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Bluewater Covenant Bible Camp builds new Welcome Center in just one weekend

By Jessa Anderson, Administrative Coordinator

On a single weekend in April, Bluewater Covenant Bible Camp completed the construction of a new lakefront Welcome Center. Working around the clock for four days, participants brought their gifts of carpentry, painting, electrical work, cleaning and cooking to the task.

“We saw more than 50 people work on the project,” said Chadwick Persons, Director of BCBC. “To be honest it was a 60/40 split of people who were connected to Bluewater, and people who didn’t have a tie but wanted to be a part of something bigger.”

The new building was con-

structed on the site where an older building once housed staff and, years before, was the manager’s cabin and office. The Welcome Center will now be the home to the camp store, offices, first aid station and a bathroom that can be used year-round.

When BCBC began to fundraise for its new Welcome Center two years ago, camp leaders knew it would not be an easy task, but they trusted that God’s faithfulness and the faithfulness of the camp’s supporting churches would prevail.

BCBC is supported by only 12 churches in northern Minnesota. Two of these congregations are

made up of only 25-30 people. Yet out of these churches an overwhelming ownership is felt toward the ministry of the camp. Through fundraising efforts, \$250,000 was raised, which included a matching grant of \$125,000.

“Camp is about people coming together from different walks of life to be together in nature and knowing that God is working in our lives together,” Persons said. “The Welcome Center will stand as an example of the people coming together to build something special.”



Summer Matters

By Ginny Olson, Director of Youth Ministry

In the summer youth ministry takes on a different rhythm. The cadence of school gets swapped with a mash-up of camp, VBS, hangout time and mission trips. Summer gives students and leaders a chance to pause and change patterns. It offers opportunities for deeper conversations down by the lake, gut-splitting laughter and S'mores around the campfire, and the possibility to be called to the things of God.

Every summer for roughly three decades, the Northwest Conference has offered two summer opportunities that allow students to pause and change patterns.

Adventures in Leadership

The first event is Adventures in Leadership—known by its acronym AIL. This annual high school leadership intensive actually begins in the spring when youth pastors and church leaders identify high school students who have strong leadership potential and nominate them to apply.

In June, students who are selected head to Adventurous Christians in Grand Marais, MN, on the edge of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. Students spend the first part of the week at basecamp learning crucial camping skills and biblically-grounded leadership les-

sons. They spend time exploring how they're wired to lead and then put that knowledge into action out on the trail in the Boundary Waters. Throughout the week, they are processing their experience with youth pastors, guides and their peers.

MUUUCE

The other summer opportunity is geared for middle schoolers and junior highers. From Aug. 6-8, 605 middle school students and their leaders from 45 churches gathered together at MUUUCE (a.k.a. Most Ultimate, Unbelievable, Urban Camping Experience). It was three days packed with creative

craziness, on-their-feet worship, formative teaching and incredible fun that was designed and hosted by Crossroads Church in Woodbury, MN.

This year marked the 30th anniversary of MUUUCE, which was created at Faith Covenant Church in Burnsville, MN, by Tony Deach and John Skelly. Five years ago, the MUUUCE baton was passed to Crossroads Church in Woodbury.

The Crossroads team designs and executes this amazing event with over 200 volunteers, many of whom take vacation time and have done so for years. It takes over 35 volunteers just to run the Welcome Party alone. Others arrive at Lake Middle School (where everyone slept in the gyms) at the crack of dawn to set up breakfast, while others work late into the night cleaning bathrooms, vacuuming and setting up for the next day. There was even a team of volunteers who created a "lounge" for adult leaders who needed a break and stocked it with homemade treats and strong coffee.

As one youth pastor put it, "It's my favorite event of the year. It's with our Covenant family, it's super for building relationships with students and I don't need to plan any of it." Another youth pastor said, "It's great for smaller churches that typically don't have access to these kind of events or experiences. It's a function that brings junior highers together where they can be focused on God with a little fun mixed in."

As we immerse ourselves in the rhythms of fall, we pause and give thanks for a summer filled with commitments to leadership, decisions to follow Christ and the changing patterns of ministry.





Thriving children's ministry with volunteer leadership

By Kara Stromberg, Director of Children & Family Ministry

Of our 140+ Covenant churches in the Northwest Conference, less than 20 have staff devoted full-time to children's ministry. Forty have part-time staff and nearly 90 of our Conferences churches have children's ministries that are led by volunteers.

When your church is staffed at less than capacity, building a thriving ministry with children and families will require more intentionality, and a mentality that views leadership for children's ministry as more than simply "covering the bases."

Here are five things to consider with your volunteer-led children's ministry.

1. Are expectations clear and appropriate?

We all like to know what we're being asked to do. Even volunteers will benefit from having a job description. Those who work in children's ministry are generally resourceful, passionate and dedicated to the task. Without clear and reasonable expectations,

children's ministry can become a hamster wheel of details that leads to burnout.

2. Are priorities clear?

In ministry, there will always be work that doesn't get done. Make peace with the fact that your church won't be able to offer all the programs of the church down the street. Discern what you will be about, and do that well.

3. Is there a clear chain of command?

To whom is the children's ministry leader accountable? Is it clear how decisions are made, budget is managed, facilities are maintained, supplies and curriculum are determined, and what safety policies are implemented? Clearly articulating all of this up front helps to avoid the difficult situation of giving someone responsibility over something without authority to make it happen.

4. Does the ministry leader have a seat at the table?

In other words, who will advocate for this ministry area when broad leadership decisions are made? For example, a leadership team may decide to have multiple Christmas Eve services, then inform the children's ministry team that childcare is needed. How would the conversation change if children's ministry leaders were invited to give voice on the front end about how to creatively meet the needs of families during Advent?

5. What is the plan for training?

God has a long history of equipping those God calls, and children's ministry is no exception. Intentional training and connections helps our volunteer leadership move from a place of "filling holes," to strategic investment in the lives of kids and families. Help your volunteer leaders be successful by encouraging a learning mentality that allows your leaders to grow into the role to which God has called them.

Thank you to all of the children's ministry leaders and volunteers for your work with kids and families. Praying along with you that your ministry impacts lives and kids, and families will know the love of God.



Lighthouse Covenant Church planted in North Minneapolis

By Mike Brown, Director of Church Planting



As we continue our 50 by '25 initiative—through which we committed as a Conference to plant 50 new churches in a 10-year timeframe—we are excited to announce our newest NWC church plant. On July 1, Lighthouse Covenant

Church, which is led by Pastor Dee McIntosh, was birthed. McIntosh has a passion for the city and has begun planting in North Minneapolis.

"Jesus is the center of everything we do. We sing, pray and preach in His powerful name," McIntosh said.

"We believe that Christ is the head of the Church, and as the Church we are called to participate in Christ's call to advance the Kingdom of God. As such, the foundational scripture for Lighthouse is from Isaiah 58, which says: 'Then your light shall shine in the darkness and your darkness shall be as the noonday ... those from among you will rebuild the old waste places, you shall raise up the foundations of many generations, you shall be called the repairer of the breach—the restorer of streets to live in.'"

Lighthouse Covenant Church will host preview services at Olson Middle School throughout the fall of 2016. Visit lighthousempls.org for more info.

COVENANT CAMPS

in the northwest conference



SUMMER CAMP HIGHLIGHTS



COVENANT PARK BIBLE CAMP

Mahtowa, MN • covenantpark.org

God has provided so faithfully for Covenant Park this summer season! Renovations to the kitchen in our main dining hall were completed just in time for our first summer group! Launching Music, Art and Drama camp was a great first-year experience. Though small in numbers, a unique environment was created where campers were invited to freely share their amazing talents. Campers bonded as they supported each other's ideas and encouraged each other's confidence in new artistic expressions.

All of our camps were based on the theme "All In." Several campers chose to be "all in" for Jesus for the first time. Many others took deeper steps to give every aspect of their lives to Christ and encouraged fellow campers to do the same! The end of the summer brought the decision for Kaela Strom to continue on as Director. We look forward to what God has planned for Park in the year ahead!

LAKE BEAUTY BIBLE CAMP

Long Prairie, MN • lbbc.com

God showed up in many powerful ways in the lives of both campers and summer staff this past summer. We had a full staff plus a couple, and our camper numbers are continuing to climb, for which we are grateful. My favorite time of the day is the early morning staff meetings where the staff share about the conversations they had the night before with kids in their cabins.

We cannot take for granted the amount of "stuff" that kids bring to camp. We also cannot take for granted the places that God has provided (our camps) where people of all ages can get away from the daily routines and distractions. They are given the space and time to have a truly refreshing retreat with God and others. It is such a privilege to be able to serve in our NWC camping ministries, as it is a great network of partnership and encouragement.



BLUEWATER COVENANT BIBLE CAMP

Grand Rapids, MN • bluewatercovcamp.org

Camp is a gathering place for families and youth to connect with God's story of hope. Our theme, "This Changes Everything," taken from Isaiah 9:6, caused us to meditate upon the birth of Christ in the midst of summer. Our 904 youth campers and another 800+ Family Campers were challenged to look at the plan that God had to change the world.

Before camp began a remarkable change happened at Bluewater. For four days, 55+ volunteers built our Welcome Center. It was a remarkable display of God's Kingdom coming together to build something new. We pray that God uses the stories from this summer to continue to increase His Church, and as we approach the Christmas season, that youth will remember their camp experience and how God changed everything with Christ's birth.

COVENANT PINES MINISTRIES

ADVENTUROUS CHRISTIANS

Grand Marais, MN • adventurouschristians.org

Justin is the Youth Pastor at Forest Park Covenant Church in Muskegon, MI. He drove his youth group 14 hours to Adventurous Christians so that they could experience the power of God on a camping trip. His students dealt with the worst headwinds of the entire summer. Those winds led to tired arms, tipped canoes, changed routes and even being stranded on an island.

But when his students came off trail, they couldn't wait to talk about the "best week of their summer." One student, Kate, said she really appreciated the intentional time, away from her phone, with the friends in her group. Another student, Josh, said he was amazed at God's power and was inspired to look for that power in everyday life when he got back home.

God worked in powerful ways in each of the 30 groups that used AC this summer. He continues to use the beauty of AC and the Boundary Waters to transform students, adults and kids. He will continue to work as we enter the fall and winter seasons!

COVENANT PINES BIBLE CAMP

McGregor, MN • covenantpines.org

Gabby came to camp this summer as a 4th Grader just looking to have a fun week. She didn't know much about Jesus. Her family had never been to church. That week, Gabby decided to follow Jesus for the first time. At the end of the week, when asked what she learned, she said, "God is really worth it. He really does love you." When asked what she was going to do differently when she went home she said, "I want to bring my family to church."

Gabby was expecting to have fun. She was expecting to make friends. She wasn't expecting to take her first steps as a new creation in Christ. She wasn't expecting Jesus to meet her and change her life.

Praise God for His relentless pursuit of His children! We are so thankful for the work He did up here this summer, and we are joyfully anticipating what He has in store next.



Advocacy for Victims of Abuse (AVA) sheds redemptive light

By Christi Pease, former Director of Women Ministries of the Northwest Conference

A woman intimidates her elderly mother, a man controls how his girlfriend spends her time, a teacher belittles a child. Abuse takes many forms including physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, verbal, spiritual and economic.

Statistics for abuse among church attendees and non-churchgoers are sadly similar. In fact, there are times when those in a Christian community may be less likely to either talk about their abuse or to leave an abuser. This can be due to a fear of losing community, a commitment to marriage vows or a misinterpretation of certain Scriptural texts.

Abuse in all forms, as well as the failure of the Church to acknowledge ongoing abuse, grieves God. In Psalm 82:3, God commands His followers, “Defend the weak and ... uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.”

So why is it that both churchgoers and pastors often abdicate God’s call and leave this work to secular agencies? In her book,

“What Women Wish Pastors Knew,” Denise George observes, “Spouse abuse shocks us. ... We just cannot believe that a church deacon, [pastor] or member goes home after worship ... and beats [his/her spouse].”

And, while abuse impacts men, women and children, women are more likely to be victims of intimate partner violence with 85 percent of domestic abuse victims being women and 15 percent being men. Further, one in 15 children are exposed to intimate partner violence each year, and 90 percent of these children are eyewitnesses to this violence.

The ignorance or denial of lay people and pastors can inadvertently stoke the fires of abuse and can even be fatal. George cites a survey of nearly 6,000 pastors that showed that the counsel many pastors would give women encountering domestic violence could potentially put women in grave danger. This survey also reveals that many pastors lack the training to counsel victims of abuse wisely.

In light of these realities, Advocacy for Victims of Abuse (AVA)

provides training for pastors and lay people so they can shed light on abuse and provide both hope and tangible help by connecting victims to local providers. Frequently, trained local AVA coordinators who connect with secular programs are met with surprise that a church is willing to help. Providers are thankful that churches will partner in this challenging work and, while secular agencies can provide services, we know that only the Church can provide Jesus’ hope, redemption and healing.

Whether you are a lay person or pastor, please seek to help shed light on abuse. If you are an abuse survivor, or you are presently in the midst of any kind of abusive relationship, you are not alone! Seek help:

- Domestic Violence Hotline (800) 799-SAFE (7233) or (800) 787-3224 (TTY). Advocates available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in over 170 languages.
- Contact the AVA Northwest Conference Regional Coordinator, Amy Deike, at avasmn@wmnwc.org for more information.

Introducing Rachel Kleinschmidt



Photo by Brenda Howe Photography

I’m very excited to begin the role of consulting for Women Ministries of the Northwest Conference. I never thought that I would be

holding this type of position, but God had other plans for me.

I grew up in central Illinois and moved to Minnesota in 2012. I studied for many years to be a history professor, earning a Ph.D. in Agricultural History and Rural Studies, with an emphasis on women’s history, from Iowa State University in 2013.

When a professorship was not on the horizon, I began working as the Office Administrator at Riverwood Covenant Church in Greenfield, MN, where I continue to work. Little did I know how my history

background could be part of my ministry! When the consultant position for WMNWC came open, I felt that I could use my administration and teaching gifts to help the women of the Northwest Conference.

My focus in the history field was on 19th century Midwestern rural women—women very much like the women who were part of the early Covenant Church. I look forward to diving into Covenant history and hope to be able to speak on the history of Covenant women in the future.

I am filling the position that Christi Pease recently held. I will be consulting in the management and oversight of all functioning of the WMNWC. I am available to coach and train Women Ministry volunteers through speaking, teaching and meeting to facilitate with WM groups and leaders in the Confer-

ence. I will also provide marketing and communication services online and at retreats and other Conference events.

Some of my areas of interest, other than history, are spiritual gifts and intergenerational ministry. I want to see women of all ages serving in their gifts and working together to fulfill the Lord’s purposes. Women across generations have much to learn from each other, and I would like to work with churches that are bringing together women of all ages.

In addition to working as the Office Administrator and Bookkeeper for Riverwood Covenant Church, I am also part of the worship team, volunteer and membership management, and meals ministries. I live in Rockford, MN, with my husband Micah.

You can contact me regarding WMNWC at Rachel@wmnwc.org.

Triennial XV serves as time of renewal

By Rachel Kleinschmidt, Consultant for Women Ministries of the Northwest Conference

The Women Ministries of the Evangelical Covenant Church hosted Triennial XV this July in Kansas City, MO. It was a time of refreshment and renewal for the women who attended. About 130 women from the Northwest Conference were in attendance.

“God was at work in calling women together for worship and connection. God’s word was communicated in classes, conversations and community,” said Marlys Wilson, President of Women Ministries of the Northwest Conference. “The speakers helped us see

how thirsty we are for God’s word and His presence.”

The Northwest Conference was also represented well by a number of speakers from the region. Nicole Bullock from Blue Oaks Covenant Church in Brooklyn Center, MN, was the Saturday evening session speaker. Sheryl Schanil, from Warren, MN, gave an update in a main session on how God is working through a study on “The Missional Mom” by Helen Lee in her church. Other women from the Conference served throughout the weekend in various capacities.

“Being on the leadership team, I now appreciate better how much prayer and hard work went into Triennial,” Wilson said. “Thank you to those who worked behind the scenes to bring it all together.”

The big news announced at the end of the weekend was that Triennial XVI will be held in Minneapolis in 2019. If you would be interested in helping with the planning and execution of the next Triennial, contact Rachel Kleinschmidt at Rachel@wmnwc.org.



Evangelizing Churches Cohort begins in the NWC

By Jon Kramka, Director of Congregational Vitality

The Evangelizing Churches Cohort is the newest evangelism initiative from the Evangelical Covenant Church that is being piloted through Conference cohorts made up of lead pastors. The NWC pilot began in September.

The Evangelizing Churches Cohort is an initiative supporting the healthy missional congregational marker of intentional evangelism, which centers on developing and sustaining evangelistic Covenant churches.

While we all know that evangelism doesn't need to be scripted, we are also aware that without intentionality it is less likely to happen.

By using a cohort model, this initiative establishes a learning community that helps move pastors and churches through stages focused on increasing the pastor's personal witness and raising the corporate evangelism temperature of their churches.

So these cohorts will generate accountability, intentionality, leadership and resources centered on evangelism through the local church.

The Evangelizing Churches Pastor's Cohort will meet over the next 12 months, and is being facilitated by Beth Seversen. Beth serves as the Evangelism Team

Leader for Make and Deepen Disciples of the denomination. The cohort is being hosted by Crosstown Covenant Church in Minneapolis with current participants including Dennis Anders, Bob DeYoung, Todd Ertsgaard, Ileana Garcia-Soto, Brad Jackson, John Jacobi, Steve Thompson and Steve Weihsmann.

We anticipate additional cohorts forming in the future as we are asking God to catalyze a fresh wave of evangelism through all our NWC churches.

An Amazing Journey of Faith

Salem Covenant Church in Pennock celebrates 145th Anniversary

By Jessa Anderson, Administrative Coordinator

Salem Covenant Church in rural Pennock, MN, celebrated its 145th anniversary on the weekend of Aug. 20-21.

SCC was organized on Feb. 22, 1871, and has been in existence on the same site ever since. It is the oldest active church in the Northwest Conference, as well as one of the oldest active fellowships in Kandiyohi County.

Salem predates the Covenant by 14 years. An organizational meeting held at the church in 1884 led to the formation of the NWC. In 1886, the church voted to join the "Swedish Evangelical Mission Covenant of America."

Pastor Mike McCain is the 19th pastor to serve the SCC.

"The history of this place is humbling; Sjoquist the first pastor, Frykman the gifted hymn writer and pastor who served here for 18 years, Pastors Franklin, Nyquist, Stenberg, Gundersen, Melvie, and so many, all left their mark on the Mamre Prairie," McCain said. "Salem's history is marked also by the many families that came to worship, make a life in Minnesota, and raise generations that followed in their footsteps!"

Salem Covenant Church is launching into its 146th year of ministry in the Mamre Prairie



region. The Gospel is preached and the Scriptures are still central to all that is done. Salem feels blessed to celebrate a seventh generation of children who are worshipping at the church.

To learn more about Salem Covenant Church in Pennock, MN, visit www.salemcovpennock.org.



Top 5 reasons to join the NWC Finance Connection

1. Everybody's doing it!

The Finance Connection started in the Spring of 2016 as an intentional time for paid and volunteer church workers to meet for learning and fellowship. With four gatherings under our belt, we've had 17 participants from 12 churches.

2. It's easy to participate!

Whether physically present in the conference room of the Northwest Conference, or virtually connected through WebEx, we are trying to make information and participation easy to access.

3. Anyone who is interested can join!

While the conversation and learning topics are geared toward the needs of church leaders serving in finance related areas, anyone

is welcome to participate. Church treasurers, financial officers, financial secretaries, bookkeepers and auditors are particularly invited.

4. Stewardship is everyone's concern!

Worshippers are giving to God's work as a form of worship, but that doesn't mean they don't care what happens to the gifts they give. As leaders entrusted with the missional use of donated funds, we want to be unquestionably certain we are stewarding God's resources as wisely as possible. Finance Connection participation helps us keep that focus.

5. The topics are timely and relevant!

Rules, guidelines and best practices are continually changing. For

example, the Department of Labor updated some rules in May that will impact many of our churches. We had an extensive conversation about what the rules mean and ways to manage staff and budgets under the new regulations in August. September's conversation topic was insights and best practices for creating an operating budget.

The Finance Connection has been a wonderful addition to the roster of resources provided by the Northwest Conference. As mentioned above, anyone is welcome to participate—whether in person or through a virtual link. Sandy Norris, Director of Finance, is available to answer questions or provide more information.

A Conversation in Cultural Competency

By *Jessa Anderson, Administrative Coordinator*

Paul Robinson, Pastor of Grace Outreach Covenant Church in Coon Rapids, MN, has been leading discussions and workshops on the topics of culture, race and community for many years. These workshops seek to bring understanding and build cross-cultural community for stronger churches and communities.

Amid the rising racial tensions in present day culture, Robinson was recently invited to lead a conversation around Cultural Competency at a meeting of the Congregational Vitality and Church Planting cohorts of the Northwest Conference.

“Because we live in an increasingly multicultural world, and because Jesus calls us to be ‘witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and in

Samaria’ (Acts 1:8), which in his day was the prevailing cross-cultural challenge,” Robinson says, “we must work to build bridges across the evil sociological barriers that humans have constructed that divide us.”

These workshops have opened the door to many important conversations and have created safe spaces for people to discuss the issues that face so many communities today. Several Covenant churches have also hosted Robinson’s workshops, including Lighthouse Covenant Church in Minneapolis, and Awaken Community and Catalyst Covenant Church in St. Paul.

This past July, following the deaths of Philando Castile in St. Paul, and Alton Sterling and the

Dallas police officers, Grace Outreach hosted a community conversation forum to talk about how to navigate the many cultural and racial tensions in the United States and local communities. The multicultural gathering was called “A Time to Hear, Heal and Help.”

Many local churches, pastors and community members participated, including Covenant pastor Jack Shields of The Door Covenant Church.

“Pastor Paul did a brilliant job in setting the stage for transformative understanding as well as practical application,” Shields said. “The forum was insightful, passionate, authentic and moving.”

NWC Calendar

- 11.18-20** » **Pastor’s Marriage Retreat** – Lake Beauty Bible Camp, Long Prairie, MN
- 1.7** » **Recharge** – St. Andrew Lutheran Church, Eden Prairie, MN
- 1.14** » **Recharge** – Hope Lutheran Church South Campus, Fargo, ND
- 2.4** » **Recharge** – New Covenant Bible Church, Cedar Rapids, IA
- 2.11** » **Recharge** – Lakeview Covenant Church, Duluth, MN
- 3.31-4.1** » **MOVE 2017** – Minnehaha Academy South Campus, Minneapolis, MN
- 4.27-28** » **Ministerial Association Annual Meeting** – Maple Grove Covenant Church
- 4.28-29** » **Northwest Conference Annual Meeting** – Maple Grove Covenant Church
- 6.17-24** » **Adventures in Leadership** – Adventurous Christians, Grand Marais, MN

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