

Agora's New Web Site Provides a New Marketplace

by Sandra Henry, Co-Chair, Agora Board of Directors

Several months in the making, Agora recently unveiled its beautiful new Web site. Agora staff and friends have been busy putting the finishing touches on the site and I must say, it was worth the wait! Like opening a present, I couldn't wait to try out all the links and look at the new video.



When I went to www.agoraminstries.org, I was greeted by two beautifully animated vines that circled around each other. The space at the base of the vines was filled with our familiar Agora logo. It was a welcoming experience, and I felt compelled to see what else was on the Web site.

The vine carried me into Agora Ministries' home page, where the design is sleek and accessible. The first thing I noticed was an Agora News section announcing the Christmas of Nations event. At the left, I was invited to click on

the "Fresh Visions for Mission Today" link which took me to the new Agora Ministries video. This video succinctly and brilliantly expressed Agora's mission and vision through the many different people Agora has touched since its inception, highlighting the journey of Agora, the lives Agora has changed and the future to which God is calling Agora Ministries.

The amount of information available from the home page is amazing. I was able to link to six different sections: About Us, What's New, Why Agora, Programs, Partners in Faith, and Support Us. Here are some highlights from the site:

What's New - My favorite feature on the "What's New" page is the "Agorablog" where we can post questions for discussion and visitors can respond! The "What's New" page also contains an event calendar, a spot for photos and recent Agora Ministries newsletters. This page is a great place to go to get a snapshot of what's happening with Agora Ministries.

Programs - The "Programs" page is nicely organized. Upon clicking on the "Programs" link, I was greeted by the Discipleship Academy's vision: *To prepare and inspire newer Americans and people born in the U.S.A. to follow Jesus in their personal lives and to become leaders in Christian communities who will minister to ALL people.* To the left of the vision statement, each program has its own link. Clicking on any one of the program links took me to a clear, crisp, compelling one-page program description. The best part of the "Programs" page is the download section. From the downloads section, I was able to download the Agora Annual Report, browse the archives for past Agora newsletters and download brochures for select Agora Ministries programs.

Agora Ministries' mission is to equip congregations to grow and flourish with ALL people in their neighborhoods. Agora's new Web site will serve as a marketplace where all people can connect, share, discuss and help Agora fulfill its mission. I invite you to check it out today.

Calling All Veterans!

by Amy Blumenshine, Coming Home Collaborative

Calling all veterans and those who love them! Recent reports paint a bleak picture for those who have come home from recent deployments. According to a Pentagon task force, the U.S. troops returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan suffer "daunting and growing" psychological problems - with nearly 40 percent of soldiers, a third of Marines and half of the National Guard members reporting symptoms.

The congressionally mandated task force found that hundreds of thousands of the more than one million U.S. troops who have served at least one war-zone tour in Iraq or Afghanistan are showing signs of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety or other potentially disabling mental disorders. Additionally, as many as one in five of those deployed in the current war zones have been exposed to blasts with the potential to cause permanent brain damage. Already the suicide rate for veterans is 120 per week, 6,000 per year. More indicative of the current situation is that the rate of suicide for veterans in the age bracket of typical military service (18 to 25) is four times higher than the average for non-veterans.

Minneapolis Area Synod churches are active in working for better outcomes for those recovering from their confrontation with war in a variety of ways. Calvary Lutheran Church, Golden Valley, will gather recent veterans and their families Thursday nights in January, 6:30-8:30 p.m. Those gathered separate into different groups given their shared experiences - as family members and veterans—for the opportunity to hear each other. This group needs some courageous folks to get it up and running. Specialists in recovery after war recommend the simple practice of talking with folks of like experience in a safe setting. Come for dinner from 5:30-6:30 p.m. Contact Jim Almquist at 763-522-8815, jim@almquist.net or Skip Reeves 763-231-2965, sreeves@calvary.org. Calvary is located at 7600 Golden Valley Road.

A cluster of eight ELCA Bloomington area churches is putting together a Community "Stand To" event on Saturday, January 12, 11:30 a.m.-3:00 p.m., at the Bloomington

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Learn More about the Book of Faith Initiative

The Book of Faith is an initiative of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The Book of Faith initiative invites the whole church to become more fluent in the first language of faith, the language of Scripture, in order that we might live into our calling as a people renewed, enlivened and empowered by the Word.

The Bible is a book of faith. The Bible is the written Word of God that creates and nurtures faith through the work of the Holy Spirit and points us to Christ, the incarnate Word and center of our faith. The Bible invites us into a relationship with God, making demands on our lives and promising us life in Christ. The Bible tells the stories of people living their faith over the centuries and, through its demands and promises, forms us as a people of faith.

The language of Scripture is our first language of faith. The Bible teaches us about God, about the world and about ourselves. We become renewed, enlivened and empowered as the language of Scripture forms our hearts, our minds, our community conversation and our commitments.

We have a calling as the people of God. Part of our calling is to know, hear, share and be rooted in Scripture.

We are renewed, enlivened and empowered by the Word. As we live into our calling as people who are formed by Scripture, we become renewed in our faith, enlivened through the Spirit and empowered through the cross of Christ to serve God and neighbor

The first year of the Book of Faith initiative centers on inviting everyone to join the conversation, to make a commitment and to become part of the initiative.

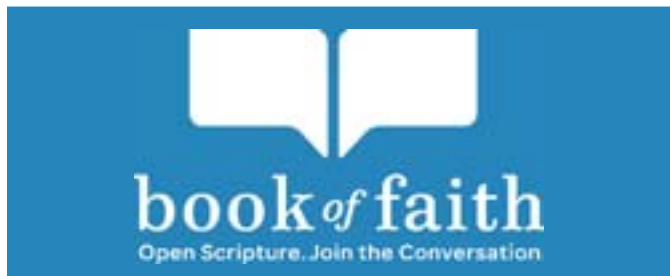
How can we be a part of Book of Faith? This initiative is the work of the whole church. Each individual, each congregation, each synod, and each church-related organization are invited to participate and to help make the vision of the Book of Faith initiative a reality throughout the church.

You can become part of this initiative by:

- Joining and making a commitment
- Encouraging all the people in your congregation, synod or organization to become part of the initiative in whatever ways your community has made a commitment
- Contributing your ideas, practices and suggestions to the Book of Faith Forum. (Visit www.elca.org/bookoffaith/forum/.)

Join the initiative; make a commitment. Sign on to the Book of Faith initiative at www.elca.org/bookoffaith/join/commit.html. Each congregation, synod and church-related organization is invited to create its own Book of Faith pact, to be updated and renewed each year of the initiative.

Book of Faith Forum provides a place to share resources and ideas that work. Share resources you have used or are using that are helpful. What are you trying? What is



working? What resources are needed to help or need to be developed? (Visit www.elca.org/bookoffaith/forum/.)

Follow e-Updates. Keep up to date by subscribing to the Book of Faith e-Update. Periodic mailings will alert you to new additions to the website, publications and events. To sign up, go to www.elca.org/bookoffaith/join/.

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Amory, 3300 W 98th St. This community picnic type event is meant to bring together people to say "Thank you. Can I help?" Explains coordinator Karen Eileen, "A military 'Stand To' means all personnel to your post. As a community, our post is to surround and support those who have offered to serve us. This special Bloomington event is a way we can commune around our fellow citizens serving in all the branches of military service whose dedication to our country has imparted a heavy toll."

Coordinators Karen Eileen and Pastor John Nelson of Transfiguration Lutheran Church, along with Dennis Donovan of the Warrior to Citizen Campaign of the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute and Bloomington Mayor Gene Winstead, are asking service providers to pledge 20 to 40 hours of help to returning veterans and their families. They are looking for help with painting, plumbing, money management workshops, classes to manage stress, resume coaching, family counseling, mock interviewing exercises, lawn care, snow removal, etc. For more information on this effort, contact Pastor John Nelson at Transfiguration Lutheran Church, 952-884-2364, jdnelson@tlcmn.com. The project manager for Warrior to Citizen in Bloomington is Karen Eileen, 952-943-0793, ke_create@yahoo.com.

The Stand To event is being organized in conjunction with The Warrior to Citizen Campaign. The campaign, originated by the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute, is a non-political call to civic action bringing communities together to assist troops and their families with the transition home.

Watch for Karen Eileen's programs on this initiative on her Bloomington Cable TV show, (channel 16) *Lemonaide Special Edition – Warrior to Citizen*, aired Thursdays at 9 p.m. and Fridays at 1 and 5 a.m.