

2012 Convention Report of the Stewardship/Human Care Committee

In the past years, as always, the most productive work done in the district is by individual congregations, pastors and people who have been stirred to care for others and be the best of stewards in God's harvest field.

Parish Nursing has long been an opportunity for congregations to be involved with the Human care of members. Dianne Thompson has continued to work with nurses in our congregations who desire specific training and certification. She has yearly attended the Conference on parish Nursing nationally and has engaged members in education through grants made available to our district. The funds available for such training may not always be there. This opportunity should be commended to every congregation and our active or retired member nurses challenged with this opportunity. Do you have a nurse in your congregation who might be able to carry human care in Christ's name?

Prison Ministry: The total population of the state of Montana has been determined to be at or slightly above 1,000,000 people. Nearly 13,000 members of this population are under the supervision of the Department of Corrections. Of this 13,000 men and women, 22%, or nearly 2900 people are in secure confinement or prisons within the state of Montana. The largest population of inmates is at Montana State Prison in Deer Lodge which is home to almost 1500 men. The remaining populations of secure housing (other than county jails) are the Montana Women's Prison in Billings (pop. 265) and additional men's facilities in Shelby (pop. 564), Glendive (pop. 144), and Great Falls (pop. 152). There are also youth detention centers in Miles City (Pine Hills for boys) and Boulder (Riverside for girls).

Rev. Jay Reinke, Concordia, Williston, has developed a brief but concise curriculum for teaching inmates the basics of the Christian faith from a specifically Lutheran perspective. He has presented this class since 2007 in a series of events titled "Christ Crucified Christian Retreats" for inmates at Montana State Prison in Deer Lodge; Crossroads Correctional Facility in Shelby, and Montana Women's Prison in Billings. Several other Montana District pastors including Rev. Al Kasten and Rev. Bob Mitchell, St. John, Deer Lodge; Rev. Ray Larson, Stevensville, Rev. Mark Schultz, Zion, Chinook; Rev. Mark Christensen, First, Missoula; and District President, Rev. Terry Forke, Trinity Harlowton along with a variety of Laymen have assisted Pastor Reinke in the effort to bring the Good News of Salvation through Christ to those in prison.

Rev. Mitchell and St. John, Deer Lodge, Layman Dave Streufert conducts regular Bible Studies and services at MSP in Deer Lodge. These services along with the CCC Retreats are the extent of the exposure that Montana inmates get to confessional Lutheran Christian Theology. Pastors Reinke and Mitchell will attend the LCMS Conference on Prison Ministry in St. Louis in September in order to get a better understanding of methods for serving this Mission field.

Recognizing that those inmates in Montana's prisons and jails have as much need to hear the comforting Word of forgiveness as those of us who have the opportunity to occupy a pew every week, the Stewardship and Human Care Committee would like to thank those pastors and laymen who have taken the initiative to serve this population. The Committee also encourages all pastors in the District to actively serve those in the correctional facilities near their cities and towns. The call is clear, "When I was in prison, you visited me!" Such a worthy goal of prison visitation and connection should be encouraged for members of all of our congregations. Is God moving you to be involved?

Disaster Response and “Mercy Missions” have also grown to be great opportunities for our churches to show the love of Christ. In His name this past year members of half a dozen churches travelled to help in Minot North Dakota after flooding there. Inspired by Warren Ellis and Pastor Maxwell nearly 30 people participated from the Flathead in clean-up efforts there last fall. A dozen folks from Grace Lutheran in Hamilton had travelled in August to “muck out” and clean 3 different homes. Our congregations at Sidney and Williston and Billings have also been active in serving the great human need with floods and current oil field activity. We enjoyed a joint venture with the Missions committee traveling to the Crow and Northern Cheyenne reservations to pound nails and roll paint. There have been great opportunities to build with Lutheran Disaster Response, Habitat for Humanity and Thrivent Builds in Biloxi, Greensburg and numerous locations after tornados or floods; the congregation at Grace, Hamilton has enjoyed these immensely. First in Missoula has made numerous trips to Mexico to help an orphanage there, and I suspect there are many other congregations who have made such trips that I have not heard about. Such mercy missions and disaster response efforts should be shared with other circuit and district congregations so that we could to involve all of our congregations and provide avenues for our people to serve. The lay people so involved should be commended! Lay people are the hidden treasures to help us respond to disasters; Corby and Shannon Dickerson attended last year’s Synodical Disaster Response Meetings, a recent presentation by Rev. Glenn Merritt in Missoula last spring and a meeting in Rapid City helped us think regionally. The real story here is in every one of God’s people planning trips and helping neighbors near or far. There are many folks who may not teach but joyfully work with hammers and hands in the name of Jesus Christ.

Life issues have been important as always over these past years. There has been and remains a rallying cry for petitions and involvement to roll back the judicial activism that seemed to open a door for assisted suicide in Montana. Bradley Williams has amassed months of tireless work and presence to bring the issue to our people and people across the state attending 7 county fairs (47-12 hour days worth) and countless congressional hearings. Our congregations have been active in efforts to close abortion clinics; members and pastors who stood quietly in the middle of the night to pray for it. Many of you know one of Kalispell’s clinics closed. Other congregations made crosses for display representing the 50 million babies aborted since Roe v Wade. Recently the strong stands taken by our District and Synodical Presidents on life and religious liberty should be commended. Again the individual efforts of congregations moved to stand for life will make the difference.

Through our own district reorganization stewardship has become part of our emphasis; Rev. Kevin Peterson recently attended conferences concerning the care and use of God-given resources recently. He has helpful suggestions in regards to those things. Congregations in present economic times should be bold to see the abundance of resources at had and so move faithfully to give first and proportionately to District and on to missions. Our District congregations should be commended for their earnest demonstration to give funds in a generous, unqualified and unrestricted manner.

Human Care and Stewardship are areas that are too huge to distill into a committee. They are the work of every congregation and we simply encourage you to let the Lord lead your people and try to stay out of the way when God is stirring people! It is impossible to list all the people who have been involved with human care efforts, but I hope we can connect with each other faithfully. It is very important that you share your experience and your opportunities and activities with each other in circuits and our district. There are numerous things that need mention, deaf ministry, blind ministry, care for developmentally disabled, homelessness, senior care and more. We could have a resource

point person for all of these in our district. Congregations cannot be islands here; such beautiful things happen when just a hand full of people get up, stand up and stretch out their hand. In the next months wouldn't it be wonderful if our district gave birth to a dozen men and women who stirred by the Spirit are bold to say...if you want to go, do, stand, move, speak, heal, pound, teach, paint, prepare or build...talk to me, go with us! These point people for Human Care and Stewards for Life would prove invaluable. If you are one of those people, talk to me!

Open your doors and your hearts to others who may be interested from other congregations. People in the world understand two things simply...neighbors helping neighbors and money. In these two items we have a medium to paint the cross of Jesus Christ for our whole world to see. The word of God does the real work, but hammers are loud, the touch of a healing hand is felt deeply, even the meager vile of oil and jar of flour prove powerful when God directs them. God bless us as we continue to be the BODY of Christ by Word and Sacrament and his HAND in deed.

Respectfully,

Rev. Vern Sandersfeld

Chair-Stewardship/ Human care