

Our life together

By the Rev. Wm Chris Boerger, bishop



With all of the technology and glitz of modern culture, our church can seem to be behind the times in its

communication methods and message. As descendants of the tradition that used the printing press to change the world, we should know that it is our message, not our methodology, that defines the church.

However, it is still easy to look for the next new and best thing to give life to the congregation and the church.

I want to argue that while these various tools have changed the way the church comes together and does its work, it is still the people of God gathered around word and sacrament that defines the church.

As we look at redeveloping the life of our congregations, it must be around prayer, the study of the Bible, and our local response to God's call through word and prayer.

I have said before that 80 percent of the people who served on the councils of the congregations I have served as a pastor came from the weekly Bible study groups. This should not surprise us. Our theology says the Spirit is at work where the means of grace, the word and the sacraments are proclaimed and administered.

It is as we read and wrestle with the word of God in Scripture that our thinking is changed. It is as we pray for each other that our relationships are strengthened. Jesus' directive that we pray for our enemies recognizes that prayer will change relationships.

The work of the church is to form its members through prayer, study and worship. We do a good

job of making sure that worship is a regular part of our congregational life. I want to advocate that we find opportunities for prayer and Bible study to also be regular parts of our life together.

Some of the confusion I see in our recent controversies comes from the fact that we aren't doing our homework when it comes to praying for each other and studying Scripture together. I've heard some interesting interpretations of how one is to use the biblical message. We would benefit from study together.

Bible study cannot be a mere repeating of a traditional interpretation of the text. The tradition needs to be on the table, but the people of God also need to wrestle with how that interpretation fits in the context of today. That discussion comes from study and engaging each other and the Spirit in prayer.

This is not new technology. It is the ancient practice of faith. □

Each day is a surprise

Nine months ago Luther's Table opened with a flurry of activities and events, and the excitement still continues. Not a day goes by without something new happening: from dinners with bishops from around the country, to a group of Haitian Lutherans passing through on their way from Holden Village to the airport, and even to Congressman Dave Reichert stopping in to support a new rapid transit bus line. Every day is a surprise and a gift.

The menu at Luther's Table fea-

tures fresh and savory foods—toasty flatbreads, crispy salads, hearty homemade soups and delightful entrées. The beers and wines are sourced as locally and sustainably as possible. Tongue-in-cheek names bring guffaws and giggles: The Vicar (turkey), The Sinner (roast beef), Luther's Plate (sausages and potato salad) and the Hippie (salad with fruits and nuts).

Live music is a great part of the scene at Luther's Table. On Friday and Saturday nights, musicians of



The Rev. Gretchen Mertes
at Luther's Table, Renton, Wash.

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Help spread the word

Join our synod's Mission Interpreters team

By Lee Bjorklund

Does everyone in your congregation know how Lutherans are reaching out with their faith and hands to help those in need? Here are a few examples:

- There are 250 Lutheran mission personnel working 24/7 in 50 countries today.
- Homeless men and women are able to find a safe and warm place to sleep, seven days a week, in several of our synod's congregations. A congregation's cost to provide shelter for 20 men, for one week, is equivalent to a family of four staying in a downtown hotel for one night.
- There are 1,530 Lutheran early childhood education centers that serve kids throughout the U.S.
- Kent [Wash.] Lutheran Church is building water filters that each provide safe drinking water for 20 people in South Sudan for 30 years at a cost of \$7 each.
- Lutheran World Relief sent \$13.5 million worth of quilts and school kits to 742,560 people in 22 countries last year (www.lwr.org).
- Every 45 seconds a child dies from malaria, a preventable and treatable disease. Now the ELCA is joining with Lutheran churches in Africa to work toward a malaria-free future. This effort is part of the ELCA Malaria Campaign, with a goal raising \$15 million over a four-year period (www.elca.org/malaria).

God's work. Our hands.

Wow. We really do have some

stories to share on what this powerful combination of faith and hands is doing today. How about getting your congregation aware of the thousands of ways that millions of people are being served by Lutheran mission locally, nationally and internationally? These are great stories to tell—and we make it easy for you to do.

I have volunteered to build and support a Mission Interpreter (MI) network within the Northwest Washington Synod. So far the synod has 20 MIs in place in congregations. The goal is that every congregation—all 115 of us—identifies a *Mission Interpreter* to help get those stories told.

Here is the basic "job" description: "Mission Interpreters share stories of how God—through our gifts—is changing lives locally, synodically and churchwide. MI's work closely with their pastors, council and church staff, and are fully supported with training and materials. They use whatever methods work best for them and their congregations to get the word out about Lutheran mission."

The objectives of this effort are simple and direct:

- **Recognize** the good work of Lutheran mission efforts and their delivery of service and evangelism.
- **Build awareness** of the scope and breadth of Lutheran mission programs locally and throughout the world.



Lee Bjorklund

- **Thank** Northwest Washington Lutherans for their continuing support of their local and churchwide mission programs.

God's work. Our hands.

Our mission has resulted in thousands of powerful stories—including your congregation's—just waiting to be shared. We know Lutherans do mission better and more cost-effectively than almost anybody. Now is the time to "tell the story," give thanks for those doing the good work, and perhaps also inspire ideas for new mission in the process.

We appreciate your partnership and support in this ministry. Please let us know if you have questions or need additional information.

For more information, contact me at 206-523-4518 or leebjorklund@hotmail.com. □

Bjorklund is a member of Bethany Lutheran Church in Seattle.

Vacation Bible school rocks!

For many years vacation Bible School at St. Andrew's Lutheran Church in Bellevue, Wash., has included a camp for students entering fifth, sixth and seventh grades.

The students meet in the church sanctuary each day for the opening events, but the rest of their camp experience is taken out into the community. Field trips often fit with the Bible story. It might be a trip to the aquarium after studying Jonah and the whale, or filling bags of food in a community food bank after studying the famine in Egypt.

Last year's outreach event was particularly stunning. One of the two community projects took the surprised camp students to a Build a Bear store. The students were told that their bears would be given to the fire station across the street from the church to be used to comfort children who had been involved in a

catastrophe or are undergoing a critical medical procedure.

Willingly and cheerfully the students created a wide variety of wonderful bears without any concern that they would be giving them away.

When the students returned to the church, Jim McEachran and Wesley Telyea, pastors of St. Andrew's, blessed their bears. Then the children walked across the street and presented 31 bears to the stunned firefighters.

To our surprise, the community liaison officer for the Bellevue Fire Department called the church office to find out the details of this amazing gift. Later, he delivered to the church office letters signed by the fire chief—one for each of the campers and their teachers. It included a photo of the firefighters with each of the 31 bears.

The letter explained: "The department will be asking individual firefighters to present the bears to a child undergoing medical procedures at Seattle Children's Bellevue Clinic and Surgery Center. The firefighter will spend time with the patient explaining how the bear came about and the special care that was taken to create this gift."

Each year's field trips have been meaningful to our Bible school students, and our camp continues to thrive. One of the many blessings has also been the noticeable number of these students who come back each year and later serve as Bible school volunteers. Our teen staff is almost half of our total volunteers each year! □

Meg Marcrander

Marcrander is director of Christian education, St. Andrew's Lutheran Church, Bellevue, Wash.

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many genres—rock, jazz, folk, indy-rock—take the stage. Open mike is every Thursday, with the stage available to anyone who has the courage to sing. The last Wednesday of every month is "Story Time," with songs, stories, crafts and snacks for young children. Every other Tuesday is "Theology Pub," with timely topics discussed over a pint of your favorite ale. Weekly worship is on Monday evenings.

The calendar at Luther's Table is packed with fun, exciting and meaningful experiences. For more information or to plan your own party or event, visit the Luther's Table website at www.lutherstable.org or find us on Facebook.

Luther's Table is located at 419 Second St., Suite 1, Renton, WA 98057. □

Gretchen Mertes

Mertes is mission developer at Luther's Table in Renton, Wash.



Volunteer Heather Kelly has gone above and beyond the call of duty. After the grand opening of Luther's Table, Kelly put in more than 30 hours a week for three months. She has helped organize structure, policy and safety training.