

2007 Annual National Association of Lutheran Interim Pastors NALIP

NALIP Conference

May 27, 2007

The conference was held at Maritime Institute of Technology & Conference Center in Linthicum Heights, Maryland. NALIP is made up of two associations: The Interim Ministry Association (IMA) of the ELCA; and the LCMS Interim Ministry Conference (IMC). The annual Conference brings together Lutherans who work with congregations in transition - pastors, laity, judicatory representatives and other interested persons.

The Rev. H. Gerard Knoche, the Bishop of the Delaware-Maryland Synod ELCA brought greetings to the participants of the conference, as well as, The Rev. Dr. Jon T. Diefenthaler, President Southeastern District, LCMS.

Gilbert R. Rendle author, seminar leader, senior consultant, of the Alban Institute was the key note speaker. Gil has an extensive background in organizational development; group and systems theory; and leadership development. He is well known for his work with middle judicatory offices and staff as they wrestle with the issues of both denominational and congregational change. The topic of the training sessions focused on "Storied Leadership." The leader is responsible for helping people find and shape a "better story."

NALIP, IMA and IMC had organizational reports and meetings on the first night of the conference. Constitutional changes, election of officers and plans for the next conference were on the agendas of each of the associations.



Conference speaker Gil Rendle talking with some attending the NALIP Conference.



The IMA board at the time of the conference.

Front – l to r – Dan DeBlock, Cheryl Berg, Dave Newhart; back, l to r – Jan Marvar, Olin Knudsen, Dick Mathisen, Cynthia Stengel

IMA Board Information – 2007-07 (Summer)

At the IMA Board reorganization on May 24, 2007, the following officers were elected: Olin Knudsen as President, Cynthia Stengel as Secretary, and David Newhart as Treasurer. Dan DeBlock took responsibility for the newsletter, managing the membership list and website. Olin emphasized his desire to involve more IMA members who are not on the Board. A resolution was passed to set up a committee on advocacy for intentional interim ministry within the ELCA, with special attention to providing assistance to newly-elected bishops. Dick Mathisen joined the board as a newly-elected board member.

Subsequent to the reorganization meeting, Cynthia Stengel resigned. Olin asked Jan Marvar to prepare a certificate recognizing Cynthia's long involvement and many contributions to IMA and NALIP. Cynthia will continue to work with the ELCA archivist to turn over appropriate materials to the archives. Dick Mathisen was elected as IMA Secretary. Keith Hammer from Idaho was elected to fill the vacancy on the IMA board. Keith had been runner-up in the election held at the NALIP conference.

Dick Mathisen

IMA Board Secretary

From the President

Partners in Intentional Interim Ministry,

I greet you in the name of Christ our Savior. My name is Olin Knudsen, recently elected President of the Interim Ministry Association and currently serving Zion Lutheran Church in McGregor, Texas. You say you have no idea where in the world McGregor is? Well, that was my thought too when my Bishop asked me to consider it. Actually I was leaning towards YES anyway because I am on Synod Council Call as Interim Ministry Specialist. So I would give strong consideration for any location if there was a need for Interim Ministry, even a location that was off my "map." By the way, McGregor is 130 miles from my home in Dallas, TX, 20 miles from Waco, TX and of course 6 miles from Crawford (Western White House), TX.

I am inheriting the position as President from Cynthia Stengel who served faithfully and diligently as President of IMA, and prior to this office as NALIP Representative to the IMA Board. (National Association of Lutheran Interim Pastors is made up of ELCA and LCMS.) In addition, she served as NALIP Secretary, and many of you are not aware of her tremendous contribution to NALIP Interim Training as Editor for the Interim Program's Curriculum. Her contribution to Interim Ministry does not end there. She has been a driving force in Lutheran Interim Ministry from the beginning. She provided leadership in the predecessor bodies prior to NALIP and IMA. Cynthia, on behalf of the Interims of the ELCA and LCMS, thanks for your labors; you will be missed. The IMA Board voted to present her with a Certificate of Appreciation and a Gift Card.

In the past year your IMA Board has been very busy. As you may be aware, the ELCA formally recognized the IMA. We are in the ELCA Yearbook. That was a result of many years of work. In addition, the WEB SITE: <http://www.elca.org/interimministry/> is up and running. Some have attributed this Web Site to me. This Web Site was, however, a team effort by a host of folks. Former IMA Board members Serena Sellars, David Pretty, Ray Hittinger as well as current IMA Board members Dan DeBlock and myself all had a significant part in making this Web Site a reality. None of this could have happened without the support at Churchwide – Dick Bruesehoff, Director for Lifelong Learning, Vocation and Education unit, ELCA and of course David Scott, Web Developer for the ELCA.

As we look ahead to the future, your IMA Board is listening to your suggestions.

At the 2007 Annual Meeting for the IMA your suggestions included:

- Educating the Church about the IMA and Interim Ministry
- Encouraging small interim support groups
- Article in The Lutheran on interim ministry, and other Lutheran publications
- Encourage settled pastors to embrace IM
- Credentialing of intentional interim pastors
- Work with bishops and synod staffs, especially the newly elected bishops

At the IMA Board June 14th Conference Call, a sub committee of the IMA Board was established to work on Advocacy for Interim Ministry focused on Synod Staffs with a special emphasis directed toward new bishops. Additionally, two articles are being prepared for Lutheran publications. Your IMA Board is looking for willing Interims outside the board to make the Advocacy effort successful. Interim Ministry is a team effort not only in the Congregations but also throughout the Church. Do you have an idea or desire to assist the IMA? If so, let us know by one of the following methods.

by mail:

Interim Ministry Association
c/o ELCA Vocation and Education
8765 W Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4195

by phone:

Toll-Free 1-800-638-3522 ext. 1460

Local 1-773-380-1460

Fax 1-773-380-2829

by e-mail: ve.info@elca.org

May God continue to bless you in your ministry of transition,

Olin Knudsen

IMA President



GROWING TRUST DURING INTERIM

David S. Wall, Interim Pastor

My present ministry gives me the opportunity to drive through areas where crops have had marvelous growth this spring. As an interim pastor, I often wonder how we can “grow” trust in the congregations and parishes where I am serving.

I will begin my thirteenth interim ministry this summer and I am sure I will arrive at the new setting with a sense of high anxiety with the previous pastor leaving and low expectation for the interim pastor arriving. It might not seem to be very fruitful soil to be trying to grow trust in that setting. Every parish needs the respect to know that the circumstance they presently find themselves in is unique. As interim pastors, we are possibly tempted to put the parish in a particular category and proceed with what we think will be the best plan of action for that situation.

The first and maybe most important thing I believe I can do, is to listen to the people. I think of my parents and the trusted teachers I have had in my life. I know first and foremost, they listened to me. I am sure that as we listen in the parish, we will sow seeds of trust as we listen to both the personal journey of individuals as well as what we hear of the overall journey of the parish. As a preacher, I am probably too quick to speak and too slow to listen. However, I am convinced that whenever we can discipline ourselves to listen, we will have seeds of trust germinating and growing. Even after we have moved through weeks and months of the interim time in a parish, we have to be willing to return to this listening mode to continue to strengthen the growth of trust.

The second area that I believe is significant is the common phrase, “Speak the truth in love.” Again, using the image of parents or teachers that we respect, I was surprised many times by parents and teachers as they would say something that I didn’t expect that would challenge me. It was speaking the truth in love that was stated. I can speak the truth sometimes but if it is done with laceration instead of love, it won’t grow trust. Also, the challenge we have is to say what needs to be said knowing that it is important and not forgetting that my interim contract asks me to do that for the positive and healthy growth of trust in the congregation.

Whenever clergy misconduct or other significant hurtful

issues occur in a parish or congregation, I believe the growing of trust will take on additional complications. I am thankful that my experience with this is limited but I have gathered from others that if some of the basics given above don’t show that trust is being grown—something might be wrong with the soil. It might be acidic, if you will, and at that point I need to make sure that I am able to check this out with someone else like another interim pastor or a judicatory staff person or someone else whom we respect.

I am thankful for Dr. Peter Steinke’s Healthy Congregations and others who produce resources that will assist congregations and parishes to grow trust.

A seminary professor said of Genesis 3, “The fall shows us that we can’t and won’t trust God.” This offers for us the opportunity of worship being a place of forgiveness, redemption and reconciliation. If we can’t and won’t trust God, how much more fragile are our trusting relationships as human beings. The New Revised Standard Version states Genesis 3: 21 as this, “And the Lord God made garments of skins for the man (for Adam) and for his wife, and clothed them.” We ask for God to clothe us in righteousness and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we serve in our ministry on very holy ground.

I would summarize by saying that it takes incarnational, sociological and theological discipline to grow trust in the parish. We arrive as individuals with our lifetime experiences as a brother or sister in Christ and we want to respect and encourage those in the faith to do the same as they also grow in trust. Quite possibly, in the limited time we have in the parish as an interim pastor, we may not see fully grown trust but it is truly appreciated when we see the early signs that trust is growing. It is a challenging task and well worth it when trust grows in the parish. I hope you will see signs of trust growing as you live and serve Christ’s church. Peace to you for the journey.

Association Dues

Annual dues for the Interim Ministry Association of the ELCA (IMA) are \$50. Dues are tax deductible.

Please make all checks payable to **Interim Ministry Association** and mail them to: IMA

ELCA Vocation and Education Unit

8765 W. Higgins Road

Chicago, IL 60631

From the Board of Pensions - Disability Coverage - Jan 1, 2008

Called interim pastors who are between assignments will have the option to purchase ELCA disability coverage as soon as Jan. 1, 2008, if approved by the Board of Trustees of the ELCA Board of Pensions this August. Read on for preliminary information about this new benefit to be offered by the Board of Pensions in cooperation with Vocation and Education.

What new benefit is being offered?

A new extended disability benefit will give interim pastors who are under call from a synod council the option to purchase disability coverage while between assignments. This extended disability coverage will replace two-thirds of the pastor's previous defined compensation if she or he becomes disabled while between assignments.

Is this disability benefit the same as when sponsored?

While details are still being finalized, there will be some differences between extended disability coverage and disability coverage for pastors who are sponsored in the ELCA Pension and Other Benefits Program. Most notably, a pastor who becomes disabled while covered under the extended disability benefit will receive a monthly income but contributions will not continue toward her or his health, retirement or survivor benefits.

The definition of total disability and the initial two-month waiting period between the date of disability and the first day of monthly disability benefit payments will be the same as when sponsored.

Why should eligible pastors consider purchasing this benefit?

The extended disability benefit will provide eligible pastors with financial protection at a relatively low cost, in the event of becoming disabled. While between assignments, eligible pastors may choose to purchase extended disability benefits, along with health and survivor benefits, to continue coverage similar to the package of benefits they receive while sponsored in the ELCA Pension and Other Benefits Program.

Who is eligible for extended disability coverage?

Pastors who have received a formal call from their synod council may purchase extended disability coverage. In other words, a pastor is eligible for extended disability coverage if she or he:

- is serving under a term call from a synod council, and continues under call between assignments, or
- has completed an interim call from a synod council to a specific congregation, and goes on leave from call.

Pastors who are serving in an interim capacity, but not under a call from a synod council (e.g., pastors who have been appointed by the bishop, or who have contracted directly with a congregation), will not be eligible for extended disability coverage.

What is the cost of extended disability coverage?

Coverage is expected to cost \$15 – \$20 a month per \$1,000 of monthly benefit. Pastors may purchase coverage to replace two-thirds of their average monthly compensation earned under their previous assignment, rounded to the nearest \$500.

For example, let's say Pastor Jensen earns \$60,000 annually, or \$5,000 a month. When his call ends, Pastor Jensen may choose to purchase extended disability coverage for \$3,500 of monthly benefit. (His prior monthly compensation of \$5,000 multiplied by two-thirds equals \$3,333.34. This figure, rounded to the nearest \$500, is \$3,500.)

At \$15 to \$20 for each \$1,000 of income to be replaced, he would be billed somewhere between \$52.50 and \$70 a month for extended disability coverage.

Who pays for the coverage?

The pastor will be billed for coverage. The synod or congregation may make arrangements to reimburse the pastor.

What is the deadline to apply for extended disability coverage?

Generally, an eligible pastor will have 60 days from the end of an interim assignment to apply for extended disability coverage by submitting a *Change of call* form to the Board of Pensions. Pastors currently have 60 days from ending an assignment to apply for extended health and survivor benefits.

Eligible pastors who are between assignments when this new benefit becomes available will have a grace period of 60 days to apply for coverage.

Can extended disability coverage be purchased indefinitely while between assignments?

No. Extended disability coverage can be purchased for up to 12 months. If a pastor is between assignments for more than one year, extended disability coverage will end after 12 months. (Extended health and survivor benefits may continue.) The pastor may choose to purchase extended disability coverage again following her or his next interim assignment.

When will extended disability coverage be offered?

The Board of Pensions plans to make this benefit available Jan. 1, 2008, pending approval this August. Further information will be presented later this year.

IMA now has a website!

We have been working for some time now to provide a website for communication to you. It is a work in progress. The address is www.ELCA.org/InterimMinistry. Your comments, suggestions, ideas are welcome and appreciated.



Recommended books

Leading Change

by John P. Kotter

Harvard Business School professor Kotter writes a comprehensible and farsighted guide to change. Kotter details a complete eight-step framework that can be followed by leaders. Included in the book are useful examples that show how to go about implementing it. He advises the importance of fostering a sense of urgency within the group or organization. It is where contentment is absent and there is a sense of necessity. This book is not a quick fix approach but an organized way of leading. He draws upon the experiences of several companies struggling with the need to change. The eight-steps are:

1. Establishing a sense of urgency
2. Forming a powerful guiding coalition
3. Creating a vision
4. Communicating vision
5. Empowering others to act on the vision
6. Planning for and creating short-term wins
7. Consolidating improvements and producing still more change
8. Institutionalizing new approaches

His solid counsel goes directly to the reasons organizations fail to change. This should be the primary concern of those leading especially during times of transition. John P. Kotter writes, "There are still more mistakes that people make, but these eight are the big ones. In reality, even successful change efforts are messy and full of surprises. But just as a relatively simple vision is needed to guide people through a major change, so a vision of the change process can reduce the error rate. And fewer errors can spell the difference between success and failure."

A book you will want to consider if you are involved in bring about change in an organization.



The Way of Transition

by Wayne Bridges

The author of "Transitions" and "Managing Transitions", and a seminar leader has built a solid reputation as an expert on the topic. Then his wife of thirty-five years died from breast cancer, he began to question his understanding of transitions. "I felt now that my words had totally failed to match in depth the experience of actually being in transition." Bridges set out on a spiritual pilgrimage through Wales. He discovered he had more to offer on the topic of transitions. It is a time of letting go and taking hold, letting go of the past and taking hold of the future.

Bridges brings to life his personal pilgrimage. "Change can come at any time, but transition comes along when one chapter of your life is over and another is waiting in the wings to make its entrance," he begins. "Needless to say it is impossible to imagine a new chapter is starting when your wife's death has just closed down what feels like your whole life. You simply cannot imagine a new chapter...." Demonstrating how disappointment, grief, or uncertainty can blossom into a time of incredible originality and happiness, he highlights the profound significance and importance of endings in our lives.

The loss of his wife made his story all the more compelling by showing him as someone who had gained his knowledge from tough acquired personal experience. He points out repeatedly, life changes don't follow a tidy, conventional pattern; but if we embrace the process of transition and remain open to change, everything will in due course work.

A book of great significance for anyone work with or living a life in transition.

– Reviewed by Dan DeBlock





Interim Ministry Refresher Course

October 22-26, 2007

Saint Luke Evangelical Lutheran Church, Devon, Pennsylvania

Co-hosted by the Interim Ministry Network (IMN) and the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the ELCA.

Who Will Benefit?

Trained interim pastors with at least one year of experience in an interim situation, middle judicatories and administrators with deployment responsibilities, settled pastors with changing congregations, transition consultants, trainers, facilitators and coaches. All denominations are welcome.

What is the Course?

For those who completed their intentional interim training awhile ago, the issues will sound familiar but the solutions may be newer and more in tune with the times.

Schedule

Monday Small World Networks A Theological Model for Transitional Ministry

Tuesday Congregational Identity The Voluntary Community from Birth to Renewal

Wednesday What we Learn from Conflict Public Agreement versus Self-Differentiation

Thursday Intentional Leadership is No Accident Appreciative Listening for Congregational Identity

Friday The Future Doesn't Wait From Pastor to Program, From Family to Niche

Tuition and Registration

Registrants will receive a list of local motels to make their own four-night reservations. Lunch is served daily and included in the tuition of \$795.

To register, visit the IMN website or contact Ellen Goudv at 800-235-8414.



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Entry – The “25 Interviews” Approach

All interim pastors face the problem of “Entry” with every new congregation. How do you find out what’s *really* going on in a congregation and who the key players are? I’ve developed my personal method which I call the “25 Interviews” Approach.

At the first Council meeting I announce that I would like to interview a representative sample of about twenty-five families in the congregation. I request Council’s assistance in developing such a list. I ask Council members to suggest names. For each name, I ask whether they would rank that family as a priority A, B or C for the list. I usually have a prioritized list within about 30 to 40 minutes. I add or subtract names later if that seems advisable.

I then make an appointment with each family on the list. I do the interview either at their home (my preference) or in the church. My interview consists of two questions, which I tell them in advance if they ask. Question #1 is “Tell me about yourself,” straightforward getting to know each other. Question #2 is open-ended: “Tell me about the congregation: what do you think of it, what are your hopes, fears, thoughts, etc.” I schedule two hours. The interviews average about 90 minutes, although some are shorter and some go much longer. I can usually complete all 25 interviews within about 4 – 6 weeks.

I developed this method because I want to hear from the members of the congregation themselves how they perceive their situation. I don’t like to depend on sources of information outside the congregation. In particular, I don’t want to be biased by speaking with the previous pastor in advance. (I usually speak with him or her at the conclusion of the 25 interviews.) At the same time as the visitation, I am doing my normal research to get myself up to speed on what’s been happening in the congregation -- reading ten years of Annual Reports, at least five years of Council minutes, and at least a year of recent newsletters.

I like this method because it’s fast and provides me with face-to-face time with the key members of the

congregation. While I always refer to this list a “representative sample,” it won’t surprise my readers that it usually includes all the movers and shakers within that congregation. By the end of the 25 interviews I normally understand what is going on in the congregation and who the key players are. Of course, that’s when the difficult work begins!

Dick Mathisen

Richard A. Mathisen is an intentional interim pastor in the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA. [Discussion of this article, if desired, can take place on the IMA Message Board.]



The Naked Truth

Truth, naked and cold, had been turned away from every door in the village. Her nakedness frightened the people. When Parable found her she was huddled in a corner, shivering and hungry. Taking pity on her, Parable gathered her up and took her home. There, she dressed Truth in story, warmed her and sent her out again. Clothed in story, Truth knocked again at the villager’s doors and was readily welcomed into the people’s houses. They invited her to eat at their table and warm herself by their fire.

Jewish Teaching Story p.27 Annette Simmons –
The Story Factor



Here’s a thought...

Print an extra copy of this newsletter and share it with someone else doing interim ministry.

Bridgebuilders for Interims

Bridgebuilders is a process structured to help congregations in conflict. The initial training started in 1994, and since then, more than 600 clergy and professionals have been trained. One third of those trained have been interim ministers. The training is based on the Bowen Family System Theory and Biblical principles. The purpose of the training is to help congregations make good decisions for themselves and move beyond polarization.

Key Elements of the Bridgebuilder intervention: A process of growth; A multi-step process of several months; A way to conceptualize emotional systems; An objective view of the congregation's emotional system; Empowering the congregation to manage the situation; Lessening of anxiety to promote greater clarity; A focus on assets, not liabilities; Redefining situation as an opportunity; Finding a vision for the future; Renewal of purpose and mission; Creating a healthy future; and Increasing the leadership capacities within the congregation.

Opportunities for Bridgebuilder Training in 2007:

Contact: Peter Steinke, PO Box 300939, Austin, TX 78738

New companion DVD goes with the new book 'Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Conversations and Reflections with Dr. Peter Steinke. He discusses issues in each chapter with lay and clergy leaders. A study guide accompanies the DVD. The DVD can be purchased from Seraphim Communications, 1568 Eustus St., St. Paul, MN for \$89 plus \$5 for shipping.

Peter Steinke

Interim Ministry Educational Opportunities—2007

The 2007 Educational Program co-sponsored by NALIP and Luther Seminary began on a strong note with 22 participants from nine states and one Canadian Province. The event was led by Dr. Paul N. Svingen, currently serving as interim senior pastor at Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Aberdeen, South Dakota. A Minneapolis Area Synod Interim Pastor, Paul also serves Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, as Adjunct Professor in the Doctor of Ministry Program (which includes a track in Interim Ministry).

The second 2007 Discernment Event at Luther Seminary is scheduled for September 13-14, 2007. The tuition for this 11-contact hour seminar is \$125.00.

The 20th Annual Intentional Interim Ministry Basic Training Event (Phase I) will be presented at Luther Seminary (www.luthersem.edu/lifelong_learning/kairos), beginning on October 29 – November 2, 2007. The Phase III of this 60-contact hour event will be presented the 4th week of April, 2008, at the Mt. Olivet Retreat Center (www.mtolivetretreat.org), Farmington, Minnesota. The \$695.00 tuition does not include room/board costs for either Phases I or III. You may contact the Kairos Web site (see above) for room/board costs.

The concluding 20-contact hour 2007 NALIP/Kairos Seminar at Luther is entitled "Interim Ministry: Essentials Beyond Basic (Training), and is for interim pastors/consultants who have completed the three-phase basic training course for intentional interim ministry. This seminar addresses: the interim process in relation to the work of visioning; responsibility, authority and accountability issues in the congregational system, a self-discovery exercise to strengthen leadership capacities so that as the designated interim leader, the Intentional Interim Pastor (IIP) can assist others in the congregation to increase their potential for effective ministry in the interim period; the IIP's role in relation to human resource issues; the process tasks in relation to appropriate systems insights; and, interim leadership and self-differentiation related to family of origin issues.

Please consult the Kairos office for details on course requirements. The tuition for this event is \$295.00. Room/board is not included in this fee. The course begins Tuesday, December 4th at 2:00 p.m. and concludes Friday, December 7th at noon.

Previously-offered advanced courses on "Effective Multiple-Staff Interims" and "Mission, Vision, Self-Study in the Interim Process" will not be offered at Luther Seminary in 2007.



NALIP Education Courses – see NALIP web site for details

DISCERNMENT FOR INTERIM MINISTRY 12-hour events

This short course introduces the options and challenges of interim ministry, and helps determine whether this form of ministry is a viable option for you. Recommended before investing time and energy in the Basic Education course.

The Discernment course is offered regularly at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN, Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, MO, and at other sites by special arrangement.

BASIC EDUCATION FOR THE PRACTICE OF INTENTIONAL INTERIM MINISTRY

This course is designed to connect you with your synod, district or judicatory and offers a foundation for working with congregations facing important issues during pastoral transition. The program is designed in three sequential phases over six months: a residential week, fieldwork in a parish or other ministry site, and a concluding residential week. The course is currently offered in the fall and spring at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, and Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

CONTINUING INTERIM EDUCATION – 12 & 36-hour events

Specialized and advanced interim ministry courses are offered each year. Check the NALIP web site for descriptions and schedules.

OTHER OFFERINGS NALIP

The National Association of Lutheran Interim Pastors (NALIP), is a pan-Lutheran body currently made up of two member Associations: the Interim Ministry Association of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (IMA-ELCA) and the Interim Ministry Conference of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (IMC-LCMS). NALIP's goals are to:

- Promote general awareness of Intentional Interim Ministry and its issues,
- Advocate high performance standards in its practice,
- Support the Church's servants called to interim ministry,
- Develop and offer programs for the training and continuing education of Lutheran Interim ministry practitioners, and
- Exercise good stewardship of resources, and pursue sources of funding.

Each year NALIP sponsors an Annual Conference featuring quality continuing education, personal and professional networking, and an opportunity to talk with local judicatory leaders about interim ministry issues.

Information on NALIP and its educational offerings can be found at www.nalip.net.

See the next page for information about this year's speaker.

Interim Ministry Network

Since 1980, the Interim Ministry Network has dedicated itself to the health and wellness of church congregations. The wellness of churches is influenced by three kinds of learned leadership skills - prevention of unhealthy practices before they take root, maintenance of congregational health during times of stress or change and restorative care when it is required. Information on IMN resources can be found at www.IMNedu.org.



The Alban Institute

AI is an ecumenical interfaith organization, founded in 1974, which supports congregations through book publishing, educational seminars, consulting services, and research. It offers practical assistance in working with congregations, garnered by continually learning from—and sharing learning's with—thousands of congregations and denominational bodies. Alban is dedicated to pursuing new knowledge in the fields of sociology, human relations, and organizational development, and disseminating original research through books, educational seminars, and consulting and training services. Information on the Alban Institute and its work can be found at www.alban.org.

The Lombard Mennonite Peace Center

LMPC is a non-profit ministry that works to encourage the nonviolent transformation of conflict in relationships in homes, workplaces, schools, churches, and throughout our world. Its programs and resources address ways of resolving conflicts and building healthier relationships in all of these various settings. Information on the programs and resources of LMPC can be found at www.lmpeacecenter.org.

Healthy Congregations: Myth or Reality

What does a healthy congregation look like? Has there ever been such a thing as a healthy congregation? We have all struggled with such questions as leaders of congregations and have come up with varying answers to the aforementioned questions. Scripture tells us that such questions have been a part of the Church since its beginning. Yes, there is that short stint of idealized peace and harmony in Acts 4:32-37 but that soon vanished and the struggle began for congregations of believer to function in a more healthy manner. The majority of the Apostle Paul's letters were addressed to congregations experiencing either open conflict or at best a confusion of mission. Even Jesus was asked as to what the

appropriate response should be when conflict arises among the members of the Church or more broadly when conflict arises between people of faith. Thus most of our congregational constitutions contain words of direction from Matthew 18:15ff. in order to return to a position of relative peace, if not harmony and healthy function. Yet the question remains are healthy congregations myth or reality?

Recently, I dusted off the copies of Dr. Peter Steinke's books: *Healthy Congregations: a systems approach*, *How Your Church Family Works: understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems*, his newest book *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being calm and Courageous No Matter What* and my *Healthy Congregations* facilitator manual. I have found that when I am not operating in a healthy and self-differentiated manner I allow the anxiety of the system to become my own, or vice versa, and I begin to lose focus on my mission as a leader, i.e., *to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ in faith, unity, maturity and knowledge*.

The Healthy Congregations material is by no means a silver bullet that will slay every conflict or disagreement that comes along. The material was not written to stop conflict, differences of opinions or diagnose and fix the dysfunctional. Rather the materials purpose is to give the leader understanding of their own functioning and tools to manage their own anxieties. By being less anxious and more self regulating and reflective the leader is able to more positively add to healthy functioning of the congregational system.

I have used the principles of Healthy Congregations for our leadership workshops each of the last eight years, with periodic immunizations during devotional times before meetings. Does it work? I think that it does. In my present call, the congregations history of calling pastors has been every two to three years. I am now finishing my ninth year. Have we had controversy and disagreements? Yes. Have people left because of such controversy and disagreements? Yes. But the leaders, to their credit, have applied the principles of Healthy Congregations, have been able to manage their own anxiety in a more healthy way, and have remained focused on the mission of the congregation. (*continues*)

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The leaders of the congregation have found that controversy and conflict are not necessarily destructive. Such events have allowed the leadership to better define themselves and their place within the congregational system. It has also helped the leadership to feel better about the decisions they have made and will be required to make. A healthier congregation? Yes. A completely healthy congregation? No. The leaders, including myself, have found that in order to have a healthier functioning congregation we must be willing to continue to work on managing our own anxieties by trying to be more reflective than reactive and to use the energy that change creates for the benefit of mission. We do this by 1) talking to one another rather than about one another; 2) realizing that we are smarter together than we are by ourselves; 3) knowing that God has already given us what we need to accomplish our mission: one another.

I have put together a Power Point Presentation that outlines the basic principles of the Healthy Congregations material. I am willing to share this material as a trained facilitator of Healthy Congregations in leadership workshops. The workshop that I have created is between four to six hours long and does not cover all aspects of the longer 30 hour Healthy Congregations training nor all of Dr. Steinke material. I work for mileage, coffee and hot-dish. Otherwise I would be so bold as to suggest if you haven't already done so, pick up copies of Dr. Steinke's books or become a Healthy Congregations facilitator when the training is offered. It is a beneficial continuing education event.

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NALIP Board Members

l to r – Ray Hittinger, Richard Paul, Jan Marvar, David Newhart, Martin Teske

Photo's from the NALIP Conference

