



River of Life Current

February 2012

Dear People of River of Life,

The “River of Life Showcase” included with the annual report highlights much of what I wish to praise and celebrate about River of Life. Yet there is even more to say! This past year I have begun to understand my role as pastor of this congregation with a new metaphor. Pastors are often compared to shepherds or teachers or caregivers; some even adapt business metaphors like CEO or agent. The metaphor for my leadership here is pretty unique: a navigator.

Navigator Task #1 – Equipping the saints for ministry

“Equipping the saints for ministry” is in my ordination vows, and especially at River of Life I see the need to lift up lay voices, equipping you in any way I can to give your own testimonies and become leaders. While some are naturally comfortable doing this, others need encouragement, role models, and examples. Whatever it takes, all of us living out our calls to ministry in various forms is what being a Christian is all about, and it is exciting to see you doing this in your own ways! Perhaps we might even dream of having a preaching seminar and lay preachers from time to time, down the road. I am so proud of how in the last year congregation members have shared their witness and faith stories in different ways in every season:

All year: Sharing stories and prayer requests during Community Time
 Spring: Talked one-on-one during teaching sermons about “What Is a Church?”

Summer: Connected a story or song from your life with an Old Testament Bible character

Fall: Shared stewardship stories

Winter: Related the nativity characters’ stories to your own life

In The New Year: Share a Bible verse and its meaning during Children’s Messages

I am especially encouraged by Presley’s leadership and others taking leadership to teach the congregation songs from Liberia. This is such a crucial part of being a bi-cultural congregation, and the lay leadership immersing around music is to be commended.

(continued on page two)



Upcoming Events

- Packing container 9-2 pm at Global Health Ministries
- All Stars—February 16 & Mar 15
- Ash Wednesday—Feb 22 at Elim Lutheran in Robbinsdale
- Synod Assembly—Mar 17/18

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Navigator Task #2 – Find our place in the ELCA and among Lutheran entities such as Thrivent, Global Health Ministries, Luther Seminary, etc.

We have access to a wealth of resources from the strong Lutheran tradition in the US, and being part of the largest Lutheran church body in the country. I see it as part of my position as pastor to expose and connect especially the immigrants among us with the resources of the predominantly white denomination. We have much to offer, and our voices are greatly valued! River of Life members have participated in the ELCA Malaria Campaign, on the synod's Mission Table, and on a Thrivent chapter board. In February we'll be helping to pack a container of medical and other supplies to be sent to Phebe Hospital in Liberia, through nearby Global Health Ministries, which ships to Lutheran hospitals all over the world. Church members have attended conferences at Luther Seminary and we are blessed to have a seminary student Rufus Kudee and his family choose us as his "teaching parish." I understand that it is easy to fall into a habit of socializing or focusing on the groups we already know, but I wish to connect you more and more to the larger Church, for all of our benefit!

What remains is for us to increase our stewardship, and give to these organizations, acknowledging how much we are receiving from them. Our congregation's giving to the synod, which has given us so very much, is a far cry from a tithe, even of the offerings we take in, at 0.7% of our offerings, not even our total income. As a new bishop enters the synod office in February, we are all asked to start him or her off with increased commitment, and River of Life can certainly do our part.

Navigator Task #3 – Connect those "outside" of River of Life with our faith and life stories

I am often asked at gatherings of pastors, the Women of the ELCA, and organizational meetings, about serving a bi-cultural congregation, Liberian Lutherans and immigrant experiences in US churches, among other things. Everyone who talks to me knows what a unique congregation I serve, and I often serve as a navigator for them too, of how to connect in the African community here. Sometimes it feels like a joke, because I know how little I understand even now, and how much I am learning every day. But there it is. I am asked how Thrivent can connect with the African community, or how the ELCA World Hunger Appeal can gain insight from those who've lived in refugee camps. So I realize that it is an important part of being River of Life's pastor to be the pastor of this congregation out in the community. I currently serve on the board of Agora, a ministry that runs a class on church leadership for immigrants in Lutheran congregations. I am nominated for a 2nd 2-year term on the synod council at the assembly in February. And at the invitation of several church members, I have just been added to the board of the Bong Kwatekeh Association (Bong County, Liberia) here in Minnesota. The credential of being a pastor of a church in the urban core with diverse membership also gives me the authority to coordinate "Seminary of the Streets", an initiative to bring people from all over our synod into conversation with one another, to understand issues faced by some of us like racism, economic disparity, and the need for innovative leadership. I have been encouraged to see these ways of serving outside of 2200 Fremont Ave North, as River of Life sponsoring a ministry to the whole church through my efforts.

Please do enjoy the "River of Life Showcase" and then pass it along to someone who does not yet know about River of Life Lutheran Church!

Pastor Lee Ann Pomrenke

Bishop's Election at Synod Assembly Feb 17-18th

Listed below are the 18 clergy nominees from the November 20 Conference Assemblies who have agreed to go forward in the bishop nomination process in our synod. According to the process used by our church body, new nominations can also be made on the first day of the synod assembly. You can read biographies of each candidate on the synod website: www.mpls-synod.org/assembly/bishopnominees. River of Life's delegates to this year's Minneapolis Area Synod assembly are Joseph Roberts and Dominique Jones. The synod assembly theme is: "Rooted in the Biblical Story."

Rev. Mary Albing
 Rev. Nancy Nord Bence
 Rev. Thomas Carlson
 Rev. Kelly Chatman
 Rev. Vern Christopherson
 Rev. Stephen Ganzkow-Wold
 Rev. Karen Geisendorfer-Lindgren
 Rev. Peter Geisendorfer-Lindgren
 Rev. Gerald Wahl

Rev. David Lechelt
 Rev. Hans Lee
 Rev. Christopher Nelson
 Rev. Durk Peterson
 Rev. Wayne Peterson
 Rev. Erik Strand
 Rev. Ann Svennungsen
 Rev. Susan Tjornehoj
 Rev. Christine Wenzel



RoL Member Nominated as Delegate for Churchwide Assembly 2013

River of Life member Dominique Jones has been nominated by the North Minneapolis Conference to be a delegate to the ELCA Churchwide Assembly to be held in Pittsburgh, PA in August 2013. Her nomination will be voted on at the upcoming Minneapolis Area Synod assembly.



February Seminary of the Streets – ABCD (Asset-Based Community Development)

Location: NE Community Lutheran at Grace Center, **1500 6th St NE, Minneapolis**

Date/Time: Thursday, Feb 9th, 5:15 pm meal; 6-8 pm interactive learning

NE Community Lutheran at Grace Center is a great example of this month's focus on innovative leadership! You should come just to see Grace Center, and all of the organizations that live under one roof! The "teaching" session can be remembered simply by ABCD; Asset-Based Community Development is about working from the assets of our community or church, rather than its problems. Council members are especially encouraged to participate! The leader of this program will also be doing a 2-day workshop to go more in-depth the following Friday and Saturday (see below).

ABCD Workshop – Friday, Feb 10, 6-9 pm and Saturday Feb 11th, 8:30 am-noon

Jody Kretzmann has been working on Asset-Based Community Development for decades. For a concrete example of this work, have you ever seen Mercado Central on Lake Street? Area churches got together with the primarily Mexican residents of their neighborhood and talked about the assets they all bring to the table. As it turned out, many of the neighbors had been small business owners in Mexico, and already knew how to run restaurants. The Mercado Central co-operative was born. This workshop will give us the tools to assess and harness the strengths already existing in our congregation and neighborhood. Council members have been particularly invited as registrations were due at the end of January, but if you have a particular interest, please speak with Pastor Lee Ann asap.

March Seminary of the Streets—Our Hmong Neighbors' Life and Faith

Location: Luther Memorial Church, 3751 Sheridan Ave N, Minneapolis

Date/Time: Thursday, March 8th, 5:15 pm meal; 6-8 pm interactive learning

Beginning with a meal of Hmong food, we'll learn about what it is like to leave behind cultural practices from an animistic/shamanistic when converting to Christianity. This promises to be a fascinating learning opportunity for all. Luther Memorial has a very active youth and young adult population, who will be a part of the session.

Youth Enterprise Expands On Our 3rd Floor

We have all enjoyed the t-shirts printed Youth Enterprise on the 3rd floor of our building. Kemen Taylor oversees and mentors a group of young men from our neighborhood. Not only do students learn responsibility and job skills, but they do Bible Study and get homework help. It is a very well-rounded ministry, funded through Youthworks. Until now, there were 2 other youth Enterprise shops, next door to each other in south Minneapolis - one for guys and one for girls. Youth Enterprise has long hoped to open a girls' shop in north Minneapolis too, and now has the means to fulfill this dream. Since keeping the genders separate helps limit distractions and keep to the task at hand, Youth Enterprise needs a separate room and separate female director for the program expansion. The large room next door to the current shop - often referred to as the "choir rehearsal area" although it has not been used for that purpose in quite awhile - was a good fit. At the recommendation of the property committee, the Council approved this new use of the space, on the condition that Youth Enterprise pay their own electric bill. Youth Enterprise has paid an electrician to do the extra wiring needed for their equipment, and also install a meter so they can pay their electrical usage fees accurately. Sharing our space in this way is a way to enable a quality youth ministry to happen in this neighborhood.

Annual Meeting Update

The River of Life Foundation welcomed two new board members at our annual meeting: Samuel Tarnue and Samuel Juah. We thank Donna Bedin for her service as her term comes to an end. All the spots on the foundation board are now full.

The River of Life congregation thanks the following Council members who have completed two consecutive terms on Council: Joseph Roberts, Emily Swanson and Sharon Stegora. The Church Council welcomed 3 new members at our annual meeting Jan 22nd: Garmai Tarnue, Bob McCollor and Samuel Juah. Thelma Dukuly was re-elected for a 2nd term. The Council officers for 2012 are: President Jeff Skrenes, Vice President Samuel Tarnue, Secretary Kris Webb and Treasurer Walter Hanson.



Global Health Ministries – Packing Container for Phebe

Global Health Ministries, a non-profit organization headquartered in nearby Fridley, collects and send medical equipment to Lutheran hospitals in 20+ countries around the world. One of those is Phebe hospital in Bong County, Liberia, where several River of Life members have worked. GHM is preparing to ship a double (40 foot) container to Phebe hospital, containing three complete dental suites (chair, lights, x-ray, etc.), several pallets of school supplies and books for several Lutheran secondary schools, assorted medical supplies and equipment for Curran, some stuff for Dr. Gwenigale, Ministry of Health, and other items for Phebe Hospital and School of Nursing. This shipment will also include 4 pallets worth of duplicators to copy bibles and other materials for Lutheran Bible Translators.

This container is scheduled to be packed on Saturday, February 4, 2012. Able-bodied volunteers aged 12 and up are asked to arrive at 9 am so that they only have to do the orientation and instructions once. Members of Bong Kwatekeh (Bong County Association in MN) are also signing up to help pack, but we'd like some turnout from River of Life! Please RSVP to Pastor Lee Ann if you will be coming.

All Stars

You are invited to All Stars on the third Thursday of the month at 12 noon. The All Stars group is for those who are 55 and older—and for anyone available during the day. We will have a delicious dinner prepared by Chef Jeff and a program to follow.

Our speaker for February 16th is Allison Johnson, who is the Congregational Relations Organizer working on the Emerson North project and also knows Nicollet Square very well. The Plymouth Community Neighborhood Foundation has two projects: one is Nicollet Square, where Chef Jeff Riley's catering crew hails from and the other is the Emerson North project, which is coming soon to 18th and Emerson, with mixed income housing, including units of transitional housing for families who have been homeless.

Our March 15 program will be the "Touching Hearts" duo of Bob Clark and Mary Kopet.

Invited By St. Andrew's Episcopal

Our neighboring church (whom we've played soccer with multiple times) invites River of Life members to participate in two activities with them.

- "Alpha" Bible Course – Wednesdays 5:30-6:15pm (food), 6:15-7:30pm (fellowship, small group Bible learning). They began Jan 11th, and will continue through March, but you can join in anytime!
- Saturday, Feb 11th – 6-10 pm Valentine's Dance at St. Andrew's with light refreshments

First Communion Training: after worship March 25, 11:30-1:30 pm with lunch

We again have young elementary school students ready to take first communion instruction. Different Lutheran congregations have different practices about who receives communion, but the teaching is the same: A person is prepared to receive Holy Communion who trusts these words of Jesus, "Given for you" and "shed for you for the forgiveness of sins". It may indeed be the case that children are the most willing among us to trust these words! So we welcome to first communion instruction any school-aged children whose parents decide they are ready. Our class for children and their parents together will include storytelling, exercises and Passover foods to understand where Communion came from. As in 2010, the children will receive their first communion the next Sunday, which is Palm Sunday.

Children Received Bibles on January 22nd



We all need a Bible that we can understand, which is why our children have been given a special children's Bible called "Spark! Children's Bible." Kids as well as adults are encouraged to bring their Bibles to church on Sundays!

Ash Wednesday & Lent Wednesday Worship

For Ash Wednesday any River of Life members who wish to attend a mid-day worship service will gather at Elim Lutheran, 3978 W. Broadway in Robbinsdale. Worship will be at 11 am, followed by a luncheon.

All other Wednesdays during Lent, River of Life members are invited to again join the noon worship service at Christ English Lutheran Church on the corner of Oliver and Lowry Avenues.

Shelter "Good Neighbor" Meetings

Every third Wednesday of the month, from 6:30-7:30 pm, in the upstairs lounge at River of Life Church there is a "Good Neighbor" meeting. It is an open house style meeting where community members are able to stop through to learn more about the shelter and St. Stephen's Human Services, share concerns, and discuss community resources. Snacks are also provided.

If you are unable to make the meetings but have questions and/or concerns, please feel free to call Nicole Simpson, Shelter Advocate, on her personal cell phone - 612-619-3852.

Bible Sermon Series Summary

(For weeks 1, 2 & 3; Weeks 4 & 5 summaries will be included in the next newsletter)

The Word of God: Reading and Understanding the Bible, 1

What do we mean when we say the “Word of God”?

How does God speak?

1. Jesus Christ - John 1:14 “And the Word became flesh”
2. The Preaching of the Good News – 2 Timothy 4:2 “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season”
3. The Bible –Martin Luther: The Bible is the cradle in which the Christ child was laid

ELCA Confession of Faith: “This church accepts the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith and life.”

- We believe the Bible’s “authority” and “inspiration” come from what it does: God speaks to us through the Bible, and changes lives.
- The Bible tells us what God wants to say.
- The Bible can be misunderstood, and has been!
- Listening to the whole church is crucial to responsible interpretation of Scripture

The Word of God: Reading and Understanding the Bible, 2

What is in the Biblical Library and How Do We Read It?

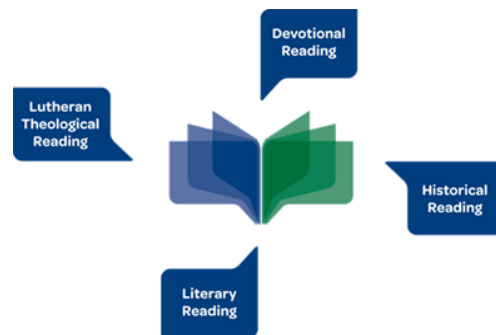
- History
- Wisdom Poetry
- Prophets
- Gospel
- Letters

Five Key Lutheran Principles for Understanding Scripture

1. When the Word of God is preached, we can hear both the Law and the Gospel.
 - The Law is that which accuses and judges us.
 - The Gospel is that which comforts us
2. What shows forth Christ

3. Difficult passages of Scripture are to be interpreted in light of those passages that are more readily understandable, and all of Scripture is to be interpreted in light of the Bible's central themes.
 - How the commandments work
 - Theology of the Cross
 - Justification by Grace Through Faith
4. Plain Meaning of the Text
5. Public Interpretation

Four Approaches to Bible Study



Reading List – These 3 books were used for reference for the Bible sermon series, and are available at the Luther Seminary bookstore or online at augsburghfortress.org.

A Beginner's Guide to Reading the Bible by Craig R. Koester
Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1991.

Opening the Book of Faith: Lutheran Insights for Bible Study
By Diane Jacobson, Mark Allan Powell, and Stanley N. Olson
Augsburg Fortress, 2008.

The Lutheran Study Bible, English Standard Version
Concordia Publishing House, 2009.

Websites for online Bible study help:

www.enterthebible.org

www.elca.org/bookoffaith

February/March Birthdays

Feb 2	March 1
Bob McCollor, Kris Webb	Marcellus Williams
Feb 4	March 4
Diana Courtney	Don Eide, Jean Johnson
Feb 6	Jean Johnson
Ruth Lundquist, Ken Volker	March 5
Feb 8	Partee Zakama
Lieve Snellen	March 6
Feb 11	Yarmah Gbelee, Maura Lapham,
Andrew Meeks III, Leo Sedlacek	March 9
Moses Vankpanah, Jr.	Patricia Shortall, Barbara Sundquist
Feb 12	March 10
Connie Bros, Laura Jallah	John Foeday, Eleanor Zasko
Feb 13	March 13
Ole Nelson, Dakaar Reynolds	Margaret Swanson,
Feb 14	March 15
Donna Hemp	Jackie Anderson, Donna Dirnberger
Feb 16	Louise Zakama
Ralph Belin, Orlando Gbahn, Jr.	March 17
Emmanuel Livingstone	Nancy Fodstad
Feb 17	March 18
Pam Lapham, Paul Lapham	Tealigga Giddings, Emmanuel Willie
Feb 18	March 28
Susan Rydell	Rose Brown, Eric Weedor
Feb 20	March 30
Marlene Hasher, Steve Lund	Mashaela Neal
Feb 22	March 31
Howard Martin, Bob Nelson	Andrew Tehmeh
Angeline ZayZay	
Feb 23	
Luke Neal	
Feb 25	
Emily Swanson	
Feb 26	
Dorothy Nyberg	
Feb 28	
Heather Schullo, Bill Stegora, Jacob Young	

FebruaryMarch Worship Assistants

Feb 5

Assisting: Samuel Juah

Communion Assistants:

Mary Adams & Horace Gbanoe

Ushers:

Moses Vankpanah & Margaret Seibeh

Money Counter: Jeff Skrenes

Feb 12

Reader: Jerry Eliason

Assisting: Momolu Kpakelipaye

Communion Assistants

Marlene Hasher and Patricia Rogers

Ushers: Victoria Gbanoe & Isabel Zubah

Money Counter: Bill Stegora

Feb 19

Reader: Dominique Jones

Assisting: Russ Nelson

Communion Assistants:

Thelma Dukuly and Florence Kpakelipaye

Ushers: Ben and Angeline ZayZay

Money Counter: Mary Adams

Feb 26

Reader: Joan Nathan

Assisting: Kris Webb

Communion Assistants:

Martin Lerum and Fametta Zubah

Ushers: Horace Gbanoe and Garmai Tarnue

Money Counter: Jeff Skrenes

March 4

Reader: Garmai Tarnue

Assisting: Jean Myers

Communion Assistants:

Jim Gratz and Ed Weedor

Ushers:

Moses V & Margaret Seibeh

Money Counter: Margaret K.

March 11

Reader: Roger Saline

Assisting: Ed Weedor

Communion Assistants:

Mary Adams and Horace Gbanoe

Ushers: Victoria G & Isabel Zubah

Money Counter: Garmai Tarnue

March 18

Reader: Dominique Jones

Assisting: Russ Nelson

Communion Assistants:

Fametta Zubah & Marlene Hasher

Ushers: Ben & Angeline ZayZa

Money Counter: Ed Weedor

March 25

Reader: Samuel Juah

Assisting: Sharon Stegora

Communion Assistants:

Marlys Noreen & Thelma Dukuly

Ushers: Horace G & Garmai Tarnue

Money Counter: Bill Stegora



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February/March Birthdays can be found on page 10

Did we forget your birthday ?? Call the Church Office at 612-521-7655 to add it to our records.