

Pastor's Ponderings . . .



Pastor Cindy seeks to lead us in discernment of God's calling for us in the future here at Advent Lutheran Church.

Part of the process is learning about options, what other people in other places are doing. What is working. What fits with us and our sense of mission?

Listening to God . . . through learning and yes, pondering new ideas or just new ways of doing what we do.

Each month Pastor Cindy will add to this booklet. Please take some time to do your own pondering as you read about ideas for ministry.

We will have a Congregational Conversation using these as a jumping off point so read, learn, listen and ponder . . . We'll be talking soon.

Unique Ministry Ideas to Ponder

Pastor Cindy Beck

These are ideas to gather the community together to create a ministry. While Advent would initiate gathering people together (following the step-by-step guides on how to do so) and possibly host the events, the volunteers should be drawn from the community so that it is not born solely by the congregation.



Tool Library

Tool lending libraries allow members to borrow tools, equipment, and how-to materials for a specified period of time, usually for free. Tool Libraries offer a friendly setting where DIYers and community groups can come together to share ideas and tips while gaining access to hand and power tools for carpentry, home repair, gardening, and more. The benefits of tool libraries include providing low-cost access to a broad range of tools, lowering the barrier to home repair/improvement, fostering sustainability, and building community.

Other “library” ideas: Clothing, toy, bike sharing, parking or storage sharing, ride sharing, book

Facilitate Community Swap

Whether it is a garden hose or toddler bike, chances are there is plenty of useful “stuff” sitting neglected within your community. Help people get access to pre-owned items – and give idle stuff a second life – by setting up community swaps and marketplaces where you can share and trade goods in a fun, cooperative, and low cost setting.

Swap ideas: clothing, recipes, toys, movies, computer games, books, household items, sporting equipment, etc.

Time Bank

Help people in your community share their unique skills and talents. A time bank is a safe, equitable way to barter skills and services. Community members trade professional skills like carpentry or grant writing, as well as practical tasks like babysitting or lawn mowing without exchanging any money.

Time Bank exchange ideas: computer assistance; video editing, teaching arts & crafts; language translation, music lessons, cooking lessons, tutoring, minor home repairs, car repair, grocery shopping, transportation, gardening, pet or child care, haircuts, companionship, sewing, cleaning

- *The above is taken from “The Center for a New American Dream – New Dream Community Action Kit.” The Kit also includes step-by-step ways of hosting all of the above.*

Weekend Snack Program and House for All Sinners and Saints

Weekend Snack Program

The “Weekend Snack Pack” program began making a difference in the lives of school-children in Berrysburg, Pa more than a year ago, thanks to Barbara Bullock. Noticing the needs of children at the local school, she decided to do something by starting a Weekend Snack Pack program.

Parents of children who are eligible for reduced or free lunches are asked for permission to allow their children to participate and the school then provides their names to Barbara. About 15 – 20 volunteers gather at the school every week to pack and distribute 72 to 105 snack packs to students from kindergarten through fifth grade. At the end of each school week, students receive two breakfasts, lunches and suppers, plus two snacks – a week-end’s worth of nutritious food. The weekend snack is not offered when school is out.

~taken from “interchange – leadership news from WELCA” Spring 2016

Ministries Discussed through Wednesday Worships in May:

House for All Sinners and Saints, Denver, Colorado – Reaching the “outsiders” HASS was founded by Lutheran Pastor Nadia Bolz-Weeber, a 6’1” heavily tattooed former stand up comedian and recovering drug/alcohol addict. Pastor Nadia says that growing up, and especially during her drug and alcohol days, she often felt like one of society’s outsiders. This fuels her ministry. One third of the church is LGBT. The church is also very welcoming to people with drug addiction, depression and even those who are not believers of the Christian faith.

They are a community of around 250+ people: mainly people 22 – 42, married couples, young families, Baby Boomers and a few folks in their 70s. They meet in the Fellowship Hall of an Episcopal Church.

Don’t assume that the worship is contemporary. They follow the ancient liturgy of the church (chanting the Kyrie, readings from scripture, chanting the Psalm, sermon, prayers of the people, Eucharist, benediction, etc.) and sing the old hymns of the church. Yet there is also some innovation. They include poetry and a time called “Open Space” in which they slow down for prayer and other opportunities to actively engage the Gospel; writing in the community’s Book of Thanks, writing prayers, making art or assembling bleach kits for the needle exchange in Denver.



Pastor Nadia Bolz-Weeber

As stated on their webpage: “House is important because it is experimenting with new ways to do church which make sense to urban postmodern folks”.

Alfred Street Baptist Church – Learning by Example

Alfred Street Baptist Church is a large African American congregation in Alexandria, Virginia, just outside Washington, D.C. Every aspect of church life includes a public component and a constant awareness that they offer ministry to all of humanity. The church responds to the “physical and communal being” of people as well as to their spiritual needs.

Alfred Street’s directory lists 23 official ministries: everything from a health and wellness ministry to a sports/athletics ministry. There are drama and dance groups as well as a huge music ministry comprising seven different choirs. Every one of these ministries is understood to have a role to play in the congregation’s public outreach. And every member is expected to participate. That level of expectation stems from the belief that talents and skills are gifts from God, they are to be shared.

Beginning with young children, there is no age or activity at Alfred Street that does not incorporate a focus on public ministry. The first thing the children are taught is to get along with one another. There is no better forum than the church for learning to care for others.

Alfred Street has a culture where, for young people, church activities take precedence. Part-time jobs, sports, etc. are adjusted to accommodate church participation, because families believe in making its faith commitments a priority.

Melanie Garrett thinks there are two factors primarily responsible for the church’s success in involving children and youth in public ministry. One is that all such activities are fun. There is always a great deal of fellowship and community, laughter, singing and eating that are important parts of any youth project.

The second point is that learning for children is done more by example than instruction. Children and young people see their parents and other adults engaged in public ministry and learn it is an important part of their family’s values as well as the church’s.



Holy Cross/Immaculate Heart of Mary Roman Catholic Church – A Commitment to Hope

Dugan Alternative High School, Chicago, IL

Located in Southside Chicago, Holy Cross/Immaculate Heart (HCIHM) exists in an area filled with Mexican immigrants seeking better prospects for their families. They are working poor, struggling to earn enough to make ends meet, often holding two or three jobs to support themselves. This leaves little time to be at home, much less to sleep.

While the hard work of the people is admirable, it has a consequence: children are so often left alone they grow up without much supervision or guidance. They spend their time on the streets with no healthy goals to pursue. Gangs offer a feeling of belonging and sense of identity and splinter the area with violence.

After two youth, ages 12 and 13 shot and killed a younger boy, HCIHM vowed to find ways to break the cycle of gangs and violence, seeking to provide youth with attention, education and stability in a safe and welcoming environment.

Father Bruce Wellems spearheaded the school's development. One of the things he challenged the parishioners was to NOT build a Catholic school, but to support and help reform the public school system. Thus arose Dugan Alternative High School, an alternative high school that accepts drop-outs or youth who have been expelled from other schools. Its success has changed not only the school's student's, but the parish and the community as well.

Father Bruce has two tenets: "It's never too late to change" and "Youth must have a commitment to hope." HCIHM has provided both opportunities for the families in their community.



Who Are Our ELCA Neighbors?

Pastor Cindy Beck

It has been the norm among congregations to work independently of one another. There might be the occasional joint youth activities, but rarely more than that.

Lutheran Church of the Master, Gethsemane Lutheran, Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, St. Paul Lutheran, Bethel Lutheran, and Calvary Lutheran in Rio Linda formed a Small Congregation Task Force and have been meeting for almost nine months to discuss how they might “Be Church” differently, together. Each month they meet at one of the congregations so they can experience first hand the facilities each have. They reflect on the nature of small congregations and innovative ways of doing collaborative ministry. The councils have shared a potluck meal together and the congregations have held a joint Epiphany Worship Service (which several Advent members attended).

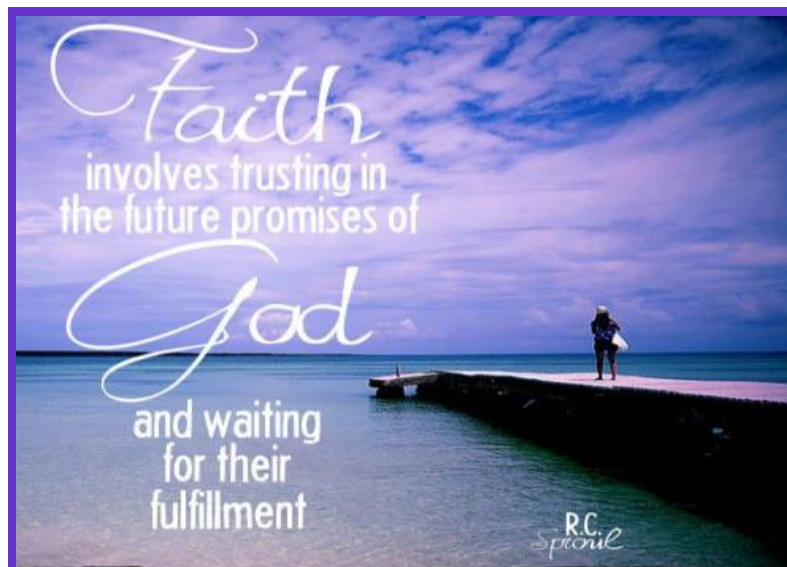
The Small Congregation Task Force has invited Rev. Stephen Bouman, Executive Director of ELCA Congregational and Synodical Mission, to be in Sacramento September 9 – 11, 2016 to be in conversation about creative ministry possibilities. I’d like Advent to have people participate in the conversation.

The two closest ELCA congregations to Advent Lutheran are Ascension Lutheran Church and Christ the King Lutheran Church. I have met with both Katie Stabler, Youth Director at Ascension and Pastor Dave Mullen, Interim Pastor at Ascension about the possibilities of our congregations doing joint ventures together in the near future.

Did you know...

- Ascension has a Mourning Bereavement Group that meets the 3rd Tuesday of the month?
- Christ the King has Breakfast with the Pastor at Annie’s the 3rd Tuesday of the month?
- Both congregations have active quilt ministries?
- Ascension has Adult Bible Studies Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Sunday?
- Christ the King has Adult Bible Studies Sunday and Wednesday?
- Ascension has a Christian Book Club?
- Christ the King uses the ancient Catechumenate Ministry? (which Ascension will be exploring to see if they want to begin – I asked Pastor Mullen to let us know when he is explaining what it is so we can learn, too)

It would be nice to explore ways that we can “Be Church” with our ELCA neighbors – not to exclude other faiths/denominations, but to at least approach a new venture with people who “speak our language” with the most ease. Let’s pray about becoming stronger in partnership with our neighbors.



Developing Leaders Among Young People

By Catherine Anderson

You've heard the statistics about young people and the church:

- Engagement in our faith communities is decreasing.
- The number of those not affiliated with any religion is at 20 percent and growing (Barna Group and Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project).
- Our culture has adopted a watered down belief system of Christianity, where the goal of life is to be happy and God is a benign backdrop who only gets involved in our life when we need something (The National Study of Youth and Religion).

Our culture is changing, and simply updating the Sunday school curriculum or worship style is not enough.

How do we shape ministry that will help people learn the practice of being Christian and of living a vital faith?

The **Practice Discipleship Initiative** offers a larger frame to explore new ways of ministry. The initiative has created training sessions that help leaders to think critically about effective faith formation practices. Online webinars are offered live and are recorded for download later. Curriculum is available for church leaders to present in their own congregation. Volunteers, paid staff and rostered leaders from all areas of ministry are invited to participate. The Initiative's resources are free and available at www.practicediscipleship.org.

Don Marsh, the Practice Discipleship Coach for the ELCA St. Paul Area Synod, describes the purpose of the Practice Discipleship Initiative: "Practice Discipleship is intended to spark the conversation about the way forward and to lift up the notion of following Jesus as a way of living. Practice Discipleship is one tool available to church leaders as we encourage the church to adapt to our changing culture. Practice Discipleship is calling the church into a new reality. As we adapt and become more authentic in our faith we will begin to realize the huge opportunities for growth that lie ahead for God's church."

While Practice Discipleship alone will not reverse current trends, it is one way in which we can engage in a conversation about how we shape ministry in our changing culture. And it is in these vital conversations that the Holy Spirit transforms leaders and congregations as the Spirit breathes new life and vision into Christ's church.

Learn more at www.practicediscipleship.org.
Catherine Anderson is director for the Practice Discipleship Initiative of the ELCA Youth Ministry Network,
<http://elcaymnet.org>.

Sounds like a good resource for Advent!

Pastor Cindy





15 Characteristics of Today's Un-Churched Person:

1. Church is not on their radar. Now that we are on the 2nd to 5th generation of people who have not been raised in the church, Sunday mornings are not equated with church. A personal invitation is pretty much the only way for them to think about it.
2. Occasional is regular. When they start coming, they don't always attend every week. Giving them easy, obvious and strategic steps to get connected is important. Disconnected people generally don't stick.
3. Most are spiritual. Most unchurched people believe in some kind of God. They're surprised and offended if you think of them as atheists.
4. They don't all have big 'problems.' While there are always people in crisis who seek God out, this is no longer a primary means of entering or returning to church.
5. They are not sure what "Christian" means. You really can't make any assumptions about what people understand about the Christian faith. Teach through user-friendly words, stories, and your behavior.
6. They have no idea of the way you always do it. Congregational traditions have no meaning or clout with people entering church. They want something applicable to their life and so will bring ideas that aren't even on your radar. Listen.
7. Some people have tried church, but left. Some people have tried church at some point, as a kid or young adult, but found it to be too hard to understand or connect. Because it wasn't a good experience, they left.
8. Something is generous. The only paradigm of giving they have is a few dozen or hundred dollars to select charities. Telling them to give more is a poor way to start the conversation.

9. They want you to be Christian. They want you to follow Jesus, authentically. That will help them understand and connect.
10. They're intelligent, so speak to that. Don't speak down to them. Just make it easy to get on the same page as people who have attended church for years by saying "this passage is near the middle of the bible." You can be inclusive without being condescending.
11. They hate hypocrisy. Enough said.
12. They love transparency. When you share your weaknesses, everyone resonates.
13. They invite their friends if they like what they're discovering. They will be your best inviters if they love what you're doing.
14. Their spiritual growth trajectory varies dramatically. One size does not fit all in people's comfort of sharing their spiritual life. Some people will want to hang in the shadows for a while as they make up their mind, others will jump right in and others will jump in and out throughout the year.
15. Some want to be anonymous and some don't. So make your church friendly to both. Also see the previous point. This is huge.

- Adapted from an article by Carey Nieuwhof, founding and teaching pastor of Connexus Church north of Toronto Canada.

Submitted by Pastor Cindy Beck.



Congregational Meeting Review

Pastor Cindy Beck

THANK YOU!!!! Thank you for the incredible participation, thank you to those who set up tables, thank you to those who provided food, thank you to those who heated and set out the food, and thank you again for all who gave their time to sit and have conversation together and with me after worship. I look forward to our next time together.

A Quick Review:

Sitting at assigned tables allowed individuals to get to know more people in the congregation – a familiar face now has a story that I know! That is Growth.

Youth are not your future, they are your PRESENT. The youth that you said were your future in the 70's and 80's and 90's are not in church. The youth at Advent are members that need as many opportunities for involvement as adults. This is their time for faith involvement. That is Growth.

The transition time is not “down” time. This is a time for renewed activity! This is a time to step back and take a hard, honest look at the gifts and skills within Advent and ask God how God wants those used in ministry in Citrus Heights. This is a time for corporate prayer together (Wednesdays at 9:30 AM everyone stop and pray!). This is a time for training on what it means to “be” church in this day and age. This is Growth.

Time is your friend. It takes time to get perspective and hindsight and wisdom. It takes time to clear old visions in order to discern new visions. Time is your friend and your asset in this process. Taking time show intentionality in seeking God's direction for the ministry at Advent. Rushing is a reaction, not a response. This is Growth.

Congregational recognition that “Change” is in order and that “Change” is difficult, scary, and challenging. To be better at dealing with “Change”, congregation needs some skills and training to understand healthy ways to navigate our fears of the unknown and unfamiliar. This is Growth.

We need a _____ pastor to help us _____.

Strong/Lead? Young/Grow with? Seasoned/Join? Any of above? All of above?

BUT... Before you know what you need a _____ pastor to _____

You need to be clear about who Advent is called to be in this time and place

BUT.... Before you know who Advent is at this time and place you have to discern what God wants Advent to do

BUT..... To discern who God is calling Advent to be in this time and place you need to individually/collectively pray about this and you need to intentionally discuss this

Continually remind yourselves that God is present and this is God's ministry. Your purpose of being is centered on God, not a pastor or one another.

OUR NEXT CONGREGATIONAL CONVERSATION WILL BE MARCH 6TH.