

Blue Earth River Conference

Lilah E. Aas, Dean

The Blue Earth River Conference encompasses forty-one churches of the southwestern segment of the Southeastern Minnesota Synod. Meetings are held monthly for the pastors and staff from September through May, with an annual Assembly the second Sunday of February. Good worship, presentations, fellowship, and food make each month's gathering a time of renewal and enrichment. Thanks to Rev. Pat Hinkie for arranging the programs. We were blessed to have two of the programs presented by member pastors: "Conflict Polarities" by Rev. Peter Soli and "Peace, Not Walls" by Rev. Curtis Zieske.

Several of our pastors have made a commitment to encourage young people to go on to the seminary; at this time we have ten such students. At the Conference Assembly, Revs. Curtis Zieske and Tamara Dahlvang volunteered to co-ordinate tuition support for these students.

At the conference assembly in 2007, Rev. Peter Soli introduced the idea of building a team for a Habitat for Humanity work project in Mobile, AL from June 9-17, 2007. Fourteen area people were able to participate in this effort.

The Blue Earth River Conference Annual Assembly was held on February 11, 2008 at Grace Lutheran, Albert Lea. Nominees for voting members for the 2009 Churchwide Assembly were elected. Pastor Jay Dahlvang presented a Resolution "Bible Book of Faith: Lutherans Read the Bible." It was approved and will be presented to the Synod Assembly.

Thanks to God for blessing us with such dedicated servants.

Cannon River Conference

Pastor Sarah Nietz, Dean

The Cannon River Conference has had an active year, with both consistent meetings and attendance. A series was presented by Rev. Dan Dimick, Northfield, Minn, on "Depression, Dependencies and Pastoral Care;" Erin Armstrong, student at St. Olaf College held a workshop on "Christ's Call to Action, Working for Social Justice;" pastors visited the Lutheran Social Services Vasa Home in Red Wing and were grateful to gather together at St. Olaf College for their annual Christmas concert; as always, our relationship with St. Olaf is a much appreciated part of our conference ministry.

Joys and concerns have been shared at most meetings; other conversations of note included assessing the level of pastoral and lay participation in the conference nominations process and the opportunity of the conference assembly to have discussion and dialogue with voting members nominated for the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in 2009. The importance of conference gatherings has been richly affirmed here in the past year.

Many thanks are due to outgoing Dean Rev. Keith Homstad, retiring secretary Bonnie Hermann and nominations committee chair Craig Breimhorst for their consistent leadership service to the conference over the past several years.



Minnesota River Conference

Pastor Jim Ahlquist, Dean

The Minnesota River Conference Pastors gather each month during the school year for worship, support, education, and of course food! The time spent with colleagues is important, as we rejoice and struggle daily in our callings. Thanks to the host congregations from the past year, and to those who will provide hospitality in the upcoming months.

Our education comes from a range of programs. A report of the ELCA, “Put Your Strengths to Work” by Marcus Buckingham, Ministry and the 12 Step Program, Recent Holy Land pictures and reflection, relationships with our hospital chaplain and the local parish, *For The Bible Tells Me So* movie and discussion with one of the featured families, Rural Ministry, among other relevant topics.

The Conference Assembly program “The Future of Children, Youth, and Family Ministry in Congregations” was presented by Pastor Kristen Venne, Chair of the Synod Task Force. We heard reports, talked about seminary tuition, designated our benevolence, voted on nominees for voting members to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly and an entire slate of Conference Officers, prayed, and ate soup and bread.

Rev. Joel Erickson will be our new Dean, Vice Dean Rev. Shelly Olson, Helen Nelson will continue as Secretary, and Treasurer will be Rev. Vicki Hultine. Thanks to them and to the outgoing officers, Revs. Jim Ahlquist and Paul Meierding, Karen Mitchell as Treasurer, and Rev. Joel Erickson as Program Provider. Rev. Phil Lewison continues to provide us with spiritual guidance as Conference Chaplain.

Root River Conference

Jodie Archer, Dean

We have seen a very busy year in the Root River Conference. We started the new synod year in May with severe vandalism at Root Prairie in rural Fountain. Not severe enough not to hold worship services the following Sunday – they weren’t going to let the vandals win and I am happy to say, they still haven’t. When speaking to one of the parishioners recently, she said that they are now looking at this horrific event as a strange blessing – it has brought the congregation together as a family and has also allowed for some updating that was needed.

Another devastating event was in August of this year when “Katrina of the North” hit Rushford and surrounding communities. It continues to amaze me how this community refuses to give in let alone give up. Hundreds of thousands of volunteer hours have been given since August and continues to pour in. How sad that Rushford Lutheran was one week away from holding their dedication services for their new addition when the flood hit. With a positive twist, they have been able to utilize the new space for so many who lost their space or for organizations that have come into the community to assist.

Devastation is not all that the Root River Conference has experienced. I have been privileged to meet so many awesome individuals. Their stories are incredible and their generosity touched my heart. This experience has shown me the many faces of our faith.



Zumbro River Conference

Rev. Kristi Koppel Paul Mainz, Co-Vice-Dean

The Zumbro River Conference continues to gather monthly for worship, fellowship, and education.

Our 2007-08 program year heard from two lay leaders and a pastor who participated in the 2006 Churchwide Assembly. Their experiences were thought provoking and humorous as they encouraged others to go and see ministry from a different perspective. We received excellent church “greening” ideas and joined in song learning new advent hymns. Unfortunately our festival of preaching was cancelled due to weather; perhaps next year. Still to come is a new angle on pre-marital counseling, spiritual care for those struggling with gambling addictions, and new paths for preaching Pentecost.

The annual Conference Assembly was hosted by Christ Lutheran Church in Byron. It was a good time of business and ministry sharing. We heard the excitement of mission congregations, the ongoing needs of Good Earth Village and their thankfulness for the support this year, the far-reaching ministry of Women of the ELCA, and an update on the activity of the Children, Youth and Family Task Force. We dispersed benevolence between ELCA World Hunger, Fund for Leaders in Mission, and Lutheran Disaster Relief. There were no resolutions this year, but many nominees for the 2009 Churchwide Assembly. A warm welcome to Cindy Wiste, our new Dean. And a big thank you to Rev. Lissa Kahl, who was interim secretary and stepped forward to start a full term.

Greatly appreciated are all congregations who hosted and individuals who led worship and taught, helping to make our meetings fruitful gatherings.

