

IMPRINTS



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The Church and its Mission

“So what do you know about the Covenant Church in your town?” This is a question that I like to ask in gas stations and restaurants as I travel throughout the conference. The answers range from, “I have never heard of the church,” to, “I think that is the church south of town,” to, “It is my church and it has a great ministry!”



Our purpose as congregations is not to be famous but to carry out the will of God for our respective ministries. Churches that are growing and making a difference are involved in mission both in their communities and internationally as well.

In his book “Breakout Churches,” Thom Rainer writes, “There can be no vision without a clear discernment of the community’s needs. And there can be no discernment of the community’s needs without a passion for the community”

Do you love your community? If so, what are its greatest needs? How can your congregation be involved in meeting those needs?

You have the contacts, you know the area and you have credibility because you live there. More importantly, we are

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MISSIONAL



Volunteers from eight churches in the Braham District helped add a second story to Iglesia Ebenezer in Rio Bravo, Mexico in March.

They Called Us Angels

By Pastor Alan Johnson
Karmel Covenant Church, Princeton, MN

It is a sobering thing to be called “angels,” but that is just how the growing congregation of Iglesia Ebenezer in Rio Bravo, Mexico, described our 20-member short-term mission team. Our team represented a new venture—the coming together of eight congregations of the Braham District just north of the Twin Cities—and our beginning work with new Covenant missionaries, Jim and Barb Mikrut and their daughters Erin and Sarah.

The words “Angels from Minnesota” were emblazoned on a beautiful banner that formed a backdrop to an outdoor fiesta at the end of our week. The congregation put on a feast of the finest Mexican foods, and with overhead strings of lights, balloons and music filling the air, we laughed and partied in a way we shall never forget.

During five days in March, through a joint effort with the Ebenezer congregation, we

had added a second story to their church, and in the process, had formed an indelible bond with these Mexican brothers and sisters. Now they were calling us their angels.

It was Eugenio, a member of their church, who explained why they felt as they did. Three years earlier their pastor had died, but not before casting a vision for a much-needed addition for classrooms and a kitchen. The congregation, facing limited means, began all-day prayer sessions each Friday to ask God to provide this miracle. On our fourth day of construction, as Pastora Avelina, the deceased pastor’s wife, walked through the work site, tears rolled down her cheeks as she remembered her husband’s vision which had now become reality.

We were attracted to the ministry of the Mikruts because they operate with a set of expectations we embrace. First, the Mexican congregations are required to participate financially, scaled to the level of their ability. This eliminates the spirit of paternalism that

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Express who you understand God to be

By Pastor Craig Case
Emmaus Road Church, Hopkins, MN

"What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. ... We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God. This is true not only of the individual Christian, but of the company of Christians that composes the Church. Always the most revealing thing about the Church is her idea of God." — A. W. Tozer

One of the fundamental challenges for any church community to wrestle with is the picture of God they hold to, understand and present. Churches present this picture through worship gatherings, student ministry events, informal conversations, and prayer, in addition to many expressions. A community and its leaders must continually come back to the story of God in the Scriptures—and their participation within it—and ask, "Who do we understand God to be?" and, "How are we expressing this understanding?"

To the writers of the Scriptures, it's clear that they showed a picture of God who is with the poor and vulnerable. We sense this in the common refrain of the Torah that God is the God of "the alien, fatherless, and the widow." The writer of Deuteronomy succinctly says, "God defends the cause of the alien, the orphan, and the widow" (10:18).



The new health care facility in Naigobya, Uganda.

Emmaus Road Church was influenced with that picture and sought to express Him in that way. Through a family in our church, we developed a relationship with an organization that connects American churches to impoverished villages in Uganda, Africa. Churches can "adopt" the village, committing to provide such needed things as clean water, school buildings, health care facilities, church buildings, sewing centers and other ways to express the story of God.

We adopted Naigobya, a village of 5,000 people who lacked basic necessities. Our leadership, in connection with our partners on the ground in Uganda, outlined a three-year plan. Imperative to this was a response to the needs of orphans and widows and the many children who were suffering from HIV/AIDS and malaria.

First, we had a bore hole dug to provide clean water—a basic right for every human being. Next, we invested in the leadership of the only Christian church there. We paid

the seminary tuition for their young pastor, Peter, to receive training and development in South Africa. Also, our church raised about \$24,000 to have a health care facility constructed. This would provide necessary medicine to combat malaria, HIV/AIDS, and provide a clean environment for births, shots, immunization and medical care.

I just returned from my first trip there. I attended the grand opening of the health care facility. I discovered that this was one of the most important steps in the history of Naigobya. Nearly everyone from the village came to the grand opening ceremony, which was filled with speeches, prayers, singing and dancing, and great food (if you like goat ... which I did). In my prayer, I shared that this health care facility was from God, that He hears the cry of the poor and vulnerable and cares for them. This was summarized in their tongue as "Katonda Akwagala"—God loves you!

Being a part of this expression of God has brought transformation to our 2.5-year-old community. We sensed that this relationship with Naigobya was so imperative to our formation, reminding us again of who God is and igniting a hunger and thirst for His Name. Whether a church is 2 years old, 20, or 200, they have a role to play in expressing this beautiful picture of God. Will you do it? What is holding you back?

Rio Bravo

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characterizes some short-term mission work.

Secondly, the Mikruts expect the Mexican church to work side-by-side with the mission team, giving them a high level of ownership in the project. And thirdly, they are asked to provide meals for the team. The most important requirement, in our view, is the one placed upon us—that we would commit to return again and again to Rio Bravo. The decision to return places the priority on relationships, the core of true ministry.

When our eight churches entered the scene, it was clear that God was connecting us with the Mikruts. We met with them several times during the prior year and de-

decided on a "scouting trip" in October. Many possibilities were considered, and finally, the decision was made to begin at Iglesia Ebenezer, which clearly revealed itself as the Holy Spirit's plan.

It has often been said that when we participate in a short term mission we receive more than we give. We are pleased with the 2,320-square-foot addition we were able to erect, but spiritually speaking, the flow was from them to us. This spiritually vibrant congregation invited us again and again into worship, prayer and fellowship. From young to old, their consistent witness was that God is our provider—the one who can move mountains—and He alone is worthy of all

praise and honor.

Were we angels? We never saw it that way, but we did find ourselves in Rio Bravo as the result of many prayers. The Mikruts were praying for how the vision to strengthen church associations throughout Northeastern Mexico would spread. Iglesia Ebenezer was praying for the facility they needed for their growing ministry. Our team was praying that God would use us to make a difference for His kingdom. We are honored that He used us as He did.

The Braham District Churches will return at the end of February 2008 to complete interior work on the addition that was erected this past year.

NWC embarking on Master Ministry Plan

As reported in the summer issue of IMPRINTS, the Northwest Conference has initiated a planning process that will result in a 3-year Master Ministry Plan. The objective of the plan will be to help our churches become healthy (pursuing Christ), missional (pursuing Christ's priorities in the world) churches.

We exist to serve the churches through encouragement to become God's redemptive arm, as well as through resources that will help our churches become what God intends them to be—salt and light in an increasingly chaotic world. We have recruited a task force and advisory team to guide the development of a plan that will help our churches make a difference for the kingdom across the conference. We have chosen the following Scripture to inform and condition the process.

"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all people. It teaches us to say, 'No,' to ungodliness and worldly



passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good" (Titus 2:11-14).

The task force met in late September to begin the journey. Please pray for discernment and godly wisdom. In the coming months you will hear more about this initiative and have opportunity to contribute to the process. We are excited to see what God will do in and through our churches and our broader conference ministries.

What is Parish Nursing?

by Corrine Benson,
NWC Parish Nurse Commission

Parish Nursing promotes wellness in the body of believers—both individually and in the community of faith. In short, Parish Nursing is a blend of nursing and faith. A Parish Nurse is not a provider of hands-on care and does not replace any health care services. Further, a Parish Nurse does not replace the need for pastoral care, medical care, or social agencies. Rather, a Parish Nurse works in partnership with these services.

Who is a Parish Nurse?

A Parish Nurse is a currently licensed registered nurse who facilitates the health of a faith community and in so doing, expands the healing ministry of Jesus Christ in the church. The focus of the nurse is on the physical, emotional and spiritual dimension of persons as they strive to achieve wellness, wholeness and manage illness. The functions of a Parish Nurse ministry are integrated in five areas:

1. Integrator of Faith & Health
2. Health Educator
3. Health Counselor
4. Referral Source and Liaison to Community Resources
5. Coordinator and Educator of Volunteers

The spiritual dimension is central to Parish Nursing practice. Integrating faith and health defines Parish Nursing. The Parish Nurse can provide a prayerful presence during times of crisis and times of celebration. The practice holds that all persons are sacred and must be treated with respect and dignity.

Spiritual health is central to well-being and influences a person's entire being. Well-being can exist in the presence of disease. Healing can take place even in the absence of a cure.

The Parish Nurse, in collaboration with the pastoral staff and congregants, participates in the ongoing transformation of the faith community into a source of health and healing.

Agent Fund: Auditor for a Day

Doesn't it sound fun to be an IRS Agent auditing financial records for a day? Well ... maybe not.

The word "audit" generally conjures negative images in our minds and yet the task is an important one. Most, if not all, church bylaws call for an annual audit or review of the financial records, but since it is such a dreaded chore, it often doesn't get the attention it ought.

To help financial leaders fulfill the annual audit responsibility the Northwest Conference will partner with Counting House—a bookkeeping and accounting service—in hosting a church audit day on Feb. 2, 2008, at Rice Creek Covenant Church.

Participants will be paired with another in the group representing a church of similar size, circumstance and financial software. These audit partners will interview each other about current policies, procedures and controls that have been established in their respective settings and make the first steps to test whether the policies are followed and the established controls are doing what they are intended to do.

Some participants will complete all the tests that day, others with desktop computer records and file cabinets of documents will have to find a mutually agreeable time to complete the work on site.

It is hoped that the formidable audit duty will be more bearable with companions along the way and that we will learn best practices from each other, sharing sweet fellowship along the way.

To register, contact the Northwest Conference office (Cheryl@nwc-cov.org) or 612-721-4893) or Counting House (bookkeepersandy@msn.com) or 651-415-9958).

Counting House is owned and operated by Sandy Norris, formerly Pastor of Administration at Roseville Covenant Church.

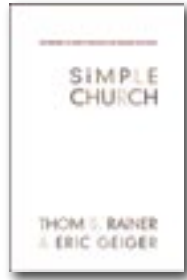
Book Review

By Jim Fretheim

“Simple Church” by Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger

Rainer and Geiger have conducted case studies on 400 congregations to measure their effectiveness in producing mature followers of Christ. A condition they found in many of the churches is what they called “ministry schizophrenia.” They observe, “It occurs when churches and church leaders are not sure who they are. They are not clear what their fundamental identity is. They run in a disjointed fashion.”

The authors argue that many of our church systems are too complex. The great number of meetings and obligations that the churches call for do not result in the spiritual growth that they seek. Geiger and Rainer call for a simplification of our structures so that people can be both grounded and



guided to serious biblical study and a commitment to take what they have learned to their community. They define a “simple church” as “a congregation designed around a straight forward and strategic process that moves people through the stages of spiritual growth.”

The book helps the reader evaluate the systems in their own congregations for nurturing the spiritual growth of the people. What do we do with new believers? Do we have a plan that will move them from the basics to the deeper things of God? Have we trained people to do this? The authors make this observation: “In general, churches that are vibrant and growing are simple. The vibrant churches are much more simple than the comparison churches.” This book can be a real help to your congregation as you seek to call people to deeper maturity in their walk with God.

CALENDAR

January 5, 2008 RECHARGE – A one day conference for those serving children and youth – Salem Covenant Church, New Brighton, MN

January 19, 2008 Leadership Forum with Dr. Scot McKnight – Faith Covenant in Burnsville, MN

January 26-27 CMJ Connection – Chicago, IL

January 26-28 Youth Workers Connection – Chicago, IL

January 28-31 Covenant Midwinter Conference – Chicago, IL

February 2 Church Treasurers Workshop – Rice Creek Covenant Church, Shoreview, MN

February 23 VERITAS Workshop with Dr John Wenrich – First Covenant Church, St. Paul, MN

April 4-5 MOVE (Mission Outreach Venture Experience) – First Covenant Church, Minneapolis, MN

April 17-19 NWC Annual Meeting – Mission Covenant Church, Poplar, WI

May 6-7 SPE (Sustaining Pastoral Excellence) Seminar – Maple Grove Covenant Church, Maple Grove, MN

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The Northwest Conference is a regional conference of the Evangelical Covenant Church. We are approximately 130 churches in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, North Dakota and South Dakota.



The Church and its Mission

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commanded by God to be involved with our neighbors. The Bible says that Christians are saints. Saints are not called to simply sit around and debate the intricate matters of faith but to serve the world in the name of Jesus Christ!

This issue of IMPRINTS contains some excellent examples of how a number of our congregations are involved in significant ministry in their world. Please read them and be encouraged by what God is doing in their mission of taking the Good News to the world.

Back to our original question. What do people know about your congregation? I encourage you to go out and ask the question. Once you have some answers, take a fresh look at your mission!

*In His service and yours,
Jim Fretheim, Superintendent*