

From Pastor
Nielsen
March
2011



Dear Friends in Christ,

We had 11 members attend the Leadership Open House in Alma, Nebraska. An excited and enthusiastic group of 140 folks from 15 congregations gathered to encourage one another in renewal and mission. I was asked to share a presentation on identifying and prioritizing mission opportunities for congregations. We asked how we can get our congregations engaged in and excited about God's mission in the world. I'm no expert on mission work, but I just shared some of the things we have been learning here at Peace Church.

We no longer talk about "this church" referring to our congregation or our denomination. We are talking about "The Church" referring to all God's people around the world in many different traditions and communions. We are committed to our Lutheran focus, but we must also be open to learning from and sharing with our Christian partners in many traditions. We have to be outward looking – like the Sea of Galilee which gives its water to the Jordan River and not like the Dead Sea which has no outlet and so becomes salty brine.

One thing our ELCA partners taught us was to remember that God's Church doesn't have a Mission. It is the other way around. God's Mission has a Church. The mission is primary and we are on earth to serve that mission. We need to define that mission. If we think of God's mission as merely "Doing good" then we will slip into "mission creep" thinking that everything we do is mission just because we are doing it. If

every good thing is God's mission, then the Church is no different from a club of do-gooders. We find our mission in the Great Commission of Matthew 28: Go make disciples, followers of Jesus, little Christs in the world. And we can't do Matthew 28 without also doing Matthew 25: feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit prisoners, welcome outsiders. As the Church we do Kingdom work. We do the things that make eternal impact. We do the things Jesus showed us to do in his ministry.

We must have both a local and a global focus in our mission work. If we think we must take care of our local needs first before we reach out to the world, then we will never serve our neighbors in deepest need around the world. We must accompany our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world, but we must also be committed to frontier mission work like Lutheran Bible Translators and World Mission Prayer League taking the gospel to people and places that have never heard. There are more people in the world today who have not heard the gospel than ever before. Now is not the time to congratulate ourselves on our mission success. Our work is far from done.

We must move from just writing checks for mission support to building relationships with people and doing mission work ourselves through mission trips, missionary sponsorships, child sponsorships, and so on. Next fall we are hosting Pastor Bill Moberly from New Mexico to present a seminar here called "Awakening Lutherans to World Mission." He will help us learn how to become a more mission focused congregation.

Our Mission support plan for 2011 has been developed and approved by the church council. Our January offering of \$3000 was given to Haiti Lutheran Mission Society, USA, which is an organization based in Lincoln, Nebraska, working to support Lutheran congregations and Lutheran schools and orphanages in Haiti. It was an appropriate gift on the one year anniversary of the Haiti earthquake. The folks at Haiti Lutheran Mission Society, USA, were excited to put our gift to good use for the Gospel in Haiti.

Our February \$3000 offering was given to Lutheran World Relief. We also gave a pick-up truck load of coats to the People's City Mission in Lincoln. The woman who received the coats at the Mission was overwhelmed with our gift. She was so grateful because the coats were so needed.

Also, in February we heard an outstanding presentation by Stacey Duensing on her summer internship with Urban Impact Ministries in New Orleans last summer. The stories and images and sounds she shared from New Orleans inspired many of us with what God is doing to reach and heal the world through the Church.

In March I have invited Rodney and Melinda Hinrichs of Lincoln to come down and share with us stories and inspiration from their ministry with congregations in India and elsewhere. They call their work "Reaching the Unreached Ministries". On Sunday, March 20 they will be sharing during the Sunday School hour with the adults and with any other classes that may be interested.

Our March \$3000 offering will go to Lutheran Family Services in Nebraska. As you may remember, we touch many Nebraskans through LFS services each year in counseling and other programs to at risk families and individuals.

Our March Lenten offerings are on the March Church Council agenda but are tentatively scheduled as follows. Ash Wednesday will support the ministry of Lakota Lutheran Center in Scottsbluff. March 16 will support Lindsey Mueller's mission trip to Uganda which we will hear about next fall. March 23 will support Reaching the Unreached Ministries through Rodney and Melinda Hinrichs. March 30 will support Urban Impact Ministries.

Speaking of Lent, I am looking forward to sharing a Lenten series of messages with you this year based on the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15. The series is inspired by Tim Keller's book "Prodigal God" and I think you will be moved and encouraged by the treasures of truth Pastor Keller has found in this rich parable of our salvation.

In February, Kristi Duensing and I took 7 youth to the Dare 2 Share youth conference in Lincoln. The Pershing Center was packed with almost 6000 youth from several states. It is hard to imagine a higher quality youth gathering experience and this one happens right here in Lincoln every year for a relatively small cost. We saw folks there we knew from St. Peter's here in Deshler and from several other towns. Kristi and I and the youth got some great ideas for the future of our youth ministry.

Finally, I want to encourage you to check out the two new fellowship/study groups beginning this year. "Prayerfully Simple" is a new women's group meeting at 9 AM on March 12. They share refreshments and a video presentation by Thelma Wells who will make you laugh and learn at the same time.

A new Men's breakfast Bible study begins in March, on March 12, at 7:30 AM. We will have coffee and juice and rolls and conversation around a resource called "The Hole in our Gospel". For now, this new group will call themselves "Brothers for Others". My hope is that we will not just study God's Word, but that we will also develop opportunities to put it into practice in our community and around the world. Hopefully, we can match our talk by our work together as Brothers for Others.

Yours in Christ, *Phil Nielsen*

Special thanks to Neva Koester for serving as the Chairperson of the Altar Guild for many years. Neva states she started sometime after Pastor Klover left, which would mean she's been volunteering for approximately 25 years. We certainly appreciate the time and dedication she's given in service to the Lord!

A meeting of the women currently serving on the Altar Guild has been called for **Tuesday, March 15, at 7:30 p.m.** in the Parish Hall to discuss the future of the Altar Guild.