

Growing God's Church

Vision: Called into God's Marvelous Light: To Be Joyful Witnesses

Objective: Identifying and supporting new congregations as mission sites

By Bishop Harold Usgaard

It is the Mission Planning and Action Team of the Synod Council that is charged with supporting and encouraging new mission efforts in the Southeastern Minnesota Synod. That team recently concluded a retreat aimed at identifying and clarifying its goals for the near future. From their work has come this statement:

“Grounded in the ELCA mission statement

Marked with the cross of Christ forever; we are claimed, gathered and sent for the sake of the world; and

the Southeastern Minnesota Synod strategic plan

Called into God's marvelous light to be joyful witnesses, Christ-centered disciples and strong leaders;

The focus of the Mission Planning and Action Team is to:

- Partner with congregations to identify mission opportunities within the Southeastern Minnesota Synod;
- Encourage and energize congregations to respond to God's call to mission by starting new congregations or initiatives; renewing congregations; and equipping congregations; and
- Gather resources to support congregations in their response

Mission depends on the faith and discipleship already alive in the church. The historical means of bringing new congregations into being was through other congregations. That is a lesson that is now being rediscovered. The Mission Planning and Action Team is excited that congregations and their communities continue to identify mission needs in their midst. Conversations are already taking place in our synod where local pastors and leaders are envisioning our newest mission start. Contact the synod office if you would like to plan such a meeting.

The Mission Planning and Action Team is grateful for the tremendous response from so many who have become part of "I'm Ready for Mission" (see this month's *Bridge* insert). Congregations are encouraged to remember the Transfiguration Sunday Offering for synod missions that was adopted at the 2006 synod assembly. And thank you for the ongoing support for our present mission projects in Rochester, Northfield, and Eyota.



2006: A Synod Joined in Bible Study

Beginner's Bible Study

By Larry Iverson, Synod Minister
Congregational Renewal Team

- 91% of all U.S. households own at least 1 Bible.
- The typical household owns 3 Bibles.
- 38% of adults in the U.S. read the Bible during a typical week – not including when they are at church.
- Among Bible readers, the average amount of time spent reading the Bible during an entire week is 52 minutes or about 10 minutes a day. (George Barna, *Data and Trends*, 1988.)

If this information is still accurate today, many people have not spent much time in Bible study. It may be helpful in your congregation to offer a Beginner's Bible Study, and ask the experienced and more serious Bible study people to consider teaching it.

Some points you may wish to cover would be the following:

- Use Craig Koester's book, *A Beginner's Guide to Reading the Bible*
- Talk about different translations that are available
- Recommend good reference helps, such as a Bible dictionary, concordance, commentaries, maps, chronology of the Bible time-frame
- Begin with prayer
- Ask the questions as you read: who, what, when, where, why and how
- Read whatever part you read more than once
- Put yourself in the story
- Ask how what you have read can apply to your life
- Listen to the questions and comments of others
- Start with the Gospels or a New Testament book instead of the Old Testament

Think about offering different levels of Bible study in the congregation and periodically offer a beginner's course for new people to help them grow in their faith.



Called into God's Marvelous Light

To Be Joyful Witnesses

To Be Christ-Centered Disciples

To Be Strong Leaders