

Mission Partners

Fall 2010



St. Mark Lutheran has 800 worshipers, but no members—only disciples

DISCIPLESHIP is being called to walk with Christ, equipped to live like Christ, and sent by Christ to love and serve others in the world!

DISCIPLES, embraced by God's grace, delight in growing in their relationship with Jesus Christ and offer themselves to do God's work in the world.

GROWING CONGREGATIONS nurture disciples, often utilizing seven faith practices: pray, study, worship, invite/witness, encourage, serve/do justice and give.

For more information, see www.elca.org/imp/disciples
www.elca.org/discipleship
www.elca.org/christianeducation/discipleship

or contact Brenda Smith, ELCA director for Discipleship, 800-638-3522, ext. 2682.



Eikon, the St. Mark high school group, serves a Lenten soup supper.

Growing congregations profiled in this newsletter have no members. They have disciples instead.

For people under 60, says the Rev. Michael Foss of St. Mark in West Des Moines, Iowa, the term membership conjures up “Sam’s Club or Costco, where you pay \$35 per year and buy lots of stuff for less and don’t even have to show up.”

Discipleship changes this mindset. “It’s not just about getting people into the church but seeing the church as a center for equipping them to practice or live their faith wherever they go,” says Pastor Foss, whose church grew from 300 to 800 worshipers in just two years.

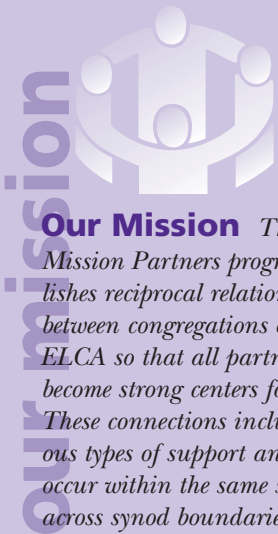
It’s also about modeling practices

for people who are unfamiliar with them—which includes many regular churchgoers. “Most people have never seen anyone pray except the pastor,” he says. “So we don’t just talk, but model.”

St. Mark models how to pray, how to read Scripture, how to discern its meaning for daily life, and how to practice Sunday teaching, Monday to Friday.

Like musicians playing scales or athletes doing warm ups, says Pastor Foss, Christians can use practices to live out their faith, deepen their relationship to God, and impact lives around them.

“Culture change is what discipleship is all about. It is the hardest and yet the most fruitful work we can do in ministry,” he says. ●



Our Mission *The ELCA Mission Partners program establishes reciprocal relationships between congregations of the ELCA so that all partners might become strong centers for mission. These connections include various types of support and may occur within the same synod or across synod boundaries.*



Santa Maria de Guadalupe was designed to look like a church in Latin America where the main entrance to the sanctuary is obvious.

Santa Maria de Guadalupe Lutheran

Worshippers greeted with open arms

Dozens of visitor parking spots and an open invitation to communion are two ways that Santa Maria de Guadalupe Lutheran in Irving, Texas, lets newcomers know they are welcome.

“Many have not been able to take communion in the Catholic Church for 20 years because of a second marriage,” says the Rev. Pedro Portillo. “They don’t feel they can participate in the community because they have been discriminated against, are not married to their partner, or are divorced.”

Weddings, baptisms, and *quinceañeras* celebrating a girl’s 15th birthday bring a constant flow of new people into the church. There, a team of leaders helps connect them to opportunities for worship, education and service.

The evangelization group welcomes newcomers, helps them find seats and works to connect their talents with appropriate ministries. Twenty teachers help

with Sunday school, first communion, and confirmation classes. One teacher offers classes in her home. An intergenerational vacation Bible school offers learning and recreation for children, their parents and their grandparents.

Twice-monthly inquirer classes draw about 40 participants. “We don’t talk about membership but discipleship, the need to work together as one community, one people who read the same gospel,” says Pastor Portillo.

Pastor Portillo urges Santa Maria disciples to serve in the PTA and other community groups including safety training by local police and firefighters.

With so many opportunities to live out their faith, it’s no wonder that 1,200 people worship every Sunday in Santa Maria de Guadalupe’s new sanctuary.

“People in the congregation talk about the church and invite others. I never knock on doors. I don’t need to.” ●

Good Shepherd Lutheran

Creating ministries deepens discipleship

Abolishing committees and training lay leaders helped deepen discipleship at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Roosevelt, New York.

“People got tired of going to meetings. They looked at them as work, work, work,” says the Rev. Jerome Taylor. “When committees became ministry instead of something they had to go to, it became something they owned.”

Prayer ministries, music ministries, dance ministries, the education, social, and property ministries—all of them gained energy. “People who had been coming to church once or twice a month come every Sunday, now that they belong to a ministry,” says Pastor Taylor. “That kind of discipleship strengthens our congregation from the inside.”

Trained deacons and lay ministers serve side by side with Pastor Taylor among Good Shepherd’s 550 baptized disciples. All six lay ministers belong to the Hannah Prayer Ministry, which “can pray me out of the pulpit,” he says. The ministry meets every Sunday morning to pray for community concerns noted on cards placed in the offering plate.

During worship, they lead spontaneous prayer, lift up “praise reports” for answered prayer, and offer personal prayers for individuals—usually about a third of the congregation—who come to the altar during the monthly healing service.

When it comes to stewardship, “we disciple by example,” says Taylor, who is transparent about his own family’s giving. *(Next Page)*

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ELCA congregations may reprint this newsletter in part or in its entirety.



Many glorify God through Good Shepherd's dance and music ministries.

Good Shepherd *from page 2*

"You grow by one percent a year until you get to 10." Not long ago, the congregation ended its year with a deficit. Now it ends the year in the black. In part, that's because people are faithful about giving even on vacation.

"Because people are disciples and not just members, they know that when they are not here their responsibility continues," says Taylor. "The whole way they think is different: this is my ministry, this is my church."

Discipleship, Pastor Taylor tells young people, was the key to Martin Luther King Jr.'s success.

"It was about submitting to God's will and making yourself available for God's ability to work through you. That's discipleship, if you say yes to God's call." ●

Glory Lutheran

Many first encountering Christianity

Newcomers to Mandarin-speaking Glory Lutheran Church in Chula Vista, California, may be encountering Christianity for the first time.

To guide them, disciples lead basic, small-group discussions that focus on simple songs, stories and concepts.

Welcome, worship, word is the format of the meetings, each of which have about 10 members and meet weekly in homes. A short worship follows a warm-up game, song, or story, and then the leader and assistant leader help the group explore a basic Bible theme using questions that relate faith and life.

"We want people to talk, not just have them sit and listen," says the Rev. Betty Chen. "Both the materials and the questions are simple, because some groups have invited non-Christians to participate."

Monthly, the small groups get together to share their learning in a meeting led by one group. Every three months, the leaders meet with Pastor Chen. "We share our experiences, look

at resources, and put our problems on the table."

Small-group ministry has proven effective for Glory, which ministers to about 70 families in two languages. Following 15 minutes of worship and praise together, the congregation divides into two: an English-language worship for the young second generation, and a Mandarin-language service for first-generation worshippers. After worship, Glory continues with lunch, fellowship and Bible Study.

Pastor Chen has offered one-on-one training that focuses on Bible literacy as well as how to connect with others in a caring way.

"I encourage members to invite and reach out to others," she says. "Church is not just a get-together for our members. To spread the gospel to your neighbor, you need to invite people every week." ●



Glory Lutheran Church emphasizes discipleship training for all participants.



'DiscipleLife' teaches leaders to 'do' discipleship

The ELCA Northern Texas–Northern Louisiana (NT-NL) Synod's "DiscipleLife" emphasis seeks to equip leaders to be and live like disciples. Six coming events for NT-NL leaders will "do" rather than "teach" discipleship.

"Every baptized person is a missionary and every congregation is a mission outpost," says Bishop Kevin Kanouse. "Lutherans get it in their heads, but they don't get it in their hearts. If we can do that, the Holy Spirit will catch fire and things will begin to turn around."

For more information: Go to www.ntnl.org and click on "DiscipleLife" ●

