

**Interim Associate Pastor's Report  
Congregational Meeting  
Bethel Lutheran Church and School  
Feb. 6, 2011**

Looking back on the self-study process of the past year, and on the focus that continues to emerge from that process, I am so impressed with the dedication and courage this congregation has shown and continues to embrace as you are poised to begin another new chapter in your life together with a new associate pastor.

A recap of Bethel's interim ministry:

- 1) We began with **informal conversations about people's dreams and concerns** for a congregation and school that began in, grew up in, and thrived in "The Valley of Heart's Delight." For more than 50 years Bethel has been a community of worship, care and support – a community that has lived the Gospel through a variety of ministries internally, locally and globally. But as "The Valley of Heart's Delight" morphed into "Silicon Valley," much more than a name was changing; the 20<sup>th</sup> Century church risked becoming irrelevant as institutional authority declined and multiculturalism grew. No longer are Lutheran churches filled with Northern European immigrants and their descendants, all raised in the faith. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, we are continuing to discern how God is calling the church to serve multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious individuals, families and communities.
- 2) Next, Bethel leaders gathered for a **leaders' retreat** at which participants, with the guidance of a consultant, identified where this congregation is in its lifecycle, and how the congregation operates in light of its size and "style". There was a feeling that Bethel was "stuck" in some ways: that many groups and ministries had become too inward focused, that newcomers were too often not welcomed and included, and that a longing to recapture the past was making it difficult to envision the future. It also was determined that the congregation often strives to operate as a "corporate size" church (which can afford to hire staff to administer programs) when it actually is a "program size" church (which relies on lay volunteers to lead and support ministries).
- 3) Then, last summer, participants **in two congregational events and an online survey** spent time remembering Bethel's history, reflecting on the congregation's present gifts and challenges, and listening for what God is calling this congregation to now. There was a strong consensus to **build on strengths such as Bethel School and children/youth programs, worship, community service, Bible study and music**, and to focus on **improving participation among those already at Bethel and reaching out to/welcoming those new to Bethel**.
- 4) From this input, Pr. Randy developed the **Pastoral Challenge**, a proposed direction for intentional welcome and service that calls for getting to know the local community and making connections more intentionally between those already active or present at Bethel and those who are new here. The congregation accepted the Pastoral Challenge at the last Congregational Meeting, and through a second leaders' retreat and the work of a task force, **the Pastoral Challenge now has become the Living Our Faith Campaign**, which task force members and Pr. Randy will present in a few minutes.

- 5) Meanwhile, the input gathered through the congregational events and survey, as well as direction in the Pastoral Challenge that developed from that input, were the basis for the **Ministry Site Profile**, which is like a resume for the congregation. The MSP was submitted to the Synod in October, and based on that three candidates for associate pastor were forwarded to Pr. Randy by the Synod. Pr. Randy accepted two of the candidates, and the Call Committee interviewed them both. One candidate later withdrew from the process to pursue a more specialized ministry, and the Call Committee had the option to consider the remaining candidate or ask the Synod for an entirely new slate of candidates. After a second interview and further vetting, **the Call Committee is recommending this candidate to the Church Council for call.** The next step is for the Council to approve the call, prepare the compensation/benefits package and direct the Synod to extend the call.

With this look back, it is obvious that this congregation is embracing a renewed sense of mission. Energy has returned, new leaders have stepped up, and long-time leader remain passionately dedicated. This congregation – which used to describe itself as one that avoids controversial issues – studied the ELCA Sexuality Statement and the decision to ordain partnered GLBT clergy, and also turned out for a class on Rediscovering Female Images of God in Scripture. So it is clear that this congregation can discuss sensitive topics without fear that it will destroy the community; in fact, you are stronger for having stayed in conversation with one another in the midst of disagreement.

I want to thank you today for all the effort you have put into the time of interim ministry at Bethel. Special thanks must go to Pr. Randy for having the vision to request an intentional self-study at this crucial time for Bethel. The Call Committee also deserves special recognition for the incredible number of hours they put into preparing the MSP and interviewing the candidates. Your Church Council members also are tireless in their efforts on behalf of Bethel and its mission, as is the dedicated and talented staff at the church and school.

As the apostle Paul was fond of saying, I thank God for you! It is a pleasure to serve with you. Let's all continue to pray for the call process, the new associate pastor to come, and the renewed mission of Bethel Lutheran Church and School.

**Peace,**  
**Rev. Lori Eickmann**  
**Interim Assoc. Pastor**