

Neighbors in Christ,

Grace and peace to you from God, our Father, and Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This month I will be exploring Congregational Vitality and what it means for our Neighbors in Christ three-point parish. Some of you may know that in late August I attended a continuing education event in Seattle, WA. I was asked, with a few other local pastors in our Southwest Minnesota Synod (ELCA), to represent rural and small member congregations from our area, including the upper Midwest.

This Congregational Vitality Training Conference welcomed rostered and lay leaders from all over the country, including some from Africa, and Asia where Christ's church is flourishing. The aim was too zero in on how congregations of all sizes develop servant leaders from within and raise up hope and awareness in congregational sustainability and find out where our Triune God is at work. But more importantly, how is God working in us to bring those talents to our congregations and share them with others in our faith and local communities?

There are many ways to define congregational vitality, but I can best describe it as the consistent flow of energy, given from the Holy Spirit, that enriches our lives and our church families in which we share each and every day. This may be found through our worship services, the fellowship that we share with one another before and after praising and thanking our Triune God, with our youth and confirmands who yearn to learn more about God and the bible, or how we act outside of the physical church in and about our communities. We are called to live and serve our Lord Jesus Christ by loving our neighbor. Though this cannot be measured in human terms, but we can recognize common themes in the way we interact and share with one another.

God is working in us, no matter where we are, or what we are doing; God, through the Holy Spirit stirs in our souls and sends us out into the world to again be the example of the living Christ. Jesus Christ comes to us, no matter where we are, or what we are doing. This is a promise that we not only confess, but also look to as Lutheran Christians. As a three-point faith community, we also need to see how we are interacting within the parish, and in our own congregational units. So my question is: How is God working in your life? And how are you sharing that with other people within our wonderful parish? What is God up to in your life – not what are we doing to please God – but what is God doing for you? And that is what I am looking to explore.

Over the next weeks and months, I want to find out the answers to these questions. And I promise, our conversations will be absolutely confidential, so you may answer them as honestly as possible. I will be looking for themes that will arise from our one-on-one talks and ask you straight, direct questions about your faith life, and what you believe God is up to in your life. My hope is that these on-on-one's will also reveal how we are assisting one another, if we even are at all. I plan on talking with the same number of parishioners from each church, across all demographic lines; this will give me an equal cross section of the parish. It will also let me know and share later on what our NIC core values are and how we may move forward in a sustainable way. And I am confident we will move forward in a sustainable way.

If you are interested in speaking with me, please ask me, call me, or email me personally. All of my contact information is listed in the front of this newsletter, or your church bulletins. I look forward to sitting down with you and going from there. May God continue to bless you all.

In HIS sake,

Rev. Erik Karlson  
Pastor, Neighbor in Christ Parish