

Congregational Life Report 2011

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.” Ephesians 2:8

The Division for Congregational Life supports and represents 10 ministry teams. **Together In Mission**, our annual event hosted by the Division was held on January 22nd at King of Kings in Fairfax. Over 150 attended this year past year. The theme was **“To See Ourselves as Others Do”** and launched the theme as one for the Metro DC synod for the year 2011. The keynote was Dr. Amy Oden, author of God’s Welcome. Nine workshops were available to those attending. Our goal was to address the needs of our congregations and facilitate connections with one another.

Christian Education: Rev. Anna Anderson

Christian educators were invited to gather for occasional LACE (Lutheran Association of Christian Educators) Chapter meetings. \$300.00 was donated to the LACE National Organization to support the work of Christian educators.

Book of Faith Initiative is represented by Susan Wisseman for our synod at the national level. She presented two workshops at the 2011 Together In Mission event. The Book of Faith Initiative is currently in the 5th year of a 5 year commitment to bring the importance of Scripture study to the center of learning in congregations.

Evangelism: Chair - Rev. Marv Tollefson

The *Evangelizing Pastors Community (EPC)* met to build community and evangelism strategies in the local congregation. They met on a regular basis to build community and spiritual formation.

Many thanks and much appreciation goes to Rev. Marv Tollefson for chairing this team over the past 10+ years. He retired as lead pastor at Christ Lutheran in Bethesda, MD in December. His advice and expertise in leadership support will be missed.

Youth: Chair - Barbara Harner.

Chi Rho (Sr. High) - 26 youth and 8 adults from 11 congregations participated in this annual weeklong servant trip with HOMES in Neon, KY.

Chrysalis (Sr. High) - *STIR UP!* - 178 registered participants from 19 congregations – Using the Advent collects, participants asked God to stir up God’s power to stir up our hearts to stir up the will of God’s people so we can go out and stir up the world. As an offering, participants contributed over \$1,300 in cash and gift card donations for Lutheran Disaster Relief.

Shekinah (Jr. High) – *AMAZING!* - 250 registered participants from 21 congregations. Using Romans 8:38-39, participants took part in discussions and activities focused on reminding us that nothing can separate us from God and there is nothing we can do to make God love us any less. An offering of \$1,420.00 was collected and directed to Outdoor Ministries - specifically Mar-Lu Ridge and Caroline Furnace. In addition, 250 bricks were donated to Caroline Furnace as an offering in kind.

Youth Leadership Team

We started the year with six team members - Rachel Carle, Tricia Edwards, Carson Fehner, Alyson Griese, Anna Lewis, Sean Robinson, and Caleb Thronson - and added 2 new members in January - Sadie Mysinger and Maddy Lewis. YLT members were active participants in the planning of Chrysalis 2010 and Shekinah 2011.

YM101, 102 and 103

Recognizing that most of the adults involved in congregational youth ministry in Metro DC are volunteers, we offered three workshops throughout the year in an effort to equip and support them with 43 adults participating in at least one of these workshops. The first was an overview of youth ministry, especially for adults new to youth ministry in Metro DC, the second looked at how various forms of media can be integrated into youth ministry, and the third offered an opportunity to explore how practices.

Financial Assistance for Youth and Adults

A designated fund was established to provide financial assistance to youth to enable them to participate in synod youth ministry events and to support adults seeking education and training.

2012 ELCA Youth Gathering

Preparations have begun to provide assistance and support for congregations planning to participate in this event. In addition, the Gathering is providing training materials to equip ALL youth ministry adults and these sessions will begin Spring 2011.

Other

Barbara Harner continues to serve as the Region 8 Facilitator for the ELCA Youth Ministry Network, as a coach / instructor for the Youth Ministry Certification School at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, and as the synod's Gathering Coach for the 2012 ELCA Youth Gathering. Tony Kerlavage is serving as the synod's Gathering Coordinator for the 2012 ELCA Youth Gathering; Andrew Buck and Becky Conrad are members of the synod's Gathering Coaching Team.

Young Adult Ministries led by Rev. Amy Sevimli

2010 was the Year of the Young Adult, and what a great year it was! We had speakers like Carol Howard Merrit, Karen Ward, Chris Nelson, Rodger Nishioka, and Matt Miofsky join us at annual synod events to share their successes in working with young adults. A new awareness around ministry with and for young adults was formed all across the synod. Two congregations committed to placing an emphasis on young adults and their ministries are growing: 501 Church, an outreach of First Trinity Lutheran Church and Pastor Wendy Moen; and Luther Place, which has a growing ministry with and for young adults.

Finally, 2010 changed my life forever. I departed the category of "young adult," not because of my age, but because, as I like to say, I "kidded out" of the young adult category. In our synod we define young adults as people age 18-35 without children, and though I still fit the age category, I now have a child. And how my life has changed! No more last minute decisions to "go out;" no more late nights and late mornings. For me, the life of a young adult was completely different than the life of a parent. What's more, the church has more to offer me now. A process for Baptism, Sunday School for my child, a parents group, family events galore, even an entire worship service in which children are taken into consideration in the liturgy. There is more available to me as a parent in the church than there ever was when I was a young adult.

This is why ministry with and for young adults is so important. Though our congregations don't mean to, we often leave young adults feeling ignored. We expect them to fit into the activities we already have, most of which have nearly no young adults attending. If there is one thing to remember about working with young adults, it's this: **young adults attract young adults**. Just like families like to attend churches which have children; just like older adults like to be in churches where they can connect with their peers, so too do young adults prefer to show up places where there are other 18-35 year olds without children.

All across our synod, I meet Lutherans who wish that their children and grandchildren would attend church. Though I've not found it effective for parents to instruct their twenty-something children to attend church (I hope I remember this bit of wisdom when my son is 20), there is something we can do about this: we can be the kinds of churches our twenty-something children would like to attend. If churches all across the country would begin doing this, our children and grandchildren might just find churches where they could connect with a community of people and reconnect to their faith.

The Young Adult Working Group (Pastor Karen Brau, Pastor Phil Hirsch, Pastor Meredith Keseley, Pastor Kate Murray, and I) continues to work on this on just this idea. We have set a goal for the synod: that by the end of 2013 there will be five young adult ministries across this synod. Those are ministries which have a critical mass of young adults (40 or more meeting regularly). 501 Church and Luther Place are well on their way to making this happen. We need three more communities throughout the synod where this kind of emphasis and ministry can take place. If your congregation can be one of those places or wants to help sponsor one, contact me.

In the meantime, If your congregation is interested in reaching out to a few young adults, here are few ideas to get things started:

Start a Small Group: If your congregation doesn't have a young adult small group, start one! It's not hard, and there are both congregations and consultants in the synod who will help you do this.

Put your Young Adult Ministry on your homepage: If you have a young adult ministry in your congregation, highlight it on your homepage. This is one of the easiest and fastest ways to encourage young adults to check out your congregation.

DVD Conversation: Engage your congregation in a conversation about the DVD you just watched. Ask congregants to watch and discuss the video, and if it would help, invite someone from YAWG to facilitate the conversation. To watch the video, pick up a DVD at the Young Adult Display or look at the DC Young Adults Facebook page.

DC Young Adults Online: Check out the website: www.dcyoungadults.org, the facebook fan page: DC YOUNG ADULTS, and sign up for the E-NEWS on the website.

Invite a consultant to your congregation: If your congregation is interested in pursuing this ministry even further, invite someone from YAWG to meet with your congregation and discuss options for your congregation.

Meet with young adults who don't go to church: It may sound scary, but ask young adults in your area if you could take them to coffee, lunch, dinner or out for a beer. If you do this, try to find young adults who fall within the age category and who are NOT related to you. Ask them what they think of they think of the Church, what they think of Jesus, and how they approach their own spirituality. ***If you do this, ask the questions and LISTEN. Please DO NOT try to rebut their arguments.*** If they are interested in learning more about your congregation, invite them

to worship or schedule a (gasp) second meeting with them. Try to use this initial meeting as an opportunity for you to hear, listen, and learn. They'll appreciate your listening ear.

Invite young adults into congregational leadership...in 3's! I add this leadership suggestion hesitantly because I have met many young adults who have been invited into leadership and whose ideas have either been rejected or have been laughed at...literally. You may find this surprising, but the number of Metro DC congregations in which this has happened is stunning. I can tell you stories! Many of the young adults who have tried out congregational leadership have soon thereafter left. If you invite them in threes, this will give them the sense that they have allies at the table and a hope that the others in the congregation will actually listen to them.

Lutheran Men In Mission (LMM) led by Rich White.

LMM continued its program of providing MasterBuilder Bibles at no charge to congregations to help start or restart their men's ministry. Rich is very involved at the national level and strives to support and establish initiatives in local congregations for men's ministries and Bible studies.

Outdoor Ministries co-led by Judi Hangen and Kim Graham

Both Mar-Lu Ridge and Caroline Furnace camps are supported by our synod and are dependent on our congregations both monetarily and through providing participants. Both are available for retreats for all the ages.

Worship Resources co-led by Rev. Dr. Robert Driver Bishop and Rev. Mark Edwards

This team provided support for congregations interested in exploring current or new liturgical practices, renewal of worship, and expanding the integration of creative arts in worship. The work and support of the Rev. Robert Driver Bishop was appreciated. We wish him many blessings as he has accepted a new call in the Delaware Maryland Synod.

Prayer Resources Group was led by Rev. Bill Wegener.

Many thanks to Rev. Bill Wegener's entire team for the many retreats and opportunities they provided over the years. Our condolences and prayers go to the family of Rev. Wegener upon his death this past year. The Prayer Resources Group as known in past years has now dissolved and graciously given remaining funds to the Congregational Life team. A portion of these funds were used to purchase books for each congregation attending Together In Mission 2011.

The book was God's Welcome by Dr. Amy Oden.

Creation Care Team led by the Rev. Sarah Scherschligt.

The team presented a resolution bringing environmental awareness to congregations at the 2010 assembly which passed. They also led a workshop at the Together In Mission event entitled Beyond Light Bulbs.

Plans have begun for **Together In Mission 2012**. It will be held on January 21st. The theme for the year will be *Re-Presenting Our Faith*. The keynote will be Brian McLaren.

Respectfully Submitted, Debbie Streicher, Chair