

***Let the River Flow II***  
**An Event for Large Congregations of the ELCA**  
**June 15-17, 2009**

*Let the River Flow II* was an outstanding four day event for large congregations of the ELCA. This conference took place June 15-18 at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Burnsville, MN. Debbie Wilson, Director of Contemporary Music, Judy Collins, Spiritual Gifts Coordinator, and Associate Pastor John Brock were able to attend. The schedule included worship, bible studies, workshops, entertainment, displays, wellness breaks, food and fellowship for over 600 participants.

Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson, led the first bible study and preached at closing worship. Other keynote speakers included: Rev. Dr. Stephen Bouman, Executive Director for Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission of the ELCA; Dr. Diana Butler Bass, author, speaker and scholar specializing in American religion and culture; Rev. Dr. Cynthia Hale, founder and senior pastor of Ray of Hope Christian Church in Decatur, GA; Rev. Dr. Gemechis Buba, director of African National Ministries in the ELCA; and Mark Mittelberg, author and evangelist.

An overriding theme throughout the week was *wellness*. The ELCA initiative of a “Healthy Lifestyle for All People” was made clear with scheduled speakers who focused on stress management, relaxation, healthy eating, and exercise. It was also apparent with healthy snacks and meals. Several keynote speakers, including Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson, encouraged participants to make time for sabbath.

Judy participated in workshops which focused on *Visitor’s First Impression, Young Women’s Ministry, Volunteers, Congregational Generosity* and *Generational Strategy*.

- Ideas for gathering First Impression information were surprising and they will be part of an ongoing project for her beginning this fall. Details will be shared later.
- Women’s circles and coffee hours are stereotypical of Women of the ELCA. This is rapidly changing, and Judy was able to give valuable suggestions to the group with current WOT projects. For example, WOT is developing and using facebook, blogs and the WELCA online magazine called CAFÉ for young Lutheran women. Working with older women who have always done it that way becomes a lesson in creativity.
- Judy has already referenced Volunteers at the Regional WELCA conference held at Trinity (June 26 & 27). Assessments tools are valuable and will be used with future Affirmation of Faith and adult classes. Several online programs were highlighted for congregational use.
- Stewardship issues are not new to any congregation. They simply are larger in scale when membership increases. Because Judy had preregistered for this workshop, the ELCA staffer provided a print-out of Trinity’s record of giving in

2007. This information has been shared with the Stewardship Committee and is available upon request. It was a good feeling to tell the group of 26 that Trinity uses the ELCA website resources and many of us know what 10-10-80 represents!

- Generational Strategy gave a clear perspective of how different ages respond to worship and learning experiences. Judy has a much better understanding why the Young Adults Group formed this summer is slow to start. A Boomer needs to realize Millennials and GenX'ers do not follow the same approach to organizing any event! Nor does a Boomer see programs through the eyes of the Silent and G.I Generation. What an amazing reality when we comprehend how a committee of different ages works together to minister to those in their community!

Debbie was a part of workshops about Strategic Planning, Visioning, Maximizing Worship Ministry, Communications and Fellowship.

- ◆ *Strategic Planning and Visioning* workshops revealed that most churches represented at the conference seem to be grappling with the same types of strategic issues that Trinity is, i.e. discerning, visioning, leadership, living through change.
- ◆ *Maximizing Worship Ministry* was a very exciting workshop led by Rev. Richard Webb, Worship Pastor, and Perry Ross, Worship Coordinator from Lutheran Church of Hope, West Des Moines, Iowa. This was the workshop that Debbie found most inspiring. This church is doing contemporary worship in a way very similar to what Debbie would like for Trinity. They seem to set an example for many things we're striving to do at Trinity and would be a fantastic church to visit and observe in action. Their website is good and can be found at [www.lutheranchurchofhope.org](http://www.lutheranchurchofhope.org).
- ◆ *Fellowship Ministry Through Food* was presented by Scott Hoffmann, Fellowship Director, also from Lutheran Church of Hope. They have experienced such growth in their Fellowship efforts over the last three years, that Scott was hired from a food service company to run the church's fellowship in a professional manner. One example of Fellowship is their Sunday morning breakfast where they feed 2,000 + people!
- ◆ *Planting Seeds: Communicating Your Core* was presented by Jan Rizzo and Barbara Andrews, both from the ELCA Marketing Department. They had a lot of good information regarding branding and church communications. Debbie will pass the information on to the P&C Committee.

Pastor Brock's workshops included Second Campus churches, Can Latinos be Lutheran, Ministry with Young Adults, Contemporary Religion in American Life, and Radical Welcome.

- In *So You Want to Start a Church* we discussed the pros and cons of an

established congregation “parenting” a new start, and which might be better: another campus, a separate standalone site, or some combination.

- *Ministry with Young Adults* was about differences and similarities of Millennials, Gen-Xers, Gen-Y, and Baby Boomers; how we reach out to each demographic; and the differing needs of each.
- *Radical Welcome* looked at how our predominately European-descended congregations can better reach out to those who are ethnically, and to a lesser degree, economically, different from us (and as the lone male in that discussion, I received a very small bit of what it is to be different from those around you).
- *Contemporary Religion in American Life* looked at the various branches of Christianity in North America and how, if at all, they relate and work with each other.
- I attended the workshop *Can Latinos Be Lutheran* due to the large immigrant population we have in Central PA. As is evident by this growing ministry, in many denominations, especially the Roman Catholics, do not know how to respond, and end up ignoring this growing culture. Lutheran worship is so similar to the Roman Catholic upbringing that many Latinos have, the switch to a congregation that **cares** for them is quite easy.

Overall, we found that other ELCA churches like Trinity are discussing and working on the same issues that we are – issues like:

- ✓ Where are we headed in the next 10-15 years?
- ✓ How do we most effectively minister not just to those within our church, but also to those outside our church to further the kingdom of God?
- ✓ How can we reach out to people in today’s culture and our own context while preserving connections to our history and traditions?

It’s quite humbling, inspiring and exciting to be part of this very-alive, local / national / global church as God sends us forward.

The three of us would like to thank the A & P Committee and congregation for the opportunity to attend this conference and meet so many gifted leaders throughout the church. We will spend several months as we continue to process all the information and use much of what we have learned.

Respectfully,

John Brock  
Judy Collins  
Debra Wilson