

Mission Opportunities

A newsletter of resources, events, and ideas to help God's people passionately, intentionally, and faithfully extend the Gospel within our communities, throughout the District, and into all the world!

March 2010

"If we are going to join God on His mission, we have to recognize that we are missionaries... wherever He places us—just like the first disciples" ([Breaking the Missional Code](#), Stetzer &



Putman, p. 3). That thought was behind the scheduling of the **Vocation Celebration** on Sunday, March 7 in Denison, Iowa. See the information elsewhere in this mailing about this event intended for public and non-public school teachers and administrators. Let's give encouragement to this movement within our District to have all of our members seeing themselves as missionaries and intentionally living out and sharing their faith in the mission field in which God has placed them!

I recently returned from a week's vacation seeing our daughter and son-in-law in Seattle. Part of that time was spent volunteering in helping the members of Trinity Lutheran, Richmond, British Columbia (a suburb of Vancouver) in connecting with the world the Lord brought to their doorsteps through the 2010 Winter Olympics. Although an event of that magnitude might not be coming to your community, what opportunities do exist to connect with those outside your congregation? Easter, of course, provides opportunities, but what about community events? It's not too late to discuss possible ways to be involved in a local festival, county fair, or other event that is "big" in your mission field. Lutheran Hour Ministries (www.lhm.org) has excellent resources to help with such an outreach.



Vacation Bible School is often seen as an opportunity to reach the children (and adults!) in your community. Excellent resources are available both from the District ("The Truth Train"—see information elsewhere in the monthly) and CPH ("Planet Zoom"). As you plan, be sure to



include in your planning and thinking, "How can we run our VBS so that we are passionately, intentionally, and faithfully reaching those in our community?" Does an afternoon or evening VBS reach more unchurched? Daily or once a week throughout the summer? Does the material clearly present Christ crucified and risen at its heart? In addition to Synod or District missions, is there an opportunity to raise funds or hold a service project for something in our community? Pray, plan, and prepare with the mission field of your community in mind!

Training lay leaders! Though every Christian is a missionary, God raises up leaders—both laity and professional—who are vital to a congregation’s ministry. What training do you provide for your lay leaders? In a joint effort Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, and Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, are releasing a compilation of educational videos available via their Web sites that might prove helpful. This collection of more than 1,100 videos covers Old and New Testament, Pastoral Theology and individual books of the Bible which were originally part of the Distance Education Leading To Ordination (DELTO) courses made available through the Concordia University Education Network (CUEnet). Simply visit <http://media.ctsfw.edu> and type in a topic in the Search box.



Helping people answer God’s call! The majority of professional church workers state that their pastor’s encouragement was a major factor in their heeding God’s call to professional ministry. Have you requested your free resources for Concordia Sunday (suggested date April 18)? Worship helps, inserts, brochures and more can even be downloaded from the Board for University Education Web site at www.lcms.org/universities (click on "Resources" at

left). In addition, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, have scheduled in March free visitation events for prospective students. Go to <http://www.lcms.org/pages/rpage.asp?NavID=16522> for more information.

Ablaze grant deadline of March 31! All congregations should have received information and an application form to apply for an *Ablaze* grant from the District. Grants, up to \$5,000, are available with priority given to those ministries that target the unchurched or unbeliever, provide the greatest opportunity for occurrence of “critical events” (a Lutheran Christian sharing the hope that is in him or her so that another may encounter Christ), and are part of a sustainable ministry. Download an application from the District Web site today!



What do you think? George Barna re-examines the various studies the Barna Group conducted during 2009 and provides a summary of four patterns that emerged throughout the company’s surveys this year. To learn more about those four trends, go to <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/12-faithspirituality/325-barna-studies-the-research-offers-a-year-in-review-perspective> (or contact me for a copy of his report). I’d be interested in hearing your comments and thoughts on the implications for our ministry!

Closer partnership with District – Our task is too critical to attempt to accomplish on our own. That’s why we have circuits, districts, and a Synod. As always, I stand ready to assist you in any way that I can to equip the people of your congregation to passionately, intentionally, and faithfully impact their community and beyond for the kingdom of God. Why not call me today at 515-570-2331 and let’s start praying and planning!

Celebrating the Victory,

Rev. Mark Gerken, Executive Assistant for Missions
Mark.Gerken@idwlcms.org or 515-570-2331

Sunday School Superintendents and Day School Principals – Each month we will be providing a devotion that you can utilize in your Sunday school opening or weekly chapel service. They will be written by our District missionaries to the Hispanics, Rev. Dan Vogel and Rev. Henry Witte. These devotions are in support of our two-year mission project that we are suggesting for our Sunday schools and day schools, *Amigos en Cristo*.



Rev. Mark Gerken, Executive Assistant for Missions

The Amigos en Cristo campaign is a two-year program with a goal to raise \$20,000 a year to provide scholarships for Hispanic children to attend Lutheran day schools and preschools in Iowa District West.

DISTRICT CHAPEL DEVOTION FOR **"AMIGOS EN CRISTO"**

MARCH 2010

THEME: "Lent around the Hispanic World"

VISUALS: CROSS, a Crown of Thorns, other Lenten symbols

When we travel to most Hispanic countries the Lenten season is probably one of the most well known and visible seasons of the Church year. There are processions through the streets with people carrying banners, pictures of Jesus and someone imitating Jesus by carrying the cross. In this season there will even be men who will be publically crucified in a dramatic reenactment of Jesus' death. But not everyone understands what this season is all about. Do you?

I recently visited with Victor from the country of Nicaragua and asked him about the Lenten season in his country. He told me that for many people this time of the year is not important anymore and when Holy Week comes it is a holiday that many use to go to the beach and to take a vacation from work.

Not long ago I also visited with Jose who is from Guatemala. I asked him how they celebrate Cuaresma (Lent) in his country. He looked at me as if he didn't know what I was talking about. He knew what the Lenten season was but he didn't like it. He was involved in a cult that believed it was a sin or just a superstition to practice what he called old fashioned traditions.

Sadly, in many Hispanic countries the true story of Jesus giving His life for our sins is not known or is treated as a silly tradition or an excuse to have a free vacation day. What is it for us? The Bible tells us how Jesus prepared the world for His most important work. In Matthew 20:17-19: *"Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them,*

'We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!''

Even Jesus' disciples didn't understand what He meant by going to Jerusalem. Do we, as we prepare for the Lenten and Easter seasons, understand what Jesus did?

Jesus was talking about His work to save the world, all the people of the world -- His disciples, friends and family of Victor and Jose and you and me. Jesus was the perfect man that we could not be and He was willing to be punished in our place for our sins. The good news was that Jesus did not stay in the grave, but was raised to new life and is preparing a heavenly home for all believers.

In the picture below the children have a cross of ashes on their foreheads from Ash Wednesday. God has given us many reminders of what Jesus did for our salvation. Crosses, ashes, thorns and pictures of Jesus and His suffering, death and resurrection remind us of God's great love in saving us.



Let us pray: Dear Jesus, Thank You for saving the world from sin and death. Bless us in this Lenten season to remember how much You have loved each of us, all the way to the Cross and the Open Tomb, for a special life now and forever in heaven. Amen.