

Opportunity House

A church 'without walls'

By Ernie Hinojosa

As director for evangelical mission with the North Carolina Synod, I partner with our bishop and synod staff to serve 200 plus congregations. One of my primary responsibilities is in the area of outreach for both new and existing congregations. As you might expect from a mission-minded synod like ours, our office gets regular inquiries from leaders looking for new approaches to outreach.

To be honest, many of these inquiries are accompanied by a fair measure of frustration as outreach strategies of the past fall flat. Leaders want to try new things, but they are faced with a common list of apparent obstacles to new ministry:

- **Lack of funds.** It's hard to find resources for new things when you're struggling to keep the lights on and the pastor paid.
- **Lack of young people.** Older folks are often less vigorous than they used to be, while younger people can be too busy, uninterested or absent.
- **Poor demographics.** Outside of a few suburbs, most of our congregations are located in areas of slow or no population growth—even outright population decline.

What to do?

About a year ago I became acquainted with a ministry that appears to be thriving despite sharing many of these obstacles to outreach. Opportunity House in Kannapolis, N.C., a joint ministry of the ELCA and the United Methodist Church, may offer hope to the frustrated.

The idea for Opportunity House arose four years ago during a Bible study at Midway UMC in Kannapolis. A group of about a dozen retired men were studying Acts. They noticed the bold yet humble way that Jesus and his disciples served others in need. What would happen if this bunch of "old guys," as they called themselves, did likewise? They determined to find out.

The men committed to doing simple things for those down on their luck: offering transportation to those without a vehicle, assisting unemployed people who need clothing for job interviews, helping homeless people find a hot meal, lending a hand to people evicted from apartments with no one to help them move, and many other simple, inexpensive, practical things. It doesn't take much money or know-how to do such things—only some time and a desire to care for people in need.



Intern Christian Harmon (right), a member of Calvary Lutheran Church, Concord, N.C., and a student at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte, and Dan Talbert, volunteer director of Opportunity House.

After each encounter, they would pray for their new friends and invite them to join the Bible study. Join they did.

Today there is still a Tuesday Bible study, along with a Thursday evening meal and worship service called "Narrow Gate," to go along with the usual everyday helping ministries. Close to 200 people attend Narrow Gate. They have literally run out of room for new people, but the Lord finds a way to pack them into the Midway UMC fellowship hall.

There is no paid staff and little money. Most everything they have and give away comes from donations. Opportunity House is 100 percent lay-led, with a 70-year-old retired schoolteacher named Dan Talbert as volunteer director. He may have debili-

Hinojosa is director for evangelical mission in the North Carolina Synod.

Continued on page C

North Carolina



Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary

Proud past, exciting future

There is an energetic buzz around the campus of Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in Columbia, S.C. In classrooms and worship, on the sidewalks and in student apartments, the campus is celebrating its proud past and looking to the future with shared excitement.

The 2011-12 academic year marks the 100th anniversary of the opening of the seminary's campus in Columbia. Founded in 1830, the campus moved around the American South throughout the 19th century, but it made its home in Columbia in 1911 where it has thrived—expanding from a student body of about 20 in 1911 to almost 150 in 2011.

“This is a big year at Southern Seminary,” said Marcus Miller, president of the school. “We are celebrating 100 years on our campus here in Columbia, and at the same time we look forward to serving the church for the next 100 years and beyond.”

Future plans include a growing partnership with Lenoir-Rhyne University in Hickory, N.C. In April 2011, the two schools announced a planned merger through which Southern would serve as the university's school of theology and continue to operate as a seminary of the ELCA in Columbia. By becoming part of the university structure, the seminary will be in a position to thrive in mission, expand its programs and better serve the church into the future.

The trustees and administrators of each school are currently studying every aspect of the proposal, with summer 2012 as the earliest possible effective date for a completed merger.

Meanwhile, the students on campus today are also looking to the future with excitement. The senior class is only a few months away from graduation and being sent into the church to serve. With last year's

Class change time at Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, Columbia, S.C.

graduating class spread across the country in churches from the Dakotas to the Carolinas and from Massachusetts to Texas, this year's class is eager to begin their own ministries.

“It's exciting to see how the seminary journey has nurtured and prepared our class the past three years,” said Jonathan Boynton, senior class president and a master of divinity candidate from North Carolina. “I am excited to see what God has in store for us as we are sent into the wider church.”

For generations, students like Boynton and his classmates have turned to Southern Seminary to prepare them for ministry. It's a proud history that is evident from the moment you step onto the seminary's campus. The exciting new horizons for the seminary will build on this proud tradition, ensuring that generations to come will have the leaders they need to see Christ's kingdom flourish. □

Andrew Boozer

Boozer is director of the Enrollment Services Center and director of communications at Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, Columbia, S.C.



In class at LTSS.

Practice Discipleship

A new way to grow youth ministry through the Gathering

- 92 percent of young people aren't deeply engaged in a faith that impacts their daily life.
- 4 out of 5 youth leave the church after confirmation.
- The majority of adults aren't literate in the basic faith stories.

(Source: National Study of Youth and Religion and Barna Research.)

We can do better than this. Recent research gives us hope despite the staggering statistics. There are effective ways to grow faith in young people, and *it begins with you, the adult leader.*

The ELCA Youth Gathering, in partnership with synods and other partners who have a stake in equipping adult leaders for ministry with young people, will offer youth ministry training opportunities for all adult leaders and congregations in the ELCA—regardless of participation in the Gathering.

- Our Gathering coach, Liz Fisher, has been equipped to lead training workshops and retreats in your area.
- Webinars will be offered live or to download.
- All training sessions will be available at the 2012 ELCA Youth Ministry Network Extravaganza in New Orleans, Feb. 8-12, 2012.

These training sessions will focus on youth ministry theory, skills and practices. They are not Gathering specific. Topics include Lutheran Theology, How Lutherans Read the Bible, Your Role as a Leader, Strategic Planning, Leading a Small Group, Faith Conversations with Teenagers, Planning and Preparing for Events of Any Size and Type, and Planning for

the Unexpected.

- **If you work with young people** as a pastor, youth director or volunteer.
- **If you know young people**—in your community, your congregation, your home.
- **If you care for the faith lives of our young people**—as people of God living out our baptismal promises.

The ELCA Youth Gathering is committed to walking with all congregations and adult leaders to begin a deeper conversation of discipleship with young people. We hope you join

this journey. Practice Discipleship is one of three learning initiatives offered through the ELCA Youth Gathering.

In preparation for these trainings, you are encouraged to read *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* by Kenda Creasy Dean.



Webinars

All events are held on Sundays, beginning at 3 p.m. Eastern time.

- *Strategic Planning*—Nov. 20.
- *Leading a Small Group*—Dec. 4.
- *Faith Conversations*—Dec. 18.
- *Preparing for the Unexpected; When it All Doesn't Go According to Script*—Jan 8, 2012.

Second cycle:

- *Lutheran Theology: How God is Working in the World*—Jan. 22, 2012.
- *Lutheran Theology: How Lutherans Read Scripture*—Feb. 5
- *Your Role as Leader*—March 4.
- *Strategic Planning*—March 18.
- *Leading a Small Group*—April 1.
- *Faith Conversations*—April 15.
- *Preparing for the Unexpected;*

When it All Doesn't Go According to Script—May 6.

For more information, visit www.lutheranyouth.org; contact Tammy Jones West (Tammy@lutheranyouth.org or 828-308-1362); or Liz Fisher (lizzie93076@hotmail.com). □

Tammy Jones West
West, an associate in ministry, is the youth and family ministry coordinator for the North Carolina Synod.

Continued from page A

tating rheumatoid arthritis, but he has more fire in his belly than most people half his age. A pastor assists from time to time.

Thanks to a grant from the Home Mission Foundation of the North Carolina Synod, the ELCA will have an “intern” serving part-time at Opportunity House. His name is Christian Harmon, a member of Calvary Lutheran Church, Concord, N.C., and a student at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte. Harmon has been a volunteer leader at Opportunity House almost since its inception. He will now be formally tasked with learning the ins and outs of the ministry and with preparing to teach others, within the ELCA and beyond, how to do likewise.

If you are a church member, lay leader, church staff or pastor looking for a way to renew your congregation, and if you're willing to serve “the last, the least and the lost” in simple yet important ways, this ministry idea may be for you. Email me at ehinojosa@nc.lutheran.org and I'll be glad to give you more details. □

North Carolina

Grace Lutheran sends two women on overseas missions

Elizabeth Daubert and Nicolette Filson, both recent college graduates and members of Grace Lutheran Church, Hendersonville, N.C., have been selected to participate in the ELCA Young Adults in Global Mission Program (YAGM).

YAGM accepts about 50 young adults each year to participate in volunteer assignments with churches, schools or social service ministries in



Daubert



Filson

Southern Africa, United Kingdom, Slovakia/Hungary, Argentina/Uruguay, Mexico, Malaysia, and Jerusalem/West Bank.

To participate, Daubert and Filson had to raise about \$5,000, primarily through donations from Grace's members.

During worship services on Aug. 14, Daubert and Filson were commissioned and received special

prayers and blessings from Greg Williams and Ken Langsdorf, pastors of Grace, for their mission trips.

Daubert is one of 12 volunteers who will serve in Southern Africa from August 2011 through July 2012 with the ELCA Ministry Upstream and Downwind (M.U.D.) program. Assigned to the Mabopane Township, outside of Pretoria, South Africa, she

will be involved with community-based HIV/AIDS outreach throughout rural and urban areas of the country, as well as in neighboring Botswana. South Africa has recorded more than 5.6 million infections.

She will assist with church-based HIV/AIDS projects (visitation of those infected and affected by the disease, distribution of food parcels, medicine collection and distribution, etc.) and serve in child-care facilities.

"I am thrilled to serve in this manner in the coming year and to hopefully touch and improve lives of those suffering with HIV/AIDS," she said. "I hope that this year gives me greater insight into what lies ahead for me and will allow me to grow in all aspects of my life."

Daubert graduated cum laude with honors from the South Carolina Honors College at the University of South Carolina, Columbia, in May 2011 with a bachelor's in biology and minor in medical humanities. Following her year of YAGM service, she hopes to attend graduate school for public health.

Her long-term plans include additional international volunteer service focused on global health issues.

The daughter of Scott and Pam Daubert of Hendersonville, she speaks French and enjoys running, cooking, and hiking in her spare time.

Volunteering in Costa Rica

Filson traveled to Costa Rica in August to begin a six-month English teaching position with the Costa Rican Lutheran Church (ILCO) in San José. This volunteer position gives her the opportunity to serve many of ILCO's faith communities in and around San José.

ILCO wanted to start an English program for some time. Filson is the first volunteer to start the effort and to lay the foundation for the cur-

riculum, scheduling and assessment of student progress. She will work mostly with youth in each community ranging from preschoolers to teenagers. Her responsibilities include establishing the needs and goals of each community in regards to English and how it can empower them, while discovering the best strategies and lesson plans for each group of students.

Filson feels called to take on this position because she has always had a passion for travel and cultural immersion. With an interest in Latin American culture, she traveled during high school and college to Chile, the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica on mission trips sponsored by Grace. There she taught English in schools and orphanages.

"This volunteer work in which I have participated since Meals on Wheels in elementary school has taught me the joy of having a servant's heart and the blessings it brings to you and those around you," she said. "Considering the friendships and love you get in return, it's not hard to want to do mission work like this."

Filson received her bachelor's degree in secondary English education in 2008 and her master's in English with a concentration in linguistics in 2011 from North Carolina State University, Raleigh. "These degrees have given me knowledge of teaching strategies, curriculum writing, and classroom management and, together with my life experience and understanding of English and Spanish, will serve me well in this missionary assignment," she said.

When Filson returns from Costa Rica she hopes to teach high school English in North Carolina, with the possibility of pursuing a doctoral degree in English education. She is the daughter of Kevin and Sue Filson of Hendersonville. □