The 2017 Northwest Conference Annual Meeting will be held at Maple Grove Covenant Church in Maple Grove, MN, on April 27-29, 2017. The theme for the upcoming meeting is “Develop Leaders.” Over the past five years, the NWC has sought to highlight the Mission Priorities as articulated by the broader Evangelical Covenant Church. This year’s theme is especially relevant to the work of the Conference as our stated regional Mission is to engage, empower, and equip healthy missional leaders, as we believe that this is an essential component in growing healthy missional churches.

The reality is this and we know it to be true … So much rises and falls on godly and effective leadership within the Church. And while Christ is the Head, those charged with the responsibility of leading God’s people are entrusted as stewards in the carrying out of God’s intention that all come to know the Good News of Jesus Christ.

This stewardship-trust has not only been given to “pastor-types,” but, in very significant ways, to those serving in volunteer roles in the local church and beyond. As such, we are pleased to be able to highlight this leadership priority at our upcoming meetings in April.

The Ministerial Association Annual Meeting (for pastors) will take place April 27-28. Then, the Northwest Conference Annual Meeting (for church delegates, lay leaders, pastors and others) will follow on April 28-29.

At both the Ministerial Association and Northwest Conference Annual Meetings, participants will have opportunities to select specific workshops to attend that will provide different perspectives on leading within the Church. Some of these workshops will be geared specifically for pastors and ministry staff members,
Edrin Williams to speak at MOVE 2017, March 31 to April 1 in Minneapolis

By Ginny Olson, Director of Youth Ministry

On March 31-April 1, high school students and youth ministry leaders from throughout the Northwest Conference will converge on Minneapolis for MOVE 2017.

MOVE is a two-day urban retreat that focuses on Christ’s call to compassion, mercy and justice. Designed for high school students by Northwest Conference youth pastors, the weekend is packed with worship sessions, serving opportunities with ministries and community organizations, experiential learning and fun.

This year’s keynote speaker is Edrin Williams, Associate Pastor at The Sanctuary Covenant Church in Minneapolis, and a popular speaker for youth and young adult audiences around the country.

Cost: $30 for students and $20 for adult leaders.

NWC building leadership capacity through Affinity Groups

By Mike Brown, Director of Church Planting

The positioning statement of the Northwest Conference is “Developing leaders. Thriving churches.” We’ve come to understand that the Church of Jesus Christ can only grow, both in numbers and spiritual maturity, as leadership capacity is developed.

So we’ve made a commitment to focus our efforts on developing leaders, both by identifying more leaders and helping those identified receive the necessary experiences and the right tools that will allow them to be fruitful, God-honoring leaders in their local congregations. We are convinced that leadership reproduction is not accidental but must be the result of intentional actions.

We want to help our churches identify, train and develop leaders in key ministry areas within the local church. One of our key discoveries as Conference staff has been that we can bring people together and resource them well through the convening of Affinity Groups.

These Affinity Groups provide a way to bring together those who are called to the same roles and provide them with new tools to live into their respective calls. We find that God brings a lot of knowledge into these gatherings as we learn from one another, support and encourage each other, and pray together.

Currently, the Northwest Conference has several groups meeting for peer mentoring, coaching and training. Throughout the year we have groups of church planters, youth pastors, children & family ministry staff, vitality pastors, church finance people, retired clergy, spiritual directors, female clergy, chaplains, camp directors and others that we are able to bring together. We hope to begin a worship leaders connection group in the near future.

With an active focus on leadership development we are seeing churches that are growing and developing robust disciple-making capacity. We desire to see leaders exposed to new resources and ideas. Our hope is that through the Affinity Groups the participants will develop strong networks with like-minded leaders in their ministry areas, so they are able to fulfill the call of God on their lives. We believe that well-equipped leaders will equip and train other leaders in the local church.

Our heartfelt desire is to pour into, support and encourage those God has called to lead in various capacities in the local church. In Ephesians 4:12, Paul tells us that God placed leaders in the Church, “to equip His people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

The specific role of leaders in the local church is to equip and resource others to discover what God is calling them to do. We want to be a catalyst that allows this to happen. If you are a ministry leader in one of these areas, or you have ministry leaders in your church who would benefit from one of these gatherings, we want to encourage you to contact the Northwest Conference office or check out our website for more information about these opportunities to connect.
Awaken Covenant Church to plant ‘network church’ this summer, Lighthouse Covenant Church meeting weekly

By Mike Brown, Director of Church Planting

Pastor Dan Lukas is currently serving as Church Planter in Residence at Awaken Covenant Church in St. Paul. The desire is to send Dan out in June to do a “network church plant.” This would mean that the church would be an Awaken network church, but not a satellite campus.

This new development is representative of a growing movement we are seeing across the country—and in the Evangelical Covenant Church—in Church Planting. The northwestern conference is a part of a growing movement of churches that shares a common DNA with Awaken.

Jamie Staples, pastor of Renew Covenant Church, moved to Eau Claire, WI, almost 2 years ago to plant a church. After 10 years of serving in Red Wing, MN, Jamie and his wife Emily sensed God was leading them to make a change.

After much prayer and seeking God—and with the encouragement of Lead Pastor Remy Diederich of Cedarbrook Church in Menomonie, WI—they began the process of planting in Eau Claire. At first, the church met in various places such as a middle school, a hotel conference room, and a park for the summer—until they were finally able to lease a storefront.

The storefront was small, and they were able to remodel parts of it to accommodate the close to 40 people who were attending. But church leaders knew it wasn’t ideal and were constantly searching for other locations.

“The storefront location gave Renew an opportunity to find its identity and grow,” Staples said. “But it just simply wasn’t big enough for the future.”

After much prayer and searching for alternate locations for ministry here,” Staples said. “He responded by saying that they were actually potentially using their space,” Staples explained. “I started emailing churches in the area that I knew were struggling to ask about renting space in their church building.” Staples explained.

After contacting First Baptist Church of Eau Claire, a 100-year-old local congregation that had been reduced to about 39 members, he found new hope.

“I talked to the pastor about potentially using their space,” Staples said. “He responded by saying that they were actually taking a vote that Sunday to sell the church.”

The storefront was small, and they were able to remodel parts of it to accommodate the close to 40 people who were attending. But church leaders knew it wasn’t ideal and were constantly searching for other locations.

“The storefront location gave Renew an opportunity to find its identity and grow,” Staples said. “But it just simply wasn’t big enough for the future.”

After much prayer and searching for alternate locations for ministry, Staples began to feel defeated. “I started emailing churches in the area that I knew were struggling to ask about renting space in their church building.” Staples explained.

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10 Times More Space

Many conversations later, and after much prayer, an agreement was made in August to sell the church to Renew Covenant for a sale price of $180,000.

“We went from a 2,500-square-foot space to a 25,000-square-foot church with a parsonage. It was a blessing we never could have expected,” Staples said.

After 5-week renovation, Renew moved into its new location and started services in the new sanctuary in December. The church, originally built in 1912 and rebuilt after a fire in 1935, now mixes the old history of First Baptist Church with the new modern style of Renew Covenant.

The vision of Renew is to lead people to be fully devoted followers of Jesus. The hope is to connect people to Jesus, engage in deeper relationships, and renew the community. The blessing of the new location has opened up many new and exciting opportunities for Renew to pursue its mission in a deeper and more intentional way.

The location of the church is on the campus of the University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire.

“There are endless possibilities for ministry here,” Staples said. Renew Covenant will be continuing a Thursday night free meal ministry to college students that was established by First Baptist. The NWC church plant continues to see growth, celebrating its new location with 185 people attending a recent New Year’s service.

“We want to be a healthy and passionate church,” Staples said. “That is what the people of this city need.”

Renew Covenant Church brings new life to historic church building in Eau Claire

By Jessa Anderson, Administrative Coordinator

Jamie Staples, pastor of Renew Covenant Church, moved to Eau Claire, WI, almost 2 years ago to plant a church. After 10 years of serving in Red Wing, MN, Jamie and his wife Emily sensed God was leading them to make a change.

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“We want to be a healthy and passionate church,” Staples said. “That is what the people of this city need.”
The purpose of Minnehaha Academy— as stated in Article 1 of its 1905 incorporation documents— was to “furnish young men and women with the essential elements of a liberal education, and to foster the development of character under the personal influence of Christian teachers.” More than a century later, MA continues to be faithful to its original mission.

The School’s Philosophy of Education, updated in 2013, declares: “We seek to lead students to commit their lives to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. We challenge ourselves and our students toward excellence, a deepening Christian faith, and a commitment to service. We seek to inspire and help every student to follow God’s will and design in all aspects of life.”

Minnehaha Academy developing plans to address Christian faith formation

By Donna Harris, President of Minnehaha Academy

Arbor recommended that MA, in its ongoing assessment of faith formation, continue its Fresh Faith Formation scoop and sequence, assess and strengthen the role of chapel in faith formation, consider the role of faith formation advocates at MA, and conduct ongoing faculty development in faith formation to facilitate spiritual curiosity. MA is currently in the early stages of this challenging, but exciting, work of developing comprehensive plans to address Arbor’s recommendations.

To that end, MA entered a consulting relationship with The Arbor Research Group last spring, made possible by a generous gift to support faith formation at MA. Results of the study involving faculty, staff, students, parents and trustees affirmed MA’s clear Christian distinctive, the positive and life changing experience at MA, the Christian model of faith by devoted faculty, and the safe space for students to express doubt and ask questions.

We are blessed to have the support and input of the Northwest Conference team, including Superintendant and MA Board of Trustees member, the Rev. Mark Stromberg, Chair of the NWC Executive Committee and MA Board of Trustees member, Jim Volling, NWC Director of Youth Ministry, Ginny Olson, NWC Director of Children & Family Ministry, Kari Stromberg, in this very important work. Please join us in praying for outcomes that continue to honor the legacy of God’s school.
Community Bible Experience in the NWC
By Jessa Anderson, Administrative Coordinator

Many Northwest Conference churches participated in the Evangelical Covenant Church’s Community Bible Experience this past year. In an effort to deepen Covenant disciples, CBE is a 40-day discipleship opportunity to dive deeper into the Word of God, which was launched in the fall of 2016 by the ECC Make and Deepen Disciples team.

CBE is not just about reading the Bible, but rather a way to encourage us to engage in the Bible in a fresh way. “It’s less like a reference book and more like a Bible in a fresh way. It’s less like encouraging us to engage in the Bible, but rather a way to make Scripture more accessible for all life stages. Two 80-year-old women from Calvary that participated in the study were able to do so because of the audiobook version.”

“I saw that the Covenant had launched the Community Bible Experience and I knew that our church needed to work on making Scripture more essential and central to their beliefs,” Churchill said.

He took the chance of launching the CBE study at the 50-member Calvary, not knowing how they would respond. After ordering 40 books, 39 were picked up.

“We ended up with three small groups that averaged about 15 people each.”

Incorporating the study into the weekly teachings on Sundays, Churchill saw a change in the congregation. “We would watch the CBE videos at the beginning of the service and discuss the questions.”

“It was intense and I didn’t always have the answers, but people were asking tons of great questions,” Churchill said. After starting the study in September, the church finished in November and people are already looking forward to an Old Testament version.

“Reading the Bible in this way has really caused me to see the Bible differently. Certain key themes have jumped out to me, like how important ‘faith’ is throughout the Old Testament,” said one participant.

Another said, “I have seen new things that I simply have missed at other times in reading the New Testament.”

Can we have a moment of silence?

By Jeff Burton, Director of Pastoral Care & Development

Having just come through Advent, it is likely that many of you were at some point reacquainted with the context of the great angelic announcements of the birth of Christ. The context is often expressed as 400 years of silence from God—a very powerful context. Scripture does not comment on the silence, it is just there. However, there are stories in Scripture where the power of silence is mentioned.

Think of the story of Job. In Job’s great loss and grief, his journey begins with his friends coming to sit with him in his sorrow. Notice their posture in this time of disequilibrium. “Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was” (Job 2:13). Then the silence was broken. Job and his friends begin to fill the air with their words, sometimes very eloquent words, sometimes just raw emotion. As the chapters fly by, many of your Bibles will have headings to remind you of who is speaking. It’s Job, it’s Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and later Elihu. Back and forth they go, sometimes the speaker spanning many chapters. Of the central characters in the book of Job, the one who is silent during all of those musings is God. But again, silence is a very powerful thing.

Finally, in chapter 38, the silence of God is broken. God speaks. Job and his friends are silent. It is a holy storm. At a critical moment, the Lord commands Job to answer, and his answer is painful and brief. In summary, his response is, “I need to put my hand over my mouth, I have already said too much.” That seemed to be enough answer to satisfy the Almighty. God once again overwhelms the silence with the wisdom and power of His words. When God has finished, Job’s final response reveals that he has had an experience of worship, a divine encounter. Human silence can become an invitation for the very personal “face-to-face” encounter with God.

We have never been more prone to ignore the deep benefit of being still. In this age of information—an age that encourages non-stop flow of comments—silence is an uncomfortable, almost dreaded experience. There is little impulse to place our hand over our mouths. Our culture has trained us to quickly give our opinion on virtually everything as an expression of our freedom.

While there have been seasons where Christians have been silent when they should have spoken (usually silent for years, not hours or days), our temptation today is greater toward speaking quickly when we should be silent for a while. Pastors are under unique vocational pressure to speak quickly when people are disoriented or in crisis. Sometimes silence might produce not only a more thoughtful response but might actually invite a divine encounter. I think I have said enough. “I place my hand over my mouth.”

Bi-vocational ministry trend on the rise

By Jeff Burton, Director of Pastoral Care & Development

Many denominations across the country are observing a rise in the number of bi-vocational pastors serving in churches. Dennis Bick- ers, a career bi-vocational pastor, author and researcher, says that a conservative estimate right now would be 33 percent of all pastors are bi-vocational—a percentage that is growing.

In the NWC the number of churches served by a bi-vocational lead or solo pastor is 20-25 percent. In addition, many of our staff ministers in specialized areas are bi-vocational. While the other jobs that some of our bi-vocational pastors engage in would seem to coincide well with formal ministry training (i.e. chaplaincy work), most of our bi-vocational pastors serve in a wide variety of other occupations.

Bi-vocational ministry is that the pastor does not get isolated in the rather unique world of institutional church life because the bi-vocational pastor lives every week with a more comprehensive view of the life of the people. These are important things for all pastors to be thinking about.

This movement was featured in a longer Covenant Companion article in the May/June 2016 issue. It led one of our bi-vocational pastors, Dan Mutterer serving Svea Hill Covenant Church in Big Lake, MN, to take action. Mutterer writes: “Another pastor and I have been meeting to plan sermons together. We are using the Revised Common Lectionary as our guide, and we meet once per month to review the scriptures, pull out key ideas, discuss illustration ideas, and hopefully leave with a month of outlines. Since we started this process—which I was inspired to start after reading the Covenant magazine featuring bi-vocational strategies—I have noticed that my sermon planning has sped up and become more thoughtful because instead of just my brain as the output system, there are multiple brains working on it.”

The NWC Pastoral Care & Development office’s goal is to become more aware of this unique calling and find ways to be more supportive.

NWC Family Go: Serve to be held Wednesday, June 28, at Redeemer Covenant from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

By Kara Stromberg, Director of Children & Family Ministry

Go: Serve is a Northwest Conference initiative focused on equipping elementary-aged kids and families for service and learning. Born from a desire to equip families to develop an outward-focused mindset that empowers children to make a difference in their world. Go: Serve cultivates ministry-minded service with a cultural learning piece that kids and families can participate in together. Plus, it’s a lot of fun!

Why Wednesday, you ask? It’s never been done that way before! Go: Serve is in its fourth year and each year Saturdays have proven to be difficult for families, who are just, well, busy.

We suspect kids are looking for things to do in the summer and that there are families and churches who can creatively make this work. If parents work, we encourage pastors, ministry leaders, grandparents, family members or neighbors to attend with kids. We’re hoping a midweek Go: Serve will bring fresh perspective and invigorate ministries in our Northwest Conference churches.

Developing leaders. Thriving churches. ... This NWC positioning statement is for our kids, too. From making sandwiches to experiencing new foods to learning about homelessness, we trust the little ones will lead us in developing a heart for people in our communities while inspiring families to develop a mindset of ministry service.

Questions? Contact Kara Stromberg by email at kara@northwest-conference.org.
God raised up a record 27 churches at Navigate 2016, held in Minneapolis on Nov. 4-9. Of the total delegation, we celebrate the first-time participation of three Latino congregations. Also attending from the Northwest Conference were members from Bethlehem Covenant Church in Minneapolis, Fridley Covenant Church, and Rice Creek Covenant Church in Lino Lakes, MN.

Once again, the NWC served as the host conference and Minnehaha Academy was host site for the weekend.

John Wenrich, Executive Minister of Start and Strengthen Churches for the Evangelical Covenant Church, provided a theme word for Navigate—“Awaken”—based on Ephesians 5:14: “Awake, O sleeper, rise up from the dead, and Christ will give you light.”

Wenrich’s challenge for every congregation was that they live under the leading and power of the Holy Spirit to be faithful, fruitful expressions of God’s Kingdom in their communities and beyond.

God blessed and moved mightily among the pastors and leaders gathered at Navigate as they engaged in a new season of discernment regarding God’s preferred future for their congregations. Many of the churches present were also launching their journey on the Vitality Pathway at Navigate.

We continue to pray that as these congregations press forward in pursuit of Christ and His priorities for their churches, that they will experience a deeper level of awareness of their own missional health, and an awakening to a fresh, Holy Spirit-inspired vision for their future.

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**NWC Calendar**

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<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>2.11</td>
<td><strong>Recharge</strong> – Lakeview Covenant Church, Duluth, MN</td>
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<td>3.31-4.1</td>
<td><strong>MOVE 2017</strong> – Minnehaha Academy South Campus, Minneapolis, MN</td>
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<td>4.27-28</td>
<td><strong>Ministerial Association Annual Meeting</strong> – Maple Grove Covenant Church, Maple Grove, MN</td>
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<td>4.28-29</td>
<td><strong>Northwest Conference Annual Meeting</strong> – Maple Grove Covenant Church, Maple Grove, MN</td>
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<td>6.17-24</td>
<td><strong>Adventures in Leadership</strong> – Adventurous Christians, Grand Marais, MN</td>
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<td>6.28</td>
<td><strong>Go: Serve 2017</strong> – Redeemer Covenant Church, Brooklyn Park, MN</td>
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<td>8.3-5</td>
<td><strong>MUUUCE 2017</strong> – Crossroads Church, Woodbury, MN</td>
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**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

- **Sandy Norris**
  Director of Finance

- **Cheryl Theilen**
  Director of Administration

- **Bryan Malley**
  Director of Communications

- **Jessa Anderson**
  Administrative Coordinator

- **Greg Ellis**
  Coordinator of CHET Northwest Conference

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