



# CHURCH PLANTING THRIVES IN THE NWC

By Mike Brown  
Director of Church Planting

At the Northwest Conference Annual Meeting this year, we had the joy of receiving five new churches into membership: Awaken Covenant Church in Lilydale, MN (parented by Berean Baptist Church); Restoration Covenant Church in Apple Valley, MN (parented by Faith Covenant Church); Real Life Covenant Church in Waseca, MN (parented by Vista Covenant Church); La Bendicion Covenant Church in Brooklyn Park, MN (parented by Redeemer Covenant Church); and Blue Oaks Covenant Church in Brooklyn Park, MN (parented by The Sanctuary Covenant Church).

It was a moving celebration on Friday night of the Annual Meeting as the planting pastors brought their congregations with them, to be recognized in front of the attendees and delegates. The exciting thing about this group of churches was that each of them had a parent church supporting them and helping them get started. The parenting churches covered the spectrum from very old, established congregations, very young congregations, rural congregations, suburban congregations, multi-ethnic urban congregations, and one parent church was a non-Covenant church with a truly missional heart.

The senior pastors of the new church plants awarded a birth certificate to the senior pastor

of the parenting church to mark the commitment of the parent church to love and support them. The NWC awarded each parent church with a flowering apple tree as a lasting memorial to the commitment to be a reproducing church (see story on page 4). As Superintendent Mark Stromberg reminded the delegates and friends gathered, "You can know the number of seeds in an apple, but you can't know the number of apples in a seed." The fruit born out of the parenting church's faithfulness will be felt for generations.

## NEW PLANTS

We have the joy of announcing the birth of two new NWC church plants. The first is Roots Covenant Church which will meet in the Midway/Frogtown area of St. Paul. The church will be intentionally multi-ethnic as they seek to reach the whole community, especially second generation folks who often feel like cultural misfits. The planting pastor is Touger Thao and the new church is blessed to have a number of NWC churches partnering to provide prayer, financial and other tangible support.

Pastor Thao sent this email, "A few weeks ago, I was talking with a guy who had not been a part of a church for a couple of years. He told me he had faith in God but he didn't have much faith in the church. ... He said that churches are too inwardly focused and don't

care about people outside. I told him that I understood where he was coming from. ...

"I casted a vision of what the Church could be and should be. I told him that I wanted to be a part of a church that passionately loved God and sacrificially loved our neighbors by getting to know them and by serving them. ...

I want to be a part of a church that seeks to be one family across racial, generational, socio-economic and cultural barriers because in Christ, we are brothers and sisters.



After my impassioned speech, he responded by saying, 'I want to be a part of a church like that!'"

The second new plant is Grace Outreach Covenant Church, led by Pastor Paul Robinson. Grace Outreach is also blessed to have a number of NWC churches providing support, prayer and financial help. Pastor Robinson wrote, "Because of the changing demographics of our community, I am deeply committed to planting a multi-ethnic, cross-generational church. The church I envision planting is a Christ-centered, bible-believing grace-filled community where people come to know Jesus, and love and serve one another. ...

"It is a place where people are taught the truth of scripture and are trained to be dis-

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**MINNEHAHA  
ACADEMY**

## Minnehaha Academy announces new logo

As Minnehaha Academy concludes its Centennial, the school introduces a renewed look—one that not only draws from a rich history, but also brings Minnehaha into the next generation as a school of excellence and distinction.

The two arcs create an “M” with an “A” in the middle. Where the two arcs intersect signifies “Where Youth Meets Truth” and the integration of Christian faith and learning, the school’s mission for more than 100 years.

The icon in the middle represents that faith is at the center of all we do. It has three beams reflecting that we are the light of Christ shining out into the world and serving others.

The three beams of light symbolize the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In addition, they represent the three A’s: arts, academics and athletics. The four sections of the icon that you see in the middle represent Minnehaha’s core values: distinctively Christian, exceptional academics, cultivating potential, and caring community.

And finally, although our school colors are red and white, the new logo is multi-colored, giving it eloquent and beautiful dimension. This aspect represents our school’s commitment to students and families from all ethnic, socio-economic and religious backgrounds.

Minnehaha is excited to implement a strong, unified and consistent visual and verbal school identity—one that will last for years to come.

For more information, visit [MinnehahaAcademy.net](http://MinnehahaAcademy.net).

# DESIRING TO LEAVE A LEGACY

*By Greg Ellis, Pastor of Bethany Covenant Church (2009-2013)*

On Sunday, May 12, members of Bethany Covenant Church in Richfield, MN voted to become a Living Legacy Church. This means that the church will close with dignity in order to pass on its assets to the Northwest Conference and the Evangelical Covenant Church for the starting of new churches within our Conference.

This has been a difficult process for our community as we weighed our alternatives. However, in the end we realized that we just didn’t have enough energy or resources to become a healthy, missional church. Consequently, we will dissolve our church, having been a spiritual home for many people through the years and having seen good and godly ministry over those years since planting in 1904.

In addition to being an emotional decision, the closing of a church and winding up of its affairs can be a complex legal transaction that involves many people. As its pastor, I and the Bethany Leadership Team, have been working closely with Mark Stromberg, Superintendent of the Northwest Conference, Jon Kramka, Director of Congregational Vitality for the NWC, and Rollie Persson, Vice President for Real Estate Services of National Covenant Properties at Covenant offices in Chicago.

Additionally, the Evangelical Covenant Church has provided a Legacy Coach for me. A Legacy Coach helps a pastor lead the congregation spiritually and relationally, as well as providing a supportive and listening ear for the pastor’s own well-being. I remain connected with my coach, Stan Hagemeyer, during these remaining weeks. Pastor Stan is a Covenant pastor who has led a church through this process in Hudson, OH, and will be coaching me through the end of July.

Jesus tells us that “unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds” (John 12:24). This sounds great, as long as we focus on the seeds that are in the stages of growing, and strengthening, and preparing—but it is scary to consider the

possibility of dying so that there might be life; especially life that we may not personally experience.

Bethany has had a long life (we celebrated our centennial in 2004), and has produced life-change in many individuals and families. Our church has also nurtured several people who have chosen to serve as ordained and consecrated pastors and missionaries. However, as our members aged, moved away, and the neighborhood changed, we became less able to relate to the culture around us.

Ministry that used to be effective and touch lives had now decreased impact. As membership and attendance declined, financial giving followed suit. Even with an owned building and a small staff, budgets became tighter and tighter.

And all of this was happening even as we were digging into what it truly means to be a healthy, missional church. God was doing a new thing in us both corporately and personally. We met God, were



changed, and desired to change the world. Although we are planning to wind up our ministry here and are currently telling stories of how God used Bethany in the past—good things do continue to happen in our present. New small groups are forming in order that we continue to nurture relationships and grow in Christ. One person for whom we’ve been praying for years even just accepted Christ as his Savior!

So, it is with a desire to see lost people found and hurting people helped that Bethany will close its doors and provide resources to plant new churches. After all, it is with a desire to see the gospel preached here and abroad in ways that are currently impossible for our congregation that we have decided to become a Living Legacy Church.

As the pastor of Bethany in its last days, I am proud of the selfless, courageous Christ-followers that God has raised up who are willing to die to self, willing to take up their cross and follow Jesus in such a way that others, too, will come to know Him as Savior and Lord. We were planted in 1904, we will die in 2013 that others may have life—abundant and eternal. May this be our legacy! And to God be the glory!

# ARE WE READY FOR KIDS IN WORSHIP?

By Kara Stromberg, NWC Director of Children & Family Ministry

At our NWC Annual Meeting in April, Dr. Kara Powell suggested that the two most important things that influence long-term faith in young people are intergenerational relationships and intergenerational worship. Has your church thought about creating a worship experience that allows all ages to worship together? Is a children's sermon the best we can do? Consider Will Willimon's take on children's sermons, as expressed in his blog for the United Methodist Church:

"I fear that children's sermons tend to backfire, saying to parents and children that which we do not intend to say. We wouldn't interrupt the congregation's worship with, 'And now I would like all those of you who are over 65 to come down front ....' So why do we single out the children saying in effect, 'Boys and girls, I know that you are bored stiff by Christian worship, that you can't get anything out of what we do when we praise God, so come down front and I'll take a few

minutes to try to make this interesting for you.'"

Ouch. Perhaps our efforts would be better spent helping the adults understand and appreciate the contributions of children in worship, without falling prey to one of two extremes: 1) giving lip service to the inclusion of children in worship, then continuing with an extended musical set and 45 minute sermon, baffled that the kids are fidgeting or 2) creating such a kid-focused worship experience that adults feel they are simply observers in a preschool classroom? I invite you to consider how your church can create intergenerational worship experiences so children, youth and adults of all ages can worship freely.

## A FEW IDEAS TO CONSIDER:

- Involve children, youth and adults in worship planning, taking ideas of each generation seriously.
- Help young families find seats in the front so kids can engage with what's going on.
- Create intentional opportunities for move-

ment during the service, with sensitivities to all ages.

- Smile at kids instead of telling them to shush.
  - Communicate about baptism, communion and other big church words in ways all ages can understand.
  - Invite children to share faith stories, lead in prayer, serve as ushers or whatever else you can dream up.
  - Consider how prayer vocabulary and sermon illustrations foster inclusion of all ages.
  - Equip parents to lead children in worship.
  - Educate the congregation on the importance of all ages worshipping together.
  - Children embrace structure and repetition. Consider how liturgical elements enhance the inclusion of all ages.
- May your children, youth and adults embrace the beauty of worshipping together!



# BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH ADOLESCENTS

By Ginny Olson, Director of Youth Ministry

"Disciples cannot be mass produced. Disciples are handmade, one relationship at a time," David Kinnaman, author of "You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church ... and Rethinking Faith."

Youth ministry is marked by youth pastors, small group leaders, praying adults, and many others who are committed to doing the slow, deliberate work of building relationships with adolescents as they seek to follow Jesus. The NWC partners with these faithful leaders to create spaces where these relationships can be strengthened and encouraged.

MOVE is one of those key events where NWC high school students are challenged to deliberate on how their following Christ impacts those who have needs in their communities. In April, 300 students and youth workers wrestled with the theme of "Invisible: Who are you not seeing?" As students served at shelters, cleaned churches, sorted clothing, and figured out how to eat lunch for a dollar per person, they thought about who was invisible in their own communities, churches, campuses and families, and what were the issues that caused that sense of invisibility. To-

ward the end of the weekend, youth groups could be found huddled together, hashing through their experiences and thoughts as their leaders guided the discussion.

Adventures in Leadership is probably one of the best examples of deliberate mentoring at work in the lives of adolescents. During this one-week leadership intensive, a small group of high school students spends time with a team of adult leaders learning what it means to be a Christian leader through experience, education and evaluation. Along with team building and skill development exercises, students have to lead their peers on a journey in the BWCA.

Throughout the experience, they receive guided feedback that is both encouraging and challenging. AIL alumni often talk about the impact the week has on their leadership development and walk with God.

Emerge is similar to AIL in that it focuses on the development of high school student leaders, but it's shorter and geared to whole teams coming from NWC churches. Over the course of a weekend, students experience what it means to lead and to follow. They examine how they are individually wired to lead.

And as church youth ministries, they pray and strategize for the school year. The second Emerge retreat takes place right as the school year begins, Aug. 23-25, at Lake Beauty Bible Camp.



Middle school is a key time of faith development. Students are moving out of a "Jesus is Lord of my crayons and sandbox" phase, into one of thoughtful questioning, albeit sometimes with a short attention span. The leadership team of MUUCE loves and understands this age group. Middle and jr. high schoolers get to experience a community that loves to have outrageous fun and, at the same time, they are challenged to seriously examine their faith. Crossroads Church in Woodbury, MN, spends months preparing to host this annual event. This year, we've moved it back so it's not in conflict with NWC camps. It's Aug. 15-17.

These are just some of the events and experiences the NWC sponsors to help local Covenant youth leaders as they seek to develop adolescent disciples. For more information about these and other events, including our monthly Youth Pastor's Connection, check out northwestconference.org.



# REDEEMER COVENANT CHURCH

By Linda Gustafson

Our relationship with La Bendición Covenant Church, a new, Spanish-speaking church plant, began in fall 2008, when we were able to offer our facilities for their Thanksgiving dinner. Not long after, talks led to a partnership, and La Bendición began worshipping here March 2009—a location more central to where many Latino families live and work.

At the 2009 NWC Annual Meeting in Redwing, MN, members of the Redeemer Covenant Church family stood in support of the ministry of La Bendición as they were commissioned. La Bendición, which means “the blessing,” has truly been a blessing to us in so many ways. We have had numerous opportunities to share together in worship, fellowship, prayer, outreach, friendship and in serving in

our community. Our children and youth have also joined together to play soccer, participate in AWANA, serve on mission trips, volunteer in our community, and attend camp.

This April, many of us were able to stand with our brothers and sisters of La Bendición once again as they were accepted as a full Covenant church at the NWC Annual Meeting. In addition to a birth certificate, we were presented with a tree—a gift in recognition of our help in planting La Bendición. We have watched La Bendición grow and will be able to watch this tree grow as well. Planted outside our nursery windows, we have already enjoyed its fragrant blossoms this spring.

As Redeemer Senior Pastor Steve Larson noted, “This tree will bloom each spring as a reminder of God’s faithfulness and the fruitfulness of joint ministry.”



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principles and to disciple others. ... It is a house of prayer, holiness and peace. It is a place committed to planting other churches to advance the work of God’s Kingdom.”



Please pray for these new churches as they begin this new journey.

## FUTURE PLANTS

Finally, we want to invite you to pray for our future church planting projects. Church planting is an activity we do collectively as

NWC churches. We have been walking with a number of pastors who are sensing a call to church planting.

Most recently we sent two young pastors, Dave Berge and Jeff Olson, through the Covenant’s Church Planter Assessment Center. Both were recommended to plant and our hope is to have both begin church planting in the NWC in the next 10 months.

Pastor Berge is sensing a call to planting in Minneapolis and Pastor Olson on the St. Paul side of the Twin Cities. We will communicate more details and ways you can be praying as we get closer to their start dates.

If you or your church is sensing a call to provide support and resourcing for new church

development, please contact me at the NWC office so I can come out to your church, meet with your congregation, and share the ways you can help advance our collective mission.

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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.*

## NORTHWEST CONFERENCE CALENDAR

**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

**SEPTEMBER 4-6** // CRIM Retreat – Covenant Pines Bible Camp

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

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

**SEPTEMBER 29-30** // Church Planter’s Retreat – Sugar Lake Lodge, Grand Rapids, MN

**SEPTEMBER 30-OCTOBER 2** // Ministerial Association Retreat – Sugar Lake Lodge

**OCTOBER 8-9** // Faith Community Nurse Retreat – Covenant Pines Bible Camp