

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 April. Good worship, presentations, fellowship, and food make each month's gathering a time of renewal and enrichment. Thanks to Rev. Mark Boorsma for arranging the programs. We often have utilized the expertise of our clergy to provide the programs. Revs. Chris and Julie Fiske shared the journey of their adoption of a son from Colombia; Rev. Tammy Dahlvang gave a presentation about "Healing Touch Spiritual Ministry;" and Rev. Krista Stokke led us in Worship Meditation. We also were blessed by storytellers Michael Cotter and Beverly Jackson Cotter sharing their artistry. These meeting also provide an opportunity for sharing concerns and making valuable connections.

Many young people from area churches attended the National Youth Gathering in New Orleans, returning with a renewed desire to serve their communities. Thanks to the adult volunteers, youth directors, pastors and supportive congregations for making this possible for our youth.

Various activities within the conference congregations demonstrate that we are actively living the theme of "God's work. Our hands." Among these: supporting our BERC seminarians, sewing quilts for Lutheran World Relief, working with Habitat for Humanity, serving meals for the needy, and supporting our local food shelves.

Thanks to God for blessing us with many dedicated servants.

Cannon River Conference

Rev. Sarah Nietz, Dean

The Cannon River Conference has been active this year with a variety of gatherings, activities and conversations. At monthly pastors' meetings, coffee hours were spent catching up, supporting and uplifting one another in our ministries. Worship was a time for gathering together around Word and Sacrament as we acknowledge the deep importance of these things in our own ministry to the congregations we serve. Laughter has been shared around the ironies of service; sorrows have been mentioned and held in communal safe-keeping.

At several meetings, I have broached the topic of the effectiveness of conference gatherings, asking for feedback on how conference is helpful and useful for our ministry as a church. (This reflects a larger renewal process happening at the Conference of Deans Meetings.) Most clergy have responded that the fellowship and worship aspects of conference are the portions that meet their deepest needs, although a few have hopes for the educational component taking greater priority.

At this year's Conference Assembly meeting it was suggested that the annual meeting of clergy and laity be changed to a bi-annual schedule, meeting primarily for the function of electing conference leadership and voting members to Churchwide Assembly. Another suggestion was to have conference meetings in conjunction with Synod Assembly, as practiced in the past. No changes to the current structure have yet been made but we continue to believe that God will guide and lead us in this renewal of the church!



Minnesota River Conference

Rev. Shelly Olson, Acting Dean

The Minnesota River Conference, met Sunday, February 14 at Faith Lutheran, Janesville for the conference assembly. Rev. Lynne Rigg, a retired nurse and pastor, world traveler and ecumenical peace accompanier presented a program entitled "Israel/Palestine: An Inside View." She shared her perspective of the dire situation of Muslim and Christian Palestinians in the "occupied territories" of Gaza and the West Bank. Most of those in attendance were surprised to learn of how little information traditional forms of media provide Americans surrounding this issue, for example how similar the wall that is being erected in the West Bank is to the Berlin Wall built in Germany after World War II.

In November, members were invited to hear from Bishop Usgaard and this conference's voting members to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly. Equal time was provided for individual members to share concerns and ask questions of Bishop Usgaard. The faithful service and prayerful devotion of our voting members, Bishop Usgaard, and all those in attendance was well appreciated.

At St. John's Lutheran in Owatonna, the Book of Faith Task Force hosted a synod-wide seminar in October. Has your congregation joined the initiative yet? It's easy; just go to bookoffaith.org

The pastors of the conference continue to meet once a month to listen, learn and worship together. In April we enjoyed watching then debating the subtle nuances of the movie *Doubt*. At the January meeting, a planning team was recruited to plan the programs for the next year and it was decided that all congregations in the conference will be strongly encouraged to host these events on a rotating basis.

Root River Conference

Rev. Kerry Eversole, Vice-Dean

Pastors, associates in ministry, officers, and guests from the congregations in the southeastern-most section of our synod have continued the custom of getting together on the second Tuesday of each month from September through May for worship, mutual care and encouragement, and continuing education. Our monthly meetings are made complete by our camaraderie, casual conversation over coffee, and delicious meals.

Here are a few of our 2009-10 presentations: Postville one year later by Rev. David Vásquez; several conversations about the response in our congregations to the social statement on human sexuality and approved changes to ministry policies; a message from the new Executive Director of Good Earth Village, Chad Campbell; and a talk by Rev. Lynne Rigg, former Ecumenical Accompanier with the World Council of Churches in Israel/Palestine in the early months of 2003.

Sincere thanks to our many speakers and host congregations.

We also met in a conference-wide assembly on the second Sunday of February 2010 at Cross of Christ Lutheran Church in Houston. In place of a specialist on the topic, I put together a brief slide presentation and read descriptions of some of the artifacts currently on display at the Dead Sea Scrolls exhibit at the Science Museum of Minnesota. Of course there was the usual conference business that needed attending to.

My heartfelt thanks to the Rev. Paul Forde, Vice Dean; Ben Ekern, Secretary, John Campe, Treasurer; and the Rev. Dennis Timmerman; Conference Chaplain, for their support and faithful service and leadership to our conference.



Zumbro River Conference Cindy Wiste, Dean

2009 was an exciting year as far as programming went for the Zumbro River Conference Pastors monthly meetings. Last winter we heard from one of the local funeral planning businesses about preparing for the future and helping our parishioners make plans for long term care, and ultimately their death. We received some very helpful information for assisting with those plans. Then, we shared our best practices for Confirmation along with reasons why we even bother to do this programming in our churches. This fall, we heard from Dr. Lauren Touissant on the subject of forgiveness. Carole Joyce enlightened us on nurturing spirituality in the children and youth in our congregations. We heard from the Rev. Nancy Maeker on poverty in Minnesota, and the goal to wipe out poverty by 2020. Dr. Craig Nesson from Wartburg Seminary spoke on transforming leadership.

We just held our annual meeting and had a speaker from the Science museum on their upcoming display of the Dead Sea Scrolls. This presentation excited us all about that scientific/religious display coming in March. We re-elected Cindy Wiste as Dean of the conference for the next two years, and Rev. Anjanette Rist as our conference secretary for the next two years. Thank you to Rev. Lissa Kahl who has served as our conference secretary for the past two plus years. Thanks to Gloria Dei Lutheran church for hosting that meeting.

