



Tri-County Ministry News

February 2025

Grace to you and Peace from Jesus Christ.

Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. ~2 Corinthians 4:1

I want to share some history with you that the SAMs learned at our zoom retreat in January. And I hope that it will encourage you or in the least help you understand the situation we are in without an ordained pastor.

Susan McArver, a retired professor of church history was the presenter. Here is the information she shared with us in an abbreviated form.

Lutheranism got its start in America in 1638 at a Swedish colony on the Delaware river. There were a number of Lutherans in a Dutch colony in New York in the seventeenth century, and they formed a parish in 1649. It's the oldest surviving Lutheran congregation in the United States. The 18th century saw increasing migration of Germans to the middle colonies of Pennsylvania. In 1742, Pastor Henry Melchior Muhlenberg was sent to Pennsylvania by the Pietist Halle Institution in Germany. Muhlenberg gathered together the scattered Lutheran pastors and congregations into the first Lutheran synod, the Ministerium of Pennsylvania, formed in 1748.

By 1750, most Lutheran congregations were in Pennsylvania and up and down the eastern seaboard. People came to the United States as individuals or in small clusters. There were no state monies or education support for pastors as there was in Europe, so very few ordained ministers emigrated to the US. Congregations had to rely either on German speaking clergy from other denominations or the lay people would preach and then wait for an ordained minister to have babies baptized, receive communion, and marry couples. Many ministers recorded in their journals that they not only married the couple but also baptized the one-year-old toddler of the couple.

In the 1850's more people immigrated to the US and there was a change from German to English but still there was a need for more pastors, especially in the sparsely populated areas. So, a mentoring system or an apprenticeship was implemented. This system was designed to grow pastors from home congregations. The synod would give a yearly license and the person serving the congregation would have to report annually. Much like the SAMs today.

Of course, in order to have ordained ministers there was a great need for seminaries. The first seminary was Hartwick (1797) in New York state, second was Gettysburg in Pennsylvania and the third seminary was Southern in South Carolina. All of the seminaries struggled with only one or two professors teaching per seminary, and they were financially precarious. Many students took many years to finish due to a lack of finances.

In 1890 there was a huge amount of immigration to the New Frontier in the west. Again, people came either alone or in small groups and were scattered. Many of the new arrivals were Norwegian. Like the first wave of immigrants, there was a scarcity of pastors so something new was started: traveling pastors.

In 1748 there was one Lutheran synod. By 1860 there were 42 and in 1875 there were more than 60. After World War II, Lutheranism grew from 5 million in 1940 to 9 million in 1965. This was due to the baby boom. With the GI bill and men returning from the war seminaries were bursting. Now men going to seminary are encouraged to bring their families with them. In the 1960's there were 160 new congregations formed per year. People started to expect a pastor in every congregation.

And because so many babies were born the emphasis in congregations was on youth, the middle class and on the melting pot or intermingling.

The 1990's saw some movement to the west coast, but the majority of Lutherans stayed where they were planted from Pennsylvania to the Dakotas.

There has been a steep decline in Lutheran congregations starting from the late 60's until now. Some of that is due to lower birth rates and less immigration from countries that have Lutheran denominations. Also, as we have noticed, there is a shortage of ordained pastors.

It seems that we have come full circle.

We are back to raising pastors or lay ministers from our congregations. It is not a new experiment. There are some positives in raising church leaders or lay ministers from our own congregations. First, a lack of a seminary degree doesn't take away from the validity of the person's ministry. Second, mentored lay ministers live among their people and share the same occupations, concerns and social interaction. They are pious people who study and read the gospel.

So as Paul encourages us:

We are engaged in God's ministry, do not lose heart! Continue to trust that God will answer our prayers for younger people in our congregations to hear and respond to the call to be lay and ordained ministers.

I am encouraging everyone to go to the Pizza and Perspective at Red Willow on February 15th to explore ways of possible ministry with the congregations in Aneta. Synod staff will be there to guide us and answer questions.

May the God of love and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you.

Submitted by

Marla Larson, Synodically Authorized Minister (SAM)

First Communion Class

Our annual First Communion class will be held on Saturday, **March 15**. (Definite time and location coming in the next newsletter.)



Children who are ready to receive the Lord's Supper are invited to take the class. A parent or other adult should attend with the student.

We would like to have a listing of participants so that plans may be made. If you have a child wishing to take the class, please contact Theresa directly at the Tri-County Ministry office if you haven't already done so. (Pre-registration by the end of the February would be greatly appreciated.)

Giving Hearts Day Thursday, February 13

This is your day to donate to any of hundreds of organizations. Eastern North Dakota Synod and Red Willow Ministries are among the organizations receiving donations and matching funds.

Givingheartsday.org

Find your organization and donate through the website. (Early giving is possible.)

Pizza and Perspective

Members of the Tri-County Ministry congregations, Sundahl and Ottawa Lutheran Churches of Aneta will gather to discuss what it might look like to enter a formal partnership.

Saturday, February 15

11:00—3:00

Red Willow Bible Camp

Synod staff will be at the gathering to guide the discussion and help discern what a merger between our parishes might look like. This event is for everyone — church leaders and church members.

Council members are asked to get a number of attendees from your congregation and register with Theresa at the TCM office by February 12. (Kindly e-mail your pre-registration to trinitybinford@mlgc.com.)

Souper Bowl Sunday February 9

Churches who wish may start out the day with a souper bowl before settling in for the Super Bowl.



Take a noisy offering for your favorite football team!

Proceeds will go to local food banks.

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