

# IMPRINTS



Spring 2007, Vol. 5 #2

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## The Fingers of Lazarus

Christ is risen! The notes of Easter are hope, joy and victory!

I thank God for the many signs of new life that I see as I travel throughout the conference.



A common question is this, "Do you think there is any hope for a church like ours?"

My answer is, "Of course!" I believe in the resurrection of Christ! I

serve a God who takes what was dead and brings it back to life! We serve a God who has promised "to restore the years that the locusts have eaten."

In his wonderful book, "Christ the Tiger," Thomas Howard writes, "I tell you of the Springtime of which all springtime's speak. I tell you of a world for which this world groans and toward which it strains."

There is hope for every one of our congregations. Your conference and denomination have made the revitalization of existing congregations a high priority. John Wenrich is the Director of Church Vitality for the Covenant. Please read his article and attend his upcoming seminar along with leaders from your church.

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### REVITALIZATION



*Mark Ellingson, pastor of Fridley Covenant Church.*

## A church in process

*Fridley Covenant Church, Fridley, Minn.*

It has been stated, "Most people are willing to change, not because they see the light, but because they feel the heat." Fridley Covenant Church was among the Northwest Conference churches that have either plateaued or declined in the past decade. The church was "feeling the heat" of possibly closing its doors if things didn't change.

As a 19-year youth ministry veteran, I was asked to come and utilize my youth ministry exuberance to participate in a conference-first "revitalization" process at Fridley Covenant Church. In youth work, change is enacted constantly to adapt to the youth world. So when I stepped into this venture, I was a bit impatient with how long the growth process was taking.

To their credit, the original 40 at FCC have been patient with me and all the change that has come their way. A group of Redeemer Covenant families followed us over to Fridley, and as a result we have created a whole new blended family. And the family continues to grow as we add more newcomers every month.

I will confess that I came into this

church with expectations that my clever marketing ploys would mix with the existing "home-friendliness" to create an avalanche of growth. Wrong! In reality, we have seen a slow and steady growth due to word-of-mouth, new move-in contacts, a new worship style and format, and our Web site ([www.getrestored.org](http://www.getrestored.org)). Ultimately, it has been the Holy Spirit sending us people to add to the family as He sees fit!

We have seen God do great things through small groups, the new AWANA program, our all-summer outdoor worship, Valentine's banquet, and so many other things that I cannot begin to list them here. See that list at our "recent history" page on our church Web site.

To get a sense for how amazed and excited our people are, the church leadership is looking toward the future by finding ways to reach more unchurched people. They are reading and discussing the book "Breakout Churches" by Thom Rainer. We hope to be a great church by following the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.

*Mark Ellingson, Lead Pastor*

# Plant your spiritual garden

*If your church has been lying dormant, try something new*

I'm not the best gardener on the planet. I know that gardening takes a commitment of time ... planting, thinning, fertilizing, mulching and weeding. So, I have chosen to plant the kinds of plants that grow without a lot of fussing. Some people would call those plants weeds. I prefer the term perennials.

I've always admired those amazing spring gardens filled with daffodils and tulips. Julie and I decided we wanted to use our backyard space and fill it with plants that would bring us beauty and enjoyment. So, in the fall we planted a bunch of bulbs of all types.

Now, as the weather has been getting warmer and the April rains have begun, the bulbs are coming up in the gardens around my home. It always amazes me that something that

looks sort of like an onion can go into the ground in the fall, and lie dormant during the long, cold, snow-covered winter.

Then, as the snows are melting in the spring, those bulbs that looked so dead in the fall begin to send out those shoots of beautiful new green growth topped by a wild profusion of color. Every time it happens I am in awe of the new life that has begun!

Maybe what I love most about spring is that all of nature mirrors God's planned cycle of life. All of nature bursts forth with a passion, thrives for a season, and then dies. Even humanity follows that same cycle of life and death. We're born, we live for maybe 80 years or so, and then we die. It's the way this world works, and it's the cycle we all face.

Churches also have a life cycle. We very intentionally plant new baby churches with the hope that they will burst forth with the beauty of changed lives. At one time, every one of our churches burst forth with new life, they were thriving, but along the way many of our churches have

"gone dormant" and are in need of a resurrection touch



from God.

As I thought about it, we've always been a people focused on resurrection.

Lost, lonely, hurting people are being given the power

of new life through the ministries of our churches ... and that's the way it should be. If that's not happening in your church, if your church has been lying dormant, I would challenge you to start doing something new.

Help plant a new church, or bring resurrection power to bear in the church where you worship by reaching out with an intentional plan to reach your neighbors, co-workers and friends. Make your church the warmest, most inviting and life giving place so that people can hear the Good News.

That is, after all, what this new cycle of life that Jesus initiated is all about. Those tulips in my garden are a reminder to me that a beautiful new life is not only possible, it's a promise ... a promise from the only one who has defeated death and come back to tell us about it.

This spring I want to ask you to do two things. First, live out the joy of resurrection in your own life. Second, plant your spiritual garden by sharing the power of new life with the people God has placed all around you and then watch them grow!

We are reminded that Jesus offers us a hope beyond the "normal" cycle of life and death. In John 11:25, Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life." That's pretty dramatic when you really think about it.

That statement represents an incredible reversal of the natural order of things. Suddenly the cycle of life followed by the finality of death is shattered for individuals and churches who choose to trust, follow, and enter into new life with Jesus. Plant something new this spring and watch it grow!

Blessings in Christ,  
Pastor Mike Brown, Director of Church Planting for the Northwest Conference



# Veritas: Telling the Truth about Revitalization

Jesus said, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free" (John 8:32).

This wisdom can be applied to many areas of life—including revitalization. Simply put, there is no vitality without reality.

As Covenanters we must confront the current reality of our established churches. While there are a number of healthy, missional churches in our denomination, the fact remains that our existing base of established churches has been eroding over the last five years. Last year, that erosion took on some troubling momentum.

Aware of this trend, the Covenant Executive Board approved a new ministry position to come alongside of established churches. We recognize that without a strong base of established churches, we will not be able to effectively and strategically move forward in ministry.

As the Director of Congregational Vitality, my prayer is that every congregation becomes a healthy, missional church. By healthy, I mean pursuing Christ. By missional, I mean pursuing Christ's priorities in the world.

Part of my role is to help churches face their current reality with accuracy, courage, faith and hope.



Veritas, Telling the Truth about Revitalization is a workshop designed to get this conversation going between clergy and laity.

The answers are not in the data that I present but in the conversations that clergy and laity have about the data as they gather around tables. This is a workshop geared for both pastors and lay leaders.

I recently taught Veritas in Duluth. Ten pastors attended along with 35 lay leaders. I was so proud of these people who were willing to confront their current reality. By far the best part of the workshop was the conversation around the tables.

On Saturday, May 19, from 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m., I am teaching Veritas at Salem Covenant Church in New Brighton, Minn. I invite pastor and lay leader alike to attend. Lunch is provided. Please contact the conference office for more details and to sign up.

Remember, there is no vitality without reality! See you at Veritas.

*John Wenrich, Director of Congregational Vitality, Evangelical Covenant Church*



## Become a Second Miler

The Second Miler program within the Northwest Conference brings together a group of people that further the ministry of conference churches by giving financial assistance to help with the immediate needs of many of our smaller (or newer) churches.

Since 1959, Second Milers have shared in helping well over 200 churches and ministries. Answering the call of Jesus in Matthew 5:41, we are responding to the needs of churches by "going the second mile" ... serving them in Jesus' Name.

Four times each year (quarterly), those signing up for the Second Miler program receive a notice about a new project in one of our churches. By giving a minimum of \$10 each time, we are taking the next step ... going the second mile ... making a difference in a practical way in the life of a sister congregation. This is part of what being connected is all about—looking out for each other.

Our goal in 2007 is to sign up 50 new members. Are you willing to be one of them?

To become a Second Miler, please contact Associate Superintendent Mark Stromberg at the Northwest Conference office at (612) 721-4893 or toll free at (800) 756-6692 (within the conference), or e-mail him at [mark@nwc-cov.org](mailto:mark@nwc-cov.org).

Thank you for considering this opportunity!

## Leadership Forum

The Leadership Forum was held on Jan. 20, 2007, at First Covenant Church, Minneapolis.



Dr. Cornelius Plantinga, President of Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Mich., presented to an audience of 200. His theme for the day was "Dying and Rising with Jesus Christ."

## Nicole Stenstrom moves on

We say thanks and farewell to our friend and colleague, Nicole Stenstrom. Nicole has served our conference as Office Manager for the past six and a half years. Nicole and her family have purchased a business and are excited about their new venture. We wish them God's best as they begin this new chapter of their lives. Thanks Nicole for a job well done! Cheryl Theilen will assume Nicole's duties.

## Book Review

By Jim Fretheim

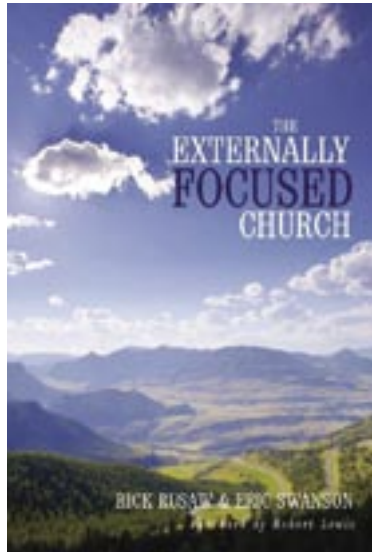
**“The Externally Focused Church”** — by Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson

My friend and colleague Jon Kramka referred me to this book. I was so impressed that I have been recommending it to our churches and pastors.

The authors call on churches to focus their ministries on the needs of their community.

Early on they argue that “neither size, location nor denomination” limits the ability of a congregation to reach out to the community.

The book is well written, very biblical and clear in its conviction that our churches need to take their communities seriously.



The authors contend that “people need exercise for physical health and service for spiritual health.”

Most of us are familiar with the “80/20 rule”—20 percent of the people do 80 percent of the work. The authors remind us, “Ministry is for the mechanic as well as the minister, the teenager as well as the tenured.”

This volume does not offer a “silver bullet” but rather calls us to a Christ-centered focus on our

communities. They raise the questions that must be discussed as we reflect on issues of church health.

I encourage every leadership team in our churches to reflect on this book together!

## NWC Staff

- **Jim Fretheim**  
Superintendent  
jaf@nwc-cov.org
- **Mark Stromberg**  
Associate Superintendent  
mark@nwc-cov.org
- **Jon Kramka**  
Director of Mission Development  
jon@nwc-cov.org
- **Mike Brown**  
Director of Church Planting  
mike@nwc-cov.org
- **Cheryl Theilen**  
Administrative Assistant  
cheryl@nwc-cov.org

### The Northwest Conference

3106 47th Avenue S.  
Minneapolis, MN 55406  
Web: [www.nwc-cov.org](http://www.nwc-cov.org)  
E-mail: [info@nwc-cov.org](mailto:info@nwc-cov.org)  
Phone: 612-721-4893  
1-800-756-6692  
Fax: 612-721-4895

*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.*

## CALENDAR

**May 7-9** Youth Pastors Retreat – Adventurous Christians, Grand Marais, MN

**May 19** Veritas Revitalization Seminar – Salem Covenant Church, New Brighton, MN

**June 16-23** Adventures in Leadership – Adventurous Christians, Grand Marais, MN

**June 21-24** Covenant Annual Meeting – Portland, OR

**August 9-12** Women Ministries Triennial – Chicago, IL

**August 16-18** MUUUCE

**October 8-10** Ministerium Retreat – Cragun’s, Brainerd, MN

## The Fingers of Lazarus

*continued from pg. 1*

I want to encourage each of our churches to consider the impact they are making on their community. It doesn’t matter if you live in a small town or an urban area. Christ calls us to bring the Gospel to lost and hurting people. The addition of one new ministry to your community could be the vehicle that God uses to bring fresh signs of life to your congregation.

The frost is coming out of the ground,

**“It doesn’t matter if you live in a small town or an urban area. Christ calls us to bring the Gospel to lost and hurting people.”**

the ice is melting, and signs of spring and vitalization are all around us.

It is difficult to have a conversation without someone making reference to the

fresh signs!

The third stanza of Jane Kenyon’s poem “Mud Season” says it well.

***On the floor of the woodshed  
The coldest imaginable ooze,  
And soon the first shoots of  
Asparagus will rise,  
The fingers of Lazarus***

What are the fresh signs in your ministry?  
*Jim Fretheim, Superintendent*