

# TO SHARE JOINTLY IN A WORK OF GOD

Currently, I have the privilege of representing all Conference superintendents on the executive board for the Evangelical Covenant Church.



While at Covenant offices in Chicago, board members are given badges which serve as key fobs; allowing them to unlock rooms and get to other floors via the elevator. Recently, I was given a badge with a picture of the Rev. Gilbert Otteson, a pastor who has long-since departed from this earthly scene.

During his ministry, he served as an associate pastor at First Covenant Church in Minneapolis with two different senior pastors, Gustaf F. Johnson and Paul S. Rees.

On this particular badge, Otteson is wearing his military uniform from WWII; something that is especially meaningful to me because it was during the war that he led my own father to the Lord while in Europe. My dad's conversion to Jesus was rather dramatic, and he is another example of the power of God at work to redeem a life and renew a heart. This is truly amazing as we consider the fact that my father was a child of First

Covenant, and God allowed one of his very own pastors to then serve as his chaplain in the army on the other side of the world! What are the odds?

Suffice it to say that every time I go to Covenant offices, I always request the same badge, as it gives me joy and comfort to wear Otteson's picture around my neck and close to my heart.

It also reminds me that all of our work in and through the churches and ministries of the Northwest Conference is centered in our desire to see lives redeemed and hearts renewed so that men and women, girls and boys, are transformed by this same gospel message—even as Pastor Otteson was used by God to transform the life of my own dad.

It is to this end that we do our work with churches, pastors and lay leaders. It is why our NWC focus remains resolutely on Congregational Vitality, Church Planting and Children, Youth & Families. It is why we serve our churches and also seek to unite our churches in service together. It is why we join as Covenant people ... to share jointly in a work of God that is bigger and grander than any one of us ... or any one of our churches. It is why we remember that, while our work for Christ may not always be



easy, it is always eternally worthwhile!

This is something Pastor Otteson understood. This is something my own father experienced.

## MA JUNIORS WIN STATE CLASSIC DEBATE TITLE

Whether the War on Drugs has been a policy beneficial to the Western Hemisphere was the topic argued at the 2012 Classic Debate State



Festival sponsored by the Minnesota State High School League and held at South St. Paul High School on November 30-December 1. Minnehaha Academy juniors Michael Everett and Hugh Mayo defeated teams from Benilde-St. Margaret and Rochester Mayo in the quarterfinals and semifinals before defeating Cara Desmond and Jay Schuffenhauer of Eastview High School by a judges' decision of 3-0.



## REDHAWKS WIN THE 2A STATE BOYS BASKETBALL TITLE

Congratulations to the Minnehaha Academy Redhawks Boys Basketball team on their first-ever state title. The team beat the Dragons of Litchfield, MN, in a 56-54 win on March 23.

## INTERNATIONAL SPACE STATION PROGRAM



Minnehaha Academy launched an experiment to the International Space Station on Friday, March 1, aboard the SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket. MA is the only high school in the midwest and only one of eight schools in the nation to send a student-designed and built microlab experiment to the ISS.



## NWC Staff Vehicles

The Northwest Conference (NWC) is a geographic mission region of the Evangelical Covenant Church with over 140 churches in Minnesota, the Dakotas, and western Wisconsin.

Enccompassed within this region are also 5 camps, Minnehaha Academy (comprising 2 separate campuses), 3 group homes for developmentally disabled adults, and a retirement community with accompanying nursing facility.



In seeking to both serve our churches and unite our churches in service together, the ministry staff of the NWC spends a significant amount of time “out in the field,” working with individual churches, pastors, and lay leaders. As a result, good and reliable transportation is essential, as many miles are driven each year in the fulfillment of staff responsibilities and responding to the needs and requests of NWC constituents.

Therefore, the NWC is currently looking for an individual who would be willing to donate a low-mid mile, late model car for use by NWC ministry staff. Besides providing dependable transportation, the person donating the vehicle would also be helping to reduce the amount of money spent from our budget on transportation costs, thereby increasing the available dollars for other ministry needs and initiatives.

A receipt would be given to verify a charitable deduction for tax purposes.

If interested, please contact Cheryl Theilen at the NWC office at 612-721-4893 or 800-756-6692.

Thank you for your consideration.

## NWC news in your inbox

Get our monthly UPDATE e-mail newsletter to learn more about NWC news and events. E-mail [bryan@nwc-cov.org](mailto:bryan@nwc-cov.org) to sign up.

# ECC INTERNATIONAL FALLS WORKS TO FIND ITS BIBLICAL STORY

One step we have found helpful for churches on their journey in vitality is a process we call “Finding Your Biblical Story.” The purpose is to allow congregations to see themselves and their ministry in light of the Scriptures. It provides them a means of interpreting how the Spirit is moving in their current season of life and ministry, and to see themselves in light of God’s larger plan. Following is one congregation’s experience in finding their story.

*By Jim Hummel*

As part of our vitality journey, the Biblical Story Work Group, made up of several church members, came together to discover our “Biblical Story.” Each person was asked to review, pray and discuss a biblical story that God had used for encouragement in his/her own life. We were asked to come prepared during our gathering to seek God’s direction for the Biblical Story that best represents where we are as a church right now, how God is moving among us, or the challenges before us.

We began with a prayer of blessing over our time. As I spoke to our group I confessed that I had no idea where God was leading me, or us as a group, but that I had complete trust that He would show us the way.

We then individually discussed a biblical story that had significance to us based on how it had impacted our lives and our walk with God. We again prayed for God’s wisdom and guidance. We all felt perhaps inadequate, clueless and generally had no idea where God was taking us other than recognizing we had an earnest desire to hear His voice that night, that it would be clear and, as a body seeking His will, it would bring conviction.

We separated and for 45 minutes took time to be alone with God, searching the Bible, its stories and individual verses, as the Spirit led us.

After we all came back together I continued to follow the directions provided to us for this task, which was to ask each person to share the story they sensed God had led them to and why it was significant to our church now. I emphasized that no one was to comment on any of the stories presented.

Each story was described on a white board to catch the theme as it was expressed. We were then to pray and come to a consensus on the story that seemed most applicable to everyone.

We heard stories from Daniel, Matthew, Hebrews, Nehemiah and more. Themes ranged from relying on God, to running with eyes on Jesus, and that prayer is essential to our journey.

By now a theme had developed as God spoke to each of us. A theme that showed the story of a church that had been firmly rooted in the Word, had sowed seed for Christ, but one that was losing its first love. It seemed our focus was more on our self as a body than others outside the church, lacking growth spiritually and in seeing others coming to Christ. Though we had agreed not to comment on each story, a surge of emotions started to grow within our group that led us to openly express a conviction that we as a church are not where God wanted us to be individually or as a body of believers. Repentance was weighing heavily on our hearts.

The eighth and final story was from Revelations 3:14-22 involving the vision John received concerning the church at Laodicea. Message: we are not hot or cold but lukewarm and the fear that we were deserving of being “spit out” by God. Though we were rich (we had stable finances, a wonderful facility, and a comfortable ministry) we had become complacent and were not fully aware that we really had nothing for God.

The Spirit quickly, unanimously and easily convicted each of us that this eighth and final story was our Biblical Story! Each of us had professed a strong emotion that this message summed up what God had laid on each of our hearts—that now came together as a picture of where we had been, where we are and where God wants us to be.

We immediately felt the extreme emotion of praise and thanksgiving that God had spoken to us that evening in a clear, concise and complete manner and yet felt overwhelmed by the harshness of the emotion of wondering if indeed we were at the point as a body of believers that God did indeed want to ‘spit us out’ of His mouth. That Jesus, as he proclaimed with the Church at Laodicea, was not inside our church but had been left outside the door and was knocking, desiring to come back inside.

As God continues to work with us, it was also clear that we desire to repent, pray, grow in the knowledge of Christ and reach out beyond our own desires. A church that is vital, missional, repentant, praying and used once again to change lives for the Kingdom.

# HOW BECOMING A PARENT MADE ME A BAD YOUTH PASTOR (AND A BETTER ONE ALSO)

By Todd Kardell, Youth Pastor at Redeemer Covenant Church in Brooklyn Park, MN

In my early years of youth ministry, I had been married a few years but was still without kids. The hours were flexible but plentiful. I could easily pour myself into every invitation extended to me from a student or family. Parent meetings, sporting events, concerts, recitals, late night excursions, and long conversations with struggling teens were always possible and a lack of boundaries just seemed like good ministry.

Then I had kids and the freedom of time was no longer feasible—nor was it healthy. I was forced into a life of drawing more clear boundaries between ministry life and home life. I found myself questioning whether I was doing as good of a job in my ministry role to youth. In addition to the incredible shift of questioning when and if I was “trading time” or sacrificing one thing for another, I also felt like I was a little less cool to incoming students. My time changed, my commitments changed, my priorities changed, I changed.

I saw through the eyes of a parent for the very first time. In many areas, I lack the zeal

and happy-fun-guy mentality that I had in my early years of ministry, but I gained a perspective on youth ministry that I could not have comprehended prior to being a parent myself. Partnerships with parents increased, telling the other side of the story to a student on the burden of parenting was communicated more than ever before. Modeling healthy boundaries to be sure to care for my own family was increased dramatically, and was critical to teaching students what the role of a Christian husband and father is to look like.

I noticed that right around this time there was a growing shift within our church ministry that brought students coming to our church from vastly more difficult family situations than in previous years. I was given the responsibility to help reveal the process of how we mend broken relationships, how we seek reconciliation, how we live well together by the grace of God, and what a Christian spouse



and parent is actually supposed to look like.

God made me a parent, in just the right time for my ministry. What at first felt like a ministry limitation became a strength. Our students and families needed to see me as a parent just as much as a youth pastor.

When I talk with young adults about their faith journey throughout the youth group years they don't mention the late nights I sat and talked with them, they don't talk about the time we spent an hour in the drive-through ordering food for 15 people in the church van. They talk about the time they had dinner at my house with my family. They talk about the time my kids said something silly to them in the car. They talk about the relationship they see between myself and my wife, myself and my kids.

The way I minister as a youth pastor looks very different—sometimes it feels less impactful, and sometimes it seems like it is inspiring more lifelong positive changes for students and families than ever before. Is it better or worse? I'm not sure, but for an ever-increasing list of students who have no idea what a God-led family life looks like, it's just what the doctor ordered.

## MAKING CONNECTIONS IN CHILDREN & FAMILY MINISTRY

By Kara Stromberg, NWC Director of Children & Family Ministry

One of the challenges to children and family ministry in the Northwest Conference is simply figuring out who is doing what. Many churches rely on volunteers or very part time staff, that would love to connect with others but don't have the gift of time or budget to make that happen. I recently met Robin Kragness from Emmaus Road Covenant Church, a church plant meeting at the Hopkins Center for the Performing Arts. As a part time employee, Robin splits her time between office administration (10 hours/week) and children's ministry (2 hours/week).

As I struggled to make my head stop spinning over the enormity of running a children's ministry on 2 hours a week, I realized that like many of our children's ministry leaders, Robin makes this happen through her creative willpower, ingenuity, and sheer determination. Robin has created a wonderful environment for kids and families at Emmaus Road, but being new to the Covenant, had many questions. The idea that there was a Conference office available to provide resources and help make connections was quite new.

Meanwhile, Judy Peterson from Excelsior Covenant in Excelsior, MN, has been ministering to children and families for quite a while. Even though she is transitioning to another ministry area within her church, she brings a wealth of experience to children and family ministry.



Geographically, Excelsior Covenant and Emmaus Road are not far from each other. I contacted both, and Robin and Judy arranged to meet for coffee. They hit it off, and decided to meet for lunch each month. They've now met four times and plan to continue.

Robin's perspective: "We're a small, growing children's ministry. Judy is such an encouragement. She's just what I needed because I had no one and I was not accountable. I'm so glad that she's in my life."

They talk curriculum, future planning, incorporating scripture into lesson plans, and their own families.

Judy reciprocates the praise: "Robin is a delightful person ... this friendship has been a real gift, and I'm learning, too, even though our situations are so different."

This connection has resulted in practical partnerships, as well. Emmaus Road recently hosted a family fun night, using Excelsior's gym and equipment. An incredible gift to a mobile church plant, Judy states that it is Excelsior's desire to share what they have with others. There were dads playing basketball, climbing kids, nursing babies, and a family movie shown in the youth room. The gift of space allowed this growing, mobile church plant to offer an evening of fellowship for their families.

There are more stories like Judy and Robin's. As the Covenant Church, we really are in this together. How can we help your church get connected?

# MAINSTREET COVENANT CHURCH

MainStreet Covenant Church recently held the Grand Opening of its dynamic new venue in the Stonegate Plaza strip mall in downtown Mound on March 17 after a kick-off concert on March 9. Both events drew capacity crowds with standing room only for the first Sunday service. The venue is designed to feel more like a coffee shop than a church building.

MainStreet Pastor Jeremy Berg said, "The vision of MainStreet is to imitate the Apostle Paul who engaged unbelievers not just on Sunday morning in the sanctuary but 'in the marketplace daily with all who happen to be there'" (Acts 17:17).

Berg said the idea for a church acting as a community-gathering place began from his experiences when he was involved with youth ministry in Mound a few years back. In 2005 he began using music events to connect with local area teens.

"I noticed a trend of people running away from the church," he said. "We started hosting live music events, and young people flooded the place looking for a spot to gather."

The new building features a café gathering area and an auditorium for hosting open mic nights, hot topic discussion forums, providing an after school youth hangout, a place for community groups such as book clubs, Zumba, etc.

"Every city needs a place for people to connect and grow," Berg said. "Why should coffee shops have all the fun when we're serving up something far more potent and



MainStreet Covenant Church recently celebrated the opening of its new facility in downtown Mound, MN.

life impacting than mere coffee!"

MainStreet began this ambitious building project only a few months into their first year as a church, believing this kind of a space is what is required to be faithful to God's unique vision for MainStreet.

"God has been faithful every time we have stepped out in faith and obedience," Berg said. "We raised the money for the project in only a few months' time thanks to the generosity of many supporters, especially our sister church Excelsior Covenant."

Berg shares how he first peeked through the windows of their new space over 7 years ago and wondered if that empty storefront might someday be used for ministry in Mound.

"God honors big dreams when we place them in his hands," Berg said. "After a year and a half of meeting first in a senior center and later in a nursing home facility, it was a pretty amazing moment to stand up that first Sunday and say, 'Welcome to Main Street—for real!'"

To learn more about MainStreet, visit [mainstreetcovenant.org](http://mainstreetcovenant.org)

## NORTHWEST CONFERENCE CALENDAR

**JUNE 15-22** // Adventures in Leadership – Adventurous Christians, Grand Marais, MN

**JUNE 27-29** // ECC Annual Meeting – Detroit, MI

**AUGUST 15-17** // MUUUCE – Crossroads Church, Woodbury, MN

**AUGUST 15-18** // ECC Triennial – San Diego, CA

**AUGUST 23-25** // Emerge High School Leadership Retreat – Lake Beauty Bible Camp, Long Prairie, MN

**SEPTEMBER 14** // Converge Metro – Brookdale Covenant, Brooklyn Center, MN

**SEPTEMBER 28** // Converge North – Grace Covenant, Little Falls, MN

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developing leaders. thriving churches.

*The Northwest Conference is a regional conference of the Evangelical Covenant Church. We are approximately 140 churches in Minnesota, Wisconsin, North Dakota, South Dakota and Iowa.*