

seeds for the parish

July-August 2009

Resource Paper for Leaders of ELCA Congregations

www.elca.org



Older generations are joining social networking sites. In January the 2009 Facebook Demographics and Statistics Report claimed a 276 percent growth in 35 to 54 year-old-users.

Ministering to an online community

Google Business Product Manager Rick Klau, a keynote speaker at last summer's ELCA Communicators Conference, has tips for using the Internet in your ministry. A member of the ELCA, Klau also is a member of the Board of Trustees of Augsburg Fortress, the publishing ministry of the ELCA.

Klau stressed the importance of the electronic audience. "There are millions of people online," noted Klau. "If you're not there answering their questions, leading by example and speaking to them where they are, somebody else will."

Since joining the Augsburg board, Klau is fully aware of the challenges the church faces, such as declining membership and the increasing numbers of people opting to join non-denominational congregations.

Blogs were something that Klau emphasized as an important tool for Web communication. He said that they are "the single most effective

way of scaling your availability in Google."

Another who understands the importance of blogs is Sister Rebecca Shinas, a Dominican Sister of Mission San José. She created a profile on MySpace when she discovered that the site (at that time) had 78 million participants, most of whom were under the age of 18. According to an article in the San Francisco *Chronicle*, Shinas told her fellow sisters, "We have to go where the people are, we need to be more visible in the world."

Also known as the "Rockin' Sister," or "Sista B," Sister Rebecca answers kids' questions about God at <http://kidsgodquestions.blogspot.com>. She also blogs at "The Day in the Life of a Nun" at <http://lifeofanun.blogspot.com/>.

But social networking can also mean building your own community, not just going where the community already is, explains Klau.

Augsburg Fortress' Creative Worship Tour (www.creativeworshiptour.com) did just that. A

new social network was developed by an intern who traveled the country, visiting congregations to talk about how they create worship (sermon preparation, music selection, etc.). He shot a lot of video and put it up on the Web through a company called Ning.

Ning allows you to build your own social network. Unlike Facebook or MySpace, Ning offers the opportunity to build a completely enclosed community that has a specific purpose—in this case, worship.

According to the Ning site, "The Creative Worship Tour is a network of visual, musical and creative worship people discussing and imagining new possibilities for worship. We hope it becomes a place for you to find ideas and support, and also a place for you to share your very best thoughts about creativity in worship." The Creative Worship Tour now has 847 members.



Worship responding to the world the church is called to serve.

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Why did the chicken cross the road? Find out how your Web site is like a working farm.

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ELCA World Hunger challenges you for change.

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The Churchwide Assembly is wired to the max. Follow the assembly from the comfort of your computer.

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Technology serves the central things

“Worship is regularly renewed in order to be both responsible and responsive to the world that the church is called to serve” (*ELW* introduction, page 7).

Worship in ELCA congregations is both responsive to the world and responsible for the central things which define Christian worship: the proclamation of the Word of God and the administration of the sacraments within the gathering of the Christian community. Each congregation exercises its freedom and flexibility of practice in its local situation on these central things while maintaining the tension between being responsible and responsive to our current culture, including the presence of technology.

Technology has served Christian worship for generations. From the development of the pipe organ to the printing press that made worship books possible to the automobile that allows worshipers from far away to attend services to the projection of images on a screen, technology surrounds our human lives and supports our worshiping assemblies. In worship, the question is not *should* we use technology, but rather, *how* do we use technology?

In worship, maintaining the tension between being responsible to the central things and responsive to the world, including our technological advances, means that we need to be intentional and thoughtful about how technology serves the central things without detracting from them.

Technology used within the worship service should serve the central things by lifting up the voice of the living assembly and deepening the assembly’s participation. Congregations may use technology within the worship service to support the voice of the assembly in song or enhance proclamation through visual media, but must take care that it has the intended effect. For example, the way musicians lead song in worship may serve to encourage and support the voice of the congregation, or it may inhibit congregational singing. Projected images may serve to open up the assembly’s imagination to the presence of God, or images may draw attention to themselves, stifle imagination and draw the assembly toward the image rather than God.



Any use of technology should strive to support and point to the proclamation of the Word and administration of the Sacraments within the gathering of the assembly, while avoiding the replacement of human leadership, creating a spectator atmosphere or fostering individualization at the expense of community. Technology will always be a part of worship. Every generation has and will continue to struggle with how to use its technological advances wisely to sup-

port the proclamation of the timeless gospel of the resurrected Christ in timely and engaging ways.

Imagine how you might use the Internet to support the connections between worshipers throughout the week and support those who lead worship. E-mail or Facebook groups may assist in information sharing, preparation, review and ongoing discussion about worship in your congregation. Electronic communication can increase the number of participants in the conversation about worship and supplement our face-to-face interactions with the community.

The Internet offers numerous possibilities for worship preparation. Augsburg Fortress’s www.sundaysandseasons.com subscription worship planning site allows multiple users from the same congregation to work on worship plans collectively and electronically. Sermon preparation may be aided by various Web sites. (See www.elca.org/worship in the leadership area for preachers for suggested sites.)

Every congregation can continue the conversation in its particular worshiping assembly. *Principles for Worship* (Renewing Worship, Volume 2, available in the Learning Center at www.elca.org/worship or for purchase from Augsburg Fortress) contains principles and applications for discussion centering on how technology is used in worship to support music and preaching (see Principles M-12 and P-17). More information can also be found in the resources section of www.elca.org/worship under Media Art.

Sundays and Seasons

Sundays and Seasons, available from Augsburg Fortress as both an online subscription (www.sundaysandseasons.com) and an annual printed book, is a useful companion for worship planning. Easy to use and rich in content, *Sundays and Seasons* follows the church year and the three-year lectionary, and will enrich every aspect of worship planning.

Lay worship leaders and planners, preachers and presiders, worship team leaders, musicians and visual artists, educators, sacristans and altar guilds, and pastoral liturgists will find that this resource eases their work. The annual printed volume is for the liturgical year, Advent through Christ the King Sunday.

seeds for the parish

www.elca.org/seeds

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Resources for using media in worship

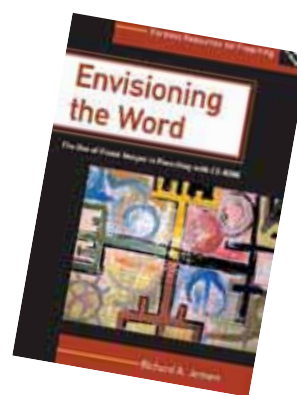


The graceful and grace-filled use of today’s media and media arts in worship poses many challenges for local pastors and congregations. Whether your congregation already uses media or is thinking about it, issues related to this worship innovation matter. Use the book *A Moving Word*, by Eileen Crowley, to stimulate local reflection. Available from Augsburg Fortress for \$9.99. (www.augsburgfortress.org).

In *Envisioning the Word*, a one-volume resource kit, Richard A. Jensen helps preachers use visual images creatively and responsibly. How, how much, when, what equipment, use of teams, relationship to exegesis, different varieties of images, sources—all the essential topics and concerns are addressed here.

Jensen first discusses how vital, if controversial, image making has always been in Christian tradition and then demonstrates how preaching with images is both profoundly traditional and necessary to contemporary proclamation. His work combines practical advice with religious reflection to enable preachers to help their congregations envision the word anew.

The accompanying CD-ROM contains not only the full text of the book and a helpful study guide, but also links to the most helpful Web



sites and Web-based sources of images. Available from Augsburg Fortress for \$16.80 (www.augsburgfortress.org).



Humble starts and high-tech arts: smaller worship communities use social networks to connect

There is a *lot* of commotion today at the Houge house in West St. Paul, Minnesota. Jodi's youngest daughter, Elsa, is playing with my 10-month-old son, Owen, while Jodi and I try to have a conversation. Elsa is only 2 years old, but she is in full control of the situation. Her toddlerhood belies her ability to temporarily care for Owen, and—outside of the occasional meltdown—I'm free to listen to Jodi tell me about Humble Walk Lutheran Church, where she's called as a newly-ordained pastor and community developer.

Humble Walk is a body in its own infancy as well. It's not a full-fledged ELCA congregation yet, but one of the Saint Paul Area Synod's "Synodically Authorized Worshiping Communities." It has existed for less than a year, and if you showed up on a Sunday afternoon you would certainly find the rough, organic joy that frequently comes with new life. You would also find a welcoming seat in their circle of 25-or-so participants, a rhythm instrument to use in their original music and liturgy, and a tightly woven community growing in the heart of their working-class neighborhood. And to think, Facebook helped.

For worship communities like Houge's, Internet-based social networks such as Facebook and Twitter are now viable alternatives in the search to connect with their parishioners. Sites like these have become overwhelmingly popular over the past several years, and the Humble Walk community has tried to take advantage of that. Their use of Facebook for community news and devotional dispatches isn't groundbreaking, but is a great example of young congregations using technology to reach out to young adults without a church home. In the case of the people living in their neighborhood, it was a perfect fit.

In October of 2008, Jodi and her husband Nate looked at their neighborhood, full of 20-somethings living paycheck-to-paycheck, and saw the need for a neighborhood church. "We wanted to do something that was specifically for them," Houge recalls, "for this socio-economic class, but, also for those artsy folks we tend to run around with." But when Houge looked at the popular strategies recommending the use of Web sites to spread the word about new worship communities, she didn't know where to begin. "I'm sort of a technological peasant," she confesses. "But I was on Facebook. . .so someone in the community said, 'Just do a Facebook group.' And we started doing all our communication through that, since almost everyone was already using it. It

was a natural place to gather people and get information to them."

Unlike many of the other, more established churches in the Saint Paul Synod, Humble Walk doesn't operate under traditional structures. Due in part to its size, but more to its organic nature, they don't have a congregation council or administrative meetings. Even the job titles are scarce: Nate, who wrote much of Humble Walk's liturgy and leads music almost every Sunday, doesn't want an official position or a pension. Instead, the congregation places an emphasis on simply worshiping and working together in community, and Facebook is just one tool that has helped them grow in that identity.

There are some who criticize the authenticity of the relationships built on Internet-based social networks. "I've heard a lot of people say that it's 'false' community," Houge admits. "But I haven't found that to be true at all. It gives people something to talk about the first time they have an *actual* conversation. So if they've connected in our Facebook group, and they're hanging out at church, and it's that awkward, first 15 minutes of, 'Well, what do we talk about?'—they've seen each other's Facebook pages, and end up saying, 'Hey, we like the same band!' We have a human need to connect, and Facebook makes it easier. Opening up conversations and putting yourself out there doesn't come easily to a lot of people, but I think this gives them something to begin with, in a positive way."

Pastor Houge and Humble Walk know that not everyone values weekly worship gatherings in the same way they do, and that's why they're branching out. This summer Humble Walk is planning a kids' program for the neighborhood, as well as a band night at a local pub. They also realize that Facebook isn't the perfect conduit for church relationships. Houge knows that, for her neighbors who speak English as a second language or can't afford a computer, a Facebook group doesn't do a lot of good. But for now, Humble Walk is in the process of creating a stand-alone Web site for those people who just aren't ready to jump on the social-networking bandwagon. Most of the information on that site will be mirrored from their Facebook group.

For the time being, Facebook is serving as a valuable tool for this intimate, developing community. It is hoped that Humble Walk will exist long after Facebook has become passé. "I think we'll always be connected to some sort of online community," Houge says, "and I have

no idea what that will look like in five years, but at this point it doesn't matter. It's working now, and we'll keep evolving with it."

If you would like to see how Humble Walk is using Facebook, you can find their group by searching for "Humble Walk" in Facebook's search option.

Justin Rimbo lives in Monticello, Minnesota with his wife Angie and son Owen, and you can be Facebook friends with him if you wish.

Share your story!

The feature stories that are printed in this section of *Seeds for the Parish* report on an individual's work, achievements, and contributions to this church. E-mail your story ideas to Marianne Griebler, associate director for marketing for member communications, at stories@elca.org.

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Web sites should produce!



“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe,” the risen Jesus said to Thomas and the disciples.

But in this world, your Web site is a means for many potential visitors to see what your congregation is all about *before* they believe that it's worth their while to attend a service. And posting up-to-date content on it helps.

You've been to congregational Web sites where content is never updated. This doesn't reflect well on the congregation. It's like displaying an “OPEN” sign in front of a locked door. It sends the wrong signal and leaves your visitor with a bad impression.

That's why it's important to have a plan—a strategy for developing content, for refreshing that content, and for retiring content when it's no longer needed.

Your strategy should be realistic: How much time, effort and commitment can you expect from those working on the congregation's Web presence?

Remember to put your best foot forward.

To share your congregation's story effectively, you must show and tell what's going on *right now*:

- **Show** who regularly comes to worship.
- **Show** people working on a current project.
- **Tell** about your most immediate commitment as a congregation is.
- **Tell** about the great things your members are accomplishing.

The fresher you can make your Web site, the better it will be.

More than just the Web site

It used to be enough to think of your Web site as a plant. It grows, but it takes its time showing significant change.

If you had few resources and only a little time, the Web site might resemble a cactus—something that's updated seasonally.

With the rise of social media (Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, Twitter, etc.), a single seasonal organism just won't do. Today, managing a congregational Web presence is more like running a fast-paced fully automated farm.

For example, a member shares the congregational Web site link with a friend. The friend finds the service times for next Sunday's worship. In turn, that friend posts a link to Twitter (a “tweet”) about his worship experience. All of a sudden, you've got a new ambassador for your congregation, and the buzz around your congregation builds.

When more members are empowered to share your message, the buzz builds and you get

more and more visitors—not just to your Web site, but to your worship services.

And people are more likely to come back for another visit. Your online presence becomes an extension of your ministry of hospitality. It's a way of reaching people where they are and feeding them before and after an in-person ministry experience.

Your Web Presence as a Farm

Consider the analogy...

Brick & mortar church = Farmhouse. This is the heart of the farm, the home base for all operations. Notice that most of the work of the farm takes place outside the farmhouse, but most of the planning, preparation and refueling/renewing happens here.

Web site = Croplands. Your Web site requires constant tending, following seasonal waves of the church year—more work in Advent/Christmas and Lent/Easter. The Web site should provide a positive drive-by impression as well as deeper content for those who linger.

Blogs = Pigsty. The pigs are hungry, but if fed right they can “bring home the bacon” with improved search results in Google.

Facebook = Chicken yard. Facebook provides social interactions, quick ways to keep members in touch with each other and with congregational life—but watch out for foxes in the henhouse!

Twitter = Cow barn. Twitter takes consistent, day-in, day-out maintenance. A great way to provide a steady stream of congregational updates and emergency info.

YouTube = Horse stable. YouTube allows you to show off the best and brightest in your congregation; creating good videos can take a significant investment, but yields high rewards.

Resources

Visit www.elca.org/webministry for an intro to congregational Web site planning.

Get practical tips and advice in “Constant Contact—inform and inspire your members with e-mail” (Nov-Dec 2008 issue of *Seeds for the Parish*) at www.elca.org/seeds.

Ten words to avoid in your e-mail subject line

Too many e-mail messages sent with the intention to sell you wonder potions or bait-and-switch “free” offers have caused the installment of spam filters on nearly every corporate and personal computer in this country. Filters are absolutely necessary.

Unfortunately, legitimate e-mail messages—such as the one announcing the “free health screening” your congregation is offering in the church basement—can end up in a huge spam file, 245th in a list of 475, offering everything from dirt-cheap real estate to fantastic body “enhancements.” Your message was grabbed by spam filters because of a phenomenon called “false positives.”

How can you stop your cost-efficient congregational e-mail communications from triggering false positives? One way is to avoid common triggers in the subject line that sound like advertising.

Here is a list of 10 words to stay away from:

Amazing – spam filters will not know that you are describing grace.

Avoid – you certainly want congregational members to **avoid** temptation, but too many marketers want them to **avoid** _____ (fill in the blank) by buying their product.

Call now – even if you are sitting right next to the phone waiting for the Sunday school superintendent to **call now**, so are thousands of telemarketers.

Click here – and then what? Buy something? No thanks – the message will not be delivered.

Dear friend – when sending hundreds of thousands of e-mail solicitations it's hard to

keep names straight. But when you are sending e-mail to members of your own congregation spam filters expect you to know their names.

Free – many people want something for nothing and marketers know that. Yes, we have **free** will and there are **free** Bible classes available, but spam filters can't tell the difference.

Life insurance – even if it is eternal life, spam filters will search and destroy the message attached.

Mortgage – spam catchers know that every Tom, Dick, and Harriett in the world of finance wants to “help” with mortgages, but they do not know when you are looking for donations to help with the mortgage on congregational property.



Promised – religious folks know what **promised** means—the **promised** land, the **promised** people, the Savior **promised** to you—but Satan and some advertising companies offer empty promises that filters need to stop.

Winner – people like to win even if they can't remember entering a contest. Want to announce the **winner** of the sack race at the Sunday school picnic? Put it in the body of your e-newsletter.

Also keep in mind that when you send zipped files, or a lot of images without much text spam filters will most likely block your message.

Lutheran blogs

A quick Google search returns more than 51,700 results for “ELCA Lutheran Blogs.” There are bloggers from all walks of Lutheran life, from the 2009 Bishops Academy to a “Sarcastic Lutheran” in Denver. There is no doubt that Lutherans are blogging in unprecedented numbers. Listed below is a sampling of what is going on in the blogosphere.

The Lutheran Zephyr 2.0: “The semi-regular reflections of Chris Duckworth, a 30-something rookie pastor encountering God, faith, and mission. . . all over again.” www.lutheranzephyr.com

A Pastor in the Parish: “A Lutheran pastor seeks to reclaim the role of pastor as theologian. Excerpts and reflections meant to generate discussion and devotion are posted.” Blogger Brian Bennett is an ELCA pastor serving the congregation of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Morgantown, West Virginia, <http://intheparish.blogspot.com/>

One Mission Blog: Reflections on the ELCA’s Ministry of Publishing—Augsburg Fortress—from president & CEO Beth Lewis. www.augsburgfortress.org/blog

Music at Bethany: Maintained by the organist at Bethany English Lutheran Church in Cleveland. Focuses on Lutheran hymns, musical heritage, and liturgy. <http://music-at-bethany.blogspot.com>

Grace Notes: Lectionary poems and daily meditations along with other thoughts and reflections of Pastor Dan Bollerud, from Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church, Anchorage, Alaska. www.coslcgrace.blogspot.com

Protestant Blog Ethic: Lutheran singer/songwriter Jonathan Rundman reflects upon the media, show business, family and church life at <http://jonathanrundman.blogspot.com>.

The Seminarian’s Sojourn: A blog from the Office of Vocation, Admissions & Financial Aid at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, written by LSTC seminarians. www.seminarians-sojourn.blogspot.com

Sarcastic Lutheran: The cranky spirituality of a postmodern gal—written by Nadia Boltz Weber, the mission developer for House for All Sinners and Saints in Denver, Colorado. www.sarcasticlutheran.typepad.com

Q&A

Recently “Seeds for the Parish” staff sat down with Amber Leberman, Web manager and associate art director of *The Lutheran*, the magazine of the ELCA, to talk to her about the use of social media in congregations. Amber also manages three Web properties: www.theLutheran.org, www.thelittlelutheran.org and www.thelittlechristian.org. She posts for *The Lutheran* in social media such as Facebook, Twitter and other emerging entities.

Q: What is a blog?

A: “Blog” is short for weblog—it’s the online version of what most people would use as a personal journal except everyone can read it, and it’s updated regularly (often several times a day).

Q. Should congregations be using social networking?

A. Absolutely! Congregations should consider taking part in networks such as Twitter and Facebook. If our call as a church is to be present in our communities, one of the biggest is the virtual community that is the Internet. These new technologies allow us to connect with people who may never have known of our congregations otherwise.

Q. Is social networking only for young people?

A. Absolutely not! The fastest-growing group using Facebook is the baby-boomer demographic. Those are the folks who are moving and shaking in the Facebook world. In fact, all of these social media are entirely non-age-specific.

Q. Where should the blog reside? On the congregation’s Web site, or on another server?

A. I think you can base the blog anywhere, as long as it’s easy to maintain. I think a lot of people see the technology involved in blogging as an impediment and it shouldn’t be. There are lots of free services out there, such as Typepad and Blogger and Wordpress, that allow congregations to have a blog presence without requiring a programmer to set them up.

Q. Who should be blogging?

A. Everyone, if they are so inclined. I don’t think anyone should be blogging who doesn’t want to blog. But if we truly believe in a priesthood of all believers, as Lutherans, I think all of our congregational members should have an opportunity to be ministers to the online community.

Q. What do you do about negative comments on *The Lutheran* blog?

A. We do have a “terms of use” in place. For instance we may remove content that we find objectionable. On the other hand, as a magazine, we believe in free speech, and unless somebody is personally threatening or libelous or slanderous or bigoted we pretty much let a negative comment stand. If we don’t let negative comments stand, we run the risk of being less transparent, being less willing to open the doors to conversation. It also allows for a counter comment that may be positive.

Q. Should someone in the congregation monitor the blog?

A. Yes, but not only from a negative comment perspective. People who are new to the Web and networking may not see the harm in giving out an e-mail address. They may not see the potential harm in posting childrens’ names and ages and the name of their elementary school. People new to the Internet might think that because it is a congregational Web site that everyone on it is part of the church. New people may not realize that there may be people lurking on that Web site for nefarious purposes. A good rule of thumb is that you do not want to share online something you would not share with strangers. If a worship leader wants to post a picture of a child, get permission from the child’s parents first.

Q. What should members be blogging about?

A. Tell a story. Suppose your congregation has a preschool. Instead of saying, “our congregation has a preschool,” write about what happened at the preschool this morning. It’s just telling the story about what makes you a congregation. There is no set method for blogging; you have to find your voice as an individual.

Empowered to do team ministry

Where do people learn to do ministry as a team? Whether new to ministry, new to staff ministry or looking for renewed direction for your team, the Multiple Staff Workshop is designed to help participants intentionally plan personal and professional working relationships.

The workshop is a 48-hour, three-day opportunity for rostered and non-rostered ministry leaders to work together as a team to explore each other's unique gifts and to learn efficient, effective and personally satisfying ways to minister as a team. Leadership is provided by: Wally Arnold, recently retired from the ELCA Southern Ohio Synod staff; Suzanne Darcy Dillahunt, assistant to the bishop, ELCA Southern Ohio Synod; and Herm Kuhlmann, coordinator for the Covenant Cluster of Lutheran Seminaries, Inc. Topics include:

- how teams are organized
- healthy functioning as colleagues
- leadership style assessment
- covenanting together for ministry
- balanced self-utilization

The leadership team is available to bring this workshop to any synod in the ELCA and has led workshops in synods across the country from Texas to Canada and from New York to Montana. For the past 20 years there has always been a workshop held in Region 6 the week after Labor Day. This year it will be held in Adrian, Mich., Sept. 14-16, 2009. For more information contact: Herm Kuhlmann, 6226 Langton Circle, Westerville, Ohio 43082-8966, 614-423-8855 or hkuhlmann@insight.rr.com.

Sparks are flying

Two new children's Bibles are now available from Augsburg Fortress. For children age 2 to Grade 2, the *Spark Story Bible* brings God's word to life through colorful art and rich retellings of 150 of the most popular Bible stories.

For children in Grade 3 to Grade 6, the *Spark Bible* (NRSV) helps them explore the Bible in a personal way with stickers that highlight questions or statements such as "I memorized it!" and "Reminds me of...".

To order go to www.augsburgfortress.org or call: 800-328-4648.

To learn about the Spark Sunday school formation program, go to www.activatefaith.org.

ELCA World Hunger challenges youth to help end hunger

In TV game shows such as *Deal or No Deal*, the object is to win \$1 million dollars. But have you ever thought about what it would be like to give away \$1 million dollars to help people who are hungry?

Youth across this church are invited to do just that—raise \$1 million for ELCA World Hunger as part of the *Change the World: 2009 Lutheran Youth Challenge*. One key ingredient to this \$1 million recipe is the Youth Gathering in New Orleans, July 22-26. Each of the 37,000 participants is asked to collect "change for change"—literally gathering their spare change and supplementing it to raise at least \$30 to help reach the larger goal of \$1 million and, in turn, changing the circumstances of many people in the world.

Participants can bring their "change for change" to the ELCA World Hunger area at the Youth Gathering. They will watch their donations grow with thousands of other offerings from groups across the country.

All youth groups are encouraged to participate in this year-long challenge, even if they cannot attend the Youth Gathering. Visit www.elca.org/hunger/youthchallenge for more information.

Anyone for dodge ball?

Some youth groups get creative in determining ways to raise money for ELCA World Hunger and the \$1 million challenge. At Grace Lutheran Church in River Forest, Ill., youth groups in the Chicago area participated in a dodge ball tournament where all proceeds were donated to ELCA World Hunger.

All players engaged in hunger-related activities when they were not playing dodge ball. That included playing "Hunger Jeopardy," an interactive PowerPoint game available at www.elca.org/hunger/jeopardy that challenges children, youth and adults to test their knowledge about world hunger.

Luke Terrell, a member of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chicago, came with his church's youth group to help the cause. "[World hunger] is an important issue that we really need to work together on, because the ELCA is about community and organizing," said Terrell on the sideline as he watched two teams pummel playground-style rubber balls at each other. Attempting to pick off members of the other team one-by-one was just part of the fun while working toward a much larger goal. "We can do it," said Terrell. "We can eradicate world hunger."

Maybe you can hold a dodge ball tournament to help raise money for your congregation's contribution to the *Change the World: 2009 Lutheran Youth Challenge*. Here are some additional ideas for raising money for the challenge:

1. Collect loose change in a special container and bring it to the Youth Gathering, or send a check for that amount instead.
2. Ask the congregation—including Sunday school children—to bring in change for two, three or four consecutive Sundays. Take a "noisy offering" in metal pots, and watch the gifts add up.
3. Remove litter from local parks, roadways, creeks or playgrounds in your community. Ask members in your congregation, local businesses, neighbors, families and friends to sponsor you in this day of community service. Designate the funds you raise toward your challenge goal.

How to donate to the challenge

Participants in the Youth Gathering can bring their challenge offerings to Jackson Square in the center of the Gathering's Interaction Center in whatever form they prefer—coins, bills, or checks. They can also send them ahead of time (or even after the event) to ELCA World Hunger, P.O. Box 71764, Chicago, IL, 60694-1764. The words "Youth Challenge" must be in the memo line, so gifts can be counted toward the challenge.



Order a brochure

Help distribute copies of the *Change the World: 2009 Lutheran Youth Challenge* brochure in your congregation and to other churches in your area. This attractive, multi-page handout explains the challenge and gives tour dates for post-Gathering events so that even those who do not go to New Orleans can participate. Order free copies (in packages of 25) from Augsburg Fortress in one of two ways:

- By phone: 800-328-4648 (order number: ITEM000920)
- Online: www.augsburgfortress.org (search for "ITEM000920")

Have you checked out Hunger Rumbblings, the blog of ELCA World

Hunger Rumbblings blog

Hunger, lately? Updated regularly throughout the week, this "hunger hub" is a place where ELCA World Hunger staff share ideas, stories, and resources about current hunger-related events and topics.

During this time of economic hardship in the United States and of a rise in the level of hunger and poverty throughout the world, ELCA World Hunger remains more committed than ever to addressing the root causes of hunger and poverty. Through Hunger Rumbblings, staff provide timely observations about economic trends and the food systems that contribute to global food crises and economic hardship. What's more, readers are able to offer comments about postings by

clicking on a link at the end of each blog entry.

Topics of previous postings have included fasting during Lent, the food crisis, water rights and water pollution, eating habits, Earth Day, fair trade, homelessness, the root causes of hunger and poverty and many more.

Visit <http://blogs.elca.org/hungerrumbblings> and read the latest blog entries online. You can also sign up to receive e-mails whenever there is a new posting.

New federal advocacy packet available



The ELCA Washington Office has created a federal advocacy packet of current resources on timely legislative and social justice issues. This packet is available to all synods, congregations and other ministries who request it. It has already been sent to State Public Policy Office Directors who have requested it for their respective synod assemblies.

The packet includes:

- general information about the ELCA Advocacy Ministries
- complimentary copy of “Peace, Con-

flict and Public Church: A Case Study on the Future of Iraq”

- handout on Lutheran Principles of Foreign Aid Reform
- order form for “God’s Mission in the World” guide
- ONE Lutheran Resources (brochure, MDG cards, faith video, fact sheet on debt, fact sheet on trade)
- “Many walls stand in the way of peace” informational flyer on the Peace Not Walls campaign
- fact sheets on climate change
- fact sheet on Health Care Reform
- fact sheet on 2009 Child Nutrition Reauthorization
- advocacy postcards on Domestic Public Policy work

Nearly all of these resources can be found at www.elca.org/advocacy/resources. For a hard copy of the entire packet, please contact Jodi Deike at jodi.deike@elca.org or 202-626-7947.

Tune in to the Churchwide Assembly



This summer, more than 1,000 voting members, congregational observers, resource members, advisory members, ecumenical guests and visitors will gather in Minneapolis for the Eleventh Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA, August 17-23. The assembly is the highest legislative authority of the churchwide organization and deals with all

matters which are necessary in pursuit of the purposes and functions of this church.

There are several ways ELCA members can keep abreast of the assembly:

- If not already elected to be a voting member, register as a visitor and experience the assembly in person. Register online at www.elca.org/assembly.
- Keep up to date with pre-assembly materials as they are posted on www.elca.org/assembly, and plan to “attend by Web” as plenary sessions are streamed live online. If you miss a plenary session, you’ll be able to view the sessions “on demand” as well. There will be plenty of associated Web items also, such as photos and news conferences, which will also be streamed live.
- Subscribe to the ELCA News Service to receive the news releases as they are published at www.elca.org/news.
- Keep up to date with “almost live online reporting” on LutherLink in three discussion groups:
 - “2009 CWA Informal Reports” will have frequent updates of brief summaries of discussions as they happen;
 - “2009 CWA in Minneapolis” is where you can ask questions or participate in discussions;
 - “2009 CWA Human Sexuality Issues” contains discussion of the proposed social statement and ministry policies recommendations. See www.lutherlink.org for links to subscribe and join.
- Connect to the assembly with prayer. For the 50 days leading up to Aug. 17, this church is invited to pray for wisdom in discernment for the ELCA and for voting members of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly. Visit 50 Days of Prayer at www.elca.org/assembly.

Sew Much Comfort



Every Tuesday evening at Messiah Lutheran Church, Alexandria, Va., volunteers meet to sew, cut fabric and assemble adaptive clothing for wounded military personnel. The group is led by Sandra Edens.

In an effort to reach more people and make them aware of the project, Messiah held a lasagna dinner and raffle fundraiser. They raised over \$2,300. Along with matching funds from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans, the amount came to over \$3000. Not just money was raised: “awareness” was raised as well for “Sew Much Comfort.”

Congregational leaders seminars

Would you and your congregation benefit from events that are designed especially for those who are part of a congregational staff? The annual **Head of Staff** seminar, for those who serve as head of staff/senior pastors, addresses the unique role of the pastor who is called primarily to guide a congregational staff and attend to the vision and direction of the congregation. This event will take place Feb. 4-7, 2010.

The **Ministry Staff** seminar is designed for those who serve on congregational staffs as pastors, and in ministries of music, youth and family, education, volunteer work, senior ministry, parish nursing and other programmatic areas. This event will be held Jan. 30 to Feb. 2, 2010.

Both events are held at the Duncan Conference and Retreat Center in Delray Beach, Florida. For more information, visit www.elca.org/staffevents.

Order hunger calendar online

Any calendar helps you mark your days on earth, comparing them to each other, making sense out of each one. The *Living Simply with God: A 40-Day Hunger Calendar* is about hunger that God wants us to abbreviate, alleviate, eliminate. The calendar guides you toward living a joyous and abundant life, filled with generosity toward others—a life modeled on Jesus’ own, a life that is lived simply so that others can simply live.



The 40-day calendar is a simple way to:

- take stock of your life.
- simplify how you spend your time.
- move God’s version of the good life into your life.
- help change the lives of people whose personal “calendars” hold hunger, poverty, and injustice every day.
- find hope for your life and the lives of others.

This calendar is available online only at www.elca.org/hunger/simplicitycalendar.

Comprehensive world hunger curriculum

A unique curriculum from ELCA World Hunger titled *Taking Root: Hunger Causes, Hunger Hopes*, is a comprehensive interactive resource designed to educate children, youth and adults about the root causes of and solutions to global hunger and poverty. The curriculum includes five sessions each for three different age groups: grades 3–6, grades 7–9 (junior high), and grades 10–12 (senior high). All age groups have parallel content, so the biblical texts and themes, children’s literature and many projects and activities are complementary across age levels. The leaders’ guide has material that can be used for adults.

Some of the resources available for ordering include:

- leaders’ guide for each grade level
- newspapers and notebooks
- book pack
- carrot stickers
- youth (senior high) videos
- sample kits (free)
- promotional brochures (free)

What are you waiting for? Order a sample kit, or test drive *Taking Root: Hunger Causes, Hunger Hopes* today! Visit www.elca.org/hunger/takingroot for more information.



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**Plug in your
congregation**

with ideas and resources from this "technical" issue
of *Seeds for the Parish*

Book of Faith goes electronic

Members of the ELCA are reading and discussing the Bible as part of this church's Book of Faith Initiative. That discussion is being propelled with Internet technology.

An estimated 2,400 members have signed on to the Book of Faith social network—<http://bookoffaith.ning.com>—made possible through Ning, an online platform for users to create their own social networks.

"Ning is really very similar to Facebook," said Bill Huff, assistant director for the Book of Faith Initiative, ELCA Vocation and Education, St. Paul, Minn.

"Social networking is one of the fastest growing vehicles for personal communication right now," Huff said. "The essence of Book of Faith is that it's not a program. We don't want it to be a top-down initiative," he said.

"The motivation for a social networking site is to stay in contact with individuals and to be in contact with large groups of people who have similar interests," Huff said. "You'll be able to socialize with your colleagues throughout the country, but also you'll be able to share ideas and be able to see what other people are doing."

"The Book of Faith tagline is 'Open Scripture. Join the Conversation.' So much

of what the Ning site is about is joining the conversation," Huff said. "Once you're signed up you have a profile, and you can tell a little bit about yourself. Then you can join the conversation."

Someone reading the Bible can find study helps as well as others who may be reading on their own. There are more than 45 videos and other resources on the site. There is an area of the site to find or add events.

The initiative is generating resources in congregations across this church, and the Ning site is a means for sharing "what's working in my setting," Huff said.

"If you are a Sunday school volunteer, you can go on to the conversation piece and see what's going on with people as they teach their kids," he said. "People post ideas, but also people post questions or theological concerns."

"The goal is to get people engaging in Scripture, so anything we can do to help that along is meeting the mission and will help the ELCA," Huff said.

Information about the ELCA's Book of Faith initiative is at www.bookoffaith.org on the Web.



Who knew saving for retirement could light up a new church?

In 11 short years, the members of Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Rockport, Texas, have gone from meeting in rented storefronts to breaking ground on their own church building — thanks to a loan from the Mission Investment Fund. Invest with the MIF and you don't just earn a competitive rate of return, you help fund loans so new congregations like Holy Cross find homes of their own. To learn more, contact us at 877.886.3522 or elca.org/mif.



Mission Investment Fund
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God's work. Our hands.