

Making Christ Known

in the



Northern Illinois Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

September/October 2015 • Volume 28 • Issue 5

"To everything there is a season and a time for every purpose under heaven." Ecclesiastes 3

Starting Strong, Ending Well

Bishop Gary Wollersheim

I think there are a lot of important times in our working lives, but none more important than our beginnings and our endings.

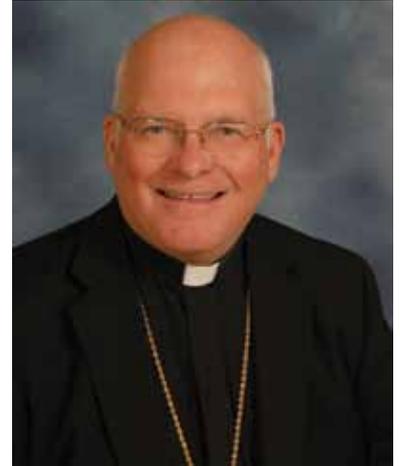
For a pastor, starting strong means listening, learning, and developing relationships based on trust and mutual respect. Sometimes pastors try to make changes too quickly in the congregation such as changing the worship times or the procedure for distributing Holy Communion. These changes often turn out badly because not enough time and energy was spent in developing relationships. When the pastor earns trust first, the congregation is much more open to new ideas and change.

"You are also called to serve God in your family, as a good neighbor and friend, as a faithful steward and citizen, and as a supportive member of another congregation."

For a pastor, ending well means saying goodbye fully, paying attention to the grief process, setting proper boundaries for future relationships with the congregation, and paving the way for the new pastor.

I often say to retiring pastors, "Remember that your calling is much broader than to a congregation. You are also called to serve God in your family, as a good neighbor and friend, as a faithful steward and citizen, and as a supportive member of another congregation."

The Discipleship Gatherings this year are designed to assist our Synod with the process of ending well and preparing for a new "pastor of the Synod" with the election of a new

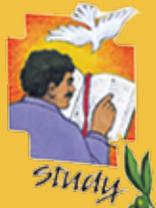


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This issue is the fourth in a series on the seven Faith Practices.

Find previous issues at nissynod.org/pubs/mck



Encourage

To encourage is to build community. This mark of discipleship is one of the seven faith practices highlighted in the ELCA-wide Call to Discipleship.

Beyond the initial actions of welcoming people into the community are the ministries of friendship and support. Encouragement is the cluster of friendly attitudes and actions that forge relationships, building a diverse set of people into a community in Christ. Jesus promises to make community with us (Matthew 18:20).

Encouragement makes it possible to cross lines of race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, politics, economic class, educational level, and generation. Common social skills are transformed by the presence of the Holy One into acts of discipleship whereby the body of Christ is continually built up and strengthened for mission and ministry.

Fall Discipleship Gatherings – Unique and Important for All in the NIS

Each fall, everyone in the Northern Illinois Synod is encouraged to attend one of the Discipleship Gatherings which are held in each of our eight geographical conferences.

Bishop Wollersheim has announced that he will retire and not stand for re-election as Bishop of the Northern Illinois Synod at the end of his term in 2016. Because of this major transition in the life of the Synod, this fall's Discipleship Gatherings will be an opportunity for the members of the Synod to begin to think about the upcoming Bishop election and the nature of Church Leadership in this time.

At the gatherings, those present will have the opportunity to worship together and pray about this process, learn the actual duties of a Bishop of the Northern Illinois Synod, hear from Bishop Wollersheim the joys and challenges that he has experienced, learn how the Bishop election will be conducted, and have the opportunity to reflect together on the qualities and skills that each individual believes to be important in the next Bishop.

Because this is such an important time for our Synod, the appointed Transition Team is doing everything it can to encourage all members of Northern Illinois Synod congregations to come to one of the Discipleship Gatherings, as a way to be part of this year-long discernment process. Please share this information among your colleagues and your congregation members, so that all can participate fully.

Registration will begin at 6:15 pm. A light supper will be served from 6:30-7 pm. Devotions will begin at 7 pm, followed by the program. The evening will end by 8:45 pm. Topics will include congregational leadership, the constitutional responsibilities as well as the joys and challenges of a bishop, and the election process for a bishop.

Download a bulletin insert for use in your congregation at nisynod.org/gatherings.



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Bishop Election



Discipleship Gatherings Dates and Locations

Date	City	Congregation
Thursday Sept. 10	DeKalb Northeast Conference	First Lutheran 324 N 3rd St firstdekalb.org
Thursday Sept. 17	Rockford North Conference	Shepherd of the Valley 2715 S Mulford Rd shep61.org
Thursday Oct. 8	Rock Island West Conference	St. John's Lutheran 4501 7th Ave stjohnsri.org
Thursday Oct. 22	Lockport East Conference	Shepherd of the Hill 925 E 9th St shepherdofthehill.com
Thursday Oct. 29	Dixon Central Conference	Immanuel Lutheran 1013 Franklin Grove Rd immanueldixon.org
Thursday Nov. 5	Galva Southwest Conference	Messiah Lutheran 317 SW 3rd St messiahlutherangalva.org
Thursday Nov. 12	Somonauk South Conference	St. John's Lutheran 235 S Green St elcastjohns.com
Thursday Nov. 19	Lena Northwest Conference	Good Shepherd Lutheran 118 E Mason St goodshepherdlena.org



Fall Discipleship Gatherings

Each fall, everyone in the Northern Illinois Synod is encouraged to attend one of the Discipleship Gatherings which are held in each of our eight geographical conferences. The 2016 Discipleship Gatherings will focus on church leadership and the election of a new bishop (Bishop Wollersheim), which will happen for us in 2016 with the retirement of Bishop Wollersheim.

Registration will begin at 6:15 pm. A light supper will be served from 6:30-7 pm. Devotions will begin at 7 pm, followed by the program. The evening will end by 8:45 pm. Topics will include congregational leadership, the constitutional responsibilities as well as the joys and challenges of a bishop, and the election process for a bishop.



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It Will Get Better

Rev. Dr. Loren L. Nielsen

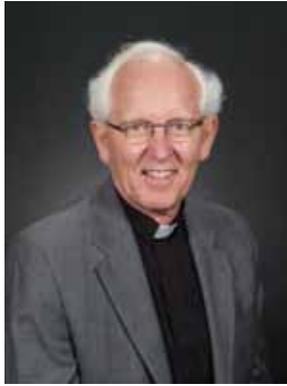
This past summer I had rotator cuff surgery on my shoulder. The surgery went well but recovery and rehab were another story. I was always hurting. I had a hard time sleeping. I couldn't drive the car for the longest time. It seemed all I could do was watch the weeds grow in our flower garden.

One day I unloaded on Mark, my physical therapist. I was discouraged. He listened. He had good tips on how to manage the pain. Then he said, "Loren, I hear what you are saying. The program you are on works. It will get better!" And he was right.

Sooner or later all of us hunger for words of encouragement. We need to hear from a trusted friend that the struggles we are going through will get better. Encouragement is so simple. Yet, it has such great power to enliven others. It stirs up in us courage, hope and faith to move on even during difficult times. Encouragement is one of the tools that all leaders of the church need to practice. It brings Good News of God's care.

We don't know much about Barnabas except a few references in the Book of Acts. Some scholars labeled him the "Son of Encouragement." I can see why. The early church leaders sent Barnabas to Antioch to see what was going on. God was at work in a new way. Were these new Christians faithful and authentic? This is what Barnabas discovered:

When he came and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast devotion.... Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch (Acts 11:23-26).



Barnabas encouraged those early Christians. They pressed on with greater zeal because others now supported them in their ministry. They were not alone.

Why did Barnabas go looking for Saul? Was Saul drifting away from the faith? Was he becoming a loner? We don't know the reason why Barnabas went looking for Saul. When he found him, he brought him to Antioch. The church surrounded them with the love of Christ. Encouragement prepared them for their upcoming missionary journeys.

Members of Congregation Councils, rostered leaders, and faithful members of committees should make it a high priority to practice encouragement in all they do. What might that look like? I've noticed that most encouragers focus on personal relationships. They have good eye contact. They know how to read the feelings of others. They listen to what others are saying, never giving false hope but linking them to the promises of God. Encouragers are mindful that they are the presence of the Lord.

Page through the scriptures, listen to the words of Jesus and Paul, reflect on the Psalms, and sing a hymn like *Lord of All Hopefulness* (ELW 765). These things will help us sharpen our skills of how to encourage.

Remember, someone close to you needs to hear, "It will get better!"



Starting Strong, Ending Well
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bishop at our June 16-18, 2016
Synod Assembly.

At these Discipleship Gatherings
we will be looking at the
responsibilities of a synodical
bishop and exploring the

challenges and joys of this
calling. We will also review
the unique election process
for a bishop which is called an
"Ecclesiastical Ballot."

I hope that several members
of each congregation will
attend one of these important
meetings.

I am looking forward to seeing
you out and about the synod.
Thank you for your service and
leadership in God's church.

In Christ,

Bishop Gary Wollersheim
Bishop Gary Wollersheim

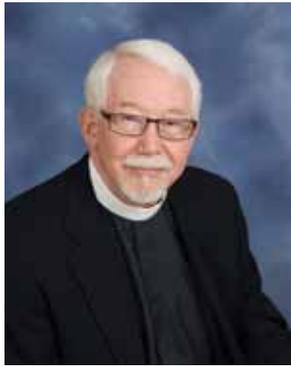
Living the Faith Practices - Encouragement

Pastor Troy C. Hedrick

While sitting in my office at the Chicago inner-city congregation I was serving, I heard the front door open and someone run in.

As I walked into the narthex to see who it was, the door opened again and 4 or 5 older African American teens noisily entered. I asked them if I could help them. Without answering, they made a hasty exit.

Puzzled, I started back to my office. And then, I heard someone crying. Going into the nave of the church, I found a shaking 13 year old African American child curled up in a ball on one of the pews. Henry (not his real name) told me that the teens I had just seen were chasing him in an effort to recruit him as a member of their gang.



He had sought refuge in the church because a friend who lived in his public housing project had told him this was a safe place.

He took a chance that what his friend said was true. I assured him that it was a safe place and that he was always welcome here. A few weeks later, Henry and his friend appeared on a Sunday morning for worship. Several members of the congregation spotted



him and made sure he was made to feel welcome. They also encouraged him to come back.

It wasn't long before he became a regular at the Eucharist both on Sunday morning and at the mid-week celebration. That sense of welcome and its accompanying encouragement then led to his request to be baptized.

Soon Henry was a regular part of the life of the congregation, participating as an Altar Server, Church School student, and member of the youth group.

With the continuing encouragement of congregational members, Henry graduated from high school, and attended Augustana College where he was an outstanding athlete with an excellent academic record.

In his senior year, he was offered a chance to play baseball on a major league farm team. After prayerful consideration, he decided that his calling was to be an ordained minister, and he is now serving as a Lutheran chaplain in a large prison.

We are called to be signs of Jesus Christ by encouraging others in their faith journeys. The encouragement of his fellow church members moved Henry from being a frightened teen, hounded by gang members, to being a Pastor, serving those in need by encouraging them, even as he had been encouraged.

Both those members and Henry practiced their faith to the glory of God and for the good of their fellow human beings.



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is a bimonthly electronic newsletter of the Northern Illinois Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)

The Rev. Dr. Gary M. Wollersheim, Bishop

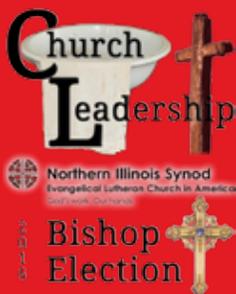
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Congregations are encouraged to reprint articles for congregational use.

Send submissions to
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Remember to attend a Discipleship Gathering!

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