

Ministry Education in Context



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“Alaskan Ecumenism: We are in this together!” by Lisa Smith, intern at Amazing Grace Lutheran Church, Anchorage, AK

The crowd gathered at St. Anthony’s Catholic Church in Anchorage, Alaska fell silent as neighborhood residents shared their stories. One woman said her nephew was shot and beaten in front of the local Boys & Girls Club. A man said his parents’ home was ransacked and his mother’s jewelry stolen early Christmas morning. I sat in a pew of Lutherans; we were concentrating, listening. More than 400 other people from different churches did the same.

The public forum enabled residents to talk with Anchorage city council members about crime. Those of us from Amazing Grace Lutheran Church don’t live in this neighborhood. Many others didn’t either. It didn’t matter. We all worry about crime. We all live in Anchorage. We stood by our brothers and sisters at St. Anthony’s - a silent, interdenominational witness.

Such an event is called an “action” by community organizers, a place where residents claim their voice, speak for themselves and work with public officials to create solutions. The forum was the product of the Anchorage Interdenominational Sponsoring Committee; I have participated in the group as part of internship.

The sponsoring committee enables congregation-based community organizing – a grassroots effort to raise up leaders in congregations who work for community change. The model is based on listening. Parish leaders conduct one-on-one visits to find out parishioners’ community concerns, and then work with local officials to improve the quality of life.

Anchorage’s sponsoring committee is interdenominational and moves across socio-economic and racial lines. Clergy in the group include Catholics, Lutherans, Baptists and Evangelicals. Congregations range from those in the affluent Hillside area of Anchorage to the poorest neighborhoods on the city’s East side. Parishioners in these congregations are white, Alaska Native, Latino, Hmong and Filipino, to name a few. I am proud to be one of those seated at the table.

Working ecumenically is essential in Alaska, where there are only a half million people and proportionally few churches. While there are 11 congregations in the greater Anchorage area, many Alaskan towns and villages lack a Lutheran presence. Cooperation is more about survival than keeping up appearances. Often, Alaska leads the wider church. For instance, Epiphany Lutheran Church in Valdez has functioned as an Episcopal-Lutheran combination for years.

As an intern in Alaska, I have participated in ecumenical activities in addition to the community-organizing group. I am involved in planning an interdenominational creation conference. Last fall, I spoke at a forum on the death penalty.

Much like attending classes in other seminaries of Berkeley’s Graduate Theological Union, I grow stronger in my Lutheran convictions by representing them among diverse peoples. I rejoice in our commonalities. I thank God for our differences. We are all in this together.



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Siri Strommen Campbell, intern at Bethel Lutheran in Rochester, MN is seen here with youth from her church. Siri wrote the musical they are presenting, “Esther.”

In the recent publication of *Legacies*, a newsletter of the ELCA Foundation, Sean Forde, Intern at Zion Lutheran Church in Anoka, MN was highlighted as one of the recipients of a Fund for Leaders in Mission scholarship. Read what he has to say about his call to ministry. “I think the greatest factor in discerning my call is actually sitting down and listening to those people God has placed in my life. They have been both influential and instructional in helping me come to realize my gifts and talents for ministry and they have been pivotal to me as I discern my call to ordained ministry. I used to think that my call was just between God and me. I now realize that God has put incredible people in my path to help, mold, shape, and guide me in my discernment process. As I enter into ordained ministry, I hope to relay the message that the local church is responsible for identifying future church leaders and it is our duty to encourage people to seek careers in ministry.”



It's been great to see pictures of interns in action. Keep those pictures coming!



Intern, Matthew Manz, finds himself at home not only behind the pulpit but in this 1941 Piper. Matthew serves with Pastor Doug Grant at Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Larimore, ND. This picture was taken at the local airport which recently hosted a Young Eagles Fly In at which youth (and pastors!) received free rides in airplanes.

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