NWC 2016 Annual Meeting in Duluth to focus on theme ‘Serve Globally’

By Mark R. Stromberg, Superintendent

The 2016 Northwest Conference Annual Meeting will take place at Lakeview Covenant Church in Duluth, MN, on April 28-30, 2016. The theme for the upcoming meeting is “Serve Globally,” and components of the event will focus on the wonderful ways that NWC churches and people engage in mission around the world.

The Ministerial Association Annual Meeting (for pastors) takes place April 28-29. Part of the Ministerial Association meeting this year will also take place at First Covenant Church in the same city. Then, the Northwest Conference Annual Meeting (for church delegates, →
lay leaders, pastors and others) takes place April 29-30.

We are very pleased to have Dr. Al Tizon, the new Executive Minister for “Serve Globally” (formerly World Missions) for the Evangelical Covenant Church, joining us as our speaker and presenter for both meetings.

“What a great opportunity to interact with the Northwest Conference early on in my time as the new Executive Minister,” Tizon said. “I love the theme!”

During the Ministerial Association Annual Meeting, Dr. Tizon will ask our pastors to consider what it means to be called to make disciples of all nations.

“With the pastors, we’re specifically going to seek to understand what we are actually calling people to become,” Tizon said.

Then, at the Northwest Conference Annual Meeting, Tizon states, “We will explore the relationship of what we do as worshipers with what we do the rest of the time.”

Tizon will reflect on the book of Revelation to help us gain some insights about what has been central to our call as followers of Jesus Christ throughout the ages.

Tizon will also be preaching at the Ministerial Association Communion Service on Thursday evening, as well as the Friday evening celebration for general delegates.

At the Friday evening Worship Service, there will be an opportunity to receive an offering to provide funding support for Rev. Soudinh Penkhay, currently the pastor of Laotian Covenant Church in Brooklyn Center, MN. Pastor Penkhay was consecrated for missionary service at the ECC annual meeting last June and is in the process of raising support to enter into his new call as a Covenant missionary in Thailand. The NWC has made a commitment to help provide resources for Soudinh to serve the Lord and his people in Southeast Asia. Please plan to help us help Soudinh by giving generously!

Further, the 2016 meeting will include interaction with current Covenant missionaries Nils & Erika Clauson, missionaries in Mexico and Julio & Katie Isaza, missionaries in Colombia. There will also be a Mission Fair that will be geared specifically at the ways in which we engage in sharing the gospel around the world, as well as a Ministry Fair in which both NWC and ECC ministries are highlighted.

Please mark your calendars and begin considering who from your church should attend this year’s meeting. Registration details and more information will be posted online and delivered to each church in the coming weeks.
Missionary families on home assignment will share at 2016 NWC Annual Meeting

By Jessa Anderson, Administrative Coordinator

The Northwest Conference is home to many missionaries that are working to transform the world for the Kingdom of God. Two of these families have returned home for this next year on home assignment to re-vision, visit with ministry partners and prepare for a new season of missionary work.

With a 2016 Annual Meeting theme of “Serve Globally,” the NWC is excited to highlight the work of the Isazas and the Clausons during our time together April 28-30 at Lakeview Covenant Church in Duluth, MN.

The Isazas
Julio and Katie Isaza, along with their two sons, are currently in the process of transitioning from serving as project missionaries to long-term missionaries. Based in Medellin, Colombia, the Isazas have been working closely with a core group that is in the process of planting a church. One of their main focuses is equipping leaders in Medellin and other cities in the areas of children’s and youth ministry, theological education and leadership development.

“It is a dream come true for me to be able to return and work with people in some of the rural areas of Colombia and see how dedicated they are to studying God’s word,” Julio Isaza said. “It is powerful to see the younger and older generations coming together for training and equipping.”

Throughout their time in Colombia, the Isazas have also seen and experienced many of the issues arising from displacement in the community. This issue has been laid upon their hearts, and they continue to work with their partners in the area to respond to this crisis.

The Clausons
Erika and Nils Clauson, and their two sons and newborn daughter, are also on home assignment from Mexico this year. The Clausons have served in missions for over 12 years and accepted the invitation as long-term missionaries in 2010 to serve in the Monterrey and Oaxaca regions of Mexico.

Their service there includes working with local Covenant congregations and nonprofit organizations to strengthen and develop ministries. They work closely with the community through ministries such as mentoring, discipleship, Bible Studies and relationships.

Together, both Erika and Nils have also focused on ministry toward victims of abuse and exploitation in Mexico.

“It’s exciting to see the Holy Spirit stirring in people’s hearts in the church in Oaxaca, Mexico, a desire for healing from past abuse for themselves and their communities. God is transforming the way the church treats the victim, survivor and perpetrator of abuse, as they see them with His eyes of mercy,” Nils Clauson said. “It is an honor to walk alongside our brothers and sisters in Oaxaca and go to Scripture together to grow together in our understanding of healthy relationships.”

They hope to see more women and men become aware of this devastating issue and help create care and support for hope and healing in these types of situations around the country.

The Northwest Conference is honored to host both the Isaza and Clauson families at the 2016 Annual Meeting. Both families will share their hearts, highlights of their service, and the vision for the future through meetings and workshops throughout the week.
Imagine 2015: A day for children and family ministry leaders

By Kara Stromberg, Director of Children & Family Ministry

The Northwest Conference has dedicated and passionate children and family ministry leaders. This year’s Imagine participants were no different. Imagine took place on Saturday, Oct. 10, 2015, at Crossroads Church in Forest Lake, MN.

Volunteers and ministry leaders came from far and wide for reasons as varied as the churches they represent: for encouragement, for practical tips on how to help challenging children, and looking for ways to improve their own teaching skills.

In addition to worship, lunch, networking and resources, Imagine participants learned a framework for discipline from Jim and Lynne Jackson of Connected Families. This framework includes four essential truths children need to hear: you are safe, you are loved, you are capable, and you are responsible.

As parents and leaders, we were encouraged to consider the messages being sent when we discipline children. Even though our intentions are good, the messages sent don’t always reflect those good intentions. What kids learn when they are disciplined lasts a lifetime. When parents and ministry leaders are thoughtful about discipline, kids grow up knowing that they are valued people built for God’s purposes.

Through humorous role-play presentations, the Jacksons dove into tricky situations we encounter in our ministries and families, and demonstrated practical ways to communicate love and grace to young people, even in the most challenging situations.

In addition, 10 CHET Northwest Conference students received continuing education credit for their CHET coursework by attending Imagine 2015. Providing verbal and written Spanish translation assured participants could fully participate in the day.

The Northwest Conference is proud to invest in our children and family ministry leaders through events like Imagine. If you would like to learn more about how the Northwest Conference can encourage your children and family ministry team, connect with Kara Stromberg, Director of Children & Family Ministry.

If you’d like to learn more about the ministry of Connected Families, including how to book a seminar at your church, receive parent coaching, or sign up for their free parent tips via e-mail, visit connectedfamilies.org.
New location for NWC Family Go: Serve scheduled for May 7, 2016

By Kara Stromberg, Director of Children & Family Ministry

NWC Family Go: Serve will be held at First Covenant Church in St. Paul on Saturday, May 7, 2016, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Go: Serve is in its third year of providing shared ministry and learning experiences for families with elementary-aged children.

We believe even young children can have an impact in their communities, and participating in ministry projects together as a family gives parents the tools needed to lead their families in developing a mindset of service and compassion.

Amy Long, Director of Children and Family Ministry at Redeemer Covenant Church in Brooklyn Park, MN, said, “GO: Serve equips families to take a step out of their comfort zone and explore the world that God has called us to serve. The experience helps families to put hands and feet to the The Great Commandment and to learn to see opportunities in their own community.”

A new location in East St. Paul provides new opportunities for ministry, including Union Gospel Mission, Loaves and Fishes and local St. Paul public schools.

Donovan DeGaetano, Minister to Children and Family at First Covenant Church, St. Paul, said, “We are excited to host Go: Serve this year. East St. Paul has a lot to offer and will be a great place for children and families to serve and learn.”

Look for registration information in March. We hope to see your family there!
NWC Youth Ministry offers opportunities to reach Gen Z

By Ginny Olson, Director of Youth Ministry

The Millennials may be the ones grabbing the headlines these days, but if you’re paying attention, you’ll notice that there’s another generation emerging from the shadows. What’s currently known as “Gen Z” is slowly making its way onto the world stage. These post-Millennials (or iGen or Plurals or Net Gen or ...) were born in the early part of this century and they are the ones populating our youth ministries. At more than a quarter of the U.S. population (and growing), they currently outnumber Millenials (24.5%), GenX (15.4%) and Baby Boomers (23.6%). It is imperative that the Church pay attention to this group—and fast.

This is a generation that is well aware of the real dangers around the world and has still immersed themselves in dangers of the fictional world by reading about teens being slaughtered in The Hunger Games and Divergent series and cheering on the living dead in a multitude of zombie shows. Dr. Tim Elmore describes Gen Z this way: “They’ve grown up in a post-9/11 culture, filled with wars, terrorism, economic recession, racial unrest, sexual-identity expansion and lots of uncertainty. They’re extremely post-modern. If Millennials are slackers, these new kids are hackers. They know life is hard, and they plan to make their own way.”

Gen Z utilizes anywhere from five to eight screens in a day and they have an eight-second attention span (down from 12 seconds in 2000). According to Sparks and Honey (a future-focused marketing agency), “Research studies suggest that [Gen Z] brains have evolved to process more information at faster speeds, and are cognitively more nimble to handle bigger mental challenges. But getting and keeping their attention is challenging.”

Part of the fallout of this is that they, “lack situational awareness, are oblivious to their surroundings and unable to give directions.”

How should the Church begin to strategize in light of this? Gen Z’s short attention span and desire to communicate in bite-size pieces means that preaching and teaching must adapt. Gen Z students have strong entrepreneurial traits, which may result in more creative ministries. They are redefining what family means, as well as traditional gender roles.

This means that “family ministry” will look very different than what exists today. Gen Z trend towards being active volunteers who believe they can impact the world and desire to have a positive influence on issues like the environment and race relations. They will gravitate towards churches that take their concerns seriously and put action to ideas. The “slack-tivism” of their older siblings is replaced by a desire to create and build. Don’t expect them to sit on boards and committees that aren’t designed to accomplish measurable outcomes.

Researchers are in the beginning phases of researching Gen Z. In the coming years, new trends, patterns and labels will emerge. But those of us in youth ministry can’t wait until the final reports are filed. We are actively seeking how to best minister to this group of people.

At the Northwest Conference, we facilitate events like Adventures in Leadership where students can unplug from their screens and learn how to become aware of their surroundings and make decisions. Every spring, the MOVE retreat provides opportunities for students to connect their desire to volunteer with local churches and nonprofits. Our camps provide opportunities for adolescents to realize that their fluid definition of family can be actualized amidst the family of God.

This emerging generation is one that will find their purpose and community somewhere. It is up to us to make sure the Church is the place where they are welcomed and embraced.

For more information on these and other opportunities to minister to Gen Z, contact Ginny Olson at ginny@northwestconference.org.
MOVE 2016 returns to Minnehaha Academy South Campus

By Ginny Olson, Director of Youth Ministry

On April 15-16, high school students and youth workers from throughout the Northwest Conference will converge on Minnehaha Academy in Minneapolis for MOVE 2016—a weekend of teaching, worship, service and experiential learning about compassion, mercy and justice.

Our speaker, Hector Saucedo, was one of the most popular speakers at CHIC 2015. He’s engaging, funny and a great communicator. We’re also excited to have the Blue Oaks Covenant Church worship team back with us. This event is one that students and leaders won’t want to miss!

Cost: $30 for students and $20 for adult leaders.
WM Renewal Conference centered around theme ‘A Beautiful Mess’

By Christi Pease, Director of WM NWC, and Marlys Wilson, President of WM NWC

The 2016 Renewal Conference will be hosted by Women Ministries of the Northwest Conference (WM NWC) March 11-12, 2016, at Redeemer Covenant Church in Brooklyn Park, MN. While we often focus on the heartache and frustration caused by “messes” in our lives, God has the redemptive power to enable us to make our mess our message.

Crafted around the theme verse, “For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things He planned for us long ago” (Ephesians 2:10), featured speaker Pastor Nicole Bullock of Blue Oaks Covenant Church and many others will offer opportunities to take a new look at our “messes” so that we can reimagine them in light of God’s view of us and God’s good plans for our lives.

WM NWC seeking new Director

The 2016 Renewal Conference also marks an important transition for WM NWC. After 8 years of fruitful ministry, Director Christi Pease has given notice that she will not seek reelection. This means that the Board of Directors is seeking a new candidate for Director of WM NWC with the plan to vote on this candidate on March 12, 2016, during the WM NWC Annual Business Meeting. Please assist us in this search process by taking some moments to prayerfully consider if you know a woman who:

- is a Godly and dynamic woman and a member of an Evangelical Covenant Church in the NWC
- has gifts of Leadership, Administration, Teaching, Speaking and Connecting
- is interested in a part-time position (15 hours/week) that does not include benefits

Potential applicants and those who have candidate recommendations please contact Marlys Wilson, President of WM NWC, at president@wmnwc.org with cover letter, resume and pastoral letter of recommendation by Feb. 1, 2016, or suggestions of potential applicants by Jan. 20, 2016.

Changes on the NWC Staff

The Rev. Judy Swanberg, currently the Associate Director of Pastoral Care & Development for the NWC, has announced her resignation from the position effective Jan. 31, 2016.

“Thank you for the opportunity to serve. … This ministry has been a great privilege for me in my first stage of retirement,” Swanberg said.

Reflecting on Swanberg’s service to the Conference, NWC Superintendent Mark Stromberg observed, “Judy has been such a valuable resource and advocate for those serving in pastoral ministry in the NWC. I am so grateful for her willingness to help pioneer the important work of the care and development of pastors in our midst. She will be missed.”

We are pleased to announce that the Rev. Gregory Ellis has been called to be the Coordinator of CHET-NWC! Ellis is former pastor of Bethany Covenant Church, and currently teaches Spanish part-time at Minnehaha Academy. He has taught a pre-ministerial class at CHET and served on the board since its inception.

Superintendent Mark Stromberg shared, “As we considered the many aspects of what is needed for the role at the present time, we believe that Greg is the right person.”

His new role commenced on Jan. 1, 2016. When discussing this new call, Ellis wrote, “Please convey my eagerness to the NWC Executive Board to serve the Conference and our churches in this way.”

This is the most current step being taken in the NWC to further develop the ministry of CHET in our region. Welcome Greg!
“50 by ’25: Our Mission to Plant” needs your support in 2016

By Mike Brown, Director of Church Planting

We are well into our second year with the Church Planting initiative we rolled out in May 2014 at the NWC Annual Meeting. “50 by ’25: Our Mission to Plant” began as a hope and prayer and is now becoming a reality. Since that Annual Meeting, we have seen seven new churches birthed in the Northwest Conference.

These new churches include:

- **Catalyst Covenant Church** with Pastor Jeff Olson, which meets at Luther Seminary in the Twin Cities
- **Genesis Covenant Church** with Pastor Steve Wiens, which meets at Sabes Jewish Community Center in St. Louis Park, MN
- **New Covenant Church** with Pastor Mauricio Dell’Arciprete, which shares a facility with Bethlehem Covenant Church in Minneapolis, MN
- **Renew Covenant Church** with Pastor Jamie Staples, which meets in Eau Claire, WI
- **The Door Covenant Church** with Pastor Jack Shields, which meets in Blaine, MN
- **Seeds Covenant Church** with Pastor Dale Durie, which will be meeting in Northeast Minneapolis
- **The Story Covenant Church** with Pastor Matt Anderson, which will be meeting in the Powderhorn neighborhood in Minneapolis

That works out to a new church being planted approximately every 2.5 months. God has been raising up gifted pastors with a heart and passion to reach their communities. These new churches are reaching hundreds of people and reporting many coming to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

It’s a really good beginning on a really long journey.

As we move into a new year, it will be critical that we have continued support from our established churches—and the folks who call those churches home—as we continue living into this reality. Church Planting is a partnership that requires all of us to be effective.

Superintendent Mark Stromberg and I will be hosting a series of meetings in the districts around the Northwest Conference this year to raise awareness and support for “50 by ’25” and our Church Planting efforts. To plant on this scale—to see 50 new churches begun—is going to require us to raise significant support in the months ahead. Prayerfully consider how you and your church might be a partner in making this plan a reality.

Please contact the NWC office, or contact me directly, if you would like more information or would like to contribute to expanding the Kingdom of God through the planting of Covenant churches.
Pastoral Care & Development team continues to resource church leaders

By Jeff Burton, Director of Pastoral Care & Development

Retreats and Events
Alongside our ongoing work to provide personal support to those going through difficult or confusing times, our other two areas of emphasis are building healthy peer connections and resourcing our pastors and ministry staff for the challenge of their work. We are working on those two priorities through a number of group experiences.

Very prominent among our efforts are the numerous retreats. We facilitated two mini-retreats this fall at Covenant Pines Bible Camp for small groups of pastors—one focused on spiritual practices and the other on life’s transition for pastors 55 and older.

Two annual retreats also...
As we enter 2016, the Northwest Conference is pleased to provide another opportunity for learning and engagement by sponsoring a workshop led by Dr. Mark Yarhouse, Psy.D., entitled, “Sexual Identity & the Christian: Positioning the Church to Be Both Faithful and Engaged in a Changing Culture.”

Join us for a discussion on how people of faith navigate sexual identity questions in their lives. Sexual identity refers to the labels people use to discuss their sexuality—labels like gay, lesbian, bisexual and straight. In the morning we will discuss two of the most frequently asked questions: “What causes homosexuality and can it change?” and, “What are the experiences and challenges encountered by people of faith who are navigating sexual identity questions in their personal lives?”

Then, in the afternoon we turn our attention to practical ministry tools for helping individuals and families, as well as strategies for positioning faith communities to engage and provide ministry in a dramatically changing culture.

Dr. Yarhouse is the Hughes Endowed Chair and Professor of Psychology at Regent University in Virginia Beach, VA, where he directs the Institute for the Study of Sexual Identity. He has spent several years promoting dialogue between people who view the topic of sexual identity differently. Dr. Yarhouse has published over 80 peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters and is author or co-author of several books, including “Homosexuality and the Christian: A Guide for Parents, Pastors and Friends,” “Understanding Sexual Identity: A Resource for Youth Ministers,” and “Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture.”

We encourage you to make use of this valuable resource.

This event is open to pastors, ministry staff members, lay leaders and key influencers in NWC churches and affiliated ministries. This event is free of charge. However, refreshments and a box lunch will be provided for a suggested minimum donation of $10.00/person.

Please RSVP with how many people are planning to attend from your church or ministry by Monday, Feb. 22 at 5 p.m. to Jessa Anderson at the NWC office by phone (612-721-4893) or by e-mail at jessa@northwestconference.org.
Navigate 2015 mobilizes Covenant churches to pursue revitalization

By Jon Kramka, Director of Congregational Vitality

The Northwest Conference, along with Minnehaha Academy, served as hosts of the ECC Navigate Conference 2015, which took place at the school from Oct. 30 to Nov. 1.

An initiative of the Covenant Office of Congregational Vitality, the purpose of Navigate is to help established churches navigate their way toward becoming healthy and missional through an intentional partnership set up with the ECC, their regional conference and other local churches on the same journey. Navigate invited this year’s participants to recognize the role of the Holy Spirit and congregational culture in the revitalization process, to drill deeper in their understanding of the 10 Healthy Missional Markers for Congregations, and provided insight into some of the unique leadership competencies required for effective revitalization ministry.

Twenty-one churches from six different conferences were represented by teams of pastors and lay people. Participating from the NWC were Bethel Covenant Church in Ellsworth, WI, Winthrop Covenant Church in Winthrop, MN, and The Gallery Covenant in St. Paul.

Tim Coyer of Catalyst Covenant Church in St. Paul facilitated worship, and Superintendent Mark Stromberg delivered the Sunday morning message on “Remembering” based on Deuteronomy 8: 1-20. A special thanks to all the NWC staff, volunteers and local musicians who served throughout the weekend.

NWC Calendar

1.25-29 » Midwinter Conference – Chicago, IL
2.27 » Sexual Identity & The Christian workshop w/Dr. Mark Yarhouse – Salem Covenant Church, New Brighton, MN
3.11 -12 » Women Ministries Renewal Conference – Redeemer Covenant Church, Brooklyn Park, MN
4.15-16 » MOVE 2016 – Minnehaha Academy, Minneapolis, MN
4.28-29 » Northwest Conference Ministerial Annual Meeting – Lakeview Covenant Church, Duluth, MN
4.29-30 » Northwest Conference Annual Meeting – Lakeview Covenant Church, Duluth, MN
5.7 » Go: Serve – First Covenant Church, St. Paul, MN
6.18-25 » Adventures in Leadership – Adventurous Christians, Grand Marais, MN
6.23-25 » Gather 2016 – Phoenix, AZ
7.28-31 » Triennial XV – Kansas City, MO
8.4-6 » MUUUCE – Crossroads Church, Woodbury, MN

NWC Staff

Mark Stromberg
Superintendent
Jon Kramka
Director of Congregational Vitality
Mike Brown
Director of Church Planting
Ginny Olson
Director of Youth Ministry
Kara Stromberg
Director of Children & Family Ministry
Jeff Burton
Director of Pastoral Care & Development
Judy Swanberg
Assoc. Director of Pastoral Care & Development
Sandy Norris
Director of Finance
Cheryl Theilen
Director of Administration
Bryan Malley
Director of Communications
Jessa Anderson
Administrative Coordinator

The Northwest Conference
3106 47th Ave. S., Minneapolis, MN 55406
northwestconference.org
Phone: 612.721.4893 // 1.800.756.6692
Fax: 612.721.4895