



Campus ministries are ready for school

While students were enjoying their summer break, campus ministry leaders were busy getting ready for their return to school in August.

“We had been planning the move-in day lunch for the day that first-year students moved into the dorms at Chadron State College,” said the Rev. Ann Sundberg, campus pastor. After unloading their vehicles, incoming students and their parents were invited to stop by Immanuel Lutheran Church for a free meal and an invite to their campus ministry’s monthly home-cooked supper events. “We feed them very well,” she added. “It’s a draw!”

Knowing that first impressions on campus make all the difference, the Rev. Adam White of Nebraska Lutheran Campus Ministry (NeLCM) tries to pave the way. “In the summer I call all the [Nebraska Synod] congregations and try to set up appointments with incoming students and their pastors,” he said. “I’ve found that connecting before students get on campus makes a big difference.”

White passes on contact information for students attending other schools to his fellow campus pastors. “We work together in NeLCM and the LuMin Network (ELCA Lutheran Campus Ministry Network) to meet students where they are, wherever they are.”

For students who move away from home, Lutheran campus ministry can be a welcome place of connection. “New students should check out NeLCM because it is a great way to meet new people from all walks of life,” urges Justin Murphy of the Peer Ministry for Northeast Community College in Norfolk.

Tessa Faust, a student at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln (UNL), agrees: “It’s all about building friendships to last. It’s great to have a community who

will love, support and help guide you through life and faith.”

In Nebraska, Lutheran campus ministry locations are supported by the synod, ELCA churchwide, area congregations, alumni and local fundraising events. But their outreach touches students of all walks of life. “What I like about campus ministry is that it helps people try to navigate college in a healthy, Christian manner,” said Zach Vyhildal, UNL Lutheran Center participant, “but at the same time allows people to grow and experience new things and people. I love how diverse campus ministry has been for me, showing that God truly loves everyone in all corners of the globe.”

Like congregations, campus ministry looks different in every location. Wayne State College Lutheran Campus Ministry has a dedicated house on campus where students live in community and invite others to join them for events and meals. In Omaha, students from any area campus meet regularly in open groups for undergraduates (NeMO and NeMONorth) and graduate students (God and Grads) in various locations, while Creighton University students connect for worship in Halley Chapel

on Sundays during the academic year. Actions In Motion (AIM) is a service-oriented ministry drawing students together for fun and service at Peru State College. Campus Lutheran in Kearney welcomes students to its building on campus for fellowship, Bible study and meals. And the Rev. Sean Koos is a regular presence at Southeast Community College in Beatrice, ready with an open ear and a cup of coffee.

Wherever they are in the state, wherever they are in their faith journey, students, faculty and staff can find fellowship and welcome at NeLCM. Thank you for helping make that happen. ✚

**Want to Help?
Here's What
Congregations Can Do!**

- * Share names/contact info of incoming students with campus ministry staff via lumin-networkreferral.org/student-referrals/
- * Contribute to your local campus ministry food/hygiene products pantry. Such pantries may be found @ UNL, UNK, Norfolk, WNCC @ Alliance & Sydney, Peru (& maybe in your community!)
- * Give to NeLCM (to support all sites) go to www.nelcm.com/ & click on Give Now.


**LUTHERAN
CAMPUS MINISTRY**

“This Changes Everything”



Bishop Brian Maas

That was the theme of the 2018 ELCA Youth Gathering—a once-every-three-years event that is one of the most outstanding things we do together as church. More than 30,000 young people gather for five days of changing the lives of others through service, and for having their

lives changed through worship, Bible study, fellowship, interactive learning experiences and, of course, service.

But “This Changes Everything” is more than a one-time event theme. It’s a reality we’re invited to experience every day. My fear is, we don’t. Or more accurately, we do—but we don’t recognize it.

The Small Catechism reminds us that baptism is a daily thing—every morning we die to all of yesterday’s sins, failures and disappointments, and

a new self, the self that God creates and gifts us to be, rises up to live a new day, new opportunities, a new life. This is incredible—and it happens whether we recognize it or not! But what a difference when we do. God grants that miracle daily through sheer grace. Blind to it, I’m burdened by yesterday. Aware of it, that burden lifts and today is a whole new possibility.

That change is real for both congregations and individuals. The whole purpose of our gathering weekly for worship and fellowship isn’t to fulfill some obligation or duty, to check in on old friends, to see if there’s anything entertaining in the sermon or old favorites on the hymn board. The whole purpose of gathering as church is to hear again—and to remind one another—that “This Changes Everything.” The gospel of God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ means hope for the despairing, welcome for the outcast, peace for the traumatized, rest for the weary and inspiration for all.

When a congregation remembers its purpose, when it gathers around word and sacrament to be renewed for living, that experience changes everything! But when a congregation forgets this purpose, when members gather for any other reason—habit, duty, sustaining a building,

Faith is formed at the ELCA Youth Gathering

The moment the location of the 2018 ELCA Youth Gathering was revealed in 2015 as Houston, people began preparing for this triennial event. The Gathering brings 30,000 youth and adult leaders together for a week of meaning-filled faith formation and fellowship, including many from Nebraska.

This past summer, just over 800 people from more than 60 congregations in the Nebraska Synod attended the Gathering. That reflects an increase from 706 in 2015. The week’s theme was “This Changes Everything,” and every day there was a different “this” to explore: God’s Call, God’s Love, God’s Grace, and God’s Hope. The theme on Sunday was Jesus Changes Everything. Each daily theme was explored at mass gatherings in NRG Stadium, home to the Houston Texans football team. Further theme exploration took place

during a day of service learning; a day of interactive learning that featured a variety of ministries from throughout the ELCA; and Synod Day, when all participants from the Nebraska Synod gathered for worship, faith-forming conversations and fellowship.

When was the last time you had a conversation with a young person, or any person, about how God’s love changes everything or about ways you’ve experienced God’s grace changing everything? This was exactly the opportunity provided to all Gathering participants. Each day there were chances for adult leaders and youth to have meaningful conversations about activities in which they took part

“The Gathering has set us up for faith formation.”

organizing good deeds—it falls short of what the Spirit is there waiting to do. When a congregation remembers its purpose, people don't leave worship the same as when they arrived.

What is your experience of life in your congregation? How often do you leave thinking, "This changes everything"? And if the answer is, "Not very often" (or, God forbid, "never"), what are you prepared to do about it?

This isn't a matter of your pastor preaching thundering sermons or your worship leaders blaring inspirational music—though we could always use a little more of the Spirit's energy. It's a matter of each member who gathers recognizing and sharing what God is up to in their lives and the world. It's a matter of banding together to hold one another up, to talk about our faith and to ask, "What does this mean?" every time we hear the word.

The world is searching for the place and the people where this happens. We can be those people. We are those people when we recognize and share anew that "This Changes Everything!"

Bishop Brian Maas

and about their sense of God's presence within and through those experiences.

The Rev. Breen Sipes of Tri-Saints Parish in Byron and Hardy traveled to the Gathering with two youth—twice as many as in 2015. When asked about the importance of the Gathering in terms of faith formation, she said, "The Gathering has set us up for faith formation." Regarding having a day set aside for serving in the community and then talking about the service, "that's faith formation," Sipes smiled and added, "Synod Day, where we do some intentional Bible study, is faith formation. This reminds the young people that they haven't graduated from Bible study simply because they've been confirmed. It reminds them that the Bible still has something to bring them, and their peers still have something to bring them."

While she knows of the wider church beyond her parish and seeks to connect with it throughout the year, Sipes admitted that taking part in the interactive learning experiences allowed her group's young people to have their "minds and hearts opened to God's presence in places they've never imagined."

It is not only the high school participants who grow from the experience of attending the Gathering. "I get to learn from the high schoolers," Sipes said. "At the Gathering we have the chance to listen to each other really well. They have more to teach me than I have to teach them."

Amy Wagner, the synod's Gathering coordinator, pointed out the significance of the adult leaders who accompany youth to the Youth Gathering: "It's important to know about the countless hours that the primary adult leaders put in. These adults show care and love and are in partnership with the youth. Maybe there are no other opportunities where this kind of connection can happen. A shared experience can bond people together and create lasting memories."

"I hope people realize that the Gathering is not a destination but a starting point."

When asked about her hopes for after the Youth Gathering, Wagner replied, "I hope there's a heart change. It doesn't have to be dramatic. Being at the Gathering may feel like a mountaintop experience, but I hope there is something they can take down from the mountaintop. I hope people realize that the Gathering is not a destination but a starting point."

As fall kicks off, would you like to have a conversation about how you can experience a deeper level of faith formation? Whether people from your congregation or community took part in the Gathering or not, you can explore themes like how God's call, love, grace and hope change everything, and how Jesus does that too. If you would like a partner to explore faith formation for all ages in your setting, contact Lisa Kramme, the synod's director of faith formation, at lisakramme@nebraskasynod.org. 4

Ministries share love & forgiveness with inmates

Prison ministry puts into practice what Jesus tells us to do in sharing God's love and undeserved forgiveness with all people. That is exactly what Followers of Christ, FEAST Ministry, and Bridges to Hope in Nebraska aim to do with the help of the Nebraska Synod, its congregations, the community and volunteers. Each of these ministries provides different services to those who are or have been incarcerated and need support.

Followers of Christ Prison Ministry provides spiritual care, worship services and transitional support to inmates inside the Nebraska Department of Corrections. Worship is held weekly at the State Penitentiary in Lincoln and monthly at the women's prison in York. Bimonthly services are provided at the Omaha Correctional Center, and Bible study is held with death row inmates at Tecumseh State Correctional Institution. Classes are also offered at Community Corrections in Lincoln to help inmates with financial decisions upon release.

This ministry gives volunteers a chance to experience the difference forgiveness and acceptance make in the lives of the incarcerated. When the men and women say, "Thanks for coming," they mean it!

Most in the program are incarcerated for less than four years. As they prepare for release, many go to Community Corrections for transition. They are then directed to the other programs in Lincoln for a church home and help with basic necessities upon release.

FEAST Ministry (Friends, Eating, And Singing, Studying, Sharing, Together) helps reintegrate inmates into society with Christian fellowship and a goal to become self-sufficient through a responsible Christian example. Our Saviour's Lutheran in Lincoln was searching for a way to help, so members brought a group from Community Corrections in Lincoln to the church for worship and a meal. The program now has grown from 65 to 70 attendees per week.

Anyone can help by becoming a transportation sponsor, cooking or serving a Sunday meal, lead-

ing a study group, sharing a hobby, mentoring or providing financial support.

Bridges to Hope is a service for inmates soon to be or recently released who are making the transition to a productive life on the outside. Integrating back into the community requires a place to live and other basic needs. The program provides them with basic household and personal items at no cost. With the support of community members and generous donors, Bridges to Hope assisted more than 700 men and women in 2016—a significant increase from 2015. Through collaboration with other community agencies, it offers additional resources and makes referrals to other support systems in the community.

Bridges to Hope relies on funding from churches, the synod, other foundations, and private and in-kind donations. It recently opened Bud's Five & Dime thrift store to help generate sustainable revenue for the program.

The three ministries also raise funds together through an annual Freed for Life Banquet. This year, it will be held Friday, Nov. 9, 5:30-8 p.m., at Sheridan Lutheran Church, Lincoln. The cost is \$25 per person or \$200 for a table of seven. The keynote speaker will be Shon Hopwood, an appellate lawyer and professor at Georgetown University Law Center. He became known as a jailhouse lawyer who served time in prison for bank robberies in Nebraska. While in prison, he spent time in the law library and became an accomplished U.S. Supreme Court practitioner by the time he left in 2009. The event also includes a "Prison Ministry Fair" with other agencies and organizations presenting their work and volunteer opportunities.

For more information on Followers of Christ, contact the Rev. Bob Bryan, the synod's director of prison ministry, at 402-640-7145 or go to its Facebook page at [facebook.com/FollowersofChristELCA](https://www.facebook.com/FollowersofChristELCA). To learn about FEAST, contact Our Saviour's at 402-483-4126 or jriedmanoslc@gmail.com. For information on Bridges to Hope, call 402-420-5696 or visit bridgestohopene.org. ♣