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An Educational Program for Preventing Child Sexual Abuse



Get this in place before the summer if possible.

Parents, congregations, church leaders and clergy can all benefit from Safeguarding god's children, a program geared to preventing and responding to child sexual abuse in everyday life and in ministry. The training makes use of videos (DVDs) and participant workbooks to provide a basic understanding of the dynamics of child sexual abuse, how to recognize signs that a child may have been abused, what to do if you have concerns about a person's behavior toward a child or youth, or if you suspect that a child or youth has been molested. Safeguarding has been developed by the Episcopal Diocese, and we have 7 Lutheran trainers ready to bring this vital training to your congregation. It is important for all adults concerned about children and youth to know the steps you can take to prevent child sexual abuse in church and other organizational settings. We consider this training essential for all clergy, employees of churches, and church organizations, and volunteers responsible for planning, implementing or supervising ministries, activities or programs for children and youth.

Please contact [Peggy Hahn](#) for a list of available trainers.

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We are asking Houston business leaders to advocate for janitors

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate!

By Pastor Kerry Nelson

(A good idea: This article could be included in every newsletter in every congregation across our synod.)



Synod Assembly Announcements



300-plus participants are registered for Synod Assembly - Saturday room block at our \$145 price is full! Overflow hotel space has been secured at the Astor Crowne Plaza (1 block away from the Sheraton) at a rate of \$162 (plus tax) per night. We are in the process of finalizing arrangements with the hotel. Information for booking rooms at the Astor Crowne Plaza should be available on Monday on the [Synod Assembly web page](#)

Registration for Synod Assembly is still open! Online registration is available through April 12. After April 12, paper registrations will be accepted for \$320. Save money by [registering online!](#)

Voting member packets have been mailed, and all Assembly documents are now online. Visit the [2010 Assembly Page](#) on our Web site to download all the materials you will need for the Assembly. If you have a slow internet connection and would like a CD mailed to you, please email [Mandy Faucett](#).

Corrections to the Nominations information have been added to the [2010 Assembly Page](#). The Reports section has also been added.

Links

[Congregations in Transition as of 03/15/10](#)

[Mission Support Information](#)

Synod Web Site: www.gulfcoastsynod.org

Children, Youth & Family Ministry:
www.soggyshoes.org

Disaster Relief: www.futurewithhope.org

ELCA Churchwide Web Site: www.elca.org

If it is true that the key to real estate is location, location, location, then it is also true that the key to ministry is relationship, relationship, relationship. Our relationship with God and one another, the relationship between congregations and pastors, the relationship between congregations, the relationship between congregations and their synod office, the relationship among all of the partners of the churchwide organization of the ELCA - this is who we are. [Read more...](#)

Prayer for Houston Area Janitors

By Peggy Hahn

Please, join me in prayer over the next two weeks for Houston Area Janitors

Last week it was my privilege to pray with other ecumenical leaders in Houston for hundreds of Houston Janitors. I have learned that working conditions for janitors in Houston are falling drastically behind other major cities. Although

Houston maintains one of the strongest real estate markets and economies in the country in spite of our current economic crisis, janitors are paid significantly less than commercial office janitors who work for the same cleaning contractors and clean buildings owned by the same corporations in other major markets.

While janitors in Houston are paid just \$7.75 per hour, their counterparts in Chicago make almost twice as much - \$14.55 an hour - despite slightly lower annual rental rates of \$22.81 in Chicago and \$23.15 in Houston. Same owners, same cleaning contractors but half of the wages for Houston janitors. Most must work 2-3 jobs to make ends meet as they are only provided with six hours of work per night. Their annual income is less than \$10,000 per year. Janitors have individual health care coverage through the Houston Service Workers Clinic for which they pay \$20 a month (Their employer pays \$185 per month). This insurance does not extend to their families. Janitors have 6 holidays each year and one week of paid vacation. They do not receive sick days.



Houston Janitors are seeking a fair agreement that will continue to improve jobs and strengthen our city's economy. Their priorities are to keep the health clinic they have built and to be able to lift themselves and their families out of poverty through hard work rewarded with fair wages. Negotiations this month with Houston business leaders, could lift the living standards of our city's most

vulnerable members. We are calling on Houston's commercial building owners to play a positive, cooperative role in negotiations for janitors to win a better life for

[ELCA Global Mission](#)

LSTC Ranks Among Top 20 U.S. Seminaries in Multifaith Education

In a study of 150 Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist and multi-religious institutions, conducted by Auburn Theological Seminary's Center for Multifaith Education, the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago ranked among the top 20 for multifaith education. The top 20 seminaries are listed in alphabetical order, and not further ranked.

LSTC's courses on Jewish contributions to Christian thought, on Islam, and on Christian-Muslim relations, offered for more than two decades; the seminary's welcoming Muslim students from around the world to study for advanced degrees; and the work of A Center of Christian-Muslim Engagement for Peace and Justice helped place it among the top 20 for multifaith education.

Other seminaries in the top 20 include Yale Divinity School, Hartford Seminary, Boston University School of Theology, Catholic Theological Union, Harvard Divinity School, Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, Union Theological Seminary, and Naropa University Department of Religious Studies. [See the complete study.](#)

For more information on LSTC's interfaith education, visit the web page for [A Center of Christian-Muslim Engagement for Peace and Justice.](#)

FCC Announces End Date for Wireless Mic in 700 MHz Band

All congregations should check the frequency of their wireless microphones, in-ear monitors, and related equipment. The FCC has ordered that these items must cease operations in the 700 MHz band (698-806 MHz) after June 12, 2010, or earlier under certain conditions. This rule change does not apply to wireless systems that operate in other frequency ranges. This only affects systems that operate on frequencies between 698 and 806 MHz.

themselves, their families and our community. We call on owners to urge cleaning contractors to reach a fair agreement with janitors that continues to lift janitors out of poverty.

Pray for Good Jobs: God of compassion and justice, you know the needs of working families and janitors in this community. You know how they struggle each day to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, education and health care for their children. You know that they work hard to provide for these needs. You know that they need a livable wage and benefits to achieve a decent life.

Please give them the courage and strength to carry on. Please open up the hearts of business and community leaders to support them so that they may lift themselves out of poverty, secure a better future for their families, and create a stronger economy that benefits everyone in the community. Amen.

Synod Statistics...sort of...



By Pastor Kerry Nelson

Numbers matter. They don't tell the whole story, but they do tell a story.

When I go to the doctor, I get weighed and then have my blood pressure recorded. Why? Because they are key numbers, key indicators, that tell something about my health. Over time, the trends are just as important as the numbers. Numbers matter. [Read more...](#)

Fundraising is Dirty Work

By Peggy Hahn

With two separate mission trips this summer, (one to Peru!) parents and youth at Advent have been really creative in their goal to raise funds outside of the congregation. This year they have worked at the concession stand at the Monster Truck Rally and delivered mulch all over Houston.

How do you fund your youth ministry? We would love to hear from you. Please [send your success stories](#) our way so other congregations can get new ideas.



\$1600 dollars on one Saturday - Delivering 900 pounds of mulch. Nice work Advent Lutheran youth group!

As a response to the recent FCC announcement, [Shure Pro Audio](#) is extending 700MHz (698 - 806MHz) Trade-in and Trade-up rebates of up to \$1,000. Purchase a new Shure wireless system and trade in Shure 700MHz frequency band wireless systems and related components or any other manufacturers' qualifying 700MHz wireless systems and related components. For complete details on qualifying products and rebate amounts, download the Rebate Form. Offer Valid: December 1, 2008 to June 30, 2010

If you have any questions, please contact (800) 25-SHURE (800-257-4873).

[Learn more about the recent FCC announcement](#) and how it affects users of wireless devices.

New Analysis of What it Means to be Church in Post-Colonial World

Vitor Westhelle, professor of systematic theology at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, has published a new book, [The Church Event: Call and Challenge of a Church Protestant](#) (Fortress Press, October 2009) The book, which comes shortly after the release of *After Heresy: Colonial Practices and Post-Colonial Theologies*, is being heralded as an important new contribution to post-colonial theological studies.

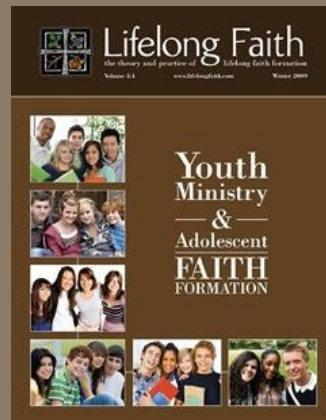
Westhelle divides the book into three parts where he first examines the colonial practice of the "missionary enterprise," and then presents the crisis of Western modernity interpreted by insiders and outsiders of the modern project. Westhelle concludes with an analysis of post-colonial practices that are theologically grounded even when used in discourses that are not religious.

[After Heresy: Colonial Practices and Post-Colonial Theologies](#) (ISBN 978-1-60608-088-7) is available from the publisher.

Genetics Social



New: Lifelong Faith Get Your Complimentary Copy



Pastors and church leaders are invited to receive a complimentary copy of the Lifelong Faith journal.

Designed for pastors, church staff, and faith formation leadership, Lifelong Faith provides the best thinking and practice in Christian lifelong faith formation in churches and homes. Each issue focuses on a particular aspect of lifelong faith formation and includes five-six major articles by national experts, book reviews, and practical strategies and program models that you can use to enrich your leadership and enhance faith formation.

To obtain a complimentary copy email [Bob Todd](#),

For LifelongFaith Associates

"Lifelong Faith sustains a rich two-way conversation between those who study and write about faith formation and those who are called to do the Church's work of nurturing disciples to grow in faith. It is an indispensable resource."

-Dorothy C. Bass, The Valparaiso Project on the Education and Formation of People in Faith

Parents & Families Pass on Faith, but Congregations Grow Christian Leaders

By Peggy Hahn

I was blown away last month at the Houston-area Youth Ministry Network when I realized that 10 out of 18 leaders now serving congregations as pastors or professional youth ministers have grown up through our system of leadership development! As I checked out what moved these leaders to consider a life of service to the church, one after another mentioned things like "The Disciple Project" or "Lutherhill" or being on an "LYO Gathering Team." It seems clear that the partnership between congregations and synod leadership opportunities are vital to our church. With this in mind -

Who will you invite to this year's Disciple Project?

If you were writing this off, take another look. The evidence is clear - this one week investment is making a difference in our capacity to nurture leaders in our church. Young people need to be encouraged into leadership. They need someone to notice their gifts and walk with them as they attend leadership schools like The Disciple Project or experience a week at camp.



We are targeting 8th graders - the people most likely to NOT RETURN TO YOUR CONGREGATION AFTER CONFIRMATION.

Statement Released

The ELCA released a [draft social statement on genetics](#) on March 18. Individuals and congregations are invited to study and discuss the draft, and provide feedback to the task force by Oct. 15.

The draft will be revised based on feedback, and a proposed social statement is to be released in February 2011.



Youth who do not have a purpose in the congregation will leave. Give them a purpose by helping them discover their own capacity as a Christian leader.

We are targeting high school students - the smallest demographic in most congregations and yet, did you know that research proves over and over that most adults make a commitment to their faith before age 18? The Disciple Project has so many learning tracks because our young people have a variety of passions, skills and interests - we want a place for everyone.

We are also targeting pastors! We know pastors influence their congregation in real ways - especially as they preach. This year a wonderful Preaching Track is being led by Paul Wilson who wrote the book *Four Pages of a Sermon* and Bishop Mike Rinehart. If you lack continuing ed funds, contact us now as there may be assistance for pastors wanting to attend. Pastors can come for part of the week or stay all week.

Even if your congregation is going on another trip this summer, [The Disciple Project](#) is worth a conversation. Take a look at the brochure and extend a specific invitation to those young leaders that come to mind - please, don't miss this.

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate!

By Pastor Kerry Nelson

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Sometimes relationships function well. Sometimes the relationships don't function very well. Well-functioning relationships create the kind of synergy where the whole is bigger than the sum of the parts.

But it really isn't as simple as that. Life is constantly moving. Relationships aren't "static" and therefore generalized descriptions like "healthy" or "broken" aren't all that helpful. What IS helpful is recognizing the direction in which relationships are heading - are they heading toward wholeness, toward synergy, toward effectiveness and health or are they heading the other way?

Interestingly, the way we find out where the relationships of our lives are heading is we talk about it. We communicate. We share and we listen. We listen with mutual respect. We communicate well and we communicate often.

We have 125 ministries in our synod, all spread out across a vast geographic territory. The diversity in our synod is dramatic. The danger in our synod is that it is very difficult to maintain a healthy relationship between the various parts of "us" without consistent, careful and honest communication. We can do something about that. We can actually do a lot about that!

Bishop Rinehart communicates extraordinarily well. Any person in our synod can regularly hear from Bishop Rinehart simply by going to his blog, <http://bishopmike.posterous.com>. In addition to a weekly devotion that sets the table for next Sunday's lectionary texts, he shares other thoughts and insights from his point of view as pastor to us all. Every person in our synod with an internet connection should be receiving those messages. How? Easy. Click on the site, click on "subscribe by email" and you're now in the communications loop.

In my position as director for Evangelical Mission, I also strives to provide regular communication within the synod. In addition to writing daily devotions <http://revkerry.wordpress.com>, I am sending out weekly or bi-weekly thoughts about evangelism and stewardship through the Mission Possible Network (<http://txlamission.wordpress.com>). Same drill - click on the site and "subscribe by email."

If you are interested in what is happening in the synod in Youth & Family ministry,

the place to go is <http://www.soggyshoes.org>. There too, click in the upper right corner and sign up for email updates that will be sent directly to you.

All three of the above can be viewed online or you can click the "Subscribe" button and have them delivered directly to your email inbox.

Effective communication goes both ways. How does that work? If you sign up for any of these three blogs, or receive the Y&F emails, you can simply reply to any message you receive and your thoughts will go directly to the writers, including Bishop Rinehart. You can also leave public comments at the end of every blog entry and open conversations with lots of people.

Yes, it is true that not every person has access to the internet. And it is true that not everyone checks their email as often as they could. But we still have telephones, and the US Postal Service. The question is, are we doing what we can to communicate with one another?

The truth is that today we have more tools to communicate with one another than ever before. The key, literally, is getting the word out.

Synod Statistics...sort of...

By Pastor Kerry Nelson

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Numbers matter in the church. Walt Kallestad used the illustration of a schoolteacher counting the children getting on the bus for a field trip. "22, 23, 24. OK," she would tell the bus driver, "They're all on board. We can leave now."

Suppose that same bus got back to the school to see a lineup of cars and parents all waiting for their children. The teacher counts them as they get off the bus, "19, 20, 21, 22. OK, that's close enough." If confronted by the parents of those two missing children, surely the teacher wouldn't answer, "Those are just statistics, just numbers. 22 is close enough."

No, 22 is NOT close enough. When we talk numbers in church we are talking about lives, about people, about ministry. Numbers DO matter in the church.

Numbers are important, but sometimes numbers don't tell the whole story. A congregation might lose participants because the congregation made a very faithful decision rooted in the gospel that some people just didn't like. Their "numbers" might be down for the year, but that isn't to say that they weren't doing effective ministry. In the same way, especially with our American penchant for "bigger is better," a congregation might grow significantly for all the wrong reasons.

Either way, it is important that we know what the numbers are and that we are diligent in keeping track of the key indicator numbers for ministry. Congregations do well to keep track of lots of kinds of numbers - baptized members, participants (in worship, learning, small groups, service groups), and careful financial accounting and tracking.

From the point of view of the synod office, the key numbers are baptized members, average worship attendance, the percentage set aside for mission support and the actual mission support given.

Here's how it looks for 2009....but first a word about accountability (noticing that 'counting' lies at the heart of accountability.)

We have 125 congregations in our synod. Every congregation is expected to do two things every year. They are expected to submit a Statement of Intent for mission support. And they have until February 15th to submit their Annual Report (parochial

report) for the previous year.

According to our most recent records, thus far in 2010, 67 of our congregations have submitted Statements of Intent for 2010. 58 congregations did not submit a Statement of Intent. The total anticipated giving for the year is about \$500,000 less than the synod budget for 2010. Unless something changes, this means a very difficult year for the synod office and diminished ministry through the ELCA churchwide office.

Please check with the leadership of your congregation and see whether or not you have submitted a Statement of Intent for 2010. If not, it is time to have a conversation with your leadership and prayerfully consider what you hope to do.

Regarding annual reports, according to our most recent records, of the 125 congregations in our synod, only 45 congregations submitted their reports on or before the February 15th deadline. Another 15 congregations submitted theirs in March. To date, we haven't heard from over half of our congregations. So what follows now is based only on the data we have received thus far.

34 congregations report having grown by at least 1 baptized member for the year.

14 congregations report positive growth in average worship attendance.

Again, I understand that statistics don't tell the whole story. But I worry about the health and vitality of the stewardship practices in congregations that choose not to fill out a Statement of Intent. Given that seeking annual estimates of giving from members is one of the key practices of vibrant congregations, how can there be integrity if the congregation as a whole isn't practicing what their leaders are preaching?

I also struggle to understand how over half of our congregations don't take the time to fill out a simple online annual report. It makes me wonder what else they aren't willing to do, and the degree to which that unwillingness might be contributing to their continued decline.

There are many pieces to the puzzle of doing faithful and effective ministry in 2010. Keeping records and being accountable will not grow the Kingdom, but they certainly indicate something about our willingness to play as a team, our sense of unity within our synod, and our ability to address significant issues in our congregational lives.

I'm hoping that the "numbers" will improve as we hear from the other half of our congregations. I'm hoping that we receive Annual Reports from 100% of our congregations by the synod assembly in April.

And I'm also hopeful that we all adopt a new standard for accountability in our synod. That:

100% of our congregations will submit Statements of Intent for 2010 and each year to come
100% of our congregations will give some measure of mission support every year
100% of our congregations will demonstrate the willingness to learn and then to adopt, new practices that lead to more effective ministry
100% of our pastors/congregations, by next February 15th, will submit their pastor's Report to the Bishop and congregational Annual Report

Why would we expect anything less than every congregation in the synod doing what is expected of every congregation in the synod? I have a sense that, if we can do that, we will discover many other things along the way that we can also do. And maybe then the Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod will finish a year knowing that we grew the Kingdom by at least one net new person.

If you are a congregational leader reading this, don't keep this to yourself. Bring these words to your Congregational Council for a conversation. And know that we in the synod office are willing to do whatever it takes to help you do what you do.

We're just a phone call or an email away.