

# CROSS Connection



*The Cross Connection is a monthly publication of the Eastern Washington-Idaho Synod published for its clergy, associates in ministry, lay leadership and ecumenical partners.*

May 2016

God's Beloved People,

Let's pick up some "Bits and Pieces" for this month:

- Many, many thanks to everyone who planned for, carried out, and participated in a very fine Synod Assembly in Boise April 15-17! We did our work together, heard very faithful preaching and presentations on the End of Life, enjoyed one another's company, worshiped in prayer and song, and participated in workshops, hearings, and sessions with the Net-Workers. Two memorials were forwarded to the August Churchwide Assembly in New Orleans regarding support for Veterans and encouragement for the ELCA to be an advocate for refugee resettlement.
- With the deaths of a couple of well-known contemporary musicians, I'm struck again by the power of music to move the hearts of people. Then again, recounting the great texts from John's Revelation that inspired George Fredric Handel in his composition of the oratorio Messiah was a deeply moving experience for me at the Assembly. Mercy! What is it that allows music to bypass so much of our critical faculties and go straight through the ear to the heart? At the very least such an awareness means the quality of our worship planning, our hymn selection, and our accompaniment must be first-rate. Our music matters and communicates!
- Having mentioned the Churchwide Assembly this summer in New Orleans, I hope some of you might consider attending the Grace Gathering (August 10-12) which is embedded in the middle of the Assembly. This is going to be a rich gathering where Bishop Eaton will speak and lots of information will be gathered and summarized about how we want to plan for our future

as a church. In addition there will be an emphasis on the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation, our anchor in human history that still directs our mission as a church. Here's the website if you might be interested: [http://elca.org/gracegathering?\\_ga=1.215692511.955991512.1393266121](http://elca.org/gracegathering?_ga=1.215692511.955991512.1393266121)

- I'm struck these days by how many of our congregations are confused or uncertain about the work of a pastor. Some of this loss of understanding may be cultural, since the office of pastor is less well-known and respected as in other days. Part of this may have to do with the number of discouraging examples that hit the news with regularity. Another part of this may have to do with a consumerist notion that our offering is payment for certain services and pastors are simply one of the service-providers in our lives.
- Finally, you should know that I enter this final year of my service as bishop with great expectations and enthusiasm. I hope to have the opportunity to visit every corner of our territory to say thank you and encourage you in your ministry. I'm more certain than ever that the Word of Jesus is crucial to human honesty and flourishing, so there will never be a day when we are without a purpose and mission!
- Blessings!

Bishop Martin Wells



## *Paying Attention*

by Pastor Helga Jansons Director for Evangelical Mission

A Poem: "TURNING TO ONE ANOTHER" by Margaret Wheatley

*There is no power greater than a community discovering what it cares about.*

*Ask: "What's possible?" not "What's wrong?" Keep asking.*

*Notice what you care about. Assume that many others share your dreams.*

*Be brave enough to start a conversation that matters. Talk to people you know. Talk to people you don't know. Talk to people you never talk to.*

*Be intrigued by the differences you hear. Expect to be surprised. Treasure curiosity more than certainty.*

*Invite in everybody who cares to work on what's possible. Acknowledge that everyone is an expert about something.*

*Know that creative solutions come from new connections.*

*Remember, you don't fear people whose story you know. Real listening always brings people closer together.*

*Trust that meaningful conversations can change your world.*

*Rely on human goodness. Stay together.*

There is new energy and enthusiasm across our synod. It seems as if people are eager to serve and become involved in ministry, particularly as leaders. One example of this was when in the space of less than two hours I invited people to attend a three day Ministry Coaching training in Seattle and one person after another said yes. We now have eight people trained to coach lay leaders and pastors especially in the area of stewardship and discipleship. Similarly, I asked ten people to lead three different workshops at Synod Assembly and all of them said yes.

What does this mean? I think it means people love to use their gifts and to develop their own competence and skills. They want to help others, and we are multiplying leaders across the synod. After all, our synod's purpose is to Equip God's People for Ministry. Connecting to the poem: we value community, people care and can care together, are brave enough to learn from others and to see things differently, and to become an expert about something they can share with others. Coaching, for example, includes a relationship of trust and meaningful conversations, so that we can grow and new things become possible.

As I travel around the synod I hear about surprising ministries. Sometimes it comes from an interest or passion as for Pastor Inger Hanson at Shepherd of the Mountains in Jackson, WY. Her dog Hobey, is the source of her creative evangelism. On St. Francis Day the church members offered "Pet Blessings to Go" in three different locations including on a hiking trailhead where church Facebook photos show blessings of horses and dogs that received treat bags and most of all rich conversations about what a church can be. I heard about this ministry during a Ventures for Growing Stewards workshop led by Kristin Koskella (Net-Worker in Southern Idaho) and myself in Pocatello, ID, when we talked about what stewardship means. I knew it was so much more than finances, but pet blessings had not occurred to me!

One way to lift up new ideas of what is possible is by encouraging people to tell their stories. One of my goals is for each church to have at least one Mission Interpreter who is given the authority to inform the church about where their money goes, thank people for their stewardship and also to encourage others to tell their stories of how the church is making a difference. Stories are being posted on our synod website for all to read and share.

I am so glad for our EWAIID Synod Mission Plan using the Net-Worker model. We have four Net-Workers who can pay close attention to the dedication, competence, creativity, passion, energy and vitality in ministry around the synod. By focusing on those things that are working well, it helps them to grow. New life is God's future for us all!



# Presiding bishop

By Elizabeth A. Eaton

Presiding bishop

## Can we answer the question ‘why’?

Knowing the ‘why’ is important for the church’s future directions



Once for continuing education I signed up for an introduction to philosophy course at the community college. I was a music education major in college and never had any philosophy courses. Since philosophy and theology are so closely related, I thought it was about time that I became better

acquainted with the Western philosophical tradition. So off I went to learn how the great philosophers have addressed the questions of human existence.

It was an interesting experience. As we marched through the centuries of Western philosophy, it seemed that the philosophers changed the approach to addressing the “big questions”—meaning, transcendence, suffering, the role of the will. The whole process was led by a professor who described himself as a lapsed Mormon who, I believe, never quite made it out of the protest milieu of the 1960s.

This convergence of a professor working through the rejection of his tradition and the philosophical systems that paid more attention to “how” versus “why” was uncomfortable. I didn’t buy into determinism, especially when one student used it to explain a rather unfortunate choice that involved drinking and driving (no one was injured). What was a Lutheran girl to do?

My chance came when the professor assigned a paper to be written about our understanding of any of the philosophies covered in class. I dove in. This was an extra credit assignment designed to give a second chance to those who were in some danger of not passing the course. As I was not in that category, I immediately became one of “those students” (I’m sure my classmates used earthier language).

I titled my paper “How or Why: Newtonian Mechanics vs. A Quantum Metaphysics.” Pretty much over the top, but I was on a mission. I wanted to make the point to my professor that there is more in life than the “how” of things, that there is meaning and transcendence even if we can’t by reason or human understanding perceive it. I wanted to give witness to

my conviction that there is more going on than a life of just mechanics and technique on the way to some deterministic conclusion. And I wanted to point to the truth I had experienced—that there is a loving and relational being who cares about us and about the creation.


Needless to say the professor was mystified by the amount of effort I put into the project, and he did take five points off because I used a contraction. But the point then, as it is now, is that we as a culture and a church have become proficient at talking about the “how” of things. For the church this means “how” has become the question that determines where we focus, how we live, where we allocate resources. We have developed programs—beautiful programs—on how to do Christian education, worship, stewardship, advocacy, justice, evangelism, global ministry and youth ministry. Don’t neglect any of these.

But can we, as a church, answer the question *why*?

As we engage in conversation about the future direction and priorities of this church this year, this is the question we must answer. If we can’t answer this question clearly and with conviction, I don’t see a lot of change for us.

In the Small Catechism, Martin Luther gives us some direction:

*“I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father in eternity, and also true human being, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord. He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned human being. He has purchased and freed me from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death. He has done all this in order that I may belong to him, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in eternal righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he has risen from the dead and lives and rules eternally.”*

This is most certainly true. 

A monthly message from the presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Her email address: [bishop@elca.org](mailto:bishop@elca.org).

## TRANSFORMATIONAL MINISTRY and LEADERSHIP WORKSHOP

**For Clergy and Lay People      Saturday May 14, 9-noon**

At Trinity Lutheran Church  
812 N 5<sup>th</sup> St Coeur D'Alene, ID

### *Discerning congregational mission, purpose and vision*

- How to develop a ministry plan
- Leadership development and multiplication
- Change dynamics
- Conflict management

Led by synod Transformational Ministry team of Pastors:  
Duane Anderson, Laura Olsen and Helga Jansons

For any questions contact Pastor Helga Jansons phone 509 380 7122

RSVP by April 29<sup>th</sup> [Helga.jansons@elca.org](mailto:Helga.jansons@elca.org) so that we have enough materials and lunch  
**No fee.** Donations for lunch provided will be accepted.

### **In preparation for this event:**

Bring existing mission or purpose statements if you have them

Bring any plans or goals that your congregation has developed over the past few years

Note the leaders in your congregation; church council, committee/team chairs, and informal leaders

Think of examples of ways in which your congregation has made intentional changes and how that went

Remember a conflict within your congregation and how it was managed

## **ELCA Members Change Lives with Veterans' Court Program**

*by Jenny Kunka*

Dave Belcher served in the Army for 17 years. He was a platoon sergeant and received a Bronze Star and a Combat Infantry Badge, but he came home with a brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). He isolated himself after returning to civilian life. "I started doing drugs and tried to commit suicide," he said. "I turned away everyone who loved me."

Belcher's life hit bottom when he awoke from a nightmare and attacked his girlfriend, who ended up in the hospital. He pleaded guilty to the attack and faced at least nine years in prison. That was when he learned about the Cascade County Veterans Court in Great Falls, Montana. State District Judge Greg Pinski, a member of Redeemer Lutheran Church in Great Falls, started the court program in November 2013 when he was searching for a need he could address. "When you look at the number of Iraq and Afghanistan vets coming back with PTSD and traumatic brain injuries, their injuries and struggles get out of hand and, by the very nature of their issues, they seem to become involved in the justice system," Pinski said. Since Great Falls has an Air Force base and a National Guard, Pinski thought it was a good fit for this specialized court.

Pinski said his work with the program was influenced by his faith. "It's about looking at who a person is and, despite faults, struggles or difficulties, trying to provide them with the resources to succeed," he said. "It goes hand-in-hand with everything faith is about."

Pinski is not alone in his efforts or his convictions. Jennifer Quick, a member of First English Evangelical Lutheran Church, Great Falls, is a prosecutor in Cascade County who has also played a large role in the Veterans Court. She, too, connects her faith with her work in the program. "I believe God has a plan for everyone, but things can get in your way, intervening forces, such as what can happen during a war," Quick said. "Each and every one of these people is important and has a plan. We can't give up on them." In February, Quick was honored for her work with the program, receiving a certificate of appreciation from the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Montana.

In its first two years, Veterans Court has enrolled 24 participants with 11 graduating, 12 still involved and three more

waiting to join. “Many of these veterans have no criminal history,” Pinski said. “They just need to address the issues that brought them into the court system.”

Although some choose Veterans Court over prison time as the easy way out, Pinski said the program is not easy. Participants must appear in court and meet with their probation officers every week. They are randomly drug tested at least two times a week and must go through continuous alcohol monitoring for the first 90 days. Additionally, multiple weekly substance abuse meetings and counseling sessions are scheduled for each individual. By all accounts, the system is working. Pinski said that on a national level, 70 percent of participants graduate and 75 percent of graduates are not reimprisoned. “The effect on the vets is amazing,” Quick said, adding that she sees a sense of pride in participants. “Their outlook changes when they know they have this whole team behind them and people who believe in them. They just shine on graduation day. They are so proud of what they’ve accomplished.”

Quick said she’s heard from some veterans that their clarity of mind after addiction and mental health counseling has made family life and church a priority. The faith community becomes part of their sobriety and part of making a positive network in their lives.

After 18 months in Veterans Court, Belcher was the program’s first graduate. Today he is clean and sober, volunteers as a mentor for the program and has been married for two years to Michelle, his girlfriend during his period of nightmares. Belcher said the people in Veterans Court are the reason he is here today. He’s especially grateful to Pinski. “He cares the most out of anybody,” Belcher said. “I’ve never met anyone like that in the court system.” Belcher said he also believes it’s hard to change without God in your life. He was baptized a year and a half ago and for the first time was able to feel God. “I think God brought me to him. I can’t think of any other way to say it,” he said. “I went to that church and got on my knees.”

After being baptized, Belcher said he asked God what he could do with his life. “The only thing I can do now is help other people,” he said. “I’ll be a mentor as long as I can. There’s a lot of people out there like me and they need help.”

Eastern Washington and Idaho also have Veterans Courts. For more information, or to volunteer contact:

Spokane County VET Court, Kathy Haugland, 509-477-2617, khaugland@spokanecounty.org

Spokane City Vet Court, Tim Sigler, 509-622-5804, tsigler@spokanecity.org

Stevens County Vet Court, Nick Wolfe, 509-684-7586, nwolfe@co.stevens.wa.us

Pend Oreille County Vet Court, Scott Cornwell, scornwell@penddoreille.org

Ada County Veterans Court, Marreen Burton, 208-287-7670, mbakerburton@adaweb.net

Canyon County Veterans Court, Dona Butler, 208-455-6006, dbutler@canyonco.org.

6th District Judicial Veterans Court, Bannock, ID

The Idaho Supreme Court, Patti Tobias, ptobias@idcourts.net

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## Highlights of the 2016 Synod Assembly

“We are the Lord’s: Our Journey with Christ” was the Assembly theme, based on Romans 14:7-8. We gathered on April 15 – 17 in Boise, Idaho. Steve Gustafson was the Chair of the Assembly and we give thanks for all his hard work as well as to the Planning Committee.

Guest speaker Rev. Dr. Herbert Anderson spoke about Continuity in God, when there is Discontinuity in Life. Dr. Anderson presented how we often shaped our lives around our losses, our fears that our sins may end God’s steadfast love and our anxiety about our own mortality and finitude. He assured us that no matter what discontinuity we have in our lives God’s steadfast love is with us forever and trumps all sin. Rev. Paul Palumbo presented Peace at the Last, a liturgy to use by individuals and groups who are visiting those who are dying. The creative team of Rev. Palumbo, composer and musician Rolf Vegdahl, artist Wendy Schramm and the Lake Chelan Lutheran congregation developed the liturgy. It will be available from Augsburg Fortress this coming summer.

We welcomed Churchwide Representative Christina Jackson-Skelton, Executive Director of Mission Advancement. She thanked the Synod for our support of Churchwide. Her report included greetings from Churchwide and Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton who reminded us that “We are church, We are Lutheran, We are church together, We are church for the sake of the World”. Christina stated the “Why” of what we do is because we have been set free through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to be reconciled to serve the world.

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## Call Process Status

<b>A</b> Process beginning/congregational study	<b>I</b> Interim	<b>AP</b> Associate/Assistant Pastor
<b>B</b> Names received or on-site visits in process	<b>P</b> Pastor	<b>VP</b> Visitation Pastor
<b>C</b> Call in process/issued	<b>CP</b> Co-Pastor	<b>AIM</b> Associate in Ministry
<b>NV</b> New Vacancy	<b>LP</b> Lead Pastor	<b>L</b> Lay Position
<b>TC</b> Term call	<b>SP</b> Supply Pastor	<b>TM</b> Transition Minister
<b>VP</b> Visitation Pastor		(available for the open-ended call)

POS	LOCATION/CONGREGATION	STATUS	PASTORAL CARE	
P	Boise, ID – King of Glory	B	Kristi Bummer	I
P	Boise, ID – Shepherd of the Valley	A	Joel Westby	I
P	Chelan, WA – Holden Village, Fullness of God	A		
P	Cheney, WA – Emmanuel Lutheran	A	Shelley Wee	I
P	Chewelah, WA – St. Paul Lutheran	NV	Betty Krafft	SP
P	Firth, ID – Bethel Lutheran	A	Paul Malek	TEEM
P	Kennewick, WA – Lord of Life	B	Ron Shipman	I
P	Lind, WA – Good Hope	NV		
P	Mattawa, WA – Grace Lutheran	NV	Ginny Kreckling	I
P	Pasco, WA – First Lutheran	A	Phylis Stromme	I
P	Spokane, WA – Bethlehem Lutheran	NV	Steve Wee	SP
P	Wilbur, WA – Wilbur Lutheran	NV		
P	Yakima, WA – Central Lutheran	A		

## Roster Changes

Rev. Bob Kenyon has accepted the call to serve at St. John Lutheran - Sprague, WA. He started April 3, 2016.

Pastor Donald Short, serving at Pilgrim Lutheran Church - Othello, WA was installed April 23, 2016.

Kathleen Tigerman, Diaconal Minister has received a Synod Call and is now serving at Grace Episcopal Church in Caldwell, ID. Kat was installed April 17, 2016.

Pastor Jilian Ross will be installed May 1, 2016 at Faith Lutheran Church - Toppenish, WA.

Rev. Kimmy Meinecke will be installed as Priest in Charge at St. David's Episcopal Church - Spokane, WA on May 15, 2016 at 4:00 pm.

WELCA at St. Paul Lutheran in Chewelah Washington are presenting

## "The Celebration of Women"

on May 6, 2016, at 6:00 pm at their church, 101 N 2nd St.

*Who is a role model to you?*

Please bring a card with their name on it and some information about them. We  
ware celebrating all women.

Dani Zibell-Wolfe will be our inspirational speaker. Come enjoy the fellowship  
(womenship). RSVP Ginger Zibell 509 935-8047

## **Celebrating Abundance to Serve in Mission** **Stewardship Workshops**

Immanuel Lutheran Church, 1020 S. A St Moses Lake Saturday April 30th 9-noon  
Trinity Lutheran 1300 NE Lybecker St Pullman WA Saturday May 21st 9-noon  
Lord of Life Lutheran, 640 N Columbia Ctr Blvd, Kennewick, May 19 5:30- 8:30pm  
Advent Lutheran, 13009 E. Broadway, Spokane Valley May 18 5:30-8:30pm

In conjunction with our Synod Mission Campaign “My Synod: Moving in Mission Together,” stewardship workshops for congregational leaders are being offered. Focused on strengthening local congregations in leading annual stewardship efforts, the workshops will include information and insight into the Synod’s Mission Campaign, and offer strategies for incorporating it into ongoing stewardship.

Our guest presenter for these workshops is Marc Rieke, our Mission Campaign consultant. Marc serves as Senior Consultant for The Enrichment Group, a team serving Christian churches in capital and annual fund appeals, stewardship education initiatives, feasibility and visioning studies, and strategic planning efforts. In his 15 years with Enrichment, Marc has led more than 75 successful capital campaigns in churches and church-related organizations.

***Workshop participants will have the opportunity to:***

- Explore the heart of generosity
- Gain new language and approaches to lead stewardship in healthy and uplifting ways
- Learn how to shift thinking and acting from a mentality of scarcity to one of abundance
- Consider ways to forward mission and ministry vs. emphasizing “budgets”
- Discern how we can best help one another joyfully live into the relationship that God keeps with us
- Better understand how we can deepen faith and serve mission through acts of witness, service and giving

***Workshop participants will gain:***

- A deepened understanding of the scriptural basis for stewardship
- An expanded knowledge of best practices regarding implementing stewardship appeals
- Language and specific techniques to use in effective stewardship appeals
- A success plan to implement an annual stewardship appeal together with the Synod’s Mission Campaign appeal in your home congregation

## *One Hundred Year Celebration*

### **St. Paul Lutheran Church**

Chewelah, Washington

June 26, 2016

The story of St. Paul’s began around the first of the 20th Century with a small group meeting in a log cabin school house close to Addy, WA. One of the first pastors was a Pastor Grosupf, whose son served us many years later. The first records kept by this group were entered in 1916 by a missionary pastor of the Missouri Synod, the Rev. Leiband. There will be worship service at 10:00 AM. In the afternoon starting at 2:00 PM there will be an Open House. At that time we would like to welcome former pastors, interims, members and those who would just like to come and celebrate with us. We are looking for pictures of former pastors, of the OLD parsonage, former members, confirmation, baptisms, weddings, and fun times.

If you have any to share please contact, Ginger Zibell, at 509 935-8047. E-Mail [woodchips@centurytel.net](mailto:woodchips@centurytel.net)

# Pray with us

***We ask that you keep the ministry of the church,  
our synod, and the whole world in your prayers,  
as well as the people listed below . . .***



for the family and friends of Rev. Phylis Stromme on the birth of her granddaughter Kaylee Esther Jones on Monday, April 14th. Kaylee joins her mom and dad, sister Adrean, and all are happy and healthy.

for Melissa and Justin Johnson on the death of their son. Laurel Robert Johnson was birthed without a heartbeat on April 13, 2016 at Sacred Heart Medical Center in Spokane, WA. Laurel is the cherished son of Justin and Melissa Johnson and beloved brother of Audrey and Camille. A service honoring the loss of Laurel Robert Johnson and proclaiming the promises of God in Jesus Christ was held at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church - Spokane, WA. Laurel Robert was birthed knowing that he was already with Jesus.

For congregations and pastors in call process.

For those who suffer loss, may they find hope.

For children in school, may they learn more than just reading and writing - may they also learn patience, compassion and caring.

For the caregivers, may their actions be rewarded with hope and a sense of kind accomplishment.

For those aspiring to political office, may their ambitions be in the best interest of the people they hope to serve.

For clergy and lay staff in our synod office and in our congregations.

For those facing the struggles of aging, may they find the joy of youth and also know the peace and joy of being older.

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*Prayer Requests . . .* to be included or removed from the Synod Prayer Request list, please send your request to the synod [office@ewaidsynod.org](mailto:office@ewaidsynod.org), or call 509-838-9871.

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**EASTERN  
WASHINGTON  
IDAHO SYNOD**

of the  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

314 S. Spruce St., Suite A  
Spokane, WA 99201-5823



May 2016  
Newsletter

Let Down the Nets  
Lifting Our Vision  
Jesus First, Last, Always  
God's Grace, Our Gratitude  
The Spirit Powers Us  
No Fear! Transformation  
Connections Multiply Miracles  
Go, Tell & Serve



Please reproduce any and all articles for publication in congregational newsletters or bulletins.  
The **Cross Connection** is also available on the synod website at  
<http://www.ewaidsynod.org/synodpublications.html>.  
*Deadline for articles is the 5th of each month.*

Synod Calendar

**April 2016**

- 29-30 LWR Boxcar Loading - Spokane, WA
- 30 Lutheran Campus Ministry @ EWU Dinner  
5:00 Advent Lutheran - Spokane Valley

**May 2016**

- 1 Rev. Jillain Ross Installation - Toppenish, WA
- 1 Bloomsday
- 12 Rural Ministry Meeting - All Saints, Spokane
- 13-14 Candidacy Meeting - Spokane, WA
- 14 Transformational Ministry - Trinity, CDA
- 15 Rev. Kimmy Meinecke Installation - Spokane, WA
- 21 Planned Giving/Stewardship Workshop -  
Pullman/Moscow
- 30 Memorial Day - Synod office closed



**Eastern Washington-Idaho Synod**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our Hands

Staff

- Bishop ..... The Rev. Martin Wells
- Director for Evangelical Missions .. The Rev. Helga Jansons
- Program Administrator ..... Cathy Steiner
- Assembly Manager ..... Julia Bennett
- Communication Director ..... Gib Dominguez
- Net-Worker ..... Linda Howell
- Net-Worker ..... The Rev. David Kappus
- Net-Worker ..... Kristin Koskella
- Net-Worker ..... Jim Peterson

# THE PARISH PAPER

IDEAS AND INSIGHTS FOR ACTIVE CONGREGATIONS

EDITOR: CYNTHIA WOOLEVER—WWW.THEPARISHPAPER.COM

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## HOW DO NEW PEOPLE HEAR ABOUT YOUR CHURCH?

When asked, “How did you first find out about this congregation?” visitors give surprisingly diverse answers. Because not all visitors are seeking the same thing, their path to your church door reflects their specific needs and interests. Thus, congregations need multiple strategies to publicize and promote their presence in the community.

### Types of Potential New Members

There are three major types of potential members in your community and they usually have a variety of methods for seeking you out.

*Transplants* are new community residents who tend to search for a congregation of the same denomination they were previously a part of. They generally use the narrowest search strategy, such as denominational lists or a recommendation by their previous pastor.

*Neighbors* are friends and relatives of people who already attend or who live close by. These visitors are more likely to respond to a personal invitation to attend.

*Seekers* are potential worshipers who have not attended church before, or at least not in a long time. They usually find a church in less direct ways and may be looking for an experience that addresses an emotional need.

### Building Bridges

Many congregations excel at building bonds—personal connections among members—but it takes something more to build bridges to new members. Congregations build bridges to potential new members when worshipers want to share something that they find meaningful with those outside the church. Unfortunately, without planning and intentional efforts, these bridges never get built.

Congregational leaders and members assume that new people first engage by attending a worship service. However, growing numbers of people, especially younger people, have no church affiliation or previous exposure to faith communities. More than ever, congregations need different mechanisms to engage new generations and populations.<sup>1</sup>

### Ways to Build Bridges

There are multiple bridging approaches, and the effectiveness of each strategy depends on the type of visitor a church is attempting to reach.

*Personal communication.* Word of mouth remains the most frequent way new people find out about a church. Decades of research support this finding: current estimates range from at least half to two-thirds of surveyed adults find a church through personal invitations. People are infinitely more likely to trust information if they hear it from a person they know.

*Virtual word of mouth.* If current members use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Yelp, Foursquare, Meetup, or other platforms, your church already engages in digital evangelism. When members post photos of church experiences and friends, their side-door evangelism spreads information about what your church has to offer to their friends *and the friends of their friends*. Online avenues allows people to feel like they belong before they ever step foot on church property.<sup>2</sup>

*Mass communication.* An effective church website gives new people the chance to do in-depth research about



a church before they visit or engage in activities there. A high-quality website connects people to the church's ministry goals, including opportunities for volunteerism, social advocacy, and meeting spiritual needs.

Other communications still make a difference. Congregations can produce attractive brochures, postcards, and mailings. Others use signs and banners on church property and in the community. Radio ads tend to be inexpensive and can reach a wide audience.

*Promoting and hosting events.* Fairburn United Methodist Church, with many members more than eighty years old, recognized that new actions could strengthen their congregation's role in the community. The church created an "Open Doors Day" for the community, a carnival-type event that offered free rides, games, food, and tours. When more than 300 people attended, the church felt more connected to new residents in their changing community.<sup>3</sup>

*Community service activities.* Meaningful service and advocacy efforts grow out of church ministries. These activities both minister to struggling or hurting people and give potential new members an avenue for social activism as well. For some, service volunteering can lead to deeper involvement in a faith community.

*Increasing visibility.* A national study of new members found that one in five first found out about the congregation because they noticed the building.<sup>4</sup> Thus, attractive grounds and facilities also advertise and can say, "Welcome." Notifications about preschools, after school programs, and service programs increase foot traffic as well as raise the visibility and use of church facilities.

## Designing Bridges That Work

Before launching plans for reaching out to new people, gather some information about what is working now. Find out what current church efforts yield the best results. Above all, make only one or two changes at a time and continue monitoring the results.

*Conduct a survey.* Ask your last twenty new members: "Through whom, or by what means, did you first visit our church? What got you on the property the first time?" Share the findings with the appropriate committee or governing board and plan new strategies.

*Assess the church's reputation.* Ask ten nonmembers in the community to tell you what they know about the church. Which of your programs or services are you effectively communicating to the public? Do these assessments match your congregation's goals and mission? If not, where is the communication faltering?

*Bolster your digital message.* Try googling your church and see what comes up. Does the church website come up first? What else can a potential church visitor learn from an internet search? Is the address displayed and are service times easy to find? Consider completing a review of church website basics and making the necessary changes to enhance your site.<sup>5</sup>

To enable current members to electronically communicate with their friends about the church, learn about their usage patterns. Expect church members to fall along the social media spectrum—from non-users to experts. An excellent Church Internet Usage Survey is available to get this critical information.<sup>6</sup> Based on accurate information, a social ministry team can build a comprehensive plan for enhancing the church's ministry through this technology.

*Plan big worship days.* Churches see spikes in attendance at predictable times throughout each year—Christmas, Easter, and Mother's Day—and even larger numbers can be expected if people in the neighborhood receive personal or print invitations. Other promoted service times might be a Back-to-School Sunday in the fall, a day in February when people are less busy, or a Visitor or Bring-a-Friend Sunday. Each of these promoted services attract different types of people, such as inactives, families with children, and relatives or friends of members. However, given the planning and effort involved, carrying out more than three or four of these special Sundays a year is counterproductive.

## The Bottom Line

What causes an increase in first-time worship visitors? Major causes are your congregation's meaningful ministry, visibility, and positive reputation in the community. When that is the case, members derive significant spiritual meaning from their church, more members spontaneously invite, and more people respond to those invitations.

1. F. Douglas Powe and Jasmine Smother, "Create New Entry Points," *Leading Ideas*, October 2014 ([www.churchleadership.com](http://www.churchleadership.com)).

2. Powe and Smother.

3. [www.sacredplaces.org/reimagine-your-sacred-place/training/graduate-success-stories/2015/02/23/fairburn-united-methodist-church](http://www.sacredplaces.org/reimagine-your-sacred-place/training/graduate-success-stories/2015/02/23/fairburn-united-methodist-church)

4. U.S. Congregational Life Survey ([www.USCongregations.org](http://www.USCongregations.org)).

5. See Scott Thumma, "Review of Church Website," [www.theparishpaper.com/review-church-website-basics-scott-thumma](http://www.theparishpaper.com/review-church-website-basics-scott-thumma).

6. See Scott Thumma, "Church Internet Usage Survey" [www.theparishpaper.com/church-internet-usage-survey-scott-thumma](http://www.theparishpaper.com/church-internet-usage-survey-scott-thumma).