

# MORE THAN SAILBOATS AND SEASHELLS

## NWC STAFF RESTRUCTURE MIRRORS STATED PRIORITIES

In his book "Don't Waste Your Life," Dr. John Piper recounts a story shared in Readers Digest entitled "The Good Life." The story is about a couple that retired in their early 50s and moved to Florida. In the story, they shared how they had been able to fulfill the "American Dream." They golfed in the morning, sailed in the afternoon, went out for dinner with friends, and collected seashells along the beach each evening.

Piper observed that this can be a very tragic way to live life, if there is nothing more to it. He states, "I want my life to be about something more than sailboats and seashells." And so it is with those who follow Christ. We want our lives to count for something!

Similarly, we want the work of the Northwest Conference to matter. We want it to be Christ-centered and effective. We want our work to bear fruit for the Kingdom of God.

As a result, we are restructuring and redefining roles as we move forward. In fact, we are structuring the staff to mirror the stated priorities of the Northwest Conference. These priorities are Congrega-

tional Vitality, Church Planting and Children, Youth & Family.

As of July 1, Jon Kramka is taking on the role of director of congregational vitality. He has served the NWC faithfully over the past 10 years working in the area of mission development in the local church. He has also provided leadership for youth ministry, urban and ethnic ministry, and compassion and justice initiatives through the conference. In this new role, Jon will be assuming a major responsibility for our work with existing churches in the areas of church health assessment, revitalization and strategic planning.



He will work closely with John Wenrich, the director of congregational vitality for the Evangelical Covenant Church. He will also continue to offer leadership in local mission development and compassion and justice ministries. Please encourage Jon in his new role!

Mike Brown will continue to serve effectively as our director of church planting. We must remain deeply committed to the planting of healthy missional churches in order to remain faithful to Christ's

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### MUUUCE turns 25!

MUUUCE (the Most Unbelievable, Ultimate, Urban, Camping, Experience) is celebrating its 25th Anniversary this summer at Faith Covenant Church in Burnsville, MN. The event continues to provide an unforgettable, spiritual, energized weekend where youth leaders are able to build relationships with young teens through lasting memories, which by God's grace, lead to a relationship with Jesus and a relationship within the church.

Through this year's pirate-inspired theme, "Find your Treasure," students will learn about the treasure that they find in Jesus. The speaker for this year will be Kara Stromberg, youth speaker and former Covenant youth pastor. In addition, MUUUCE will be collecting an offering for the ministry happening at Alaska Christian College. Please pray for the 800 students that will attend MUUUCE August 18-20, 2011.

### 2011 Ministerial Association Retreat

Time to encourage your pastor/s to sign up for the NWC 2011 Fall Ministerial Association Retreat. New brochures and a retreat registration form have been mailed to all NWC churches.

The retreat will be Oct. 10-12 at Arrowwood Resort and Conference Center in Alexandria, MN, and is for all pastors, spouses and ministry staff. Larry and Barbara Magnuson from SonScape Ministries in Colorado will be our speakers and retreat facilitators.

You can also find the retreat brochure, registration form and scholarship application form on the NWC website's Ministerial Association page. We encourage you to encourage your pastors to attend.

### 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.



## SUPERINTENDENT MARK STROMBERG INSTALLED DURING ECC ANNUAL MEETING

Mark Stromberg was installed as superintendent of the Northwest Conference during the evening worship service on June 29 at the 2011 Evangelical Covenant Church Annual Meeting in Estes Park, CO. He assumed the new position July 1.

"I am so pleased to be able to continue to serve the Lord through my work with Northwest Conference churches and other fine ministries," Stromberg said. "To stand before delegates representing the broader Covenant and affirm my commitment to the work within the Northwest Conference was a humbling and holy experience for me."

Stromberg was joined by his wife Terri, daughter Amy and son-in-law Kevin Pieh, sisters Julie Tutt and Teri Oelschlager, and in-laws Roland and Shirley Danielson.

"I am grateful for the rich heritage I have received from being a child of the Northwest Conference. However, my passion and commitment has much more to do with the future than the past. Thus, I pray that I am used to move our collective ministry forward in the years ahead," Stromberg said.

### FRETHEIM HONORED

Delegates attending Thursday's business session honored retiring conference superintendents Ken Carlson and Jim Fretheim, and Rodney Sawyer, regional field director of the Evangelical Covenant Church of Alaska. Fretheim has served as Northwest Conference superintendent since 2003.

In his introductory remarks, ECC President Gary Walter said he was discussing with Fretheim about what it was like knowing that

this would be his last day in office. Walter said it quickly became clear that Fretheim already had plans - someone had spotted his fly-fishing pants already packed in his car.

"I want to thank the churches of the Northwest Conference for the privilege of serving as their superintendent," Fretheim said. "What a joy to be a superintendent and serve with my great team of colleagues and good friends. I look forward to tight lines, ducks coming into my blind, and other chances to serve the Lord."

### THE GALLERY

Delegates to the 126th Annual Meeting also welcomed 11 churches into membership, including The Gallery Covenant Church in St. Paul, MN.

"Every church in the Evangelical Covenant Church was once planted by a faithful group of pioneers willing to step out in faith and trust God's dream for the Church and the growth of His kingdom," said Brad Kindall, pastor of The Gallery. "To join that group of the faithful is a humbling experience for The Gallery."

During the June 30 ordination and commissioning service that concluded the Annual Meeting, five from the Northwest Conference were ordained, including: Christine Fossum, Rockford, MN; Robert Foster, Evangelical Covenant Church, Thief River Falls, MN; Steven Larson, Redeemer Covenant Church, Brooklyn Park, MN; Calvin Lindstrom, Mah-towa Covenant Church, Mahtowa, MN; and Ann Waterman, Plymouth Covenant Church, Plymouth, MN.

# MEET GINNY OLSON, NEW DIRECTOR OF YOUTH MINISTRY

In many ways, joining the team of the Northwest Conference feels like coming home. Although I was raised in Methodist and Baptist churches (with a brief stint in a Congregational church), it was at Lake Beauty Bible Camp where I became a Christian. From Trail-blazer to staff member, LBBC was a deeply formational place for me. It's where I learned what it meant to follow Christ and it's where I fell in love with youth ministry.



In the years since that time, I've served at several camps and churches in various capacities, both in Minnesota and Illinois. Sixteen years ago, I switched from ministry in a church to ministry in academia. Teaching youth ministry to undergraduate and seminary students pushed me to think beyond, "What's going on locally?" with adolescents to, "What's going on globally?" That question has guided my exploration in youth ministry.

When it comes to research, one of the

areas I focus on is adolescent culture, especially as it impacts girls. It's a culture that's constantly morphing and, as youth workers, it's important that we are aware of the implications for our students. Another area of investigation is justice and youth. Teaching and worshiping in an urban environment over the past several years has shown me that ministry must go beyond the church steeple; it must also seek to influence the surrounding community and its systems.

One of the many reasons I'm drawn to the director position is the opportunity to be part of a conference that clearly values youth and youth ministry. In the states that make up the Northwest Conference, between 22-25 percent of the population is under the age of 18. In light of those percentages, the church must take its ministry to youth seriously and the Northwest Conference has shown that they do that.

"Having carried the NWC youth ministry torch for the last 10 years, I count it a privilege to now hand that torch to Ginny. It is great to have you as part of the NWC team." – Jon Kramka

Jon Kramka has developed a strong network of youth workers, and I'm excited to come alongside this group of people who not only love kids, but also are committed to supporting and encouraging each other and dedicated to seeing ministry happen. To be able to work with a group like this, as well as to minister with a strong conference team and serve local churches ... like I said, I feel like I've come home.

*Ginny Olson, Director of Youth Ministry*

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call to share the gospel with our world. And remember ... your church was a new church at one time!

The blessings you are receiving through its ministry are a direct result of earlier decisions to start a church in your community. Therefore, it is important that we continue to "pay it forward" by planting new churches on a regular basis.

Further, beginning Sept. 1 we are pleased to welcome to our staff Ginny Olson as our new director of youth ministry, even as we continue to live into our historic commitment to ministry to youth in the NWC. Ginny most recently served as the co-director of the Center for Youth Ministry Studies and assistant professor of youth ministry at North Park University and Theological Seminary in Chicago, IL.

Before teaching undergraduate and seminary students, she was involved in youth ministry for more than 10 years at various churches and camps, including serving on staff in the junior high ministry at Willow Creek Community Church.

She is the author of "Teenage Girls: Exploring Issues Adolescent Girls Face and Strategies to Help Them," co-author of the Youth Specialties resource, "Youth Ministry Management Tools," as well as an editor and contributing author for "Breaking the Gender Barrier in Youth Ministry."

Welcome Ginny!

## NWC STAFF RESTRUCTURE: IN A NUTSHELL

As we align our staff structure with our Ministry Priority Areas (Congregational Vitality, Church Planting, and Children, Youth & Family), here is a recap of recent and future staff changes at the Northwest Conference:

- Mark Stromberg moves to Superintendent from Associate Superintendent
- Jon Kramka becomes Director of Congregational Vitality, a newly created position
- Ginny Olson hired as Director of Youth Ministry, a newly created part-time position
- When finances allow, NWC will hire a part-time Director of Children, Youth & Family

Please know that it is also our intent to bring on to our staff a director of children & family ministry as soon as our finances allow. While this person will work with local church staff, a primary emphasis will be to equip volunteers who work faithfully in our churches week in and week out, often with very little coaching and encouragement. It is our desire to provide the necessary resources to allow those working with our children to grow in their effectiveness and sense of calling to their task.

Cheryl Theilen will continue to serve our churches by staying in her role as NWC office administrator. She plays an important part in helping things "tie together" for our common life together. She works with finances, licensing, clergy benefits and our NWC Annual Meeting, just to name a few of her responsibilities.

And finally, Bryan Malley will continue to

serve as our director of communications. It goes without saying that his work has "raised the bar" on the communications efforts of the NWC. It may even be fair to say that the materials he has developed are among the very best in the entire Covenant!

In summary, it is our intent to structure according to our stated priorities so that we are both faithful and fruitful as your Conference staff. Further, I intend to balance my work as your superintendent; resisting the temptation to spend all of my time in administrative details and conflict resolution (something that could easily consume the role) and ensuring that I spend time in God's Word in order to lead out of my walk with our Heavenly Father. Please pray for us as we live into our new ministry configuration. We are here to serve you and are doing the best we can to live into our Holy Callings.

*Mark Stromberg, Superintendent*

# ABBEY WAY OFFERS 'LIVING HOSPITALITY'

*Editor's Note: Abbey Way Covenant Church, a 4-year-old NWC church plant, recently shared this update about their summer outreach.*

By Jaime Gjerdingen,  
Abbey Way Covenant Church

It was the first Picnic in Logan Park worship service for us this summer. The camp chairs were all arranged in a circle with the communion table in the center; holding the bread, wine and cross. Off to the side, tables were laden with food and people were scattered about eating together before worship.

For the first time since we began the practice a few summers ago, a young neighborhood boy, Cameron, joined our meal and worship. Even though it was exciting to meet him, I later learned that he had just come from being beaten up at the McDonald's down the street. When I heard that, a deep gladness arose in my heart that Abbey Way was the place he ended up; receiving a plate of food and listening ears.

A few Sundays later, I was reminded of Cameron as we listened to a sermon on hospitality. Our preacher for the evening, Lisa LeMay, talked of how, "We are not just sharing food with our guests. We create space for their personhood as well. It encompasses providing 'food and shelter' to their souls ... providing validation of their value and safe keeping of their personhood and dignity. Imagine offering a stranger a meal served with a cold heart ... it is incongruent and not hospitality."

I know that Cameron's visit that night in the park was carried deeply in the heart of one member he shared with—my husband,



Craig. When Craig was a child, he experienced painful and extensive bullying in his neighborhood. As an adult, with the help of other Christians and Jesus, he worked through his 'stuff' around that issue. He experienced Christ's love: tenderness towards his wounds and strength to help him truly release and forgive the people involved.

In biblical times, the practice of welcoming strangers into the home was deeply valued and regularly followed. In those times, providing for the stranger, especially for the traveler, was an essential part of the social fabric. This was true for both the people of God and the pagans. What set the people of God apart is why they were hospitable.

Over and over again the scriptures refer to God's people as "strangers" and "aliens" that God graciously welcomes into the circle of Trinitarian love. Therefore, for the Christian, creating a space of welcome flows from our gratitude at having been extended welcome into God's Kingdom "when we were yet sinners." Practicing hospitality is a natural expression of the love of Christ; it is a posture of acknowledging and receiving Christ's love and having the same open stance toward others

that Christ has toward us.

During the summer, Abbey Way shares their dessert of ice cream cones with whom-ever is in the Park. We then get together and play a game of kickball where all are invited; and each is made space for. The night we received the sermon on hospitality; we once again experienced it lived out in Logan Park. And, once again, Cameron was there.

When we came out with the ice cream and kickball supplies we were met by the largest group of neighborhood kids yet; about 15-20 kids all ready to lick up cones and play with us! Craig was the Captain of the team that Cameron was on, and during the night Cameron pointed out to Craig the boys that had beaten him up and they continued to talk.

What struck my heart that night was how as we have learned at Abbey Way to live with Christ at the center of our lives—in our practices and relationships—that truth is mobile. When we change locations, we still bring it with us, and the love of Christ in each of us and between us comes too. When we're out in the park offering ice cream or cheering for a neighborhood kid running the bases, we are inviting people into the love of Christ that we've brought along. And our hope is that, like the sweetness of ice cream, it tastes good to the people we meet.

## NORTHWEST CONFERENCE CALENDAR

**AUGUST 18-20** // MUUUCE – Faith Covenant Church, Burnsville, MN

**OCTOBER 4-5** // Parish Nurse Retreat – Covenant Pines Bible Camp, McGregor, MN

**OCTOBER 10-12** // Ministerial Assoc. Retreat – Arrowwood Resort, Alexandria, MN

**JANUARY 7, 2012** // Recharge – St. Andrew's Church, Mahtomedi, MN

**JANUARY 30 – FEBRUARY 3, 2012** // Midwinter – Chicago, IL

**MARCH 30-31, 2012** // M.O.V.E. – First Covenant, Minneapolis, MN

**APRIL 19-21, 2012** // NWC Annual Meeting – Alexandria, MN

**JUNE 21-23, 2012** // ECC Annual Meeting – Irvine, CA

**JULY 15-20, 2012** // CHIC – Knoxville, TN

## NWC STAFF

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**northwest conference**  
developing leaders. thriving churches.

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