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Summer plans?

It is a question I hear frequently:
"Any plans for the summer?"

How about you? Do you have plans? Summer is a busy time for the Church. Many of our congregations are reaching children through vacation Bible school. Others are having concerts and other outreach events in local parks.

Many are sending their young people to one of our outstanding Bible camps! Many people are able to get a few days off for a trip to the lakes and parks. Some church members have family reunions and graduations. It is a hectic time!

I have another question for you. Have you and your church leaders scheduled a planning session for this summer? I realize this is not the same as going to the beach or some exotic resort, but it is important.

Summer is the time to seek God's direction for your next season of ministry. It may be that new people have moved into your community. Schools are getting ready for the beginning of another year in just a couple of months. The needs and opportunities are endless!

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IMMIGRATION

NWC represents the voiceless in Washington, D.C.

On Wednesday, June 13, Ernesto Tapiz (Nueva Vida Covenant Church, Monticello, Minn.) and David Kelly (Bethany Covenant Church, Richfield, Minn.) traveled to Washington D.C. as NWC representatives to the 6th National Hispanic Prayer Breakfast and Advocacy Conference sponsored by Esperanza USA. Tapiz grew up in Mexico and Kelly in Ecuador, and through their wives' Minnesota roots now make this their home.

Affordable housing, HIV/AIDS and immigration reform were all discussed with immigration reform identified as the most urgent issue. The issue of advocacy has a personal aspect for Tapiz. For 10 years he and his family have fought to resolve the legal status of his Mexican-born son-in-law. *continued on pg. 3*



Left to right: Ernesto Tapiz, Dario Vasquez, Sen. Sam Brownback and Darin Guries met to discuss immigration reform during the National Hispanic Prayer Breakfast and Advocacy Conference in Washington, D.C.

'VERITAS' Conference

Due to positive response, NWC to host more seminars focused on revitalization

In the last issue of Imprints, Covenant Director of Congregational Vitality Dr. John Wenrich wrote an article called, "VERITAS: Telling the Truth about Revitalization."

In the article, Wenrich affirmed the commitment of the Evangelical Covenant Church to church health and effectiveness among its established churches. He shared about a recent "VERITAS" seminar held in Duluth, Minn.

Further, he announced another seminar that would be taking place at Salem Covenant Church in New Brighton, Minn. That particular seminar took place on Saturday, May 19. It was very well-received by the 15 churches in attendance. Moreover, it was the largest gathering of churches for any "VERITAS" presentation to date.

Throughout our time at Salem, John encouraged churches to have "balcony" conversations in which they could be reflective about their ministries, rather than simply reacting to daily logistical pressures. He challenged lay leaders and pastors alike to assess their own willingness to change in order to renew ministry at the local level.

Wenrich stated that there are two fantasies present in many churches. The first fantasy is that there can be growth (numeric and otherwise) without change. The second is that there can be change without some degree of pain.



Dr. John Wenrich, Covenant Director of Congregational Vitality

One of the values of the day was that John was able to lead the participants through a variety of constructs, providing a common language in order to discuss the challenging issue of church vitality and readiness for change.

The Northwest Conference is equally committed to the health of our established churches. After all, the loss of vitality profoundly affects the local communities in which our churches reside. Moreover, our mutual ministry is hampered when our churches lack strength.

Therefore, one of our goals is to provide resources to aid in revitalization efforts. In the years ahead, we will be working with Dr. Wenrich's office in order to provide a range of practical helps.

Because of the positive response to his recent presentations, we want our Northwest Conference churches to make every effort to attend one of the upcoming "VERITAS" seminars scheduled with Dr. Wenrich.

The next opportunity is Saturday, Sept. 15 at the Evangelical Covenant Church in Baudette, Minn. The Northwest Conference will be hosting another one in the Twin Cities metro area on Saturday, Feb. 23, 2008. Our goal is to have a minimum of 50 NWC churches in attendance.

This event will be for pastors and lay leaders alike. We believe that those in attendance will find the day to be instructive, challenging and inspiring.

NWC Ministry Planning

In recent days, the Executive Board of the Northwest Conference has enlisted the help of strategic consultant Dr. Gregory W. Bourgond to assist in the development and implementation of a long-range ministry plan.

Currently, Bourgond is Vice President of Operations and Strategic Initiatives for Bethel Theological Seminary in Arden Hills, Minn. He is also President and Founder of "Heart of a Warrior Ministries."

In preliminary discussions with board members, Bourgond has addressed the issue of change at the conference level. He has reminded board leadership that conference ministry must change, even as it is imperative for local congregations to do the same.

Further, he affirmed the commitment of Northwest Conference leadership to focus our most significant efforts back into the local church.

The goal of the Ministry Plan will be to better equip our conference churches for future ministry effectiveness. It will also serve as an ongoing guide for our mutual ministry endeavors. Please pray for Dr. Bourgond and our Northwest Conference leadership as they seek to be wise stewards on your behalf.

Mark R. Stromberg, Associate Superintendent



NWC welcomes new church plants

We celebrate with the June 1 signing of Covenant Agreements with these new Covenant church planters (left to right: Chris Studenski, John Foley, Terrance Rollerson). Pray for each of them as they work to expand the Kingdom of God and reach out to those who need Jesus Christ. With the signing of the Covenant Agreement, these pastors begin the task of building a core group of people who can help them reach out in their communities. Birthing a new church is a process that involves gathering a core of like-minded people, hosting outreach activities that connect the new church with those

who are unchurched, assimilating those who come into the growing body, planning and holding worship, and eventually reproducing themselves again by planting another church.

These pastors are just beginning the process, and we are excited as we anticipate the impact they will have on the lives of those who don't yet know Jesus. Please pray about how you and your church can help us reach an increasingly unchurched world for Jesus Christ. Watch for updates in future Imprints on what God is doing through church planting in the Northwest Conference.



New member churches

Please welcome our two newest member churches to the Northwest Conference and the Covenant Church family. The two new churches are Emmaus Road Church in Hopkins, Minn. (Pastor Craig Case, left), and Frontline Church in Maplewood, Minn. (Pastor Pat Hall, right). Both churches were welcomed into membership during the NWC Annual Meeting, which took place April 19-21, and then officially received at the Covenant Annual Meeting in Portland in June.

NWC represents the voiceless in D.C.

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Both Kelly and Tapiz have seen the anguish of families in their communities divided by immigration raids, deportation, and living under constant uncertainty and fear due to the lack of a well-defined and enforceable immigration law. The Rev. Luis Cortes, Jr., president of Esperanza USA, described two extremes held by those opposed to the current immigration debate. There are those that fear reform means amnesty.

"Amnesty is receiving something for nothing," Cortes stated, "but the current bill proposal includes payment of fines, the need to pass language and citizenship tests, as well as an obligatory return to the country of origin."

The other extreme is the fear that by providing a path for documentation for the 12 million undocumented workers, the economy will suffer. Studies indicate that the undocumented, in fact, overwhelmingly contribute to the health of the economy.

The Church, Esperanza USA feels, has a profound biblical basis to seek the welfare of all. Jesus' word in Matthew 25 is to see Him in the lives of the stranger, the naked,

the sick and the imprisoned.

A highpoint of the trip was a visit to the offices of the senators who advocate for those who do not have a voice. The group of three included Dario Vasquez, pastor of the Salina Covenant Hispanic Church, Tapiz, and Kelly. The group met with Darin Guries, legislative correspondent for Sen. Sam Brownback. Before the meeting was finished, Sen. Brownback joined the group and shared the following verse:

"Bring all the tithes of that year's produce and store it in your towns, so that the Levites and the aliens, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands" (Deuteronomy 14:28-29).

On Thursday morning the overall group met for prayer and then divided by states to visit Capitol Hill. That night before the end of the final evening session, the announcement was made that prayers had been answered. In a rarely seen move, the Senate voted to bring the immigration bill that had failed the week before back to the

floor. During the week, Sens. Mel Martinez, Edward Kennedy, Hillary Clinton, ex-first lady of Massachusetts Ann Romney, Howard Dean, and at the final breakfast session President George W. Bush, each addressed the conference. A common thread in every talk was of the rich heritage and gift immigration has been for this country, and the potential it has to bring new life to our nation in the future.

"Ernesto and I came away from this experience with a clear sense of obligation that as fully enfranchised citizens we should be a voice for those who have no voice, and with the realization of the power the Church has to work together for positive change through political channels in Jesus' name," Kelly said.

One hundred years ago Swedish immigrants were the founders of many of the existing NWC churches. Today, in most of the same communities, immigrants are finding the same hope for their families that motivated those who came before them. May God open our eyes to see Christ in them.

For more information go to www.esperanza.us.

Book Review

by Jim Fretheim

'Surprising Insights from the Un-churched,' by Thom S. Rainer

There is a new sense of urgency in our congregations regarding the importance of evangelism. One of the issues we face is that the longer some people are in our churches, the less they have contact with the non-Christian community in which they live and work.

The gap between those who attend and those who do not continues to grow. Thom S. Rainer offers this book as a way to help us in the important work of evangelism.

Rainer is the dean of the Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth. Instead of going to the masses, Rainer goes to a sampling of people who have recently begun to attend church.

His first chapter deals with the myths we have regarding the unchurched. As the book unfolds, Rainer offers his research

that helps us understand what is most helpful to the unchurched. The research helps us to engage in conversation with those who are not believers.

Rainer argues that much of what we have assumed about people that do not attend church is simply not true. The results of his research provide an impressive collection of data regarding the way the Church should relate to non-attenders.

The author writes: "Is it possible we have been asking the wrong people the wrong questions? Are we involved in exercises in futility by researching a large group, most of whom will never attend church? Should we be talking to those who were unchurched but who now attend? It is this group, the formerly unchurched, from whom we have the most to learn" (p. 51).

I commend this book to our churches. May God bless you as you share the Good News with your community!

CALENDAR

August 16-18 MUUUUCE (Most Unbelievable Ultimate Urban Camping Experience) – Faith Covenant Church, Burnsville, MN

September 15 VERITAS Conference – Evangelical Covenant Church, Baudette, MN

October 8-10 Northwest Conference Ministerial Retreat – Cragun's Resort, Brainerd, MN

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 – Twin Cities Location

January 26-27, 2008 CMJ Connection – Chicago, IL

January 26-28, 2008 Youth Workers' Connection – Chicago, IL

January 28-31, 2008 Covenant Midwinter Conference – Chicago, IL

February 23, 2008 VERITAS Conference – Twin Cities Location

April 4-5, 2008 MOVE (Mission Outreach Venture Experience) – First Covenant Church, Minneapolis, MN

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
E-mail: 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.



Summer plans?

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The glorious summer season is the time to plan for the seasons that are coming. Does your church need a fresh vision? What changes do you need to make?

Who are you praying for? Have there been significant changes in your community that will require you to change the way you have been doing ministry? This is the time to pray, to discuss and to plan. Your

conference staff is here to help you with this process in any way that we can. Don't hesitate to call us!

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