



Bethlehem's Journey Toward Vitality

90-YEAR-OLD CHURCH COMPLETES VITALITY PATHWAY, EXPERIENCES GROWTH AND NEW MINISTRY

Bethlehem Covenant Church in Minneapolis traces its earliest roots back to a South Minneapolis home, where in 1913 a Sunday school for children studying at Minnehaha Academy was started. On December 28, 1922, Bethlehem Covenant Church was organized with 26 charter members. The facilities of Minnehaha's school chapel and classrooms were made available to the new church.

Fast forward 90 years, and Bethlehem is now the first church in the Northwest Conference to complete the Vitality Pathway and develop a resulting Strategic Ministry Plan.

Each church that has engaged elements of the Vitality Pathway has a unique story to tell. BCC's journey began in 2008 when the church was in the midst of a pastoral search process. Delegates to the NWC Annual Meeting heard about Veritas from John Wenrich, director of congregational vitality for the Evangelical Covenant Church.

Leaders from the church were excited about the potential impact of Veritas at BCC, but decided not to proceed with the process until a new pastor was called.

Pastor Ryan Eikenbary-Barber was installed on Sept. 20, 2009, and one year later, on Sept. 25, 2010, 60 members of BCC participated

in a Veritas seminar led by Mark Stromberg, current NWC superintendent.

"There was an excitement generated that day that can only be explained by the Holy Spirit at work in the congregation," said Charlotte Sjoberg, president of BCC.

Veritas helped build momentum for the church to form a Vitality Team, and one month later, potential leaders for that team were being identified. Leaders from Bethlehem were also invited to participate in the first Navigate meetings in Kansas City, and out of that experience, Bethlehem was paired with two other NWC churches on the Vitality Pathway: Edina Covenant Church and Rice Creek Covenant Church.

In January 2011, BCC's Vitality Team held its first meeting, and by March 2011, church leadership was participating in an EPIC workshop, also facilitated by Stromberg. To keep the congregation informed, the Vitality Team developed a month-long devotional series based on the 10 Healthy Missional Markers.

"A lot of effort has gone into keeping the congregation informed about the process and outcomes," Sjoberg said. "It has been very



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converge

Mark your calendars for Converge 2012!

We are excited to announce our next NWC Converge leadership training event, which will take place at Redeemer Covenant Church in Brooklyn Park, MN, on Oct. 27.

The one-day event will feature a variety of workshops designed for pastors and lay leaders to come together to learn and be inspired. Some of the topics that will be addressed include: church communications, local church governance, church finances, processing setbacks, children's ministry, funding strategies for local churches, risk management, working with volunteers, and more.

Stay tuned for registration materials and more details.

Director of Children & Family position update

The application deadline has passed and the search committee is in the process of interviewing candidates to fill the new Director of Children and Family Ministry position at the Northwest Conference.

We expect to have the position filled by our target date of Sept. 1, and we look forward to continuing to increase our ability to serve our churches in this key ministry area.

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 to sign up.



SPONSOR A CHILD. TRANSFORM A COMMUNITY.

Northwest Conference churches, members and attendees have an opportunity to stand alongside our Congolese friends in the remote area of Congo known as Equateur Province.

Along with them, we are seeking to turn around the most overlooked province in the neediest country of the world. But it will take all of us, says ECC President Gary Walter. A partnership with World Vision is about to make sure our Congolese friends receive the help they need. Together we can make a difference!

Right now, we ask our NWC churches to

schedule a "Hope Sunday" this coming fall of 2012 in order to give members and attendees the opportunity to sponsor a child in Congo.

For \$40 per month, a Covenant household can make it possible to promote clean water, nutrition, education, health, and economic development; expressing God's love in tangible ways that provide opportunities for the recipients to experience new life in Jesus Christ. An unprecedented need ... an unprecedented partnership!

Visit the Covenant website for the full story: <http://blogs.covchurch.org/covenantkid-scongo/>

MINNEHAHA ACADEMY INVITES YOU TO HELP CELEBRATE ITS CENTENNIAL

One hundred years ago, a dedicated group of Covenant pastors from Sweden, inspired by God, came together to build a school offering high quality education that would serve future generations.

Through hard work, sacrifice, and God's blessing, Minnehaha Academy was founded.

As we stand at the threshold of our school's second century, our mission remains the same... integrating Christian faith and learning. Minnehaha Academy, invites all of the Covenant community, our many alumni, faculty, staff, parents, students and friends to join us in honoring Minnehaha's heritage and charting our future with celebration and thanksgiving.

The homecoming celebration is set for Sept. 20-24. On Saturday, Sept. 24, join us for tours of the NWC office, Minnehaha's Archive House and Historical Exhibits featuring items from your Covenant roots at Minnehaha Academy, 3100 West River Parkway, Minneapolis, 55406. For more information, please visit MinnehahaAcademy.net/100.

Please join us in celebrating our Centennial and help launch Minnehaha Academy into its second century.



AIL IMPACTS STUDENTS, EXPANDS TO OTHER CONFERENCES

Can high schoolers lead? Sure they can lead their peers, but can they lead the church? The Northwest Conference is banking on it.

Developing strong, young Christian leaders is a core value woven throughout the NWC's priorities. For over 20 years, we've fostered this value with high school student leaders via Adventures in Leadership, an experiential leadership challenge in the north woods of Minnesota.

This year, 21 high school students and a group of youth pastors and wilderness guides joined together at Adventurous Christians in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area (BWCA).

After spending several days at base camp learning about leadership principles and camping skills, the group headed into the BWCA, only to experience a deluge. With over five inches of rain during their 4-day canoe trip, they slogged through soggy and sometimes overgrown portages, carrying packs and canoes, all while soaked to the core. In these harsh circumstances, being a servant leader took on new meaning for the students.

According to Tiffany Espe, "The program was life changing and makes me want to take up more responsibility and to be a role model for others."

Vanda Niemi said, "AIL has given me confidence in the position of being a leader and in myself as a leader. More importantly, I've learned what it looks and feels like to lead as a Christian. This has, in turn, helped me to grow in my relationship with Christ."

Upon their return to base camp, common themes voiced by the students were: the im-



Adventures in Leadership 2012 drew 21 high students to the BWCA for a week of leadership training experiences.

portance of relying on God as they discovered their own leadership abilities in relation to the leadership role, a realization that they actually could lead others, and a deeper appreciation for their teammates—and for dry socks.

As Micah Friez put it, "I never knew that carrying a canoe would mean so much more than carrying a canoe."

EMERGE

Now, a new initiative is being piloted in the NWC to challenge students

as leaders, in addition to AIL. This August, the NWC will launch Emerge—a weekend leadership retreat designed for high school



students to explore who they are as leaders. Emerge combines practical teaching, hands-on interactive learning experiences and time for individual reflection, peer-to-peer feedback and group worship.

This is a national Covenant initiative that is being piloted in the Northwest Conference. Emerge takes place Aug. 24-26 at Lake Beauty Bible Camp. The cost is \$75 per person. More details and promotional materials coming soon.

As youth pastors around the country wrestle with how to develop strong leaders among their students, the Northwest Conference is becoming recognized by others for our efforts to raise up young leaders.

AIL and Emerge are investments that will continue to pay out for the church for generations.

BETHLEHEM COVENANT VITALITY PATHWAY, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

rewarding to hear people outside those directly involved in the process talking about becoming a more healthy missional church."

On May 15, 2011, the congregation took the PULSE Survey during its worship service. Seventy-eight percent of those who responded were positive toward starting a second, more contemporary worship service. BCC's Vitality Team spent the summer studying the demographics of the church's neighborhood using MissionInsite, a tool provided by the NWC to all its constituent churches.

In the fall of 2011, church leaders attended "ONE: A Unified Approach to Strategic Planning," a presentation by Wenrich and NWC staff designed to help facilitate the planning process. BCC leaders decided to break down the job of developing the Strategic Plan into "bite size tasks" and set a goal of completing the plan by May 31.

"We started putting up 'Post it' flip charts [in the room] where we held our meetings that summarized the main points of our meetings so the congregation could follow our progress and give us input, if they had questions or ideas," explained Lowery J. Smith, BCC's vitality chairperson.

"We were a stable congregation and it was easy to think there was no need to change anything. After a realistic evaluation of where our congregation was moving, I believe we have taken strides toward becoming a healthy missional church," Sjoberg said.

The Strategic Planning team developed a Mission Statement, Vision Statement and a set of Core Values. From there, the team also created Critical Success Factors, and a first draft of the Strategic Plan. After a second draft, the planning team presented the Strategic Plan to the Church Council on May 17

and it was approved.

"We have committed ourselves to studying the Bible more. We are seeking to take more risks and leaps of faith," Eikenbary-Barber said. "Bethlehem is developing a series of small groups to enhance fellowship and discipleship, study God's Word, and serve others in need."

"We pray that the final Strategic Plan will not sit on a shelf and gather dust, but can be updated and modified on a regular basis as conditions and priorities change," Smith said.

"The Vitality Pathway invited us to go exploring our own uncharted territory. It gave us the freedom to step away from stability towards health and vitality," Eikenbary-Barber said. "There is a profound sense that the Holy Spirit is moving in new ways at Bethlehem Covenant Church."

DEVELOPING PASTOR INTENSIVE

The Northwest Conference and Remy Diederich, founding pastor of Cedarbrook Church in Menomonie, WI, recently partnered to create and host the first Developing Pastor Intensive, May 21-24.

"This intensive is for those pastors who are off to a good start but might benefit from being able to spend a concentrated time with a pastor who has navigated the church planting waters successfully," said Mike Brown, NWC director of church planting.

"The DPI was an idea that I stole from a worship leader (Aaron Keys) who did something similar. He invited worship leaders to live with him for a week and just hang out and talk about their craft for five days," Diederich explained. "It sounded like a much better format to me than a conference setting, which is more formal and where it's hit or miss if the sessions will help you. This way the entire time is very purposeful as well as flexible."

The three church planters who participated were: Jeremy Berg, lead pastor of MainStreet Covenant in Mound, MN; Michael Behm, lead pastor of Real Life Covenant in Waseca, MN; and Rob Jacobson, lead pastor of Restoration Covenant in Apple Valley, MN.

The week's flexible schedule included mornings off to rest, relax or exercise, and evenings spent hanging out together. Each day focused on a different topic.

"The first day we just spent time telling our stories to each other. Day two was spent on strategies to grow the church. Day three we spent on the Sunday experience and preaching. Day four was a 3-hour coffee session



"It was like having coffee with your close friends but it lasts several days," said Jeremy Berg, pastor of MainStreet Covenant.

talking about a variety of topics from leadership development, to staffing, to training volunteers, to time management," Diederich said. "One night I had the guys over for a BBQ and let my wife tell them what she thought they needed to know from her experience in helping me plant our church."

"The close, intimate fellowship we four pastors shared over these days was priceless. No retreat or conference I've attended allows such a precious blend of relaxing retreat and rigorous coaching," Berg said of his experience at the DPI. "It was like having coffee with your close friends but it lasts several days!"

"It was a really good experience to get to know and see the staff and volunteers at Cedarbrook in action," Behm shared. "They are competent people and it was good for me to hear them and get their perspective, not just Remy's."

"This truly was a benefit to my church as well, in that through God, it gave me perspective and practical tools and skills to use right when I came back," Jacobson said.

Diederich has agreed to host two DPIs each year, with up to four church planters each session.

"I'm ready to do it again, with a few tweaks here and there to make it an even better experience," he said.

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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, North Dakota, South Dakota and Iowa.

The NWC is committed to equipping and resourcing our Church Planting pastors. To learn more about future DPI events, contact Director of Church Planting Mike Brown.

NORTHWEST CONFERENCE CALENDAR

AUGUST 9-12 // MUUUCE – Crossroads Church, Woodbury, MN

SEPTEMBER 5-7 // Retired Pastors Retreat – Covenant Pines Bible Camp

SEPTEMBER 30 - OCTOBER 1 // Town and Country Workshop – Grand Rapids, MN

OCTOBER 1-3 // Ministerial Association Retreat – Grand Rapids, MN

OCTOBER 6 // VIVE – First Covenant, St. Paul, MN

OCTOBER 9-10 // Parish Nurse Retreat – Covenant Pines Bible Camp

OCTOBER 27 // Converge – Redeemer Covenant, Brooklyn Park, MN

NOVEMBER 10 // IMAGINE (for those serving Children and Family) - Forest Lake, MN