



## Youth Ministry events impacting student lives and empowering youth leaders in the NWC

By Ginny Olson, Director of Youth Ministry

### MUUUCE 2014


Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines “epic” as “extending beyond the usual or ordinary, especially in size or scope”—an apt description for this year’s annual MUUUCE (Most Unbelievable, Ultimate, Urban Camping Experience), which took place at Crossroads Church in Woodbury, MN, Aug. 7-9. Epic was the theme woven throughout the 3-day retreat of over 600 middle schoolers, jr. highers and their leaders from 42 churches. From the moment they drove up, students knew they were going to experience an out-of-the-ordinary event designed for them—an event that communicated that God loves early adolescents in an epic way—from the powerful worship and preaching, to the awesome decorations, to the hard-working volunteers.



Gabby, an 8th grader, summed up the weekend: “MUUUCE is having a great message with friends you love and you meet new people to have fun with.”

Over 200 Crossroads volunteers created an amazing atmosphere by doing things like standing in the summer sun cheering the buses and vans as they arrived, and manning a massive welcome party with enormous inflatable games, a giant gaga ball game, carpet ball, video games,

ping pong, foosball and cotton candy, mini-donuts and popcorn. They transformed the church into a colossal beach party complete with surfboards and beach balls and a MUUUCE store.

They were there to feed the crew early morning breakfast (imagine 28 gallons of milk) and enough pizza for a small town (1,220 slices, not including gluten-free options). Another crew of volunteers would come in to clean up after the students would head out to Valleyfair, or Pinz (bowling, laser tag arena and arcade) or to bed. Yet another group brought treats for all the youth workers to have when they needed a break. Hanging with the students throughout the days and nights were youth pastors, volunteer youth leaders, and even a few senior pastors. They led small groups, grabbed 



↳ teachable moments and turned them into deeper conversations, laughed, and prayed and slept in massive, un-air-conditioned school gyms.

Steve Fitzhugh, interim youth pastor at The Sanctuary in Minneapolis, reflected, “MUUUCE had the perfect blend of fun, activity, excitement, worship and inspiration.”

Jenny Gullickson, Youth Ministry Associate at Excelsior Covenant, Excelsior, MN, has seen God at work over numerous MUUUCES. “As a leader, you come thinking, ‘Here we go, God. Show up in a stupid, ridiculous way,’” she said. Like screaming the Gospel over the noise on the bus to a kid who’s got questions, or praying with a student as he/she is terrified on the Rip Cord at Valleyfair and then sitting down and talking about it on a bench. “We’re tired and exhausted and yet ... we keep seeing God moments.”

## Adventures in Leadership

For over 25 years, the Conference has led a weeklong leadership intensive for high school students—known as Adventures in Leadership (AIL)—with the goal of developing strong, young leaders who will step

up to lead in their churches and their communities. AIL 2014 took place at Adventurous Christians the week of June 21-28.

Churches nominate AIL participants as high schoolers who show strong leadership potential. This group of select students spends a week up in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area learning about Biblical leadership models and character qualities, spiritual disciplines and wilderness skills.

They put their knowledge into action by heading out on a canoe trip in small groups where each student leads for half a day, and then receives constructive feedback from the accompanying youth pastor, AC guide and the other students.

As one participant said, “It gives a rare chance to lead without serious consequences and shows how to lead in a Godly way.”

Mitch Downing, one of the youth pastors serving at AIL, summed it up well: “Adventures in Leadership explores the idea of Christian leadership on an extremely thorough level. People are challenged mentally, physically and spiritually to launch upcoming leaders to a place where they see the need to step up and fill a void in the Kingdom.”

## EMERGE

Developing as an adolescent leader was the focus of the Emerge retreat at Lake Beauty Bible Camp at the end of August. Students in middle school were included for the first time and joined with high school students from churches around the Conference. Participants were challenged to think about what it means to be a leader who follows Jesus as they spent time facing their fears on the ropes course, working as a team on the obstacle course, reflecting on how their God-given personality impacts their leadership, and discerning God’s voice for themselves and others.

There were how-to seminars on leading as an athlete, counseling your peers, starting a campus club, designing and leading games and more. Adventures in Leadership alumni helped lead worship as well as led devotions and a seminar on how to lead a Bible study. The retreat was put together by NWC youth pastors Mikey Bechtold (Crossview Covenant, North Mankato, MN), Rocky Hovda (First Covenant, Willmar, MN), Zack Klein (Maywood Covenant, Foley, MN), and Jim Murphy (Bemidji Covenant, Bemidji, MN).



# Dr. Kara Powell presents parenting seminar at Minnehaha Academy

*By Kara Stromberg, Director of Children & Family Ministry*

In a first-of-its-kind collaborative ministry event between the Northwest Conference and Minnehaha Academy, the two organizations partnered to host Dr. Kara Powell from Fuller Youth Institute, presenting "Practical and Tested Ideas to Build Family Faith," a free seminar for parents and grandparents.

Powell presented new Sticky Faith research directed toward families who desire to raise kids with a strong faith that "sticks" beyond high school. Practical information informed by research reminded parents that children mirror what they see parents doing and offered practical ways to engage in faith conversations at home, in addition to creating warm home environments, creating opportunities for quality time, and finally, remembering that parents need the support of a community. Instead of one adult to minister to five children, she issued the challenge of building a team of five caring adults to minister to each child. Feedback about the evening was positive from the nearly 150 attendees, and parents expressed gratitude for the opportunity to think strategically about how to raise this next generation of Christ followers.



## Upcoming Youth Events

*By Ginny Olson, Director of Youth Ministry*

### VIVE

This half-day college readiness event is designed with under-represented students in mind. A partnership with North Park University means it is free for high school and middle school students, as well as their parents.

VIVE will take place on Nov. 8 from 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at Hope Academy in Minneapolis.

### CHIC

CHIC registration is under way. How are you getting there? The NWC provides bus transportation for churches for \$205/person. No need to worry about exhausted drivers or getting stranded when the church van breaks down. Plus, every rider gets a NWC-designed T-shirt and breakfast the morning we leave CHIC.

## IMAGINE

*A day for those serving Children & Families*

## Imagine 2014 to feature speaker, author, teacher Jim Wideman

*By Kara Stromberg, Director of Children & Family Ministry*

**WHO:** Children & Family Ministry Volunteers

**DATE:** Saturday, Nov. 8, 2014

**TIME:** 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

**LOCATION:** Salem Covenant Church, 2655 5th St NW, New Brighton, MN 55112

**COST:** FREE!

The Children & Family Ministry Commission of the Northwest Conference is excited to sponsor "Imagine," an event designed to:

- encourage and connect children and family ministry volunteers,
- provide training for your ministry team, and
- facilitate space to share ideas.

The event is FREE and open to anyone who works with kids and families. Lunch is included. We hope you can attend with your volunteer team.

**SPEAKER:** Jim Wideman is a speaker, teacher, author, leadership coach and ministry consultant with 4 decades of ministry experience. Jim will share practical information to encourage and inspire your ministry volunteers to lead well.

Please RSVP as a group by Friday, Oct. 31, to [kara@northwestconference.org](mailto:kara@northwestconference.org) or 612.721.4893.

# '50 by '25: Our Mission to Plant' sees 4 new churches since Annual Meeting

By Mike Brown, Director of Church Planting



At our Northwest Conference Annual Meeting in May, we introduced “50 by '25: Our Mission to Plant,” a new initiative to see at least 50 churches planted in the Northwest Conference by the year 2025.

Currently, only about 17 percent of our neighbors throughout the Northwest Conference attend church on any given Sunday. Statistically, we have been planting only 1/8 the number of churches we need just to keep up with population growth. Our towns and cities are also becoming increasingly diverse. The mission field is huge and there are so many opportunities to share the Good News of Jesus Christ.

By announcing and committing to this new mission, the Northwest Conference, the Evangelical Covenant Church, and our partner churches throughout the region have decided to accelerate the pace of Church Planting—and hopefully in the process, alter the dynamics in our communities and neighborhoods.

## How's it going so far?

We've prayerfully been working on this new goal. We need each individual and every church to consider how they might resource and give to see the family of God expand over the next 10 years in the Northwest Conference. You can contact Mike Brown, Director of Church Planting ([mike@northwestconference.org](mailto:mike@northwestconference.org) or 612.721.4893) if you would like to host a presentation at your church, or if you as an individual are feeling the call of God to give or to be a part of a new work.

We also wanted to give you an update on what has happened since the campaign was launched at our

Annual Meeting. Since May, we have seen the birth of four new church plants in the Northwest Conference.



In May, Pastor Jeff Olson planted Catalyst Covenant Church, which meets at Luther Seminary in Minneapolis. The church has just begun once-a-month “preview” worship services and has around 100 people attending. The majority are people who were previously not church attenders, and several are new believers.

Catalyst has partnerships with Emmanuel Covenant Church in Shoreview, MN, Salem Covenant Church in New Brighton, MN, and Christ Church in Rhode Island, where Jeff served prior to coming back to the Twin Cities.



In June, we launched Genesis Covenant Church. Pastor Steve Wiens and his church are meeting at Sabes Jewish Community Center in St. Louis Park, MN. They have had two monthly “preview” worship

services and are running just under 400 in worship attendance. Again, many are new to church. Genesis has partnership support from Christ Presbyterian Church in Edina, MN, and many individual and family partnerships. Pastor Steve came to the Covenant after serving for many years at Church of the Open Door in Maple Grove, MN.

Pastor Jamie Staples began planting as lead pastor at Renew Covenant Church in Eau Claire, WI, in August. Jamie was the Associate Pastor at First Covenant Church in Redwing, MN, prior to being assessed and recommended to plant. Renew is just beginning and is in the gathering stage. They haven't settled on a meeting location yet, but the church has partners in First Covenant Church in Redwing, MN, Cedarbrook Church in Menomonie, WI, Zion Covenant Church in Ellsworth, WI, Bethel Covenant Church in Ellsworth, WI, First Covenant Church in River Falls, WI, and United Covenant Church in Clear Lake, WI, along with many individual partners.

We also planted New Covenant Church on Oct. 1, with Pastor Mauricio Dell'Arciprete. Pastor Mauricio was formerly on staff at First Covenant Church in Minneapolis. The church is working on securing worship space to meet in Minneapolis and is temporarily meeting at the south campus of Minnehaha Academy. New Covenant has about 100 people committed to the ministry, according to Pastor Mauricio, and they are working on developing several ministry partnerships.

**Look for more “50 by '25” updates in future communications, and please remember to pray for all of our NWC Church Plants.**

# Welcome Sandy Norris!

*By Mark Stromberg, Superintendent*

At the 2014 Northwest Conference Annual Meeting, a budget was approved that provided funds to call a Director of Finance to the NWC office. I am pleased to report that the Rev. Sandra (Sandy) Norris was selected and approved for this new role by the NWC Executive Board at its July meeting, effective Sept. 1.



This position will prove to be invaluable, serving as a resource to our existing churches and their finance personnel, whether they be staff members or volunteers. Further, as we seek to live into “50 by ’25: Our Mission to Plant”—a new Church Planting initiative aimed at starting 50 new churches in our region by the end of 2025—Sandy will provide the necessary skills to ensure that things are done in a fiscally responsible way. She will assist these new churches in setting up their financial systems and help these young churches do the right things in the right way at the right time.

Sandy has already been working with many NWC churches through her business “Counting House.” She will continue to serve these churches, if it be their desire, as a staff member at the NWC. Moreover, she will also be available to connect with even more of our churches. Some of her services will be on a fee-for-service basis. In previous roles, Sandy served as Pastor of Administration at Roseville Covenant Church in Roseville, MN, as well as Associate Superintendent of the East Coast Conference. She and her husband, Jeff, have one daughter and are active at First Covenant Church (St. Paul). Please join me in welcoming Sandy to the NWC staff. Like the rest of us, she is here to serve you.

## CHET Northwest Conference

### Did you know ...

- CHET stands for Centro Hispano de Estudios Teológicos (in English, Hispanic Center for Theological Studies)
- CHET is headquartered in Compton (Los Angeles), CA, and has satellites throughout the United States, Latin America and Spain
- CHET Northwest Conference, which primarily serves immigrants from Latin America, meets at Minnehaha Academy, which was originally founded to serve Swedish immigrants
- CHET Northwest Conference begins its 8th semester in September 2014
- CHET’s pre-ministerial program is six semesters long, focusing on the life of Jesus based on the Gospel of Matthew
- Every semester of study costs each CHET NWC student \$170
- Course instructors are all currently pastors or members of NWC churches
- Superintendent Mark Stromberg and Pastor Juan Ovando of Verbo en Acción Covenant Church have been elected to serve on the national CHET Board

**Learn more about CHET NWC at [chetnorthwestconference.org](http://chetnorthwestconference.org)**

## Pastoral Care & Development builds connection

*By Jeff Burton, Director of Pastoral Care & Development*

There have been a number of summer connections and projects we have worked on that expand on our ministry to pastors and ministry staff.

One of the new connections is with the Faith Community Nurses (formerly Parish nurses). Their ministry has always been so integrated with pastoral ministry that it is an important and natural connection for our department.

Also, this fall at the Ministerial Association Retreat, we are doing our initial training and orienting of our expanded Clergy Care Team. This team now includes 20 pastors in our Conference that have committed to care ministry to the credentialed clergy in their districts.

Speaking of districts, another summer project has been to redistrict the Twin Cities area from one large district to four districts that are closer in size to our other 12 districts around the Conference. That brings our total number of NWC districts to 16.

Finally, a project very much in process right now is a reshaping of the concept of the Pastoral Relations Committees (PRC). From multiple conversations with pastors it seems like there is need for improving and refining the concept in some significant ways. Look for more details on this development soon.





## AC launches Building for the Future Capital Campaign

*By Mike Nelson, Camp Director*

From the time Adventurous Christians put its roots down on the Gunflint Trail, the ministry (formerly owned by the NWC) has embraced simplicity, resourcefulness and frugality in the vision for its buildings and structures. The largest retreat cabin, Bosworth—named for one of the original founders of AC—had to be closed September 2013 due to many issues not worth confronting, fixing or eliminating. A new retreat building will be conventionally built, but simply finished. This financial commitment (\$260,000) is daunting, like a 600-rod portage with a 100' elevation difference. We cannot do this alone.

I have given this burden to our Lord Jesus. We need His hand and assistance at this time. We are appealing to the people and organizations who value wilderness ministry as a vital part of Christian faith. Your gifts toward this campaign will help provide a place of retreat for all people who desire to find God in His creation. We aim to have 50% of funding raised by early winter of 2014 and be open for guests by December 2015.

Visit [adventurouschristians.org/building-for-the-future/](http://adventurouschristians.org/building-for-the-future/) to see pictures and learn more about the Capital Campaign.

## Maywood Covenant opens The ROC youth center

*By Jeff Burton, Director of Pastoral Care & Development*

The ROC, a new youth center in Foley, MN, opened its doors in June. The building—that in the past was a clothing store, a series of restaurants, and has been vacant for the past 4 years—has been transformed once again.

When the missional heartbeat of Maywood Covenant Church encountered community need and divine opportunity, things happened quickly. A missional opportunity related to the vacant building in downtown Foley came up that captured the hearts of church leaders. The location was unique in many ways; adjacent to the movie theater, next to public housing apartments, and a 10-minute walk from the Foley Schools. Pastor Al Monson, Youth Pastor Zach Klein, and the leaders of Maywood Covenant began to pray and consider that God might be up to something unexpected.

I remember Pastor Al sharing the idea for prayer at the District Pastors meeting in March in St. Cloud, MN. We talked after the meeting and I connected him with Jon Kramka, NWC director of congregational vitality. It was exciting for the NWC office to hear of such ministry passion. By April, the staff and leaders at Maywood presented a proposal to the congregation for opening the youth center, which was enthusiastically supported.

The ROC is open Tuesdays and Thursdays, but there is an emerging vision for greater ministry use of the building. There have been many affirmations from the community along the way—including a lot of donated equipment and labor—but nothing beats a great first day. On June 24, one of the



students who dropped in heard about summer camp at Lake Beauty Bible Camp (LBBC). She picked up on the enthusiasm she was hearing from some of the other students and indicated she would like to go. Klein helped her with the application.

When Monson left the center that afternoon, he stopped at the grocery store on the way home. While there, he met a woman from the community who asked how the first day went. Monson told of the girl who signed up for camp. The woman (not from Maywood Covenant) asked how the student was going to pay for camp.

"We're still working on that," Monson told her. The woman wrote out a check on the spot for the entire camp fee!

It is exciting to see two of our NWC Ministry Priorities—Congregational Vitality and Children, Youth & Family Ministry—lived out so beautifully. Local church, camp, conference, community; we really are "in it together."

# Choir Director finds 'a family at Bethlehem'

Tesfa Wondemagegnehu has been making a name for himself in the choral community since moving to the Twin Cities from Tennessee last year, and was recently chosen to lead a Minnesota Public Radio (MPR) initiative to promote music education in the public schools. He'll also head up a new group of young singers, the APM (American Public Media) Radio Choir.

Bethlehem Covenant Church in Minneapolis is thrilled that he also happens to be their choir director.

A lengthy feature in the Star Tribune accompanied by a video showing "Won" directing the choir describes how choral music changed his life after he was kicked out of high school for selling stolen pagers. His mother suggested he audition at a Memphis performing arts school. There, he was mentored by a choral director he describes as "a mean old grandma with no filter."

Wondemagegnehu (pronounced won-dih-MAWG-knee-you) is a joyous director with exuberant spirit that inspires those around him. Dick Sundberg, the church's president and a choir member, told the Star

Tribune, "Most choir directors struggle to get their singers to watch them. With Tesfa, you can't help it, he's so animated, always asking us to sing with our 'big mama voice.'"

Before he was hired in his new position, Wondemagegnehu had been working part-time with MPR, which streams classical music 24 hours a day, and also served as assistant artistic director for VocalEssence, a renowned choral music program.

He also surprised the people at Bethlehem Covenant when he applied to be their part-time choir director. He had found the job opening online.

"He had just taken the job as the assistant artistic director at VocalEssence directed by Philip Brunel," says pastor Ryan Eikenbary-Barber. "He beat out 90 other candidates in a national search. We saw his amazing résumé and assumed



that he was overqualified for our part-time position. He was looking for a church, not just a job. He could have kept his job with VocalEssence while taking the promotion at MPR, but he prioritized his job at church. Tesfa has found a family at Bethlehem. It is a joy to work with him."

"Whoa-oh-oh, break free, come on now," Wondemagegnehu exhorted the choir at a recent rehearsal. "Come on now, take me to CHURCH." The choir members will tell you, he takes them there.

*This article originally appeared in the Covenant Newswire.*

## 2015 Annual Meeting

*By Bryan Malley, Director of Communications*

Plans are already under way for the 2015 Northwest Conference Annual Meeting, which will take place at Salem Covenant Church in New Brighton, MN, on April 16-18, 2015. The theme for the upcoming meeting is "Strengthen Churches," and components of the event will focus on Congregational Vitality in our churches.

We're very excited to have John Wenrich, director of Congregational Vitality, Church Growth and Evangelism for the Evangelical Covenant Church, joining us as our speaker. It's not too early to mark your calendars and begin considering who from your church should attend next year's meeting. Look for more details in the coming months!

## STRENGTHEN CHURCHES NORTHWEST CONFERENCE



SALEM COVENANT  
CHURCH

ANNUAL  
MEETING

NEW BRIGHTON,  
MINNESOTA

# News from NWC Affiliated Ministries

## Solid Rock Discipleship Program Update

Aug. 26 marked the beginning of a new ministry in the Northwest Conference as the Solid Rock Discipleship Program welcomed the first cohort of students (right). An extension of the ministry of Lake Beauty Bible Camp, Solid Rock is a yearlong program for young adults who have graduated from high school.

This first year has brought 11 students from five states to live, learn, serve and worship in a small community. During the first few weeks students have gone through orientation, helped serve at Labor Day Family Camp, and started working through the program curriculum. The fall courses the students are taking are "Introduction to the Bible," "Cornerstone Seminar," "History of the Church," and "Holy Land"—all taught by Covenant pastors. At the end of October, the students will be taking a two-week tour of the Holy Land through Biblical sights in Israel and Jordan.

Thank you for your prayers as this new ministry grows and this first cohort of young adults seek God this year. For more information visit [lbbc.com](http://lbbc.com). To follow more Solid Rock updates Like our Facebook page at [facebook.com/solidrocklbbc](https://facebook.com/solidrocklbbc).



## CRIM Retreat 2014

The 21st annual CRIM (Covenanters Retired in Ministry) Retreat is now history. Intended for retired and soon-to-be retired ministers, missionaries, staff members and spouses, the retreat is held each year during the week following Labor Day at Covenant Pines Bible Camp.

Dr. Jay Phelan taught and challenged attendees with ideas presented in his latest book, "Essential Eschatology." A primary theme of the book is that kingdom life is not only the Christian's future hope, but there is a need to "bring the future into the present" and act as kingdom people in our daily journey.

The group was also inspired by life stories from ministerial spouse, Jinny Larson, and former missionary, Ann Carlson. Judy Swanberg, associate director of Pastoral Care

& Development for the NWC, preached the communion sermon, and the group joined in the singing of many historic and contemporary hymns. Some of the new participants indicated on the evaluation form that this is an event they will not miss in future years.

## Faith Community Nurse Ministry info

The NWC Faith Community Nurse Ministry Commission is encouraging Registered Nurses to consider the opportunity to serve as an FCN in an Evangelical Covenant Congregation.

Faith Community Nurses complete a Foundation or Preparation Course before beginning a ministry with a congregation. The NWC FCN Commission offers a scholarship of \$150 to the RN upon completion of a preparation course.

Additional information can be requested from: Corrine Benson, FCN Chair, NWC Faith Community Nurse Commission, [corrine44@gmail.com](mailto:corrine44@gmail.com) or 651.356.6487.

## 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

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## NWC Calendar

**11.8 » Imagine** – Salem Covenant Church, New Brighton, MN

**11.8 » VIVE** – Hope Academy, Minneapolis, MN

**1.10 » RECHARGE** – Location TBD

**1.26-30 » Midwinter Conference** – Denver, CO

**3.1-3 » Children, Youth & Family Ministry Sabbath Retreat** – Covenant Pines Bible Camp, McGregor, MN

**4.16-18 » NWC Annual Meeting** – Salem Covenant Church, New Brighton, MN

**7.12-17 » CHIC 2015** – University of Tennessee