



Let's Do This Again, and Soon!

by Vern Christopherson, senior pastor of Transfiguration Lutheran, Bloomington

Worshippers arriving at Transfiguration Lutheran Church on Pentecost Sunday found several surprises in store for them. Flags from around the world adorned the narthex and fellowship hall—Norway, Tanzania, Peru, Liberia, Ghana, Mexico. Recent immigrants from a variety of countries were shaking hands with longtime members. Colorful banners proclaimed the fruits of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience—and were carried in the opening procession.

Agora Pentecost was breaking out at Transfiguration. It felt a little like Acts 2. God's people from around the world were gathered in one place. A variety of tongues were spoken. The Spirit was poured out. And each of us heard, in a very real way, the story of God's amazing deeds of power done through Jesus.



These Pentecost events added wonderful diversity to our worship. Traditional hymn favorites were given a new setting: "The Old Rugged Cross" was sung in Spanish, "Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior" in Liberian, and "Amazing Grace" in four different languages. At the close of the service, we prayed the Lord's Prayer together in our native tongues.

I found the worship service profoundly moving. God felt a little bigger to me, the story of Jesus more universal. Still, as worship drew to a close, I wondered what the tried and true Lutherans would have to say. Their comments surprised me: "Very moving." "It's nice to have such diversity in our church." "It gave me a whole new understanding of Agora and immigrant ministry." "Let's do this again, and soon."

Perhaps the miracle of Pentecost isn't simply speaking in tongues. Perhaps it is sitting in the same pew and realizing that our similarities are greater than our differences. Perhaps it is knowing that we worship the same Lord. Perhaps it is understanding that what Peter proclaimed is true, that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."



Churches Train for Returning Veterans and their Families

Workshops and events are helping to prepare the community to aid in the crucial transition home from war of our soldier men and women. Experience with past wars and research from those who have returned from Iraq and Afghanistan so far indicate that everyone who has been exposed to war will be going through a transition process of some length as they learn what is their "new normal." A subset of those people—no one knows how many—will have severe problems.

The Duluth-based group, "Welcome Home," is offering a free guide to churches written by Rev. John Sippola, prepared through a Wheat Ridge grant. They are also compiling a directory of Lutheran churches who offer ministry to veterans. Visit welcmelim@aol.com to get the free guide. Let them know whether your church should be listed as providing ministry to veterans and their families.

Nativity Lutheran Church, 3312 Silver Lake Road, St. Anthony Park, will host a community open forum on returning veterans on July 26 at 7:00 p.m. Call 612.781.2766 for additional information.

Shepherd of the Lake Lutheran Church, Prior Lake, has already hosted a community-wide event June 4, co-sponsored with St. Michael's Catholic Church. Brenda Hawkinson is coordinating the veterans ministry at Shepherd of the Lake (952.230.2937).

At the Minneapolis Area Synod assembly, some delegates attended workshops to learn more about both the nature of the challenges facing veterans returning from war and the synod responses so far.

In planning its response, the church faces a dilemma. Many returning soldiers will have invisible wounds such as traumatic brain injury, catastrophic war trauma, or negative coping habits from the war situation. If their invisible wounds are not effectively treated, they may develop secondary problems that create more harm to themselves and their circle. These problems may include alcoholism, relationship breakdowns, job loss, and debt. Too many veterans become involved in accidents, are incarcerated, become homeless or suicidal when they do not get help for their war-related but invisible injuries.



Editor's note: In last month's Interacts, an article highlighted Wayne Vrioni's Appalachian Trail walk for inner city youth. To make a pledge for his walk, visit www.stolaflutheran.org.