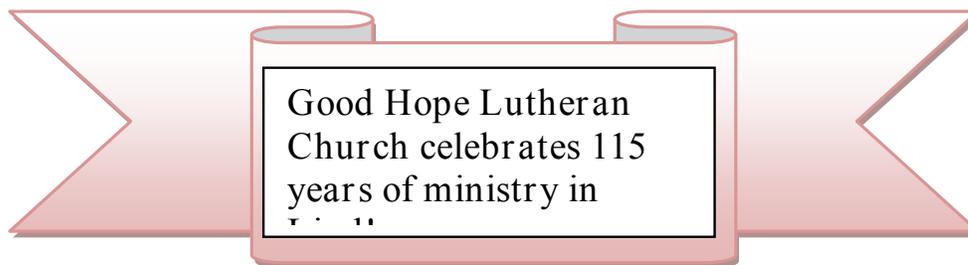
October 26th Central, Spokane 9am-noon Story Telling with PR Shelley

November 2nd Upper Snake cluster 11am-2pm

Don't Forget!

The Open Enrollment period for Portico Members ends November 22

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



On behalf of Good Hope Lutheran Church, I am pleased to invite you to attend **Good Hope Lutheran's annual *Oktoberfest*** sausage feed as we celebrate 115 years of ministry in Lind, from 11am to 2:00pm on Sunday, October 27st, 2013 being held at the **Senior Center located on "I" (Main) Street in Lind.**

This wonderful meal includes: German sausage, sauerkraut, mashed potatoes, green beans, applesauce, rolls, and dessert. The cost for adults is \$9.00 and \$5.00 for children 12 and under, and for a family of 2 adults and 2 children for **\$25. You won't find a better meal anywhere for this price, plus you can shop at the bake sale and purchase a raffle ticket.**

LIFE-CHANGING CARE IN BANGLADESH

Eleven-year-old Ratna Mannan was studying at home when the accident happened that would change her life. As she worked by candlelight, her linen dress caught fire and nearly 90 percent of her body sustained burns. Her father was a day laborer and the family did not have much money for medical treatment. Ratna was taken to a nearby hospital where she was treated for several months.

As she grew over the years, though, her scars became tight, and her movement became constricted. She underwent operations over the years at a number of hospitals to alleviate her suffering.

Then finally, at the age of 21, she was admitted to Lutheran Health Care Bangladesh, a hospital that specializes in maternal and children's health funded in part by the generous gifts ELCA members make to ELCA ministries through their Sunday offerings. Lutheran Health Care Bangladesh is a program designed to not only meet the immediate health-care needs of women like Ratna, but to sustainably improve the health and living conditions for women and children in the southern part of the country through education and development. The program includes medical outreach to women who may not otherwise receive health care. It has a mobile clinic that visits rural areas of the country five days a week and soon will begin conducting training seminars aimed to teach especially women not just about personal health care, but about how to build a better future for themselves through working for human rights, gender equality and sustainable income generation.

"Bangladesh is a country where poverty particularly affects women and children, increasing risks to their health and well-being. I am grateful for ELCA members paying attention to this reality by allowing us to support Lutheran Health Care Bangladesh," says Franklin Ishida, who coordinates the ELCA's involvement in Bangladesh. "In accompaniment with Lutheran Health Care Bangladesh, the ELCA is indeed reaching out to provide for safe and appropriate health care for women and children."

For people like Ratna, who has now had four surgeries to relieve the constriction caused by her scarring as well as reconstructive operations, Lutheran Health Care Bangladesh is the gateway to a better, healthier life. Ratna will remain at the hospital until her treatments are completed. Her procedures and meals will be paid for until she is ready to return home.

DID YOU KNOW THIS ABOUT MARTIN LUTHER?

Voted number three in A&E's "Most influential person of the millennium" countdown, Martin Luther was decidedly a major influence on western culture during the last 500 years. With Luther's birthday coming up on Nov. 10, you might be interested in reading more about the reformer. Here are a few things you might like to know as you read and perhaps post his quotes, such as. . . "Be a sinner and sin boldly, but believe and rejoice in Christ even more boldly, for he is victorious over sin, death, and the world." — Letter to Philip Melanchthon (Aug. 1, 1521).

Luther was a 16th-century man who was just as much a sinner as any other person. Lutherans are Christians who accept the teachings of Martin Luther and hold to the basic principles of Luther's theological teachings, such as "Grace alone, faith alone and Scripture alone."

Luther liked to drink beer. Luther had been known to frequent the Black Eagle Tavern where he went many evenings after supper for rounds of bock beer and lively debate. By 1527, Luther and his wife, Katharina, had established a household in a former monastery. With that much space, Katie Luther successfully ran a student hostel, farmed, raised cows and pigs and brewed her own beer.

The discovery of Luther's toilet was an important archeological find. "Luther refers to a *secretus locus monachorum hypocastum* or *cloaca*; that is the monk's secret place, the sweat chamber or the toilet," the American psychoanalyst Erik Erikson wrote in his best-selling book, *Young Man Luther*. Despite Luther's candid accounts of his daily battle with constipation, nobody knew the location of his *cloaca* (Latin for "sewer").

The "secret place" remained unknown until 2004 when excavation work to plant a garden in the grounds of Luther's house in Wittenberg brought to light an annex of his house. Among the remains, the archaeologists found a 9-by-9-meter (about 30-by-30-foot) room, a vaulted ceiling, and a niche with a 450-year-old toilet.

Luther's call to ministry was confirmed by a thunderstorm. In 1505 when he was in route back to law school after a trip home, Luther was thrown from his horse during a thunderstorm. Terrified, he promised St. Anne — the patron saint of miners and his family — that he'd become a monk. The rest is history.

SERVING HIS COUNTRY AND THE LORD

Stephen Martin served 16 years in the military before becoming an ELCA chaplain — eight years in the Air Force and then eight more as an active-duty National Guardsman. He seemed a natural fit then to take part in a year-long pilot program at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center in Houston, which called for chaplains from a number of denominations to work with veterans of the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Vietnam, who were struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder.

“There was a lot of mental illness, a lot of suicidal soldiers,” he shares. “Some of the stories I couldn’t even imagine. Seeing people killed or actually killing people themselves and wondering how God is involved in all of this.”

In November 2012, the ELCA Church Council adopted a social message titled *The Body of Christ and Mental Illness*. The message serves to encourage learning and moral discourse about mental illness and to shape the ELCA as a church that offers hope, prayer and support for people seeking treatment; and support for caregivers and mental health professionals. The message also acknowledges that 10 years of extended overseas military campaigns have resulted in a large population of combat veterans who are experiencing mental health issues and are prone to suicide. At the same time, “the veterans’ health system is widely deemed inadequate to address the massive mental health needs among our troops,” says the message.

A large part of Stephen’s job was to work alongside the psychiatrists and psychologists who were there to teach the veterans coping techniques. He remembers one particularly powerful sailing trip he took with a group of veterans from the hospital on nearby Crystal Lake. “We were out on the lake, and they had all these little rocks. Each one represented something they wanted to put in the past.” The group tossed the stones into the water to symbolically let go of their memories. It was a powerful moment, Stephen says, for many former soldiers who were struggling with guilt.

“They’re almost seeking forgiveness,” he shares. “We believe that we have a loving, merciful, forgiving God, and he’ll forgive all if we repent with a genuine heart, but your memory is a different thing; we tend to remember the things we said or did. But God promised to forgive us as long as we ask.”

In his time at the hospital, Stephen encountered a number of veterans who had turned to substance abuse to dull their memories. In turn, their lives became even more complicated. “They turned to drugs and had problems with relationships and turned to alcohol and that led to them being incarcerated.” “It seemed like half of the guys who had been in my group had been incarcerated because of post-traumatic stress disorder,” he continues. Because of this many pleaded with Stephen to go into prison ministry. “They said, ‘Sir, you need to go to our prisons; a lot of our guys are there.’”

It was by the grace of God then that Stephen’s first call after seminary was to serve as chaplain in the Arizona state prison system. “It’s just amazing how God works,” he says. “The community is very similar to being in the military. There are a lot of veterans that are incarcerated, and there are a lot that work there as corrections officers.” And like the veterans at the hospital, Stephen sees many people every day who “are really doing their best to change and accept responsibility for what they did and trying to move on.”

He’s glad that he can be a part of that process. “I tell them, ‘I can’t do this for you, but I’ll be here with you. I’ll guide you as much as I can, but ultimately it’s between you and God.’”

Here is the FINAL info on

TheoProbe 2014

The dates have been selected as
February 22 – 28, 2014.

We also have our Professors lined up:
Pastor Glen Segond is an

ELCA Pastor and Clinical Psychologist

Professor Mary Hinkle Shore is a
former Professor of New Testament at Luther Seminary,
currently serving an ELCA congregation in Brevard, NC.
We plan to continue at Winter Park/Mary Jane ski areas
because of reasonable lodging and skiing cost
and smaller weekday crowds.

Due to overwhelming response on
lodging preferences, we have moved the lodging to
The Vintage Hotel in Winter Park.

Check out the web site: www.vintagehotel.com

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
Camp Lutherhaven
<http://www.lutherhaven.com/>



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

**Upcoming
SEMINARS**

Portland, OR
Nov 4-6, 2013

Seattle, WA
Nov 11-13, 2013



What's Next on Your Vocational Horizon?

The purpose of the Crossroads Seminar is to provide a safe and open venue for clergy and other rostered church workers to explore and discern potential vocational transitions in their personal and professional lives.



Are you facing a professional transition?

For some, this potential transition might simply be the consideration of a call to a different setting. Or, it could be a recommitment to your present call—but with some changes in your style or approach. For others, the transition may be to a different kind of ministry that provides a better “fit” for your gifts and interests. And for others, the next chapter may be one of bi-vocational work or the decision to “re-career” and take a different path altogether.

This seminar will provide the opportunity for reflection, discernment, the time to re-explore God’s call, to define your key vocational strengths and to develop a new and vibrant vocational vision.

This 3-day workshop will help you to:

- Clearly assess your key vocational strengths, interests, values and transferable skills
- Better understand your best vocational “fit” in terms of your professional strengths and interests
- Identify a number of viable vocational options and potential “next steps”
- Redefine your personal and professional vision for the next chapter in life and ministry
- Develop a workable strategic plan to live out your vision

Early Bird Special
Register early and save \$25.

Registration fee includes:
Consultation Manual, Snacks and Career Testing

Key questions this workshop will address:

- ✓ Do I need to re-evaluate the kind of ministry that I am doing?
- ✓ Do I have a sense of balance between life and work?
- ✓ Should I consider other vocational options?
- ✓ How does stress, burnout, conflict in the parish and/or family relationship strain affect my ministry? Are there healthier, life-enhancing changes I can make?
- ✓ Am I clear about my vocational strengths?
- ✓ Do I have a clear picture or vision of what I would like to be doing vocationally in the future?
- ✓ How might I be more effective in the work and ministry that I am doing now?
- ✓ What are my “growth edges?” Where do I seek to grow and expand as a person and professional?
- ✓ Is God calling me to a vocational transition?

**EASTERN
WASHINGTON
IDAHO SYNOD**

of the
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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



November 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

October

- 27 Deans' Meeting (Richland, WA)
- 28-30 Bishop's Convocation (Richland, WA)

November

- 3 Salem Lutheran Spokane celebrates 125 years as a congregation
- 10 Campus Ministry at University of Idaho Auction
- 18-21 First Call Theological Education (Auburn, WA)

December

- 11-13 Synod office closed, attending Region 1 All Staff Meeting (Tacoma, WA)



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

November 2013 - Volume 21, Number 11

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E-newsletters: Worth More Than You Know

E-newsletters are pervasive—marketers, businesses, politicians, civic organizations, and physicians, among many others, prize them for the content they deliver. Churches have also embraced e-newsletters because information can be easily shared with members. But they're worth more—much more.

Whether your congregation is new to e-newsletters or a long-time user, the vast majority of congregations do not fully mine the reader information that e-newsletter companies make available. Many people are aware that e-newsletters provide “open” and “click” rates; however, this overlooks 90 percent of what makes e-newsletters such a powerful tool for building community, empowering your staff, and reaching out to others.

Using E-newsletters Effectively

In an age where social media (Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, etc.) and mobile technology represent the cutting edges of communications, e-newsletters are a bit old-school. What sets e-newsletters apart from any other form of electronic communication?

- *They provide a true look into readers' reactions to what your church is supporting.* While social media allows for feedback and reaction, those writing are aware that everyone is seeing what they're saying and reacting to, so they self-screen what they say. They may “like” something not because they really like it, but because a friend—or the minister—put it up. E-newsletter subscribers, however, do no such self-screening. Most are unaware that others are tracking what they open and click (though this is beginning to change), and in the comfort of their home or office they feel no compunction to engage something for reasons other than genuine interest.
- *They provide unparalleled granular detail about who reads your material.* E-newsletter data allow you to track readers' reading histories, who they have shared the information with, and how many times any given piece is read over time and by who.

- *They can help develop a stronger sense of community.* E-newsletters require a great deal of work. Some congregations are finding that in this work there is an opportunity to create community by turning members into profile-writers, book reviewers, designers, and editors. The e-newsletter goes beyond sharing information; it develops community.

Best Approaches

Developing healthy approaches to working with e-newsletters ensures that you remain flexible in your work. Done right, e-newsletters should constantly be changing as you use them to experiment with new ideas and adapt to what your members show interest in.

- *Think and Learn.* E-newsletters are popular tools for sharing and promoting activities and programs. In reality, pushing information is among the *least* effective uses of this tool. When building your e-newsletter, think first about what you want to learn, not what you need to communicate. Are your education programs connecting with people? Do you understand how people connect with one another? What are the big ideas your congregation wrestles



EVEN THE MOST CAREFULLY DESIGNED
E-NEWSLETTER WILL NOT REACH EVERYONE.

with? Are people's spiritual needs being met? Are they growing spiritually? Are there undiscovered volunteers you don't know about? Running articles that test these ideas will yield rich results.

- *Track, Track, Track.* It's not enough to know how many times something was opened, or how many clicks it received. Alone, this data tells you little. However, placed in context, and measured over time, you will begin to understand the habits and interests of your congregation. Are people on mobile or desktops? Do they read in the morning, afternoon, or evening? Are they sharing the information on social media? If they are, which channels? Do certain members read everything? Who are they? Do certain members just lurk? Why? What time of year do people respond to which topics? Tracking can tell you all this, and raise hundreds of additional questions.
- *Embrace Being Wrong.* The desire to be right all the time will impede your ability to learn what your e-newsletter is teaching you. Pieces that receive few clicks and opens aren't failures but important lessons in what people respond to. Maybe it was poorly written. Poorly timed. Poorly placed. Ask the hard question: Why did this fail to engage congregational readers? Then search for the answers.

Mistakes to Avoid

We expect a lot out of our church communications. And although most of us know that no one way of communicating will reach everyone, we want to believe that we can develop that one channel that most people in the congregation will depend on for information. And while carefully designed e-newsletters will tell you a lot, they are not a panacea anymore than social media, print newsletters, bulletin boards, phone trees, or public announcements. But to get the most out of this communication tool, here are five practices to avoid:

- *Don't send a PDF of your existing print newsletter.* Most people don't read print newsletters. Putting your print piece in e-newsletter format won't change that. An e-newsletter represents a whole other way of communicating, so wrapping it up in an online format won't make the print version more appetizing, or the electronic communication exciting.
- *Don't expect everyone to get on board.* As noted above, e-newsletters can be great community builders. But not everyone is going to share your excitement. Don't expect or force them to. If you do, those who resist will feel left out and unheard.
- *Don't expect instant results.* Building a readership takes time. Many church leaders expect half or more

of the congregation will read the e-newsletter in the beginning. They're shocked when they realize that only 10 percent of subscribers (and not everyone subscribes) will read what you write at first. Time, patience, and a willingness to be wrong and to learn will change this.

- *Don't abandon other communication channels.* On average, you can only expect 10 percent of subscribers to click through and read your e-newsletter early on. Most congregations are fortunate to get 30 percent of members to subscribe initially. If you drop other communication channels right away, you're effectively cutting off 60-70 percent of your congregation. Allow the e-newsletter to blossom and work in tandem with other ways of communicating.
- *Don't ignore the tracking.* The ability to track what every reader reads, and doesn't read, over long periods is what sets e-newsletters apart from social media, the website, and print publications. If you choose to ignore it, you have effectively nullified all the positives that e-newsletters bring to a congregation.

So What Do I Use?

There are many good e-newsletter programs on the market. The oldest, and probably best known, is Constant Contact, which features robust analytics, easy design, and a full range of exceptional templates. Many other programs share the program's one drawback—it costs. Not much at first, but Constant Contact and others charge for every little feature.

MailChimp is an excellent alternative. Analytics, photos, and basic templates are all free, as are sending the emails—so long as your list doesn't exceed 2,000 people and you don't send more than 12,000 individual emails per month. Most churches will never come close to this.

Final Thoughts

E-newsletters offer a communication learning experience that no other tool can match. With careful tracking, you can learn what your congregation reacts to, improve the way you communicate with them, and test new ideas. The results? Empowered staff, a more connected congregation, and unprecedented insight into your members' lives.

About the Writer: Martin Davis owns Sacred Language Communications, formerly directed Alban's Congregational Resource Guide, and has 20 years of experience working with congregations (www.sacredlanguagecommunications.com).

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