



# VISIONS OF VITALITY

Congregational vitality is a result of the living God breathing new life into the heart of a congregation. Vitality is about the wind of the Spirit ... "a rushing wind so wild and strong," as the old hymn goes. Vitality is nothing less than a spiritual awakening in Christ. Vitality is not about sustaining and maintaining; it's about thriving, growing, and depending on God to lead us deeper in Christ and further in mission. Enjoy these stories of growing vitality in NWC churches.

## HOPE CHURCH: COMPASSION FIRST SUNDAY

By Eileen Zygarlicke

What's better than giving more than \$44,000 to area organizations? How about giving away \$71,000? HOPE Church of Grand Forks, ND, did that and more during their Compassion First Sunday.

"We voted to give away whatever offering we took that equaled our weekly budget," Pastor Paul Knight, lead pastor at HOPE, explained. "If more funds came in above that, we'd keep it to meet HOPE's needs. Anything over that, we'd also give away. We developed a three bucket idea to communicate the concept."

Knight challenged his church to give in a crazy, generous way so that there would be

funds in all three buckets.

"Last year, our first in giving a Sunday offering away, we gave away nearly \$45,000. It was the largest single offering we had ever taken," said Knight. That was last year.



This year, with less promotion but more prayer, the church body responded with an offering over \$98,000. Of that, over \$71,000 was given away.

"I was stunned at the size of the offering. I felt like we hadn't promoted it enough and our budget needs were larger this year. When I read the amount Sunday morning of the offering that overflowed into the third bucket, the congregation gasped. It was a beautiful time of awe before God."

HOPE Church's vision is to reach 10% of unchurched people in its region. The church staff encourages people to love the community; giving is an expression of that love.

A church member decided to take things a step further and donated \$10,000 to be given out on a Sunday morning in \$20 increments. The caveat? Each recipient of the envelope holding the \$20 had to use the money to "reach wide and touch someone for Christ." People hosted neighborhood parties, gave the money to someone they knew, or used it to buy ingredients to bake for others.

"I want the community to know HOPE Church loves our community. Gary Walter asked when visiting our church, 'Will HOPE be missed in Grand Forks if you disappeared?' We want to make sure the community knows HOPE is here and cares."

## THOUGHTS FROM NAVIGATE

By Darren Olson, Senior Pastor of the Evangelical Covenant Church of International Falls

As a church, we have been in a season of transition for five plus years. We have known something needed to happen if we were going to become the church God was calling us to become. Yet we have struggled to find our way out of the comforts of maintaining and sustaining church as we have known it.

We have been surviving in the status quo of stability, happy to know that we have had the same number of people in attendance, that we have a nice building, and a budget

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## True North Awards presented for service to Alaska

Two members of Covenant churches in Minnesota were recently honored with the True North Award for their long history of furthering the ministry of the Evangelical Covenant Church of Alaska (ECCAK).



Keith Hamilton, president of Alaska Christian College (ACC) recently presented a plaque to Glen Mehrkens at Red Wing Covenant Church. He also presented Marv Bjorlin, who attends Excelsior Covenant Church, with a plaque. Hamilton also gave each of the men a personal note of appreciation from Alaska Governor Sean Parnell for their history of volunteering in the state and demonstrating a godly example of servanthood.

This award is presented to Covenanters who live outside of Alaska and have a history of traveling north to serve, Hamilton said.

Mehrkens has brought teams from the church and other congregations for 11 years to remodel dilapidated parsonages in remote villages and repair some of the churches as well. Mehrkens and his wife, Millie, also served at ACC for five years full-time in maintenance and administrative support.

Bjorlin served Alaska ministries for more than 10 years, constructing and serving at radio stations in Bethel and Eagle River and helping with construction at village churches.

"These men demonstrate to all of us how best to use our retirement years for the glory of God," Hamilton said. "I can't imagine what the Covenant churches of Alaska would be like without dedicated volunteers from the lower 48 churches. We hope that many will continue to follow their example for this mission outpost of the Covenant."

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that consistently has been met. Yet, there has been an inward gnawing in our community's soul that there is so much more for us to embrace. We wanted to thrive in the mighty rushing winds of the Holy Spirit but have been unwilling to take the risk. After three of our lay leaders and I spent time going through Navigate (Nov. 1-3 at First Covenant Church in Minneapolis), we are convinced that we can and will become the healthy, missional church God has been prompting us to become.

Since returning, we have taken significant steps to address this. We have decided to rewrite our vision statement to read, "We exist to love Jesus and to love like Jesus." How we will measure whether we are effectively doing this is by making the Ten Healthy Missional Markers our standard by which we evaluate our progress.

We, like most churches, are wrestling with change. It simply is not easy. But we have adopted a new way of thinking about change. It's an acronym for the word "C.H.A.N.G.E."—Christ Has Another New Growing Experience. We believe that when we can change the culture of the way we look at change, change for God's purpose becomes attainable. We have only just begun. Yet we are committed and believe God has called us to be in a constant state of becoming His Church for His glory. Pray that we learn to better love Jesus and love like Jesus. After all, this is the Great Commandment and "the greatest of these is love."

## NEW HOPE AT HOPE COVENANT IN ST. CLOUD, MN

By Keith Meyer, Lead Pastor of Hope Covenant Church in St. Cloud, MN

At Hope Covenant, we are enjoying a time of refreshing as we follow the Northwest Conference and Evangelical Covenant Church's process of Congregational Vitality.

In the two and a half years since we started, God has met us in our stumbling attempts to follow Him, moving us from a descent into "Critical Moment" and sliding slowly towards "At Risk"—but turned around now and steadily headed up from "Stable" and on the way to "Healthy Missional." A service of Repentance and Healing

has been a big part of our story, not just the one service as suggested in the preparation of the vitality process, but eventually as two special services each year and a regular part of the service each weekend.

Following a sermon by visiting and retired Covenant pastor Carl Taylor on Jesus healing various body and soul sicknesses, and an altar call I delivered explaining that Jesus often

asked those who came for healing, "What do you want?", we asked people to come for what they wanted from Jesus in healing.

One person or couple and then another, kept coming out of their seats, sometimes waiting in lines, telling

Jesus and the four prayer team couples their needs and wants, which were prayed for and then anointed with oil for healing by the laying on of hands. In the days and weeks after our first Healing Service, people were still buzzing about what they experienced. Here's a taste of what we heard ...

*"We haven't seen God move like that in all the 32 years we have been coming to Hope Covenant!"*

*"A palpable spirit of repentance was hovering over the congregation, accompanied by the sounds of sniffing and tears being shed and occasional deep sobs."*

We now have two special "healing" services a year, announced ahead of time by e-mail, bathed in intercessory prayer by our leaders, to give dedicated opportunity for God to work in confession, healing prayer, laying on of hands and anointing with oil in our midst. We have made prayer like this a regular feature of each service where the last song of the opening worship set, just before the sermon, is our "prayer" song. Sometimes it means we sit quietly together before the Lord, or as we sing people go to pray with Elders that are in the aisles. At other times, we call for the congregation to shout out loud praises, thanks, and intercessions or simply repeat together the Lord's Prayer or a responsive reading of a psalm.

As Carl and I reflected on the services we have done together in fall 2012 and summer 2013, we have been humbled to see how God works when our planning isn't just an order of service, but prior intercession together with the Elders and congregation for God to move in healing power, not as just one service, but a part of ongoing worship and congregational life. Praise be to our healing God.



# CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILY EVENTS OFFER REST AND RENEWAL, SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES

## SABBATH RETREAT FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILY MINISTERS

Feb. 26-28, 2014

Covenant Pines Bible Camp

Mark 6:31: "Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, 'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.'"

Sound familiar? Children, youth and family ministers are invited to Covenant Pines Bible Camp for a spiritual rest and renewal retreat. Come after dinner on Wednesday, Feb. 26, and stay through Friday breakfast.

Steve Burger, Director of Christian Formation for the Evangelical Covenant Church, will lead spiritual practices on Thursday (Feb. 27), and Judy Swanberg, Associate Director of Pastoral Care & Development, will be available for individual spiritual direction conversations.

Churches, we invite you to give your staff ministers the gift of rest and renewal so they can be healthy leaders, in tune with God's leading.

Suggested donation for the retreat is just \$20. Please RSVP to the Conference office at [kara@northwestconference.org](mailto:kara@northwestconference.org) or 612-721-4893 by Friday, Feb. 21.



## NWC FAMILY GO: SERVE

Saturday, April 26, 2014

Redeemer Covenant Church, Brooklyn Park, MN

Looking for ways to teach families with young children about serving the world around them? Join NWC families for a new event, targeted to families with children in pre-K through upper elementary school. Go: Serve is an opportunity for families to learn and grow together, in a family-friendly, yet stretching environment suitable for younger children.

Families can expect to have their worldview expanded, to be inspired by God's kingdom workforce in the world, and to have



# GO:SERVE

opportunity to extend the hope and love of Christ with those experiencing unmet needs.

Resources will be provided for families to learn together, debrief and reflect on the experience together. Registration information coming in January. Questions? Contact Kara Stromberg, Director of Children & Family Ministry, at [kara@northwestconference.org](mailto:kara@northwestconference.org).

## UPDATES FROM PASTORAL CARE & DEVELOPMENT

By Jeff Burton, Director of Pastoral Care & Development

In the first few months of our new roles, Judy Swanberg and I have had the opportunity to connect with a variety of pastors and ministry staff in group settings. Our new ministry began at the Fall Ministerial Association Retreat. We have also connected with nine District pastors gatherings, and six different affinity groups.

In addition, we have been able to connect with a number of groups that we see as part of the Pastoral Care & Development team: the Spiritual Director's Network, the Clergy Care Committee, the Committee



on Ministerial Standing, and the Executive Committee of the Ministerial Association. One on one connections—both personal meetings and phone calls—have also been a growing part of our work.

An unexpected blessing for me has been the chance to lead in three pastoral installations. Those are significant moments in the life of a church and its pastor. One

pastor is new to the Covenant, one new to the lead pastor role, and the other a recent seminary graduate taking his first call. Each of those situations comes with unique first-year challenges. We are blessed as a Conference to be able to provide real, individualized support to these pastors.

I was reminded in a rather unique way that Judy and I are only part of the picture. One of the pastors I installed has been mentored for the last four years by a retired pastor in our Conference. It is our desire to encourage and facilitate those kinds of connections.

We really are better together.

# CITY OF LAKES COVENANT CHURCH

On Oct. 1 the NWC signed a Covenant Agreement with our newest Church Planting pastor, Dave Berge, who has officially begun planting City of Lakes Covenant Church in South Minneapolis!

Most recently, Berge served a church in California prior to being assessed and recommended to plant with the Evangelical Covenant Church. Please pray for Dave Berge, his wife Amy, and their children, Kyle and Peter, as they settle into a new home and begin this new ministry. Thanks for all of your faithful support of NWC ministry. Every plant is a collaborative effort between the Conference churches, the denomination and individual partner/parent churches.

## WHY HAVE YOU CHOSEN TO BECOME A CHURCH PLANTER?

I became a church planter because I felt God calling me to do the riskiest thing possible to leverage the gifts he's given me to engage people with the gospel and invite them into Christian community. Jesus didn't leave his disciples with a book. He left them with a command to "be my witnesses." For me, church planting is about the forming of a new community of witnesses to the power of Jesus to transform our lives and our city.

One of my favorite theologians, Lesslie



Newbigin, said, "The best apologetic of the gospel is a congregation that believes it." I feel called to be a part of planting a church with that sentiment at the core of our DNA. We will be a church that constantly asks ourselves, "If we really do believe this stuff, then what is God calling us to do about it?" It's the opportunity to form a congregation like that that makes me excited to be a church planter.

## HOW/WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THE LOCATION OF YOUR CHURCH PLANT?

I chose south Minneapolis because it's where I'm from, it's where I am most deeply connected, and it's the place that God has given me a heart for. I am a Minnesotan to my core. God has called me to minister in this place and to these people.

We will be meeting at Armatage Elementary School because it's the right size, the right location, and it has an administration that is incredibly supportive of hosting a church be-

cause of the mutual benefits it brings to both parties. Finding the right space has been one of the hardest parts of the planting process, but the timing with Armatage was providential and a huge answer to prayer.

## WHAT WILL BE UNIQUE ABOUT THE CHURCH YOU LEAD?

In many ways our church won't be unique at all. We will read from the same Bible, pray the same prayers, sing the same songs, say the same creed, and administer the same sacraments as churches all over the world have done for centuries. One of the things I love about the church is its uniformity that reflects an aspect of our unity across time and space. What will make our church unique is the people whom God calls to be a part of our fellowship, the individual stories of lives changed in their own unique ways, the different gifts, skills, and talents that people will bring to the table and use for the glory of God and the good of the city.

To learn more about City of Lakes Covenant Church, visit [cityoflakescov.org](http://cityoflakescov.org)

## NWC CALENDAR

- 2.26-28** → **Children, Youth & Family Ministry Sabbath Retreat** – Covenant Pines Bible Camp
- 3.14-15** → **NWC Women Ministries Renewal Conference** – Buffalo Covenant Church
- 4.4-5** → **MOVE** – First Covenant Church (Minneapolis)
- 4.26** → **Go:Serve** – Redeemer Covenant Church
- 5.1-2** → **Ministerial Association Annual Meeting** – Rochester Covenant Church
- 5.2-3** → **NWC Annual Meeting** – Rochester Covenant Church
- 6.21-28** → **Adventures in Leadership** – Adventurous Christians
- 8.7-9** → **MUUUCE** – Crossroads Church



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