



# Mission Builders



## Mission Builders, members work side-by-side on addition to Minnesota church

**T**hanks to the close collaboration of Mission Builders and local church volunteers, the addition to Rushford Lutheran Church (RLC) is expected to be dedicated in June 2007, a year after volunteers began construction.

Rushford is in southeastern Minnesota, approximately 40 miles from the famed Mayo Clinic in Rochester.

Said Mission Builders construction manager Bill Speer, "Because of the tremendous volunteer hours provided by the congregation, a fine Mission Builder crew, and very timely subcontractors, the project was on schedule by the end of October 2006—the end of the project's Mission Builder phase."

"Now, it is April 2007, and the congregation can see the light at the end of the tunnel—victory!" said the Rev. Roger Michaelson, Rushford's pastor.

"Our moment of realization came when three large, custom-made windows went in on the addition's east wall before Easter." The narthex addition is about 30 feet tall from floor to ceiling. "The windows let in so much light. People comment that they can see them from the highway," said Michaelson.

Congregation members were excited to see that the addition's limestone exterior matches that of the existing building. The addition also complements the 40-year-old, two-story education wing built onto the original church building.

There is a lot to be excited about with this addition: fellowship space and worship overflow space for 150 with a

flat screen television monitor, an elevator for easier sanctuary and basement access, storage space, additional space for the Sunday school and a new nursery, library/media room with Internet and PowerPoint capabilities, kitchenette, and a covered drop-off area.

"Our church already was the place to meet in town, and now, it will be even more so," said Michaelson, "for groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous, the Boy and Girl Scouts, and others."

Rushford Lutheran's 1200 members also anticipate being able to more comfortably host congregation council and committee meetings, men's and women's synodical events, youth activities, and educational events.

Volunteers from the congregation and Mission Builders—who by April had logged more than 12,000 hours—made all of this possible, while saving the congregation some \$200,000. Michaelson explained that the congregation could have spent \$1.5 million by hiring a general contractor. Instead, by working through Mission Builders and cutting costs, the congregation is expecting to spend \$1.1 million.

"We have done better than expected budget-wise," said Dale Evavold, the building chair. "We got more done than we thought we would, and there have been some special gifts."

Not only is this facility expected to enhance congregational life, its construction already has helped build new relationships. "This project has brought

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Rushford members were pleased at how well the addition blended with the older structure.



Local volunteers and Mission Builders offered over 12,000 hours to the Rushford project.

a whole bunch of people together,” said Evavold.

“People in the congregation made new friends and deepened existing relationships as they worked side by side and shared morning devotions.”

Congregation members also have forged relationships with the Mission Builders, who came from as far away as California and Colorado and as near as 50 miles away.

The volunteers’ dedication impressed Speer: “Several folks told me that they had not voted for the project, but came to work anyway—true servants of Christ—no ordinary volunteers.”

The Mission Builders earn minimum wage while on the job so that they are covered by workers’ compensation should they incur injury. The Mission Builders started their day at 7 a.m. and worked well into the afternoon, Tuesdays through Saturdays.

Michaelson said, “I believe that the congregation made two great decisions here—first, to do the addition, and second, to call Mission Builders. The Mission Builders brought an energy, zeal and overall positive attitude and joy to ministry that has stirred people to be servants here even more.”

Looking back on this project, Michaelson offers advice for other congregations contemplating building projects: “Contact Mission Builders. It should be considered almost a heresy within the ELCA not to consider the

Mission Builders.”

Interested congregations should contact the Builders as soon as possible, especially if the congregation chooses to serve as its own contractor, adds Speer: “To begin construction in April or May (in the north), the congregation needs to start months in advance. In addition to the hands-on building, Mission Builders provides budget estimates and bidding process assistance.”

Evavold added, “I once heard that if you are going to invite company into your home that you should make your home as comfortable for them as possible. The Mission Builders are helping us do just that.”

### Pastor calls them “servants”

You realize that the Mission Builders are a tremendous group of people dedicated to what they’re doing,” says Pastor Michaelson. “They see themselves as—and they are—servants of Christ.”

The Mission Builders are retirees who help congregations with building projects. There are 115 Mission Builders from 30 states, including 15 construction managers, who don’t mind traveling.

Five or six other Mission Builders projects were underway in the U.S. during the RLC project, including one in nearby Cumberland, Wisconsin.

Michaelson, now in his sixth year at Rushford Lutheran, became acquainted with the Mission Builders when he served as a pastor in Menasha, Minnesota. He



Merle Evenson, a Rushford member, helps children make benches out of the left-over wood.





## Our Mission

The ELCA Mission Builders are dedicated Christians who work for their Lord, helping congregations, schools, camps, and social ministry organizations of the ELCA build their facilities.

A typical project includes Mission Builders, members of the congregation, and various professionals working side-by-side.

While building structures, Mission Builders also build up the kingdom.

Tom Chase  
Director for Mission Builders  
2038 Princeton Way  
Montrose, CO 81401

800.643.5295

[th\\_chase@msn.com](mailto:th_chase@msn.com)

[www.elca.org/outreach/missionbuilders/](http://www.elca.org/outreach/missionbuilders/)

left before the actual building process started, but he performed all the preliminary construction set-up work.

When RLC decided to build, he suggested that the congregation contact the Mission Builders. "We're very delighted to have them," said Michaelson. "The work of the local (volunteer) helpers also has been excellent."

The number of local volunteers turning out to help was steady, sometimes higher than anticipated: "Anywhere from five to 10 (daily)," said Evavold. "We've had as many as 20 in a day. I know one week there were 33 different people, so it's been really good."

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Tom Chase of Montrose, Colorado, who serves as Mission Builders' national coordinator says the organization has completed more than 150 projects since 1987 and is always looking for builders.

He said that the program is self-supporting through gifts, donations, and charges. Through its endowment, it has helped fund building projects for several ELCA-related ministries among people living in poverty.

"It may be hard for you to believe, but we as Mission Builders get as much out of this as those we help. It is a blessing to serve," said Chase.

### Influence of Mission Builders:

**Virgil Mehus:** They set some great examples. They are an inspiration to our church. I was physically inactive—but it's getting better all the time. You go home tired and achy, but you've accomplished something. They'll tell you it's a blessing to work.

**Merle Evenson:** I really enjoy working with them and fellow congregation members. It is a blessing from our Lord and if you missed the chance of working with them and our members you have missed God's gift to you. They are the greatest.

**Keith Connaughty:** They're really nice people to work with.

**Lyle Nelson:** It's very worthwhile. My wife can hardly keep me home, and I'm singing a song every morning.

**Charles Boehmke:** I'm here to see that it gets completed. These people are so much fun, and these people have strengthened my faith so much. It has been a good summer. I voted against the project, but then got behind it.

**Claire Olstad:** I just thoroughly enjoy the whole business. These Mission Builders are awesome people. I go home tired, but I feel better than (I have) in a long time. I voted against it, but if anybody could tell me that a group of people could come in and be so good to get along with...."

**Marvin Bestul:** I'm really working for the congregation and I want to see it through. Mission Builders...it has been a joy working with them. We're fortunate.

*This Mission Builders piece has been adapted from an article written by Ron Witt that first appeared in the September 29, 2006, issue of the Tri-County Record, Rushford, Minnesota.*



Like clockwork, 9:30 was time for a break and snacks, followed by Scripture, prayer, and song.



## ELCA Emergent Ministries partial list

### Illinois

Shekinah Chapel, Chicago

### Indiana

Come2Go, Fort Wayne

### Michigan

Detroit (anticipated soon)

### Minnesota

Discover Church, Champlin  
(anticipated soon)

Jacobs Well, Minneapolis

Mercy Seat, Minneapolis

Spirit Garage, Minneapolis

Spirit Garage Underground,  
Minneapolis

### New Hampshire

Nashua

### New York

Buffalo (anticipated soon)

### North Carolina

Well of Hope, Pineville & Charlotte

### Oregon

Soul Café, Hood River

### Texas

Inter-Mission, Seguin

(anticipated soon)

PM Verb, San Antonio

### Washington

Church of the Apostles, Seattle

Church of the Beloved, Edmonds

*Well of Hope focuses on  
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and cyber-cafe ...*



Living one's faith tends to be a strong component of most emergent congregations. Here, one of the members of Spirit Garage works on a Habitat for Humanity house.

## Spirit Garage welcomes all through the really big door

**W**e're like a garage party with a big, wide, open door where everyone is welcome," said the Rev. Rob Norris-Weber, Spirit Garage's pastor. "We're Lutheran under the hood. We live out Luther's teachings that we are saved by grace, and that people own their ministries as the priesthood of all believers. People respond to this trust and get to lead worship in their own folksy, hard rock, pop, jazz fusion, and self-created styles."

About 50 percent of Spirit Garage's 150 members participate in a community ministry, such as the Bridge for Runaway Youth or the Dwelling Place, which offers shelter to abused women and children while offering rehabilitation to the abusers.

"We have been around so long (10 years) because of Bethlehem Lutheran in south Minneapolis," said Norris-Weber, who once served as Bethlehem's youth minister. Bethlehem has faithfully provided monetary support as well as the freedom to develop without recasting Spirit Garage in Bethlehem's image.

In 2005, Spirit Garage, in turn, founded The Underground outreach ministry. Bethlehem has also planted another outreach ministry known as Jacob's Well. ●

## Emergent church grows in two locations

**W**e are one church in two locations," says the Rev. Todd Zielinski, Well of Hope's pastor. The congregation, with its diverse membership, celebrates at The Well @ Pineville, in Pineville, North Carolina, and at The Well @ Southpark in Charlotte—formerly the Lutheran Church of the Incarnation that merged into The Well of Hope.

"We believe that authentic relationships are the end, not the means to the end," said Zielinski. "That's why Well of Hope focuses on love and accessible, comfortable settings such as the coffeehouse and cyber-cafe that encourage people to reach out to one another."

Some 175 people are involved at the two sites and include young and old, rich and poor, artist and engineer. Despite financial challenges, the congregation has raised and given away \$20,000 in benevolence during the first quarter of 2007.

"We could not have made it without the generosity of the ELCA and the North Carolina Synod," said Zielinski. "We have minimal resources but great hope. We would welcome Mission Partners to support this adventure."

For more of this story, see [www.the-well.org](http://www.the-well.org).

*Mission Partners Focus*

## Spreading God's Hospitality

### Church of the Apostles, Seattle, Washington

Church of the Apostles (COTA) and its abbess, the Rev. Karen Ward, minister in one of the most non-churched ZIP codes in the U.S.—98103. Approximately 92 percent of Seattle's citizens report no church affiliation.

"People here are spiritual," Ward said. "But some have had hurtful church experiences, and many have no frame of reference to understand church."

The congregation welcomes the community to its abbey and art center and to a variety of worship opportunities—including an upcoming anti-poverty "U2Charist" benefit—Holy Communion set to U2's Christian-influenced rock music. Members may live in intentional Christian community houses as part of a "New Monastic" way of doing church.

"We earn our right to speak by addressing community needs," said Ward.

COTA members see God's call to mission in their baptisms. The newly baptized—many of them young adults—live out their baptisms immediately, by helping serve Communion while still wet or going out into the neighborhood to invite others into God's hospitality.

Ward invites local congregations and synods to partner with emergent ministries to help them become self-sustaining and to plant new ministries.

See [www.apostleschurch.org](http://www.apostleschurch.org)



Anna, Melisa, Skye, Steven, and Corey encourage one another in their spiritual walks as members of the Fremont Abbey monastic community, an optional living arrangement for COTA members.



Worship at COTA and other emerging congregations reflects their unique community contexts.

## Sharing God's Love

### Church of the Beloved, Edmonds, Washington

Church of the Beloved (COTB), sister congregation to Church of the Apostles, began last Lent with lay mission developer Ryan Marsh and 14 others. "We try to live more freely in Jesus by helping each other accept our belovedness—our acceptedness—in Jesus," said Marsh.

The COTB community shares God's gifts by being "generous humans," added Marsh. In addition to regular mission support, members support such causes as Habitat for Humanity, a Haitian orphanage, and alleviating the plight of Ugandan children.

Church of the Beloved was started and is supported by a collection of local ELCA congregations—known as the Emergent Prayer Team—committed to reaching out to missing generations.

"We are allowing our first months as a community to be a time of listening. We don't yet know the deepest longings and needs of our neighborhood, and we don't yet know the role that the Spirit of God is calling us to in the story of redemption here, so we are committed to active listening.

"What we do know is that we are called to practice our four core values, both as individuals and as a whole."

See [www.belovedschurch.org](http://www.belovedschurch.org)

Paula and Tara offer an original song during worship at COTB.



### COTB's Core Values

**WELCOME:** showing and receiving radical hospitality to strangers,

**STORY:** hearing and telling our broken and beautiful stories—and wondering where they collide with God's story,

**PRESENCE:** becoming more and more present to the suffering of our community, neighborhood, and world, as we become more fully aware of Christ's presence, and

**GIFT:** learning opportunities to give ourselves away.



## You can . . .

### Pray.

**Give** generously. . . to the regular offerings in your congregation . . . or to a specific ministry through Mission Partners.

**Listen** to those involved in developing ministries.

**Ask** what God is up to where you live and work and play.

**Talk** to your mission director about connecting your congregation and synod to a local developing ministry.

### Pray.



*Tap into the Emerging Leaders Network*

*—See what emerges!*

Log onto  
[www.emergingleadersnetwork.org](http://www.emergingleadersnetwork.org)

Thomas Knoll, ELN participant, seminarian, and Web designer, believes that “whenever people are ‘being’ the church together, they will share all they have with each other and with the world around them . . . I believe that more people need to feel encouraged to pursue the ministries placed on their hearts and into the midst of their lives.”

This network, ELN, helps those interested in emerging faith communities to share experiences, theological views, and resources. Here, leaders—ELCA and others—develop in their roles by sharing the joys and frustrations of planting new ministries among the non-churched—often in settings that seem to defy traditional church planting techniques.