

BETHEL NEWSLETTER

May 2009

Reaching Out – Praying, Caring, Sharing

Holdrege, Nebraska

"Living With Suffering"

There seems to be a great deal of suffering in our midst today. I have experienced this especially in the area of broken relationships. But there are people hurting because of personal issues related to health and finance also. There is more hurting going on than I am aware I'm sure. So how do we as Christians deal with suffering?

Bishop David deFreese in the April issue of the Nebraska Synod newsletter to ministry leaders offered some insights around that question. I would like to share his thoughts with you.

"HOPE IN THE FACE OF DARKNESS"

"We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know suffering produces perseverance; perseverance produces character; and character, hope, and hope does not disappoint us because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."

John 5:3-5

Suffering seems to be more prevalent and pervasive these days. Several of our friends have experienced authentic hurts in their lives due to illness, financial turmoil and broken relationships. Their sadness is permeated with a sense of wondering regarding the meaning of these difficulties. "How can I hope when I hurt so badly?" and, "Where is God in my pain?" have not been rare expressions.

Without giving in to simplistic responses, these situations have raised a struggle of honest reflection. Let me share a few thoughts of faithfulness:

Does it matter that we know the Gospel? We have been shaped by the incredible recognition that the God of the universe truly cares for us. . .we are created to be loved by God. This Lenten season, we have once more journeyed to see the gracious power of our God willing to die so that we might live. God's mercy is greater than our sin. Jesus chose to give His life so that forgiveness, love and hope might be ours. The cross of Christ extends its unconditional compassion over every human experience. We are different because our lives live in the shadow of that cross.

God cares. God cries. When the earth shakes, when your world gets shattered, when you do not know what to do, God's arms embrace. When His friend Lazarus died, Scripture simply states: "Jesus wept." In Jesus, we have a God who cries...cries with you...compassion supreme.

Suffering can produce strength. While suffering is not a chosen thing...good things sometimes come out of suffering. Suffering can sensitize us to the reality of our shared vulnerability. Suffering has the power to connect us to each other in ways that we have never known before. Simply ask a few cancer survivors. Many times relationships deepen, masks come off and souls meet in a way that normal life never caused.

Many times, suffering has awakened a new perspective, caused a new lens in seeing life. Energy and emotion that were wasted on trivial and peripheral concerns are realigned. Priorities and principles take on new meaning.

Our redeeming God grows us. Is it possible that in some ways, people can grow from – maybe even need – adversity, setbacks, difficulties and heartache to reach the fullest level of humanity, development and growth? Can it cause them to be better, stronger, more generous, more pure-hearted human beings?

An experiment in California showed that fruit trees put behind windbreaks were dwarfed in size and incapable of growing fruit because their stems could not develop the strength to hold. They were weakened because they did not have to withstand the wind. Sometimes people find themselves rising to the challenge that reveals abilities that were hidden in easier times. An awakened reliance on God's Holy Spirit has given rise to new strength, profound gratitude, and honest recognition. James stated it powerfully: "*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking in anything.*" (James 1:2-4)

God does God's best work in cemeteries. Jesus got crucified, but Satan got nailed. In the face of severe disappointment and ruthless despair, God rose triumphant from the grave. When all looked to

be lost, the disciples' greatest hopes dashed, God Eastered! The story is not over, until God sings...sings the song of victory!

Celebrate our God...who loves, who cries, who strengthens, who redeems, and who redeems, and who raises even the dead!

Blessings!
Bishop David deFreese

I hope you found these words helpful related to any suffering you may be faced with.

Yours in Christ.
Pastor David Sites

When Chaos is Erupting

I know the title seems somewhat silly, especially for the month of May. This is the month of May Baskets, flowers starting to bloom, gardens are being planted, farmers planting the valuable seed in the ground, life is supposed to be great in this time period. Most of our lives this does happen in this month.

But, perhaps you made some choices that you believed would get you to a certain destination in life but instead landed you far from it. Maybe you rushed to action, afraid of losing what seemed like a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. In these situations, Satan, our enemy and master identity thief, is quick to move in to distort the truth and remind us of our short comings. Guilt, fear, anger, doubt, self-worth, and self-condemnation begin to sap our strength and tear at our confidence, while every aspect of our circumstance warns us of an impending crash. Many times we allow Satan, to interrupt our finances, our mental state, faithfulness to a spouse and family. These are things that give Satan much satisfaction.

I went through a harrowing experience in my past life. Today, because of God and this experience, I can resist Satan. Shortly after this experience, it caused me to take stock of the life that God had given to me. I learned from the experience and ordeal that I could trust the Lord and only him in his answers to my prayers, as well as

the mercy of others, who the Lord placed in my life. I could not let Satan berate myself for human mistakes from others or myself. The truth is, no matter how intimidating a challenge may seem, the Father's commitment to us does not change, and nothing can ever separate us from His love and mercy. (Rom. 8:38-39.) Even when we trust and don't question the devotion of those around us, we can plant our wavering feelings in God's unchanging love. (John 4:16.) I realized that what I went through was actually a valuable opportunity to prepare myself for life's continued and bigger challenges. I now have a plan of action, which some days I have a tough time to adhere to and I have to say; "Sorry God, for what I allowed to happen today." So, just as the month of May brings all the beautiful and glorious things to life again, after being dormant all winter, I know I cannot let Satan hijack the truth of God's word to and for me or for you.

God Bless,
Darrel Wissmann, PMA

The hymn "God Who Stretched the Spangled Heavens" (ELW #771) uses vivid images to depict God's creative acts. It states that God "flung the suns in burning radiance through the silent fields of space". As I sing those words, I see God—looking amazingly human—randomly flinging suns and planets into the dark nothingness of space in the same way someone would fling a Frisbee across the park. Although that depiction perhaps is not theologically sound, it causes me to reflect on the myriad of ways that God is revealed to us through art, music, and the written/spoken word, and yet, how little we actually know about the essence of God.

As human beings we cannot depict an accurate image of our omni-dimensional God. What we can do is take the time to appreciate the many ways God speaks to us, through others, through our experiences, through our minds, through our hearts... through every facet of our existence.

The final line of the first verse of the above-mentioned hymn recognizes that creation is an ongoing process. The "great Creator" is "still creating." God works through human creativity;

however our creative minds can also misuse and distort the inventive powers meant for positive purposes to create that which is not in the best interests of God's good creation.

It is the time of year when thousands of young people are completing their education and are going out into the world to use the skills that they have acquired in creative ways. I believe verse 3 of this hymn speaks eloquently to these young people as they enter a new phase of their lives: As each new horizon beckons, may it challenge us anew

Children of creative purpose, serving others
honoring you.

May our dreams prove rich with promise;
Each endeavor well begun;
Great Creator, give us guidance till our
goals and yours are one.

Intern Margaret Jacobus

AS A PLACE OF GRACE WE **PRAY** for each other as members and friends of this congregation:

May 3, 2009

Bill & Sherry Anderson
Cory & Jennifer Olson
Roger Olson

May 10, 2009

David Olson
Virginia Johnson
Marlene Johnson

May 17, 2009

Don & Wendy Ostgren
Caleb, Ashlyn
Janet Palmer
Josh Palmer

May 24, 2009

Louise Johnson
Joyce Johnson
Kermit & Elaine Johnson

May 31, 2009

Dorothy M. Johnson
Dean & Elaine Pape
James & Mary Paulsen



GOLD STAR AWARD

Every Sunday morning between services we are privileged to be served coffee and goodies by some very gracious hosts and hostesses. Their efforts to serve young and old alike are very much appreciated. Their presence enhances a blessed time of fellowship for all who come together. It is often said, but we want to say it again, "**Thank you**" for all you do.

Council Corner

The Parish Planning Council approved the contracts for the new sound system that was approved by the congregation on April 19. The system is scheduled to be in place by July 1.

Committee chairpersons continue to give rewarding reports of all that is being done by them. Thanks you to all for their time and talents for the mission of the church.

Russ Edeal
Parish Planning Council Chairman

May Ushers

8:30 a.m.

Bryan Keffeler
Bill Blackburn

11:00 a.m.

Dr. Stuart Embury
Kirk Ronhovde
Chris Erickson
Dave Dahlgren

6:30 p.m. Monday Night Ushers

May 4 Jim Engler
May 11
May 18 LeMoyne Exstrom
May 25 Memorial Day (no worship service)

May is National Stroke Awareness Month

A stroke happens when vital blood flow and oxygen to the brain are cut off. Stroke is the third leading cause of death and the leading cause of adult disability in the U.S. About 780,000 strokes will occur this year and about 500,000 of those strokes can be prevented. Stroke can happen to anyone at any time, regardless of race, sex or age.

Recognizing the symptoms of a stroke-and acting FAST when they occur-could save your life or the life of a loved one. Common symptoms include sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg (especially on one side of the body), confusion, vision problems, loss of balance or coordination, and severe headache with no known cause. This simple test will help you detect stroke symptoms and Act F.A.S.T.:

- F=Face – Ask the person to smile. Does one side of the face droop?
- A=Arm – Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward?
- S=Speech – Ask the person to repeat a simple sentence. Does the speech sound slurred or strange?
- T=Time – If you observe any of these signs, it's time to call 9-1-1 or get to the nearest hospital.

Everyone has some stroke risk factors. Being over age 55, being male, having diabetes, and a family history of stroke are a few risk factors beyond your control. Medical stroke risk factors include: Previous stroke, previous episode of transient ischemic attack (TIA) or mini stroke, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, heart disease, atrial fibrillation and carotid artery disease. These medical risk factors can be controlled. Talk to your doctor about what will work best for you. Lifestyle stroke risk factors include: Smoking, being overweight and drinking too much alcohol. You can control these lifestyle risk factors by quitting smoking, exercising regularly, watching what and how much you eat and limiting alcohol consumption.

Again, leading a healthy lifestyle and being aware of stroke risk factors can help to prevent a stroke from happening to you.

Alice Ann Swanson
Lay Ministry Committee

BETHEL WOMEN OF THE ELCA

The Chairpersons of the Bethel Women of the ELCA met on Saturday, April 18. It was decided that the Serving Groups will be reduced from seven groups to four. The three groups being dissolved will be placed into the other four groups. There is a course on how to ServSafe to be held at McCook on May 28 and Lexington on May 29. It was recommended that one or two ladies from Bethel should attend one of these meetings. Information covered in the sessions is "Controlling Time & Temperature," Preventing Cross Contamination," and Cleaning and Sanitizing." The registration fee of \$20 will be paid by the Bethel Women. Other expenses would also be covered. If anyone would like to step forward to attend one of these trainings, please contact Karen Daffer at 995-5120 or 991-1391 as soon as possible.

Work is beginning on the calendar for 2009-2010. Circle members will be signing up to be hosts and Bible study leaders. Other items for the year book are being dealt with.

Whoop-de-doo: Where Women Celebrate Faith will be held at the Midland Lutheran College Even Center in Fremont on July 24 – 29. April Barr, an international Christian speaker, will be talking on "True Worth," "True Beauty," and "True Colors-God's Designer Clothing." The website www.fremontwdd.com will provide more information.

Nebraska Women of the ELCA will hold the **Ninth Biennial Convention** on September 25-27, 2009, at the Holiday Inn at Kearney. Set this date aside. More information will be coming.

Remember to continue to bring your plastic bags to the church. Anyone going to Kearney during usual working hours: M-F; 9-5; may take a bundle of the bags to the SAFE Center. Thank you to those who have been taking them over.

There are so many great ways to serve others! The "Saved to Serve" opportunities are at

Scottsbluff and Lincoln this summer. Check out the bulletin board across from the office for more details. The Lutheran World Relief Projects need support. Consider helping to tie the quilts on the fourth Thursday of the month at 1:30 P.M. If you can tie a knot, you can help.

- Karen Daffer, Treasurer of the Bethel Women of the ELCA



I am happy to announce the creation of "Four in a Row". This is an addition to our Sunday School attendance system. We will continue to reward the highest attendance in each grade, per semester. However, this new system will let everyone, Pre-K through adult, to have a chance at recognition.

It is easy to participate. If a student attends Sunday School **4 times in a row**, the student will **receive a gift** and choose a **gift to give**. The given gift will be food for the Food Pantry or a gift for Lutheran World Relief.

The younger students will get to see that learning God's word is a life-long mission. The older students will get to feel like kids again. The gifts we give will truly help others. **Come to Sunday School!**

Sunday Church School 9:40 a.m.

Adult Sunday School 10:00 a.m.

Lori Swanson,

Christian Education Coordinator

Community Care Project for May

The S.A.F.E. 2009 Wish List

- Garbage Bags
- Cleaning Supplies
- Deodorant
- Shampoo/Conditioner
- Tooth Brushes/Toothpaste
- Gas Vouchers
- Phone Cares

- Postage Stamps
- R.Y.D.E Cards
- Working new/used paper shredders
- Basic Tools: hammers, screw drivers, pliers, handheld power tools, levels, etc.
- Basic Household Hardware/Supplies: nails, screws, stud finders, first aid kits, fire extinguishers, smoke detectors, door locks and deadbolts.
- Pyrex baking/cake pans with lids for transporting food.
- Tampons/pads
- Bed sheets
- Laundry detergent
- Dryer Sheets/Fabric Softener
- Paper Towels
- Toilet Paper
- Diapers/pullups
- Baby Wipes, Wash & Shampoo

Please bring your items to the church and place them in the community care box located at the northeast entrance, lower level.

Thank you for your contributions!

WINGS

FOOD PANTRY NIGHT at WINGS! Our students, teachers, and listeners donated over 75 items to the Phelps County Food Pantry. The Pantry was very appreciative and I know this will make a difference for area families!

PENNIES FOR MISSIONS NIGHT at WINGS! Our students collected \$170 that will be donated to Bethel's Missionary, Ruth Ellen Rebelein and her ministry. **THANK YOUR AND GREAT JOB!**

Jody Thulin, WINGS Coordinator

BUILDING Your Bethel Evangelical Lutheran Church Foundation

Memorial gifts meet two important needs at once. They allow you to express your feelings at the loss of a loved one. In addition, the gift to the **Bethel Evangelical Lutheran Church Foundation** helps support its ministry.



**CHANCEL CHOIR
PICNIC**

**Wednesday, May 20th
6:30 p.m. at
Kneppers!**

**Bring meat to barbeque and a
side dish. Bring your family!!**

**BETHEL LUTHERAN CHURCH
FOUNDATION SCHOLARSHIP**

You may recall that through the years of 1997 and 2001 the Bethel Foundation challenged the congregation to raise matching funds to establish two \$20,000 scholarships at two seminaries. They are Wartburg Theological Seminary and Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC). Recently we received word from LSTC that Elizabeth Lee and Melissa Hoffman are receiving support from that scholarship. Elizabeth is from Oconto Falls, WI in her fourth year of study. Melissa, a first year student, is from Lancaster, PA.

Please know you are assisting in another way those who plan to be pastors in the ELCA.



The 12th class of GriefShare finished Monday, April 20th with a potluck meal before the regular session. Average attendance in 2009 was fourteen per meeting. This is a great outreach for Bethel Lutheran as it involves the community and surrounding area. We had participants from Wilcox and Franklin this year.

Facilitators were Cathy Anderson and Melva Tranmer. We have appreciated their efforts, caring concerns and support these past two years.

Ivan and I have benefitted in working with groups the past three years, but will not be

coordinating the group next year. We will work with the new coordinators in any way we possibly can. We will include the group in our prayers as we ask the Bethel congregation to continue in support and prayers.

God Bless,
Ivan & Sandra

TANZANIA AIDS ORPHAN PROJECT

Our Lenten coin folders were designated to go to this project to help orphans in Tanzania to be able to attend school. This year we have covered the scholarships of three students. Recently, we received some responses from the recipients of two of the scholarships. One is included below from Elirehema N. Simbo. We will be posting pictures and sharing responses from the students.

*VUNJO SEC SCHOOL
PO Box 1883
MOJHI
13th March 2009*

Dear,

I'm greeting you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. I believe you are fine physically and healthy.

Back to me. I'm fine and I'm going on well with my studies. I'm thankful for your help of paying my school fees.

Thank you so much and may God bless you millions times. I'm praying for you as I believe you are praying for me too.

*Let's remember each other on prayer.
Be blessed.*

*Yours in Christ
Elirehema N. Simbo*



**VISIT OUR
WEB SITE**

Have you visited Bethel's web site? If not, please check it out. It is being updated and kept current by our web master, Sylvia Person. If there is something you would like on the web site, please contact Sylvia at 995-6488.

www.bethel-lutheran-church.com

The Staff of Bethel Lutheran Church works as a Team, with defined roles and responsibilities to support and advance Bethel's Vision and Mission. We work as a cohesive, supportive Team, with an effective communication process that enhances our ability to provide cost effective service, administration and support to (for) the Congregation and its mission.