



THE COURIER

a monthly newsletter of St. Luke United Methodist Church

Volume 46, Issue 1

January, 2010

Pastoral Ponderings

It's snowing as I write this. Think back to the storm/blizzard of December 8-9. It's *really* snowing!

I'm not wild about snow. I'm no Winter sports enthusiast. My one and only acquaintance with skiing came during a youth group ski trip that I accompanied when we lived in Syracuse, NY. It was to—of all places—Whiteface Mountain, one of the more important “slopes” in the Lake Placid area. They offered an introductory package: ski and boot rental, an hour of group instruction, and a lift pass for the novice-and-easier slopes...all for \$25. Even in the early 90's that was a pretty good deal.

So I signed up for the package while the rest of the group and their leaders headed for the one- and two-diamond slopes. After the group lesson, I had made several trips up the lift and down the slope. It was fun, except for the fact that several eight-year-old snowboarders thought that I was a stationary object they could use as a turning pylon or gate! But when I wasn't being harassed by “tweens,” I enjoyed gliding smoothly over the surface of the snow.

I tried going down one of the novice slopes—that was a mistake. I got off the lift, followed the signs to the beginning of the slope, and found that it was mostly ice and about as narrow as the center aisle in the sanctuary! I decided in short order that this slope was why God had invented sitting down. Having “skied” down that slope on my rear end, I stayed on the lower slope for the rest of the day.

The only real problem I ran into was that, as tight as I thought my boots were, they were not tight enough and I woke up the next day with an inch-wide blister that circled each leg just above my ankles. Ouch!

I'm not sure that it's an experience I would repeat, but I'm really glad that I did it. And I can truthfully say that I've skied Whiteface Mountain! (I just don't go into many details.)

We're finishing the first decade of this century. (I know, strictly speaking this century didn't begin until January 1, 2001, so technically it's only been nine years, but I've given up fighting that battle.) All of us at St. Luke are beginning a new year and a new decade and we will certainly have occasions to decide whether to risk trying something new. It may be a choice between trying a new activity like skiing or sitting out the day in the lodge, or perhaps a choice between “the way we've always done it” or a new form of ministry.

In any event, I hope for myself and for all of us that when we have the chance to try something new, even if it's outside of our “comfort zone,” we'll give it a try. Like my exposure to skiing, it may not turn out to be something I expect to do again. But who knows? It may turn out to be a life-changing event, something that opens up the future for us in a new way. And then we'll be glad that we we're open to being a little uncomfortable, a beginner, a novice, a little incompetent in a new situation that calls for new skills. That way our future will be an adventure!

—*Blessings, Pastor John*

INVITE SOMEONE TO CHURCH THIS SUNDAY!

SUNDAY WORSHIP SERVICES ARE AT 9:00 AND 10:30 A.M.



Worship & Preaching Schedule

January 3

Epiphany Sunday

Rev. Stephen Toller preaching

Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14

- ◆ The Chancel Choir will sing in the 10:30 service.

January 10

Baptism of the Lord

Rev. John Caldwell, PhD, preaching

“I Have Called You by Name...”—Isaiah 43:1-7

- ◆ The Chancel Choir will sing in the 10:30 service.

January 17

2nd Sunday after Epiphany

Rev. John Caldwell, PhD, preaching

“Called by a New Name...”—Isaiah 62:1-5

- ◆ The Chancel Choir will sing in the 10:30 service.

January 24

3rd Sunday after Epiphany

Rev. John Caldwell, PhD, preaching

“To Bring Good News...”—Luke 4:14-21

- ◆ The St. Luke Singers (children’s choir) will sing in the 9:00 and 10:30 services. The Chancel Choir will sing in the 10:30 service.

January 31

4th Sunday after Epiphany

Rev. John Caldwell, PhD, preaching

“I Have Put My Words in Your Mouth...”—
Jeremiah 1:4-10

- ◆ The Chancel Choir will sing in the 10:30 service.



Indoor Work Day at St. Luke Jan. 16

Our Winter Indoor Work Day is scheduled for Saturday, January 16, 8:00-11:00 a.m. Show your pride in your church and come help us care for a number of projects and needed maintenance items in the St. Luke building.

Our project list for January 16 includes: Rearranging the pictures in the Great Room (to fill the void where the screen used to be), painting part of the wall by the Great Room kitchen, caulking the bell tower foyer, repairing some of the pews, and doing some cleaning.

If you have tools that will help with any of the above, please bring them with you. On January 16, please enter the building at the west bell tower entrance.

Our building is showing its age and there are plenty of activities for all—please stop by on January 16 to help.

Kudos to Chancel Choir

We all appreciate what the Chancel Choir does to lead us in worship each Sunday. Last month, they offered to host the decorating of St. Luke for Advent and Christmas. The results of their hard work was enjoyed by all as we attended worship and other special events at St. Luke in December.

An additional thanks to the Chancel Choir and their helpers for the added time and responsibility of taking down and packing away all of the decorations at the end of the holiday season.

Special Thanks to Leadership

St. Luke “happens” because of the combined efforts of staff and church members. We express thanks to the persons listed below who have completed a three-year (or more) term of service on a committee. They each provided unique gifts and talents so that St. Luke might be a church that provides expressions of love in numerous fashions.

Finance Committee—Rod Brakke, Jim Rea

Lay Leadership—Frank Lastovica, Loyd Neve

Staff Parish Relations Committee—Vince Bramer, David Hinton (Chair), Robin Nelson

Trustees—Chuck Casanova, John Tucker (Chair)

Larry Uebner—Lay Leader, Administrative Council Chair, Lay Member to Annual Conference

Thanks to one and all for the time and effort you have shared on behalf of St. Luke!

For those continuing on in leadership roles and those coming on the various committees, thanks and prayers are provided in advance.

Food Drive Successful

Thank you to all who donated to our food drive in November and December. St. Luke collected 476 items and \$50, which were taken to the food pantry at Pearl Memorial United Methodist Church. Your donations made a difference for numerous persons and families for the holidays.

Thanks

Thank you from St. Luke’s staff for the Christmas bonuses given so generously from your hearts. You brightened our holidays!

Jeremy Boldt, Custodian ♦ John Butler, Youth Director ♦ Pastor John Caldwell, Senior Pastor ♦ Vern & Deb Goff, Custodians ♦ Abbey Jackson, Teen Center Director ♦ Sherrie Lindsey, Administrative Director ♦ Suzanne Rood, Administrative Assistant ♦ Terry Theis, Chancel Choir Director ♦ Pastor Stephen Toller, Associate Pastor ♦ Kori Williamsen, Children’s Choir Director ♦ Joan Young, Organist

Finance Report to the Congregation

January 1-November 30, 2009

Income.....	\$391,167
Expenses	\$516,156

Check Your Contribution Statement

Contribution statements will be mailed in January, reflecting your donations in 2009. Will you please take time to look over your statement to see if any corrections need to be made. If corrections are needed, please call Sue in the Church Office (333-6886 ext. 300) ASAP so that she can get the changes made before we close out the year at the end of January.

Please remember that this contribution statement serves as your official record of giving for use when you are filing your taxes.

Committee Meetings This Month

- BeFrienders—Thursday, January 7, 6:30 p.m.—Staff Lounge
- Trustees—Tuesday, January 12, 5:00 p.m.—Staff Lounge
- Children's Ministry Team—Wednesday, January 13, 6:30 p.m.—Staff Lounge
- Teen Center Board—Wednesday, January 20, 5:30 p.m.—Staff Lounge
- Finance Committee—Tuesday, January 26, 7:00 a.m.—Staff Lounge

NOTE: See other listings elsewhere in this Courier for group activities such as UMW, Book Clubs, etc.

Sermons Available

Sunday sermons are available on our web site: www.stlukeumc.com

If you are home-bound and would like copies of sermons mailed to you, please call Sue in the Church Office at 333-6886 ext. 300.

Confirmation Class

Watch the *Courier* each month for the upcoming schedule. Drop-off and pick-up will always be at the west bell tower entrance of St. Luke (unless otherwise noted).

- Sunday, January 24, 4:00-8:00 p.m.—Class
- Sunday, February 21, 4:00-8:00 p.m.—Class

The Confirmation session runs through April 4. Confirmands must attend worship at least 16 of the 23 Sundays. When you attend worship, remember to check in at Pastor Stephen's office prior to worship.

At least 15 hours of service is required during the Confirmation session.

Parents, remember that there is a brief parent's meeting at each Confirmation class gathering.

Confirmation Sunday is April 11, 2010.

When Bad Weather Comes...

Cancellations will be posted in the "Latest News" column of the home page on St. Luke's web site www.stlukeumc.com

If there is no cancellation notice on St. Luke's web site, then all programs will go on as scheduled. Our preferred way to get word to people that we are closed is via our web site. St. Luke's web site is the most reliable source for cancellation information. Please always check our web site first.

In addition to posting on the web site, we will attempt to list cancellations on radio stations KFAB (1110 AM) and KKAR (1290 AM), and on the four primary television stations (KETV, KMTV, WOWT, and KPTM).

Please do not call St. Luke to find out if we are closed, as there may not be anyone there to answer the phones.

In the event of inclement weather on:

Wednesdays - Always assume that choir rehearsals, Wednesday Nights at St. Luke, Devos, etc., will go on as scheduled UNLESS a cancellation is posted on St. Luke's web site and radio and t.v. stations.

Sundays - St. Luke will always be open for morning worship, regardless of weather conditions.

Martin Luther King, Jr., Observations

Martin Luther King Day is officially celebrated on January 18, 2010. St. Luke's Church and Child Care Offices will be open as usual (though the Teen Center will be closed since OPS does not have school that day). Along with many thousands of others in our city and across our country, we are each encouraged to reflect on race relations. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the work he did reminds us of the journey we have been on and the journey we need to travel to overcome personal and systemic prejudices in our country.

It is a special blessing to live in America. We have the opportunity to experience the rich, cultural traditions of people from ethnic backgrounds different than our own; however, along with blessings come responsibilities. Differences in a population that is as ethnically and racially diverse as Omaha can lead to divisions if intentional practices and mandates are not nurtured that bring about appreciation. Let's go to the mountaintop and see the vision of all people living in harmony!

Please consider taking part in one of the Martin Luther King observations listed below or held elsewhere in the community:

Unity Service - Sunday, January 17 at 7:00 p.m. at Salem Baptist Church (3131 Lake Street)

Luncheon - Monday, January 18, 11:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m., at the Qwest Center - This luncheon is sponsored by the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance and is open to the community. Tickets must be purchased by January 13. Tickets are \$35 each. For tickets, contact Rev. Gaynelle Kilgore at 453-0625, or mail your check to Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, PO Box 11412, Omaha, NE 68111.

Day of Service (Make it a Day "On," Not a Day "Off") - Monday, January 18 at Tri-Community United Methodist Church (2319 Ogden Street) - Youth groups are invited to participate in a day of service that engages youth and youth leaders in activities that celebrate the teachings of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and look at justice issues that exist in our present day. The day will include service work at local agencies in the metro-Omaha area and education on race and poverty in our communities. The day will begin at 9:00 a.m. Cost to participate is \$15 per person (includes lunch and a MLK Day of Service t-shirt). Pre-registration is required. For further details, contact Lisa Maupin at 898-9862 or Imaupin@bigmuddyumc.org

Some quotes to ponder by Martin Luther King, Jr.

All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality.

Faith is taking the first step, even when you don't see the whole staircase.

Hatred paralyzes life; love releases it. Hatred confuses life; love harmonizes it. Hatred darkens life; love illuminates it.

Human salvation lies in the hands of the creatively maladjusted.

I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. That is why right, temporarily defeated, is stronger than evil triumphant.

In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.

Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.

Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars...Hate cannot drive out hate—only love can do that.

We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools.

The good neighbor looks beyond the external accidents and discerns those inner qualities that make all men human and, therefore, brothers.

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

Our scientific power has outrun our spiritual power. We have guided missiles and misguided men.

The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.

UMW (United Methodist Women)

Activities listed below are open to all St. Luke women and friends.

Dining Out Group

Saturday, January 16 at 11:45 a.m. at Elaine Misner's home (13028 Franklin Street)—This will be our organization meeting to plan our get-togethers for 2010. To RSVP or for details about this group, contact Elaine Misner at 498-8346 or emmisner2@aol.com

Loving Touch Group

Meets "as needed" to make baptism banners and work on craft-related projects for St. Luke programs. For details about this group, contact the Church Office.

Prayer Shawl Group

Thursday, January 28 at 7:00 p.m. at Kelley Patton's home—Knitters and crocheters make prayer shawls with love and prayers—the shawls are then delivered by Pastor John or Pastor Stephen to persons in need of comfort. The shawl is an easy pattern, so if you would like to learn to knit or crochet, this would be a great opportunity. Yarn is provided, you just supply the needles. For details, contact Kelley Patton at 964-2130 or kellpatt@cox.net

Quilting Group

Friday, January 8 from 9:00-3:00, in the home of a member—Each quilter brings a sack lunch and the hostess provides beverages. Interested St. Luke women are invited to come—no prior quilting experience is necessary. Quilters may work on a group project (donation quilts) or bring their own work. For details and/or location for the next meeting, call the Church Office at 333-6886 ext. 300.

UMW Book Club

Meets every other month—see Book Club listings elsewhere in this Courier for details.

Walking Group

Every Friday at 8:30 a.m.—call the Church Office for details.

Book Clubs Meet...Good Reading & Stimulating Discussion

Guilty Pleasures Book Club (formerly Hospitality Book Club)

Our next meeting is Monday, January 28 at 7:00 p.m. in the Staff Lounge. We will discuss China Road, A Journey Into the Future of a Rising Power by Rob Gifford. For details about this book club, contact Jean Lahrs at 397-1061.

UMW Book Club

Our next meeting is Thursday, January 14, at 6:30 p.m. in the Staff Lounge. We will discuss The French Gardener by Santa Montefiore. For details about this book club, contact Sue Rood at 493-3745 or suzanne@stlukeumc.com

A Good Read/Resource

To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings by John O'Donohue

From the author of the bestselling Anam Cara comes a beautiful collection of blessings to help readers through both the everyday and the extraordinary events of their lives. O'Donohue, Irish teacher and poet, has been widely praised for his gift of drawing on Celtic spiritual traditions to create words of inspiration and wisdom for today. In To Bless the Space Between Us, his compelling blend of elegant, poetic language and spiritual insight offers readers comfort and encouragement on their journeys through life. O'Donohue looks at life's thresholds—getting married, having children, starting a new job—and offers invaluable guidelines for making the transition from a known, familiar world into a new, unmapped territory. Most profoundly, however, O'Donohue explains "blessing" as a way of life, as a lens through which the whole world is transformed. O'Donohue awakens readers to timeless truths and shows the power they have to answer contemporary dilemmas and ease us through periods of change.



Available from Soul Desires bookstore and other book outlets.

St. Luke encourages all of us to support Soul Desires. Soul Desires is a full service bookstore; offers a place to relax and meet friends over a cappuccino,

latte, mocha, tea, or soft drink; and stocks "holy hardware" (greeting cards, jewelry, nativity sets, art, etc.). Check out their web site at:

www.soul-desires.com

Bring Your Mug to Church!

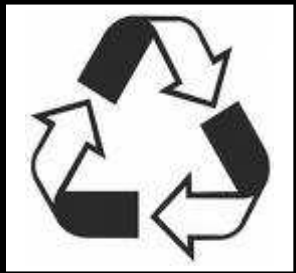
Make plans to attend church each Sunday. You'll be glad you did! There is a lot going on at St. Luke, but you will never know what is happening or experience the benefits if you don't attend.

And when you bring yourself to church, please bring your own coffee mug. When you bring your own reusable hot or cold drink cup/mug to church, you are not only helping the church budget (purchasing fewer cups), but you are also helping conserve natural resources and reducing the impact to our landfills. This is something we can all easily do.



See you in church this Sunday!!!
And remember to...

Reduce.
Reuse.
Respect.
RECYCLE!



Donate Your Used Ink Cartridges

St. Luke welcomes your donation of used computer printer ink cartridges—for the brands **HP, Dell, and Lexmark**. We are able to turn these in for cash credit at Office Max, which helps reduce our office supply expenses.

So...gather these from your home or office and bring them to St. Luke. Get your friends to do it too. The cartridges may be deposited in the pink bin marked "Inkjet Cartridge Recycling" in the Usher's Closet (The bin is stacked under the counter. The Usher's Closet is located beside the Church Office.)

We LOVE saving money, and your donations will be a big help!

2010 Calendars Needed

If you get 2010 wall calendars in the mail that you cannot use, or have spares laying around your house, we will be glad to take them off your hands! We post calendars in many places in our building, and we can use the pictures on leftover calendars for projects. We can use calendars of all sizes. If you have a calendar that you are willing to donate, please leave it in the Usher's Closet by the Church Office. Thanks!

"Beginning Experience" Opportunities

The Archdiocese of Omaha's Family Life Office sponsors programs that provide healing support when a marriage ends due to a death or divorce of one's spouse. Both groups provide the individual with a ministry of encouragement, information, and an opportunity to share with others in a peer-to-peer environment as one deals with the issues surrounding spousal loss.

Beginning Experience—A weekend retreat for widowed and divorced adults of all faiths. This weekend is a time of healing and growth—a weekend away for a lifetime of change. Pre-registration is required. Cost is \$100 for semi-private room or \$125 for private room. Visit www.beginningexperienceofomaha.org for further details or an application.

Coping—A six-week program for widowed, divorced, and separated adults of all faiths. These sessions are designed to help individuals work through the initial trauma of the death, separation, or divorce of a spouse. Sessions are offered throughout the year at various churches in the Omaha area. Cost is \$20. Pre-registration is not required.

Widowed, Divorced, and Separated Support Group—The Widowed, Divorced, and Separated Support Group is a peer-to-peer Christian ministry that offers a safe environment where men, women, and their families can find support in the areas of spirituality, education, friendship, and social.

For further details about any of the above, contact Pat Seier, Coordinator, at 557-5514 or paseier@archomaha.org

BeFriends Available

Do you have a pastoral need or know of one? St. Luke BeFriends provide pastoral care for people in all kinds of difficult and transitional situations. They are trained lay volunteers who extend care by providing a listening ear. To arrange for a BeFriender visit, let Pastor Stephen know. He can be reached at 333-6886 ext. 313 or stephen@stlukeumc.com

Remember that we have Care Notes pamphlets available to provide comfort and suggestions to help people cope with difficult situations. Adult Care Notes are in the Bell Tower and Canopy entrances; Youth Care Notes are in the Youth Lounge; and Children's Care Notes are located by the fish aquarium.

St. Luke Calendar at a Glance*

Weekly worship:

Sundays at 9:00 a.m. - Casual worship in the Great Room, with continental breakfast

Sundays at 10:30 a.m. - Traditional worship in the Sanctuary, with music and liturgy

January

- 7 BeFrienders
- 8 UMW Walking Group
- 8 UMW Quilting Group

By 10 on the 10th! Articles for the **FEBRUARY** Courier are due by 10:00 a.m. on **Sunday, January 10**. Please turn in articles for activities happening between **February 1** and mid-**March**. The deadline for turning in articles is firm. Articles may be edited by the Church Office. Articles may be brought or mailed to the Church Office, or e-mailed to: churchoffice@stlukeumc.com

- 12 Trustees
- 13 Children's Ministry Team
- 14 UMW Book Club
- 15 UMW Walking Group
- 16 Indoor Work Day at St. Luke
- 16 UMW Dining Out Group
- 20 Teen Center Board
- 22 UMW Walking Group
- 24 Confirmation Class
- 26 Finance Committee
- 28 Guilty Pleasures Book Club (formerly Hospitality Book Club)
- 28 UMW Prayer Shawl Group
- 29 UMW Walking Group

* For the most current schedule, see the Calendar page of St. Luke's web site.

State of the Church Report

By Rev. John M. Caldwell, PhD, Senior Pastor

On staff since July, 2009

Phone: 333-6886 ext. 312 E-mail: revjohn@stlukeumc.com

As I write this, I have been the Senior Pastor at St. Luke UMC for a grand total of five months. I've had some opportunities for conversation, reading, and investigation of St. Luke's past and present. My natural inclination is to withhold my conclusions until I can be sure that they are correct. But there is an urgency to our shared business that tells me that this would be unwise even if it would be more comfortable for me personally. So let me make a few observations and offer a few suggestions as a way of encouraging a conversation. Help me fill in the blanks, correct misimpressions, and point me in the right direction!

First of all, let me express my appreciation to everyone in the congregation for the warm welcome that you have extended to Carol and me. I especially thank those who organized, hosted, or attended the get-acquainted sessions this Summer. Getting to know a new congregation (or a new pastor!) is always an exercise in cross-cultural communication and appreciation. We seem to speak the same language, but we use our words a little differently. We hear each other through the filter of our previous experiences. We are surprised to find that words and gestures we thought were perfectly clear are heard or experienced in ways we never anticipated nor intended.

Second, I want to extend my appreciation to the staff of St. Luke who have suffered (at close range!) through two pastoral transitions in the last eighteen months. A change of pastors is a challenge for everyone involved, but for none more so than the people whose working life depends for its quality on their relationship with the head of staff. Thank you for your patience, your truth-telling, and your willingness to be a part of this ministry team!

Third, let me apologize to anyone whom I have "crossed" (a word that is especially charged in a Christian congregation) or have hurt or disappointed by what I have said or done or left unsaid or undone. If this describes you, please do me the immense and undeserved favor of asking for a conversation with me. Almost all conflict can be worked through to everyone's satisfaction. Even in those few cases where it cannot, we can still resolve to be mutually respectful and honest.

St. Luke is a congregation with great gifts. Its unique history as a theologically progressive congregation, its commitment to openness to the "stranger" (especially the stranger who comes to us wounded by their encounters with the Christian movement in some of its other forms), its historic concern for children and youth, its members who are well-connected with many of the communities within our community, and even its location, are all important assets.

Engagement in any sort of ministry involves risks, but St. Luke has been willing to take risks for the sake of the Teen Center and other ministries. Another word for risk is opportunity, and we find ourselves in a great adventure in learning about ourselves and our community and about the God who is at work everywhere, but nowhere more than at the margins of our society.

St. Luke enjoys a heritage of intellectual inquiry and honesty. In a world in which so much is built around illusions and self-deceit, this is a precious gift to offer.

We face challenges, too. We may take heart that we face them together with almost all of the congregations of our conference and denomination. We are not alone! Others are working on meeting them and we can learn from them. Not all of what they discover will necessarily apply to us, but much of it will. The fact that no one has all the answers also means that we are in a position to contribute new understanding as we explore new models for ministry. Here are three challenges that I see:

1) Our congregation is "graying." A vital congregation roughly reflects the demographics of its neighborhood. If we assumed that St. Luke is representative of our neighborhood, we would have to imagine that there are very few families with children living near us—and we know this is not the case! With very few families with children in our congregation, we are less and less aware of their needs. Simply from a lack of other voices we will design ministry that meets the needs of ageing baby boomers like me. This means that we will be comfortable, but increasingly out of touch with our community.

I believe that we need to plan for a high level of investment in children's, family, and youth ministries (in that order). Our Sunday School is staffed by capable, caring, and dedicated volunteers...but it is very small. Visitors who come with children do not see a Sunday School program that reflects the size of this congregation. The paradox we are living with is that our Sunday School program will need to be bigger (while maintaining its high quality) in order to grow!

I think that what we need to do is to launch a "new" Sunday School program. We need to plan for a Sunday School of ninety or so children per week. We need to select our curriculum. We need to recruit the teachers and support staff. We need to train them well. We need to reach out into the community with advertizing, direct

(over)

contact, and neighborhood distribution of fliers. Doing that will require an investment of financial resources. It will also require that we adjust our thinking about who should be teaching Sunday School. For at least two years, recruiting enough Sunday School teachers will require some people who are not parents of school-age children to volunteer. I believe that if we are deliberate and energetic about these efforts, we can certainly turn the Sunday School program around.

Beyond that there is a need for broader “family ministries.” Today’s families are incredibly stressed. I find that my own memories of raising children do not equip me to understand the pressures that today’s parents are under. The only way we can understand what families in our neighborhood need is to ask them. Demographic and marketing surveys will take us only so far. The really useful information will have to come from our neighbors!

One thing that is certain is that if you have growing children’s and family ministries, it won’t be long before you had better be ready for a growing youth ministry. Give the Sunday School a three year head start and then there will be a need for adult volunteers who are trained and supported to work with youth!

2) Today’s congregations are facing new financial pressures. To do significant ministry takes significant money. The competition for charitable giving has never been higher. We are not used to having to compete for people’s giving. The time when St. Luke was chartered was the heyday of “civil religion” in this country. Everyone agreed then that “the church” was important and worthy of both participation and support. It was a time of community-recognized church nights and of “blue laws” that closed most retail businesses on Sunday morning.

To say that things have changed is a gross understatement. A little participation from many people used to suffice to keep the church financially viable. The “many people” now no longer see the importance of the church or its financial support.

Our members are mostly not well-prepared for the higher level of financial support that is needed to sustain our ministries. We don’t talk about personal finances very much. Money is not a comfortable subject for most of us. I’m convinced that we’re just going to have to decide to be uncomfortable and talk about money anyway, if we’re going to grow in the ways that we need to grow.

We have also not done very well in cultivating large gifts. The last few decades have seen an increasing concentration of wealth in the hands of fewer and fewer people. The economic pyramid has much steeper sides than it used to! While the gifts of all are important, there is a group of people that has the ability to give very large gifts if we had the ability to envision the kind of ministry they could support and we were willing to ask.

A much larger group having more modest wealth will have a chance to make large gifts in the next few years. We are entering into a period of the greatest inter-generational transfer of wealth in our nation’s history. People are making decisions about what will happen to their wealth when they die. We should be prepared to receive large bequests. We need to envision the kind of ministry that this kind of money could support. We need to become willing to ask.

3) Our cultural context for ministry is changing at an ever-increasing rate. This is a congregation dedicated to progressive thinking in religious matters. But it is the nature of progressive thinking that it is a moving target. St. Luke cannot stand still. God is still speaking and we need to continue to find new ways of listening.

The mission of the church, our denomination tells us, is “to make disciples of Christ for the transformation of the world.” I believe that we become disciples of Christ as we know ourselves to be loved by God and, following the teachings of Jesus, commit ourselves to loving God and our neighbor.

In Mark’s gospel, when Jesus was asked for the greatest commandment, he replied, “[Y]ou shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Each disciple and each congregation has a particular gift for loving God and neighbor; none of us does it in the same way and with the same emphasis. At St. Luke we believe that a theologically questioning *mind* is also a faithful and loving one. We cultivate lively debate, believing that we have much to gain from listening carefully to each other. This is a great gift and it is often missing in contemporary conversations among Christians.

The challenge we face in this area is at least two-fold. First, it’s hard to keep up with changing thinking, but that is exactly what we have to do if we are to bring the best of contemporary thinking into conversation with Christian faith. We need to develop ways of doing that. Second, we need to make this conversation more widely available in our broader community. Partly this is a matter of discovering where this kind of conversation is already happening and asking to be a part of it. Partly this is a matter of sponsoring relevant and challenging conversation ourselves. There are a number of churches in our community that sponsor lectureships or other learning events. We should be among them if we are serious about our claim to be theologically progressive!

Yes, we have our own version of the challenges that many congregations face. But we have resources that are more than adequate to face them. Perhaps our greatest need is also our greatest potential resource. A proposal that is before this Charge Conference is a process to clarify our goals and purposes. Greater clarity about our mission and ministry will allow us to focus our resources, align our staff, and be more effective in ministry together.

I’m certain that, once we have greater clarity about God’s purposes for us here, the people of St. Luke will rise to the challenge. It is my intension to help that process along in any way that I can. I am glad to be here and committed to facing these challenges with you.

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January 2010

Youth Calendar

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1 <i>Go home from the Lock In</i>	2
3	4	5	6 <i>Junior High Devos 6:30—8:00 PM</i>	7	8	9
10 <i>Sr High Devos 6:30—8:00</i>	11	12	13 <i>Junior High Devos 6:30—8:00 PM</i>	14	15	16 <i>7–10 PM Ice Skating Tranquility</i>
17 <i>Sr High Devos 6:30—8:00</i>	18	19	20 <i>Junior High Devos 6:30—8:00 PM</i>	21	22	23
24 <i>Sr High Devos 6:30—8:00</i>	25	26	27 <i>Junior High Devos 6:30—8:00 PM</i>	28	29	30
31 <i>Sr High Devos 6:30—8:00</i>						

One of the top initiatives at the Teen Center in 2009 was “Healthy Lifestyles.”

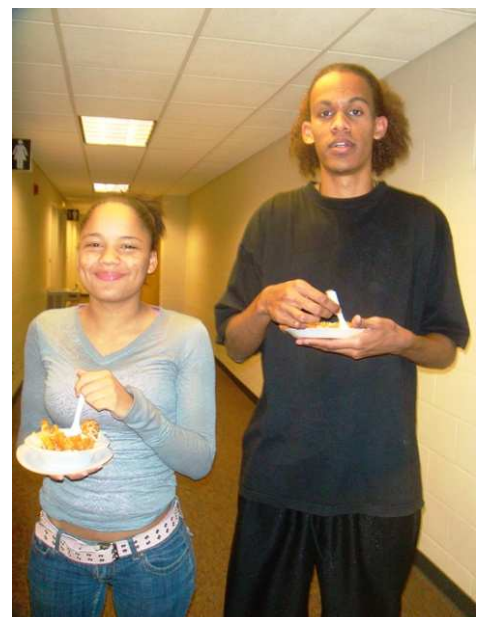
One aspect of that program is called “Kids in the Kitchen” and was sponsored by Quaker Oats, Visiting Nurses Association and St. Luke congregation members.

Left: Teens spend time learning about food safety and nutrition through the VNA’s Operation Frontline.

Below left: Small groups spent time cooking in the kitchen.

Below right: Making yogurt parfaits allowed lessons in healthy snacking.

Bottom Right: The joy of eating!



The donation of healthy snacks and volunteers in the kitchen has been a blessing for our teens.

If you would like to continue to support these efforts, you can drop off snacks in the Church Office/Usher’s Closet or sign up to lead a cooking class.

Popular Healthy Snacks:

- | | | |
|------------|--------------|----------------------------|
| Fruit cups | Fruit Snacks | Fiber One Bars (chocolate) |
| Gatorade | Baked Chips | Nature Valley Granola Bars |

Thank you. Abbey Jackson, Teen Center Director