



Congregational Life

Congregational Life Centre—Consultants to Congregations 780 619-0386

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Changing with Our Youth

Centre Staff talk with Mervin Gallant

If you want to meet someone excited about their work, talk to Mervin Gallant. "A ministry with youth has been life-giving. While I get tired," he confesses, "I have not regretted it for a minute."

Mervin's career for the 18 years up to this point had mainly been as the minister in various congregations. With two opportunities before him, he chose the role of youth minister — working as part of a team with Ross Smillie at St. Andrew's Church, Lacombe.

A visit one Sunday last year told us St. Andrew's had a thriving contingent of children and teenage youth as part of the congregation. In a time when so many congregations have few children and almost no teenagers, we wanted to find out what made St. Andrew's thrive.

The answer according to Mervin Gallant: "The congregation had a vision. They knew Lacombe was growing. They were not afraid to do what it took to grow along with the community." When he was called, the congregation had just finished renovating the building. The bills

were only half paid when they made the decision to hire a second full time person. Rev. Ross Smillie's leadership influenced the willingness to do what was needed to make that happen. Now Mervin spends at least 80% of his time working with children and youth.

The congregation was also willing to put the financial resources behind its youth program. Making a connection with youth not only takes time but also costs money. The church yearly budget now includes \$500 for leadership training — both for youth themselves and leadership of youth. There is \$700 budgeted for youth programming and \$300 for youth pastoral care — taking youth out for lunch or out after school. "Having a relationship with the kids is the big thing," Mervin attests. The results are there. They were up to 40 last year in their Jr. High group, with members bringing friends because of what was happening.

Mervin finds that youth are just as busy as their parents.

The upper end of Jr. High and certainly High School students are into dance, skating, piano lessons, not to mention part time jobs. Trying to fit something at the church into their busy schedule is a



Mervin Gallant

Our theme this issue:

Responding to change ...

... by changing the response.



challenge.

The church's Halloween dance was one indicator. Last year there were 30, but this year quite a few less. The problem — busy schedules. The answer — schedule more events so that kids can fit the church into their schedule rather than the other way around. This year the Halloween dance was on Friday, the kids were taken to Riverbend on Saturday night, then to a Linea Good concert in Red Deer on Sunday. In total, 20 teenagers were involved, but spread over three nights. That kind of programming takes staff time, and a willingness to work together with other churches in the area. "I can't do all the programming," says Mervin, "but I can help them connect with events elsewhere."

Senior High programming is more of a challenge. The Sr. High group can drop to three or four, but then along comes a new batch of Jr. High graduates and the group goes up to 15. Youth from the congregation participated in Alberta and Northwest Conference and in Red Deer Presbytery events. "At first it was hard to convince the youth," says Mervin. "Now they get quite excited."

Part of Confirmation is done in co-operation with another congregation. Between two study weekends at the church, they do six activities in the broader community. Events included walking a labyrinth and a wilderness experience to echo Jesus' time alone in the wilderness after his baptism. The youth spent a morning at the Bissell Centre in Edmonton, then went on a walking tour of the inner city in the afternoon. Visits included a mosque in Red Deer and a Pentecostal Church in Lacombe. "Now the younger kids have come to expect that, and

are looking forward to it. They are getting more and more used to going outside for events and experiences."

Workshop Rotation Children's Ministry

St. Andrew's is becoming well known for its Workshop Rotation Church School. They call it "Son-light City." It features a theatre room with real theatre seats, a computer lab, a drama room, a music room, and an exploration room, among other features.

How is it going? "Workshop Rotation is, in some ways good. The challenge is always finding enough leadership." At St. Andrew's they do six week rotation periods. The first two weeks concentrate on telling the story. Weeks 4, 5, and 6 ask what the story means to you, to the community, and to the world. "Every six weeks we try to find another set of leaders," Mervin confessed, "16 leaders every six weeks." The program is great, with the kids really enjoying it. They come out knowing the stories, because they spend six weeks with each story. For Mervin and Sharon (the Sunday school coordinator), however, it is often several weeks into a rotation before they have a full compliment of volunteer staff.

Youth and Sunday Worship

There is a team of three adults who work with the Sr. Highs on Sunday morning, and another team with the Jr. Highs, with a commitment to be there for the full year. That way, one leader can be away and the other two provide continuity.

The young people want to have their own



(Changes and Youth: Continued from page 2)

group every week, and are working at playing a major role in the congregation's worship service once a month. What is coming up is a drama based on a true story that happened to a girl in a nearby town. The girl told her story to the group, and one of the kids wrote it up as a play. It is about a girl walking the lonely road of teenage life who gets into a crowd using crystal meth. Her friends don't know how to help her, and walk on by. Her parents don't want to know anything bad is happening to their little girl, so they walk on by. It is a youth group that gives her the support she needs. The play closes with the young people joining hands with the people in the front row of pews, calling on the whole community for their support.

It was a shocking realization to discover how big the drug problem was in the area. They brought in ADAC to do a general drug-alcohol awareness session. Next they brought in a person who had run a drug house at one point. She had been off drugs for two years, and had been spending her energy telling youth, "Don't do it." Next they heard from a family who were dealing with FAS, foetal alcohol syndrome. What young people do, not only has consequences for them, but for the next generation as well.

Your Best Advice

What would Mervin's advice be to a congregation that wants to thrive. "Don't be afraid to invest in your youth. Some churches may have strong volunteers who can do it, who have the energy for a youth program. But the reality is that volunteers have their own lives." There is no replacement for a staff person who is there full time for the congregation's young people. "Without that time, you can't build the relationships that make the program work. And you need the relationships."

His last word was about self care. "I do a retreat every January or February. This year I'm going to Naramata to focus on soul tending for youth ministry."

Joyce's Rant

Over the past year as I have continued to read and explore the topics that challenge me and the church, I have read Stephen Covey (*The 8th Habit*), Jim Collins (*Good to Great*), *Good Impressions*, *The Power of Asset Mapping*, *Finding our Way*, *Selling Swimsuits in the Arctic* ... just to name the ones I have found most powerful.

What I find most exciting and most discouraging is that we wrote *Wings Like Eagles* in 2000, and our theories and theology are basically the same as we hear these other authors sharing.

It is exciting because it supports what we believe is important for us as Christians to do in our current times. It is disappointing because so few congregations and organizations are actually doing the basic work that it takes to transform to meet today's needs.

If you haven't read it yet, we recommend *Wings Like Eagles* as a foundation for exploring possibilities for your congregation.

- Joyce Madsen

Editorial



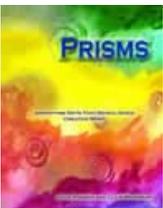
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Catching the Bethel Beat

by Don Retson, Reprinted from The Edmonton Journal



With four weekly services, a Lutheran church in Sherwood Park hits all the right notes.

SHERWOOD PARK - Carla Cuglietta was studying in Quebec City several years ago when a Quebecer started talking about "a really cool church" in Alberta, where she was from.

Back then, Cuglietta had never heard of Bethel Lutheran Church in Sherwood Park.

But she figured that any church known halfway across the country might just be worth taking a quick look-see.

When she did eventually check out a worship service at Bethel, Cuglietta wasn't disappointed. She felt instantly among friends.

"It's just a really upbeat, uplifting service," Cuglietta says of what's known as the "express service" at Bethel on Sundays at 9:45 a.m.

"The pastors there -- Pastor Marv and Pastor Matt -- are just so open. It's almost like it's your friend doing the service."

These days, after attending the express service, Cuglietta, 27, enjoys going out for a meal with several of the young adults from the congregation and getting involved in some great discussions.

"That's what keeps us all going back because we have such a strong network of friends from there now," she says. "Pastor

Matt comes too."

Unlike other churches she's attended, Cuglietta isn't the least bit shy when it comes to inviting friends to Bethel.

Everyone at Bethel is so welcoming, she says, recalling, for instance the time one of her friends who'd never been inside a church before showed up with his ball cap on backwards. She says father-and son pastors Marv and Matt Ziprick loved it that her friend felt comfortable enough to do that.

"Everybody's included in everything," adds Cuglietta. "Even The Lord's Prayer is on PowerPoint so nobody feels inadequate" if they don't know the words. It's in large part because of its great success in attracting non-traditional Lutherans like Cuglietta that Bethel Lutheran has staged a resurrection of sorts.

Shortly after he arrived here in May 1987, Pastor Marv Ziprick was told that at the rate Bethel was losing people, the church would likely shut its doors within a decade or so.

Instead, this past Sept. 1, the church embarked on its second major expansion in five years.

It's now in the process of adding 9,500 square feet of space to its church at 298 Bethel Drive in Sherwood Park. The congregation moved into its current 18,000-square-foot building in May 2000.

Bethel's amazing transformation is causing church observers to sit up and take notice.

In a recent edition of Congregational Life, church consultant Joyce Madsen recalls hearing about Bethel through the grapevine and visiting there one Sunday two years ago.

"There were more teenagers in church than you could count," wrote Madsen, who was also impressed with the number of activities going on for every member of the family.

Today, Bethel serves 1,700 to 1,800 people, a nice jump from the 65 people Ziprick once counted at a weekly worship service in 1987.

A large percentage of the congregation is made up of people who either started off in other church denominations or didn't have a church background.



Contemporary music director Normay Wiebe, centre, leads on keyboard at Bethel Lutheran Church, where 90 musicians are available at different times to play in the church's worship services.

Rick Kilford, 54, is among the former. About 31/2 years ago, Kilford attended a funeral service at Bethel. He was bowled over when Ziprick senior talked about a "loving, caring and forgiving" God.

Kilford said he'd never heard God described that way. Now a member of the congregation, Kilford feels he's doing folks a favour whenever he invites or personally takes them to Bethel.

"I can't stress enough that pastor Matt and Marv are so positive," he says.

Members of the congregation weren't always so inclined to sing the church's praises.

Back in 1987, when Bethel was located in a smaller building on 98th Avenue near Ottewell Road, only hardcore Lutherans attended the lone Sunday service.

In a recent interview, Ziprick said born-and-raised Lutherans would tell him they liked the traditional worship format, the chanting and liturgy.

"But when they started talking about inviting people who had little or no connection with any church, they felt uncomfortable because they knew we were speaking a different language. They would feel awkward."

The coup de grace was delivered by Ziprick's three own school-age children.

Asked by dad how they would feel about bringing their friends to Bethel, all three confessed they really wouldn't be comfortable doing that. The writing was clearly on the wall: change or die.

The congregation embraced change. After a Bible study focused on the purpose of their congregation, a mission statement was drafted.

That was followed by a period of experimentation with different styles of worship and music.

Ziprick knew the church was on the right path when older members would make comments to him like: "If we had been using this music and this style of worship, my children and grandchildren would probably be worshipping with us."

By 1992, the church was bursting at the seams and looking for larger facilities.

Although contemporary worship services are no longer the novelty they once were, three

of Bethel's four services, including one on Saturday evening, are contemporary.

Drama, puppet presentations, video clips, various interactive elements and, of course, non-traditional music are all part of the worship mix at Bethel.

Unlike most churches, there isn't a core group of musicians who play every week.

When she was hired to run the music for its contemporary services, Normay Wiebe was told she'd probably need to bring in outside musicians as there weren't many at Bethel.

That's not what she found after putting an announcement in the church bulletin saying she was looking for folks to get involved in putting on the worship music.

Not everybody who signed up is orchestra-level in terms of their ability, although there are a few of those, too. But for Wiebe, passion counts as much as precision.

"I think we provide a pretty non-threatening place for them to be," she says of the 100 or so people that provide a broad range of music for the three contemporary services.

Ziprick agrees that the high degree of involvement and leadership shown by regular members is vital to the church's continuing success.

He knows not everyone is comfortable with change. Some former members felt the church should stick with doing a traditional liturgical service out of the hymnal.

As for Ziprick, there are no regrets. He notes that a survey done at the church three years ago showed more than half of its worshipping community was under 30 years of age.

Among that group are young people with no previous church connection. Ziprick says they often start off saying they're not interested in church. Then they come and start asking questions.

"Those kinds of things excite me," says Ziprick. "Probably this is the most exciting era of my ministry that I've ever been in."

Our thanks to Don Retson and The Edmonton Journal for permission to reprint this article from Saturday, October 15, 2005.

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No Young People — So We Changed

An interview with Marv Ziprick
Pastor, Bethel Lutheran Church

Story by Centre Staff

It is a congregation full of young people, young adults, and children — with a healthy mix of seniors. We were intrigued. What makes this congregation thrive, when so many main-line congregations are aging and in decline?

Marv Ziprick agreed to share the journey with us. At his covenanting service, a little over 200 people filled the sanctuary. Imagine his surprise when on Sunday morning there were only 60 people in the pews, and most of them were over 60. There were no young people. There were names on the role, but they were not coming. Marv had been taking a doctoral course in Chicago on leadership. He challenged the Church Council: “If we don’t do something, we will be closing our doors.”

Bethel used to be on 98 Avenue across the river from Concordia College. They had some connection with students as a result. “My wife and I started inviting young adults to our house on Sunday afternoons. The initial group was small, 10 or 12. They did bible study and other activities.” Marv had a question for them: “What would keep you coming to this congregation.” The insight was: “We need young adults planning things for young adults.”

Marv did a study of the differences between generations, and started making presentations to the Council and the congregation. What are Boomers like, the “X” generation? What do they look to the church for? What about their music, their faith?

“Then I held four different services. I picked the Builders first. Then the Boomers. Then continued with Generation-X and Generation-Y.

Some of the older people said if they had worship like this when their children were young, they would probably still be coming to church.”

One thing that was holding them back was the facility. It was an older building and not designed for modern

ministry. They explored expanding on the site, but the only land available was a former gas station. They did not want to touch that. In 1992 they decided to relocate. “It was a painful time,” Marv said. “Some wanted to relocate, some did not. We were at that for five years, working through it, looking for land.”

In 1997 they moved to Sherwood Park and worshipped in Festival Place for three years. They did not have land when they moved, but knew they were in the right place. Sherwood Park was growing, and most of that growth was young families. “During those three years we learned lots about being a church for people, and learned to be flexible.” They got tired of hauling 200 hymn books every week, which is when they went to overhead projection of the hymns. They did find land, and moved into their new building in 2000, only to find it was already too small. Construction of additional space is now underway.

Leadership Style

We know from past research how important leadership is in moving a congregation forward. Marv Ziprick’s style is “to get people involved and owning the ministry.” What he discovered is that as people take ownership, more and more come forward, and then they start bringing their friends.

“Someone asked me to define leadership. It is best defined with one word, influence.” It is a matter of building the relationships that lead to influence with people.

The leadership role also means removing barriers that get in the way. An example? “Every church has standing committees,” Marv told us. “If you want to kill an idea, all you do is pass it to a standing committee. They are called standing committees because they stand in the way of good ideas.”

The practice at Bethel is to keep a few standing committees, but when they want to get something done, they form a study committee. Recommendations are then given to an action committee for implementation.

Leaders help to create an atmosphere within the broader community that things are positive. “So often people have a defeatist attitude. ‘We are too small,’ they say. We don’t



give ourselves enough credit for the gifts that we have, and don't give God enough credit."

The secret to moving ahead? "The vision must be big enough. If the vision is big, we need others to be involved and we need God to be involved." When that happens, says Marv, "God just shows up!"

The Naysayers

How does one deal with the opposition? It comes whenever there is change, as sure as night follows day.

"There were some who tried to sabotage things," Marv told us. "It was painful. Others were devious and worked behind the scenes. Some wanted me to pack up my bags and go back where I came from. Others just dragged their feet"

Marv's response with some of them was to meet over coffee. "Where are your children worshipping? What about your grandkids?" he would ask them. He knew they were not worshipping anywhere.

It was a matter of slowly working with people. Some came on board, and some didn't. When the vote happened in 1992, some 80% of the congregation supported the move.

Planning

The congregation's leadership take planning seriously. At their planning retreats they develop goals, and review those regularly. They call their governing body "The Parish Planning Council" in order to keep a focus on the fact that planning is important to keep the church moving. That Council has nine people. "If you have too many people," Marv told us, "it takes too long to work through issues."

The staff has grown with the congregation. Marv was joined by his son Matt as a pastor. They have added a full time youth leader plus half time music leader for the three contemporary services and a quarter time music person for the blended/traditional service. The secretary has become the office administrator and a full-time secretary was hired.

Technology plays a role, but it is secondary to building personal relationships. They use e-mail and the Internet a lot, and have cut down on mailings while increasing their ability to keep in touch with people. They are working on putting sermons on I-pod. That is in the future.

They keep learning from the new people who are coming to be part of the congregation, and responding to their needs. They are thinking about developing a coffee area seating 100 people around tables. It would be a place

where people could meet to talk and pray together. "Young adults and teens are looking for relationships in which they can engage one another."

One of the ways they engage is through small groups. People currently have a choice between 11 support groups, 14 growth opportunity groups, and 13 service and fellowship groups.

A Culture of Appreciation

It started almost by accident. One of the four RCMP officers who were killed was the son of a Lutheran pastor. Marv decided to ask all law enforcement officers to rise and have it recognized how they put themselves into difficult situations day after day. "These people are living out their faith in their vocations. I got a hug of affirmation right after that service."

As a result, they decided to choose one Sunday each month to appreciate a vocation. They have had a Sunday for teachers and one for health care workers.

It was our impression that the willingness to affirm one another goes far deeper, and has a great deal to do with the feeling of warmth and acceptance that permeates this congregation. There is a recognition that the role of a congregation is to prepare people for a life of service. Marv puts it this way: "There is a difference between 'church work' and the 'work of the church.' Church work is ushering and what happens in the building. But the most important work is the work of the church, which happens every day as people go about their lives."

You can contact Marv Ziprick by e-mail:
zip@bethelchurch.com



Why not launch a Small Group Ministry in your congregation? Small groups are proving to be the key to spiritual growth in current members and integrating newcomers. Contact us at 780-619-0386, or by e-mail, clair@congregationallife.com, for more information about our SGM events and coaching.

Abundance

You only need to do a quick Google search on the word *abundance* to see that it is associated primarily with financial prosperity and new age sentimentality. First Nations spiritual teaching has a very different approach. The Medicine Wheel, for example, celebrates the gifts of the four directions, with each direction — North, South, East and West — representing different human qualities.

The East is the place of all beginnings. The new day comes into the world from the East. It is the direction of renewal and reawakening. It is a place of innocence, and of naturalness, and a place to be happy, joyous and free. It is also the place where we learn to believe in what we cannot yet see. (Judy Bopp, *The Sacred Tree*)

There it is. Abundance — unlike its garish, evil twin *excess* — is invisible, ethereal, mysterious, and subtle. Abundance exists in the place that religious historian, Robert Orsi, calls *lived religion*—that daily practice of faith that is inexorably linked with the thoughts, practices and activities of the rest of our everyday life.

Lived religion exists in the space in between: "... In between body and spirit, in between public and private, in between the inner world and the outer world, and most importantly, in between the real and the imaginary." (Lansdowne Lectures, University of Victoria, 2003) It is here that abundance resides.

Halloween is a microcosm of the excess/abundance dyad that I think exists in our world culture. Some children hoard their candy, concerned about how long it will last as though there will never be any more. Other children experience this bounty from a place of abundance, willing to share and enjoy what they have received.

There seems to be a societal belief that we need *more than enough* to be satisfied, and we must constantly compete and scramble to get *it* and keep *it*, versus the counter-view that the Universe provides exactly what we need on a minute-by-minute basis. I think there is much to be gained in shifting our thinking away from the model of excess/scarcity towards the model of abundance.

- Terry Harrison

Light

Could any imagination?
Would the deepest dreamer?
How would the most visionary?

See,

the light of life,
in a humble place;
of straw,
of cattle,
of lambs,
with a donkey.

Who would ever believe
wise men would travel,
shepherds would kneel,
on a winter night.

Who could dream,
angel voices
lifting eyes
heavenward.

Who did see
a star so bright?

So many did not.

So many do not.

Do you?

- Andy Michaelson.

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Our New "Practically Perfect" Website

*The e-mail
edition
extra page.*

This fall we redesigned our Congregational Life website www.congregationallife.com. The idea was to make the information more accessible from the home page — and we think we've done that using drop-down menus in a side bar.

We knew there would be a few typos, so sent out a call for help in the form of a contest as to who could find the most mistakes. We thought we had a winner when Peter Chynoweth from Jasper e-mailed us with his list of 9 typos.

Then came the surprise. Bob James who attends St. Peter's Anglican Church in Calgary sent us his list of 43. His e-mail begins with a line from the Frank Sinatra song, "Mistakes, I made a few ..." He said, "This is what happens when it's pouring rain outside here in Calgary. Nothing to do but review your new website!" We met Bob at St. Peter's and presented him with his prize book. Peter Chynoweth's award is on the way to him too.

Thank you. All the typos have been corrected. Do have a look at our now "practically perfect in every way" web site. Any comment you might have are always appreciated.

Links to Websites on Leadership

We have found the following websites provide helpful information on what it means to play a leadership role in a congregation today.

Jim Collins <http://jimcollins.com>
Jim Collins info on his book *Good to Great*.

Peter F. Drucker Foundation www.pfdf.org
Excellent information on leadership.

William Bridges www.wmbridges.com
The guru on leading through change.

The Teal Organization www.teal.org.uk
A Christian Leadership web site in Great Britain.

My Skills Profile www.myskillsprofile.com
Resources for identifying skills.

Congregational Life Newsletter
www.congregationallife.com/Newsletters/articles.htm#leadership
An index to articles on leadership published in Congregational Life newsletters.

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