BY THE WORD

LCMC
Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ

We are an association of congregations and individuals, free in Christ, accountable to one another, rooted in Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, and working together to fulfill Christ's Great Commission to go and make disciples of all nations.

4th Quarter, 2013

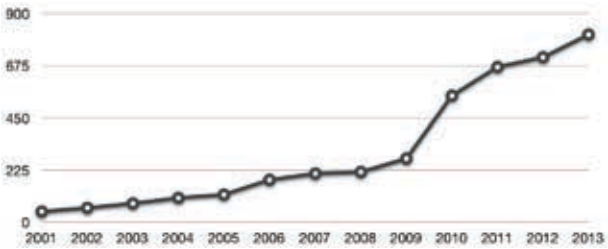
2014 Budget, Service Project

— Rev. Mark Vander Tuig, LCMC Service Coordinator

One very important thing took place at our convention in Dearborn—we approved the budget for 2014!

Our 2014 budget calls for a 16% increase in giving from our member congregations. At first, this seems like a large increase, and we have not often asked our congregations for more funds. But as our association has grown, so have the requests for greater resources and help. We remain committed to a horizontal structure and to finding ways to help the congregations, pastors and leaders carry out the work of ministry, but that requires an increase in staff.

Our new position, **Coordinator for Pastoral Ministry**, replaces the former position of Coordinator for Pastoral Certification and moves from ¾- time to full-time. The graph below shows clearly the growth with which we have been blessed, but to whom much is given, much is required.



If every congregation contributes, it would only require an increase of $100 per congregation! Some of us can do more, not all of us will be able to do that much...but we desire to continue to support what God is doing in and through LCMC.

Packaging Meals in Des Moines

One of the things we are hoping to do at our Annual Gathering in Des Moines next October is a service project! **Meals from the Heartland** is an agency that organizes people to package meals to send all around the world, and also to areas here in the U.S. You have maybe seen or even helped with a similar project in your area. These efforts are also known as Kids Against Hunger, Feed My Starving Children, and others.

Our hope is to get 1,000 people to package meals on Tuesday night during our Gathering. If we can do this, we could package 400,000 meals together in two hours. Purchasing supplies/packaging materials and paying for shipping will require raising about $80,000. We are asking each congregation to begin now to set aside funds for an offering to make this happen. With 706 congregations in the U.S., this only comes to about $115 from each church. Again, some of us can do more, some not as much ... but we can ***all*** do ***something*** to help feed the world's hungry! If your congregation would like to contribute before next October, send your check payable to LCMC and write "Meals for the Heartland" in the memo line. ♦

Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ

From the Board...

— Becky Lee
Vice Chair, LCMC Board of Trustees

"The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me. My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise him."
— Psalm 28:7

Five years ago when I was first elected to the Board of Trustees, I was uncertain if this was a job I could ever carry out. This fall I began my sixth and final year on the Board. Now I know that everything we do as a Board, we do as a team. Our work is never dependent upon any one person, and nothing we do could ever succeed or come to fruition if we were not dependent on the Lord God as our guide and our strength.

LCMC has experienced incredible growth and change since my first year on the board. In 2008 we were less than 150 congregations. When we came together at an Annual Gathering, we were able to greet everyone by name without having to check out his or her name badge. Today we are over 800 congregations in 13 nations. Getting hundreds of new names straight as we met in Dearborn this fall was a real challenge. We were all thankful for great name badges.

LCMC continues to grow, and as we grow your Board of Trustees meets new and exciting challenges every time we meet. These challenges include finding the right places and presenters for our Gatherings, pro-

... continued on page 3

This newsletter is a publication of LCMC, an association of churches and individuals.
Inclusion of articles is intended to provide information and does not imply official endorsement.
Opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect an official position of the Association or its board of trustees.
We welcome comments, suggestions for stories, and submissions from our members.See contact information below.

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Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ

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BY THE WORD
Newsletter
4th Quarter 2013

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"For it is by grace you have been saved through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." *Ephesians 2:8-9*

Board Business

—Rev. Martha Uecker Nelson,
Secretary, LCMC Board of Trustees

- Over 850 people met at the Annual Gathering in Dearborn to hear great speakers and to participate in the various breakout sessions.
- The Board approved the 2014 budget during the business session.
- Kip Tyler reported that the By-Law changes from the previous year had been accepted by the Association.
- The Board interviewed candidates for the new position of Coordinator of Pastoral Ministry. Rev. Steve Lien was chosen to fill the position. (See article on page 11.)
- Rev. Julie Smith joined the Board of Trustees. Rev. Sally Gausmann and Rev. Paul Owens joined the Ministry Board.
- The Board and assembled members recognized and thanked the following people: Rev. Paul Spaulding for his years of service as Pastoral Certification Coordinator; Mrs. Anne Gran as Board of Trustees member; and Rev. Steve Ernst and Rev. Jeff Nellermoe as Ministry Board members. Well done, good and faithful servants!
- The 2014 Annual Gathering will be held on October 5-8 at the Polk County Convention Center in Des Moines, Iowa. The theme will be "Defending the Faith. ♦

Has your church sponsored a short-term missions trip?

Have your youth worked on special projects in your community?

Are your women's groups serving in special ways?

We'd love to hear about it!

Send to:
joyminion@gmail.com

From the Board, *continued from page 2. . .*

viding staffing for our goal of planting 1,000 congregations and giving support to current congregations and pastors.

Our main work is still developing and organizing great Annual Gatherings. In November we will meet in Chicago to review the 2013 Gathering in Dearborn and to put the finishing touches on plans for the 2014 Gathering in Des Moines. We also will begin to plan for the 2015 Gathering—if you have ideas, please let us know ***now***. A successful Gathering requires that we always be about a year and a half ahead of the game.

The Board of Trustees is always evolving as we say good-bye to members ending a term and welcome newly-elected Trustees. This year we thank Anne Gran for five years of serving and sharing her gifts of thoughtful discernment, and we welcome Julie Smith as she comes to her first meeting in November.

Five years ago I was uncertain whether or not this was my place to serve LCMC. As I begin my last year on the Board I know that it has been one of the most exciting, fulfilling and challenging places I have ever served. I thank LCMC for this opportunity. It is an incredible place to serve the Lord's Church with great, dedicated people who never forget that the Lord is their strength and shield. We continue to be "In Mission for Christ!" ♦

Financial Snapshot

—Laurel Swanson,
Treasurer, LCMC Board of Trustees

LCMC celebrated its 13th Annual Gathering in Dearborn, Michigan, in early October. As part of the plan for 2014 shared at that Gathering, we will be replacing a part-time staff person with a full-time staff person to provide necessary support and resources to our current congregations and their pastors. That means a step out in faith to increase our budgeted income by 16% from 2013. The proposed budget was approved, and we are excited to see how God will move with this new position. ♦

Today's Word: Choose

— Tony Stoutenburg

The most Lutheran of my professors once boomed, "Choice is not a Biblical word!" Well, OK, but most American Christians believe they have some role in choosing their salvation. The truth is more complicated and more beautiful.

Luther talked about Two Kingdoms. On God's right hand is the heavenly or spiritual kingdom. That is the realm of the Gospel and grace. On God's left hand is the earthly Kingdom, where the Law and works and civil righteousness have their place.

Jesus says "*You did not choose me, but I chose you*" (John 15:16).* Here He speaks of the Kingdom on the right. It is by God's grace, not our doing or choosing, that we are saved. This is pure Gospel.

On the other hand (God's left hand that is) there are choices we are free to make. Joshua puts this in terms of service. Will we serve God, or something other than God? We ***choose***. Joshua says, "*Choose this day whom you will serve*." In this fast-paced world, many of us find the choice is made moment by moment.

The Scriptures are clear that we have no free will, yet we experience the making of choices. As is so often the case, by distinguishing Law and Gospel, Luther offers a way of living in the paradox. It is a wonderful calling: having been chosen in eternity, we are free to look around today and ***choose*** who and how we will serve.

*I have a study Bible where the footnote says, "*Jesus makes the first choice and we must make the second choice.*" That is ***not*** what He said! If your study Bible has such a note, do what I did: cross it out. ♦

Thank You, Paul Spaulding!

— Mark Vander Tuig

There are not words enough to thank Paul Spaulding for his service to our Association! He started with us in late 2009 to help with the overwhelming influx of pastors and congregations into our association. His role then was the Coordinator for Pastoral Certification.

The work grew, as did our Association, but Paul was faithful to raise up pastors and leaders across the Association to do the certification interviews and welcome these new congregations and pastors in to LCMC.

After the Service Coordinator position became open, Paul served as the Interim Service Coordinator until September 2010. Since then Paul has helped countless call committees, pastors and leaders along this journey into what the Lord is doing with LCMC. Paul and his wife, Renee, have both been faithful servants and we will miss them! ♦

Leadership Training and Go...Conference

— Jeremy King,
Chair, LCMC Ministry Board

The LCMC Ministry Board encourages our congregations to consider scheduling a church council workshop in your area, led by Service Coordinator Mark Vander Tuig. We believe this is a great opportunity to train LCMC leaders.

In addition, this year for our Leadership Event we are offering the "Go... Conference" at Mount of Olives Church in Mission Viejo, CA, on May 15-16, 2014. Keynote speakers for the event will be Dr. Hal Seed and Pastor Paul Cross. We look forward to seeing you there! Watch for more information on the LCMC website, or contact Maria Gleckl at:

mgleckl@moochurch.org ♦

A Word from Mark...

— Mark Vander Tuig,
LCMC Service Coordinator

We had a great time in Dearborn, Michigan, this year! We gathered over 850 people from all over the world to hear great speakers who challenged and inspired us. I hope that next year ***you*** will be able to join with us in Des Moines, Iowa, for our 2014 Annual Gathering and Convention. Please mark your calendars today!

When the Board of Trustees plans these events, they do so for a number of reasons.

First of all, it is good for us to be together. Hebrews 10:25 says,

> *And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

It is important for us to know that we are not alone, that we can encourage each other, and that together we can find the strength to carry on.

Second, there are a few times when we have business to take care of as an Association. At this last Gathering our business sessions lasted only a few minutes, literally! But we did pass the budget for the coming year, and we are looking for an increase in giving from our member congregations. You can find more information on this elsewhere in this newsletter.

As our association has grown, so has the need for greater and more detailed resources. To accomplish that we need to have people in place who can help. We do not call/commission people to do the work, but rather we call them to expand the network, to help and encourage our leaders, pastors and congregations to do the work. We remain committed to a lean and horizontal structure and will continue to celebrate what was begun 13 years ago.

Third, we need to continue to *think outside the box*—or as I prefer, to *think inside the Book*! In many cases, the keynote speakers we invite are not from a Lutheran background. They are people who challenge us, help us find new ways to share the Gospel, inspire us to faithfulness and teach us about living out this faith in ways that might be different from what we have done before. There are times when we ***need*** to hear a different perspective, to see what we have not been able to see.

Fourth, gathering together is also a time for us to remember who we are and to Whom we belong. The theme for our next Gathering in Des Moines is "***Defending the Faith.***" We have invited Prof. Skip Sundburg from Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota, and Prof. Mark Mattes from Grand View University in Des Moines, Iowa. Both speakers will help us to understand our Lutheran Christian faith in a world that is much different from what it was even 50 years ago. See you in Des Moines! ♦

LCMC: In the Cloud

— Mark Vander Tuig

When Facebook first became popular, I signed on thinking that it would be good for me to "stay in touch." I lasted about 3 days—mainly because I was overwhelmed with too much information! It seems some folks have trouble discerning what should be public and what should remain private. TMI is still a problem in some cases, and it simply reflects a symptom of our culture: there seem to be few, if any, boundaries anymore. Anything goes, and the more extreme, ridiculous and inflammatory the better. However, Facebook does allow people to keep in touch and stay in the loop.

— continued on page 13

LUTHERAN DISASTER ASSISTANCE FUND

— Submitted by Karen Barth

The Lutheran Disaster Assistance (LDA) Fund was established in May 2013 by the LCMC to provide emergency funds in the event of natural disasters. Thanks to the generosity of congregations and individuals from around the country, the Fund has been able to respond to three disasters and is building a reserve for the future.

Requests for funds are submitted through a grant application. A five-member committee comprised of representatives from contributing churches reviews the application. When approved, grant funds are forwarded to the congregation that made the request. Grant guidelines require applicants to submit a report explaining how the monies were used. This report is filed upon completion of the project(s).

Thus far, three churches have sought LDA funds:

Lighthouse Lutheran in Edmond, Oklahoma, will receive over $49,500. These funds were specifically designated by LDA donors for Oklahoma tornado victims. In requesting funds following tornadoes in nearby Moore, Oklahoma, Pastor Pete Balaban said they were:

> *...looking to assist in situations where other agencies and funders may not be able or ready to help. We believe that God will guide us to those situations where we could do the most good.*

Bethel Lutheran in Colorado Springs, Colorado, received over $2,000 in designated funds for the Black Forest wildfires**.** Concerning the fires, Pastor John Witkop commented:

> *I preached at Black Forest Church (a sister congregation in the heart of the fire) ... the spirit is good, but still unsettled amongst those who have suffered loss. They are excited to partner with us to help with cleanup and some of those basic incidental needs that are not always thought about.*

Faith Community Lutheran Church in Longmont, Colorado, received a combination of designated and general funds totaling $10,000. In reference to the severe flooding in Colorado, Pastor Erik Gravrock stated:

> *Our hope and prayer is that we'll be able to put this grant to use not only in helping our affected members, but also truly be the Church to those beyond our walls.*

According to Dave Brauhn, LDA Fund chair:

> *Churches are so glad to have the LDA Fund. Many take up an offering in response to disasters and now they have a place to send the money.*

To learn more about the LDA Fund or to apply for a grant, please visit the LCMC website:

www.LCMC.net

Contributions to the LDA Fund can be sent to:

Lutheran Disaster Assistance Fund
c/o St. Mark's Lutheran Church
8300 C Avenue NE
Marion, IA 52302 ♦

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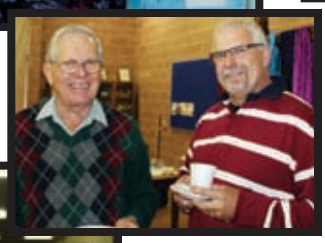
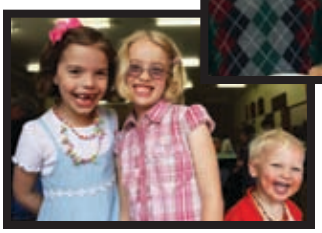
We Wish You a Blessed and Merry Christmas!

Getting to Know. . .

Living Water Fellowship

Wagga Wagga, Australia





COME to Jesus, GROW in His Grace,
GO in His Power, SHOW His Love

Living Water Fellowship (LWF) is LCMC's first Australian congregation. Located in the town of Wagga Wagga in New South Wales, LWF is a new congregation with an average weekly attendance of 75. We currently meet in a very humble, rented Girl Guide's Hall. Most of our members have come from a traditional Lutheran background.

In 2012, after much prayer and discussion, we decided that God was leading us in a different direction from that of the Lutheran Church of Australia. We had to work out from scratch who we are and what we're here for. We had planning days, where we developed a mission statement, vision statement, strategic plan and organizational structure to carry out our ministry. Wanting to build links with other independent congregations with similar vision, values and beliefs, we decided to join LCMC.We are blessed to be served by Pastor John Guilfoyle, who has faithfully shepherded us through this process.

- Worship Team—coordinate Sunday morning worship, including music, drama and engaging members in worship. They also meet with Pastor John to discuss worship themes and issues.
- Membership Team—has a pastoral care role, caring for those who are sick and/or experiencing hardship. They do hospital visitation and provide meals for those in need.
- Discipleship Team—work to encourage, equip and empower people to grow in their relationship with God and with each other. They facilitate Life Transformation Groups (groups of 2-3 who meet weekly for prayer, Bible study and mutual support). Our "Home Groups" include a weekly "Impact" youth group, women's fellowship and the Care & Share Group, who meet for a chat and work on service projects (currently they are knitting prayer shawls for the frail and sick). A children's ministry is on our "to-do list.
- Lordship Team—engage in mission and explore how we can reach out locally, nationally and internationally. They ran a drinks stall at Wagga's recent Fun Run and organized a BBQ at a local school fete.
- Fellowship Team—aims to build intentional relationships in the community so people can come to know Jesus' grace, power and love.
- Stewardship Team—looks after the practicalities of buildings/facilities, staff, structure and finances to achieve our goals. ♦

—Submitted by Philippa Prenzler

Thoughts About LCMC's Future

— Rev. Dr. Paul Spaulding

Since I am retiring December 31 from my position as the Pastoral Certification Coordinator for LCMC, I was asked to write this article. Those of you who attended the Gathering in Dearborn may recognize a condensation of the thoughts I shared there.

First, I want to thank LCMC, and you all, for the privilege of serving you in this role since 2009. A special thanks goes to Bill Sullivan for shaping our early development in his years as the Service Coordinator for LCMC, and to the Board of Trustees, Ministry Board, Mark Vander Tuig and the staff of LCMC—and to all of you for *keeping the main thing the main thing!*

And I want to thank my wife of 33 years. Renee is also a pastor in LCMC (Emeritus, as I soon will be). She is my best friend and my strongest supporter.

But let's talk about the future. We live in post-Christendom America—where church is no longer wed to general culture. Our challenge is how to live out the calling to be a 1st century church for the 21st century. LCMC has the flexible and minimalist structure that can serve as a platform for this, but with great freedom comes great responsibility. The *Holy Spirit* is not surprised by the shape of our American mission field. Let me give you some things I see as essential for LCMC's future…

1. Our churches need to consciously drop the unspoken concept of being a "club" and see ourselves as an ***open embassy*** filled with ambassadors for Christ.

2. Leadership takes a certain amount of self-confidence. Yet lurking just below self confidence is an Ego, shot through with original sin. Humility, please, is essential as a companion to effective leadership.

3. LCMC must resist the temptation for more and more control structures and documents. We ***will*** get into certain uncomfortable situations because we are designed to avoid the ditch of control. But as Dave Drum, an early member of the Ministry Board, used to say, "*We choose freedom and therefore walk in the ditch less traveled.*"

4. Twenty-first century organizational models built around networks can thrive. LCMC is thriving! But we must do what network associations must always do—circle back, ***always and frequently***, to the core values that draw us together and feed the enthusiasm for the task at hand. It is our being "*in mission for Christ,*" and not our structures that will energize LCMC for the coming decades.

5. The myth of Lutheran homogeneity must be acknowledged. We are ***not*** all the same. There is a wide range of emphases within confessional and biblical Lutheranism, and LCMC has most of the options. We need an open and vigorous discussion of why we each cherish certain emphases within the historic Faith. And we need to do it in love.

6. Christ's Church is bigger than just us Lutherans. LCMC's statement on ecumenical relations basically says, God is alive and at work ***way*** beyond your stuff… so work with those people in your area who are doing God's work—cheer them, talk with them, listen to them. It is Christ we serve.

7. We must fight stereotypes. It is not without reason there are the jokes about Lutherans, such as:
   - "Why do Lutherans get to heaven first? Because it says, '*The dead in Christ shall rise first.*'"
   - Or, of Lutherans in a parody of Scripture, "Many are cold and a few are frozen."
   - Or, why is the Lutheran mantra this: "We sit in the back and don't bring our Bibles."

   I challenge all of you, for the next 20 years, to fight those stereotypes. Resting on our laurels and maintaining the institution will not cut it in this post-Christendom world.

8. The Great Commission emphasis of LCMC is needed—if you don't think so, perhaps there is a better church body for you somewhere else. Is there anyone in a 20-minute radius of your church who doesn't know the Lord? Our true goal is not to maintain a self-sustaining 501c3 non-profit with a religious twist. The Great Commission is in our name and in our DNA.

9. We must have a believing use of the Bible. Sometimes we ***use*** the Bible, but don't really ***believe*** it, that is, ***trust*** it. Sometimes we say we ***believe*** it but don't ***use*** it. LCMC says it is rooted in Scripture. Roots are ***alive***, finding resources and wrapping themselves around sure foundations. Go to the Bible for ***content*** and ***application***.

10. Remember that Jesus died and rose ***for you***! It's a relationship!

    I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and true man, born of the Virgin Mary **is my Lord**. *At great cost He has saved and redeemed* **me**, *a lost and condemned person. He has freed* **me** *from sin, death, and the power of the devil—not with silver or gold, but with his holy and precious blood and his innocent suffering and death. All this He has done that* **I may be his own…**

There is a rich personal element to our historic faith. ***Live*** that way, ***preach*** that way, and you will touch lives in this post-modern world that are so hungry for relationship.

Thank you for the chance to be in ministry with you!

God is going ahead. Follow! ♦

ARTICLE DEADLINE FOR
1ST QUARTER 2014 NEWSLETTER:
FEBRUARY 1, 2014
Send to: joyminion@gmail.com

INSTALLATION

Rev. Michael Knauff

was installed as pastor at Greenford Evangelical Lutheran Church, Greenford, Ohio, on October 20, 2013. Rev. Dr. William G. Beck, STS, officiated. Pastor Dennis Whalen of Lighthouse Lutheran Church, Freedom, PA, preached. Pastor William Wilkins, retired, led the Prayers of the Church. Also participating were pastor Laurel Bobb of Resurrection Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Western Reserve, Stow, OH, and Pastor Ralph Edwards of Good Hope Lutheran Church, North Lima, OH.

Leaders of the congregation also participated in the service, including Dean Hiner, Nicole Rothbauer, Kathy Chizmar, Walter Pim, Sherry Taylor, Ann Meyers, Harold Everson, Cindy McCue, Ed Schaefer, Jr., Eric Ericson, Eric Kochanowski, Chris Kondas, Jim Meyers, Mike Witmer, Terri Dance and Carrie Toy.

Michael is a graduate of Trinity Lutheran Seminary. He previously served Zion Lutheran Church (Frewsburg, NY), Lord of Life Lutheran Church (Fairfax, VA), and Faith Lutheran Church (Castle Rock, CO). Michael and his wife, Debbie, have been married for over 25 years and have three grown sons. ♦

front, l-r: Pastors Laurel Bobb, Dennis Whalen, Michael Knauff, William Beck, William Wilkins and Ralph Edwards

—Submitted by Rev. William Beck

2nd Annual "3 Days of Prayer"

— Rev. Mark Vander Tuig

Our 2nd Annual ***3 Days of Prayer*** will be held on January 7 - 9, 2014.

Prayer is a great gift that the Lord gives to His people. He calls us to lay every care and concern at the throne of grace, because He cares for us and loves us. We too often see prayer as the last resort, and even as an acknowledgement of defeat. But it is not! It is the greatest and most effective thing we can do.

Day One: January 7

This is a day focused on ***confession***. We have made our lives, our relationships—and even the church—in our own image. We confess that the church belongs to Jesus and not to us. We gather to lay down our pride, our sin and our agenda and ask the Lord of the church for forgiveness, which He gives freely and with mercy.

Day Two: January 8

This is a day of ***petition***. Pray for your congregation, for the pastor, for the leaders, for those who carry out ministries, for the Sunday School teachers, for the Confirmation leaders, for those leading adult Bible studies and for those leading small groups. Pray for those in hospital and nursing home ministries. Pray for all those connected to your church that they might know God's redeeming love for all in Christ.

Day Three: January 9

This is a day for ***vision***. Pray that the Holy Spirit will again move through the hearts and minds of leaders and pastors that God's vision for His church might be revealed and fulfilled. This is a time of prayer for renewal, revival and encouragement. Pray for God's vision.

Each congregation or person can structure this however seems best. Some congregations have gathered together each night for prayer, and some have put together a prayer vigil for each of the three days. Others have encouraged their people simply to pray at work, home, school or while traveling—wherever they are and whatever they are doing.

No matter how you structure this time of prayer, let's come together as an association of congregations across the U.S. and around the world to pray! I believe that the church will never rise up until we first get down on our knees! ♦

For more information, please visit our website:
www.lcmc.net

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LCMC Announces Facebook Discussion Groups

— Kristy Thomas, LCMC Communications/PR Specialist

Now it's easier for LCMC'ers who face similar challenges to connect with one another! See the links below to find several new discussion groups on Facebook.

LCMC Homepage—*link from website to our Facebook page:* **http://www.facebook.com/lcmc.net**

LCMC Groups—*general discussion group:* **http://www.facebook.com/groups/2236102486/**

LCMC: The Next Generation: **https://www.facebook.com/groups/lcmcthenextgeneration/**
(*FB group for LCMC young adult leaders — help find each other, plan get-togethers, talk, etc.*)

LCMC Clergy Spouses—*discussion group for prayer and support:*
https://www.facebook.com/groups/lcmcspouses/

Introducing LCMC's New Pastoral Ministry Coodinator

—Steve Lien

Steve Lien

Dear Friends in Christ:

I am thrilled to introduce myself as the new Coordinator for Pastoral Ministry in LCMC! I was born in southern Minnesota and was raised in Staten Island, New York. I finished high school, college and seminary in Minnesota.

Along the way I attended Lutheran Bible Institute (LBI) in Seattle, Washington; toured with a Youth For Christ International singing team in southeast Asia and the U.S.; and finally landed in Watertown, South Dakota, for my first call as a pastor. Since then I've served congregations—large and small—in South Dakota, Texas, Iowa and California.

I am passionate about serving Christ, loving my family, and being a faithful husband, father, and grandfather. I met my wife, Joanne, when I was" the pastor's kid" in New York. The Arthur Hall family, who were serving as medical missionaries in South Africa, came to visit the congregation my father served. The Lien and Hall families became friends, and many years later—after getting acquainted as adults at LBI and again at Augsburg College—Joanne and I were married in 1975.

Joanne is a Registered Nurse who has served most of her career in long-term and hospice care. She recently resigned as Director of Patient Care Services at Hospice Partners of Southern California, based in Santa Monica. We have three grown and married children and are proud grandparents of seven (soon to be eight!) grandchildren.

I'm told that I'm energetic, often comical, and certainly out-of-the-box! I love telling people about a God who relentlessly loves, forgives and embraces His children. Some of the very best and most fulfilling years of my life have been spent in ordained ministry—and some of the most painful and challenging years as well. Through it all God has proved faithful, sustained me, taught and tempered me and continued to use me in others' lives.

I'm absolutely thrilled and humbly grateful about the opportunity to share what I've learned and what I'm learning through serving God by serving congregations and pastors throughout LCMC. I look forward to meeting many of you in the years to come!

Yours in Christ,
Steve ♦

Contact Steve at:
steve@lcmc.net

New Stephen Ministers

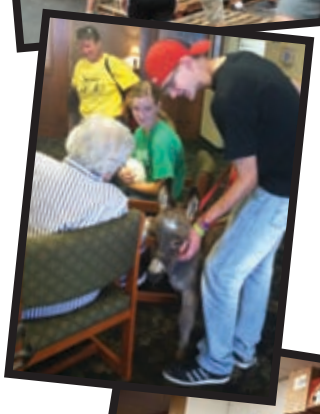
Grace Lutheran Church (LCMC), Erhard, MN, commissioned its first five Stephen Ministers for service within the congregation and community on August 25th. The motto of Stephen Ministry is "*Christ caring for people through people*," and it summarizes the Christian care Stephen Ministers provide for their care receivers as they listen, pray and encourage them in faith. ♦

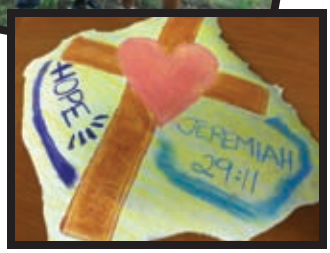
— Submitted by Pastor Brad Soenksen

l-r: Pr. Brad Soenksen (Stephen Ministry Leader), Hans & Rachel Ronnevik, Pat Teberg, Linda & John Wright, and Jan Belmont (a Stephen Minister who helped with training).

Lutheran Youth Take the Urban Plunge

— Rebecca Dawborn & Gwen Labovitch





Over the past eight years, 82 groups of youth from Lutheran churches all over the country have taken the Urban Plunge—a 48-hour period spent working with the poor, feeding the homeless, visiting prisoners in jail and serving, serving, serving. Operated by Christ For the City International, Urban Plunge does not provide a "tour of poverty," but instead helps participants to grasp how they can use their talents and passions to assist faith-based social-service agencies who already work alongside those who are in great need. The Urban Plunge operates all year round in Lincoln, Omaha, Kansas City, Dallas, Des Moines and Sioux Falls.

A team of 3 adults and 5 youth from Lutheran Church of the Master, Omaha, NE, took the Plunge June 23-28. The team (from a wealthy area of West Omaha) went into poverty-stricken North Omaha and stayed at ***Turning Point*** shelter. The team served in various ways at: ***Heartland Hope Food Pantry*** (largest food pantry in Nebraska); ***Hope Center*** (Christian-based center working with school age students in one of the worst areas in Omaha providing empowering afterschool care); ***Open Door Mission*** (Gospel rescue mission committed to breaking the cycle of homelessness and poverty); ***Siena Francis House*** (Nebraska's largest shelter, providing food, emergency shelter and clothing to the homeless); ***Soby Ranch*** (non-profit farm that adopts abused animals and retrains them for animal therapy); and ***Omaha Dream Center*** (Christian center working with women and men who are/had been in prostitution for their healing and their future).

The changes in the team over the week were amazing, and God did great work on their hearts and minds. One Team member said, "*I have lived in Omaha over 40 years and did not know of the need...*" Adam Bachorski summed up the experience: "*It not only helped me get closer to God, but also opened my eyes to how some people live, day to day ... It showed me how many people are in need, and what we can do to help ... It was life changing!*" ♦

For more information visit: **www.urbanplunge.com**

Contact Rebecca at: **bec@cfci.org** • *Contact Gwen at:* **gwen.labovitch@churchofthemaster.com**

Preparing the Way for Planting in 2014 and Beyond

— Rev. Dan Clites,
New Ministry Development Coordinator

"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth." — 1 Corinthians 3:6

As our congregations "*prepare ye the way of the Lord*" through faithfully crafting our 2014 ministry budgets, I invite you to prayerfully consider starting (or keep going) a church planting fund. Then, when the Lord's time is right, you'll have a significant financial blessing to share with a local or national church planting endeavor. Please call around to other LCMC churches to see how you can partner together in your city, district or state. If you're interested in talking with me about national church planting efforts that are seeking start-up assistance, please contact me!

In the meantime, I continue to work with potential planters and teams. It is proven that planters who seek the training and advice of a coach are the ones who are most likely to succeed. Be sure to watch the LCMC website (**www.lcmc.net**) for up-coming **New Planter's Workshops**. These workshops are designed for those who are interested in learning more about the possibility of either being a planter or supporting a planting team. A Facebook page for planters is also in the making.

With all that in mind, the following is a light-hearted, but still seriously important, count-down list of 7 things ***NOT*** to do when planting:

7. Launch too soon without a vision, mission and values for existing in a particular mission field.
6. Fail to speak about giving until it becomes a time for desperate begging.
5. Fail to acknowledge and combat spiritual warfare.
4. Invest more in stuff, rather than investing in people's spiritual giftings.
3. Put people into formal leadership too soon.
2. Worship is plug-in and go, rather than flow-and-grow.
1. No plan for Monday morning ministry in the marketplace. ♦

Contact Dan at:
dan@lcmc.net *or* **507-403-3940**

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LCMC: In the Cloud

...continued

I now have a Facebook page as the Service Coordinator for LCMC. My page is pretty lame… nothing inflammatory, political or personal, just a few posts once in a while to let people know where I am, where I've been and that's about it.

LCMC has a Facebook page as well and I find it to be administered very well, having good questions, answers and discussion. Plus, it is a source of information about what is happening in our association—and in some cases what is happening in the lives of some of our pastors, leaders and congregations. The posts I most love to read are the requests for prayer. Who would have guessed that the internet would be such a great network for people to pray!

And this seems so natural for our association since we were born out of the WordAlone Network, another internet-based movement. I love the words of Hebrews 12:1: "*For we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses…*" Obviously, the writer was not referring to the internet, but now when I read it as a member of LCMC (an association that genuinely does occupy the "cloud" in the 21st century), all I can think of is us! If you have not yet signed up for our LCMC Facebook page, see the article on page 10 for more information. ♦

Elkhorn TGIF — Fun, Free Community Events

— Pastor Tom De Groot
St. John's Lutheran Church, Elkhorn, WI

Elkhorn, WI, is a family town of many generations. In that spirit, St. John's organizes ***Elkhorn TGIF***, a free, community event for ages 0 to 120 on the second Friday of every month. Each event will include genuinely fun activities for all ages.

Chili Cookoff

The first-ever ***Elkhorn TGIF***—a chili cookoff and comedy show—was held on October 11, with 13 contestants judged by over 120 cookoff-goers who dropped change into the box by their favorite chili. Jen Christman of Elkhorn was the winner, receiving a funny antacid trophy. The cookoff raised $500 for ***Operation Christmas Child***, a program helping connect Christmas gifts with children in need around the world. Later, everyone enjoyed the hilarious comedy of ComedyCity (Green Bay), led by member Theresa Kaman and a team of amateur performers from the community, including Ted Johnson, Lance Ellsworth, Susan Happersberger, Donna Searles and myself.

The two things people were most surprised about was the fact that the event was "free," and that it wasn't "religious." We were amazed when $500 was raised for Operation Christmas Child. We are thankful to have been able to host a good, clean night of fun for all ages, and are blown away at the generosity of the people who came. And, of course, it was great to leave with our faces hurting from so much laughter.

Scenes from the comedy show

Photos courtesy of Tom De Groot

The second ***Elkhorn TGIF***—*Thanksgiving Giveway & Scavenger Hunt*—was held November 8th. Over 30 people from St. John's handed out 75 handmade Thanksgiving centerpieces as free gifts to the neighbors and participated in a picture scavenger hunt. The evening concluded at ***PerkUp***, a local coffee shop, where everyone exchanged stories from their experiences and enjoyed a cup of hot apple cider. In addition to handing out the free gifts, families were asked to contact the church if they or anyone they knew is in need of a Thanksgiving meal this year. Eight families contacted the church during the first three days after the event, and countless donations have been made to be distributed to families in need.

Scenes from the November Elkhorn TGIF

The December ***Elkhorn TGIF*** will be a special performance of ***First Christmas*** on December 13 at 7:00pm. Guests will travel back to the first Christmas and hear the story told through six different people who were there. Included will be Christmas carols and special music performed by St. John's Sunday School children.

The January ***Elkhorn TGIF*** will be ***Parent's Night Out*** on January 10, providing couples with young children a much needed date night after the chaos of the holidays. Free childcare will be available, as well as discounted fine dining options at select restaurants throughout the area. ♦

For more information, please contact Tom at:
pastortom@stjohnselkhorn.com

No Room at the Inn

— Rev. Dave Denzer

"... she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."
— Luke 2:7

Ah ... the inn. What would Christmas be without the inn? But rarely does anyone ask the question, "Why did Mary and Joseph even have to look for a room at the inn in the first place?"

"No room in the inn" would have been like nails on a chalkboard to Luke's first readers. They were accustomed to the practice of "hospitality." This isn't hospitality as we think of it now—it wasn't about Martha Stewart, setting a good-looking table or even about friendly greeters on Sunday morning. Hospitality back then involved a resident of a town going to the town square or to the city gate to look for travelers for whom they might provide care overnight. The hosts would be expected to provide three things: protection, provision and renewal. Hospitality cost them something.

But there was no hospitality given to Joseph and Mary's newborn Son. Jesus came as One to His own, but they would not take Him in (John 1:11). Joseph was returning to his town of origin. At a time when hospitality was the norm and in a town where Joseph should have had at least extended family, no one took them in. They couldn't even buy a room. Instead, they were treated like animals.

Even though no one would show Jesus hospitality, He came into this world to offer God's hospitality to people like you and me. Jesus spoke often of the "Kingdom" being like a wedding banquet with guests and invitations. Before He went to the cross, Jesus told His disciples, "*In my Father's house are many rooms ... I am going there to prepare a place for you*" (John 14:2). He told the parable of the rich man and his two sons, describing salvation as sitting at the rich man's table, in his household. Jesus came proclaiming that the Kingdom of God, or God's household, was "*at hand*." Where Jesus went, God's household was found. It went with Him. In God's household, people were healed, lives were changed and hope was born.

When Jesus sent out His disciples two by two, He told them, "*He who receives you, receives me.*" His message was their message. It was a mutual receiving: people who are invited into God's Kingdom signal their acceptance of that invitation by welcoming Him into their lives. If Jesus' disciples weren't welcomed, they were to brush the dust off their feet as testimony against that household.

When Simon the Pharisee welcomed Jesus for dinner, it might have been considered hospitality by the world's standards. But it was the woman who wet Jesus' feet with her tears who demonstrated real hospitality. Like that woman, those who accept the invitation into God's house receive Him into their own. The end result is that, "... *to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God*..." (John 1:12).

That invitation is there for you and for me. Jesus came to invite you into His Kingdom. He is your Host. There, you will know the joy of being a child in His household—protected by the One who died for you, provided for by the bread of life and renewed by the One who gives you rest.

— Dave Denzer,
Lead Pastor, St. Michael Lutheran Church,
Canton, Michigan ♦

BY THE WORD

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DATES TO REMEMBER

May 15-16 Go... Conference
Mount of Olives Church,
Mission Viejo, California

June 26-29 Youth Encounter IMPACT
Cleveland, Ohio

October 5-8 2014 Annual Gathering
Des Moines, Iowa