

# STORIES OF FAITH IN ACTION

## Building a Church for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

The members at Living Grace Lutheran Church, Omaha, Neb., are incredibly well-connected. They connect at worship services on Sunday mornings, at meetings during the week—and on Facebook anytime they'd like.

Melissa Jewell believes Facebook has been a blessing to this suburban congregation under development. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) churchwide expression works in partnership with the ELCA Nebraska Synod and local congregations to provide the compensation package of the Rev. James Lindberg, the mission developer.

“We are a tighter family because of Facebook. I’m in contact throughout the week with half the people at church. I know what’s going on in their lives. I can offer support, a prayer request or share a laugh.”

Ryan Blakestad says that it’s no accident that Living Grace is on Facebook. In the early days of developing their strategy and vision, the core leadership team studied the demographics of the area and decided to build a 21st century church that would appeal to these young families.

The congregation produces very little paper and no monthly newsletter. Pastor Lindberg shares updates in weekly e-mails that members of all ages appreciate. He videotapes his reports to the congregation council. And now he’s on Twitter too, sending out daily messages that include a Bible verse and a quick and relevant inspiration.

Any congregation thinking of adding social media tools to its communication plan must keep the needs of its membership in mind before making a decision. Nothing can replace the personal touch in keeping current members feeling informed and new members welcomed.

But in difficult economic times, the affordability of social media is a plus for congregations. Ryan thinks the benefit goes far beyond dollars and cents. “We’re on the uptick in terms of growth,” he notes and believes social media has been a key factor in their success.

Ryan hopes Living Grace’s experience will inspire other congregations to discover what Facebook and other social media tools can do for them. Used with discretion and an eye to mission, “these can be ways to invigorate a congregation and draw people together.”



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