
COUNTRYSIDE NEWS

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Calvary, Barnum; Faith, Harcourt; Fulton, Roelyn; Trinity, Boxholm; UCC/Congregational, Moorland; Zion, Gowrie

THE WORD OUTSIDE THE BOX

Monte Albert's voice began to tremble as he read Esau's despairing plea to Isaac: "Have you only one blessing, Father? Bless me, also, Father" (Genesis 27:38).

After he and other members of the Bible storytelling group at Zion Lutheran Church, Gowrie, Iowa, finished reading the entire account, Albert blurted out, "That was me! Esau is me."

The youngest of three brothers,

Albert explained how he had felt keenly his father's refusal to show him the affection and favor he had shown the oldest brother. More drawn to sports than the arts, his father attended many of the brother's football games, but he consistently failed to appear at Albert's plays and concerts. Albert grew up believing he was bad because of his artistic bent.

Years later while reading Esau's story aloud, Albert felt that childhood hurt sweep over him with a terrible force. The

FUSION for Our Future

If you are ever wondering what is in the future for Lutherans in this neck of the woods and maybe even thinking about who will make up the Church in 20 years, take a look behind the unmarked door on Market Street in Gowrie (just east of the Heartland Bank) on Wednesday evenings at 7:30. Or, you can just listen and follow the music that you hear even before you open the door, even if

y o u r
h e a r i n g
h a s b e e n
d u l l e d b y
3 0 y e a r s o f
t r a c t o r

noise. You'll know you are in the right place.

Friendly smiles greet you as you enter the world of today's youth. Their enthusiasm is really something to experience. It is truly amazing to see gospel and church teachings delivered to today's kids.

Go to Gowrie on some Wednesday evening and take it all in. Take a look at our future. They really are neat kids. It's a great message for everyone.

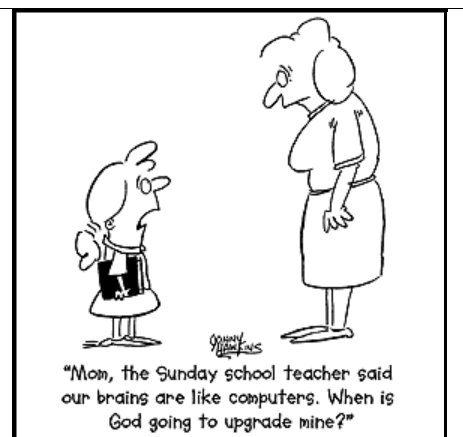
Yours in Christ,
Greg Moe,
Fulton Lutheran Church

Countryside Cooperative Ministry Council

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A message from
Cindy Youngquist,
Stephen Ministry Leader

The Stephen Ministry began in 1975.

- ◆ The Stephen Series is in more than 8,500 congregations from more than 100 Christian denominations in all 50 states, nine Canadian provinces, and 20 other countries.
- ◆ More than 45,000 pastors,

church staff, and laypersons have been trained as Stephen Leaders. A Stephen Leader supervises and directs the Stephen Ministry in the congregation.

- ◆ More than 350,000 people have been trained as Stephen Ministers in their congregations.

Over a million people have received care from a Stephen Minister in a formal one-to-one Stephen Ministry caring relationship, and millions of others have

received care from Stephen Ministers in informal ways.

During our Joint Cooperative worship service in February, we commissioned 24 of our cooperative's members as Stephen Ministers. I now invite you to call my office if you have any questions or are interested in having a Stephen Minister. These Stephen Ministers are ready to be care-givers.

In this month's newsletter I decided to share a story from the Stephen Ministries website. It was in a section called "Stories about Stephen Ministry in Action." Hopefully this story will enable others to see how the Stephen Series will be at work in our Cooperative.

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Outside the Box

rivalry of the brothers Jacob and Esau validated his story and freed him to tell it to the small group gathered around a table in Zion's basement.

Albert's encounter was true and life-giving. Just as it did in that moment for him, the word comes alive at the most timid of invitations. It breaks out of its box — the Bible's pages — and takes root with unsettling accuracy in open hearts. If you hunger for a closeness to the word that goes beyond the usual Sunday-morning two-step of worship and Sunday school, invite yourself and a few other hungry hearts into a Bible storytelling group and watch

what happens. But be careful — you might unleash more than you're ready for.

How Jesus taught

Why invite the word out of the box? Because Jesus did. He reinterpreted the Jewish word, the law, and added his perspective. On his lips the word took on a new life and made uncomfortable claims on God's people. On their lips, it became both a protest and a praise that couldn't be silenced. Luke's Gospel reports that during Jesus' ride into Jerusalem, the Pharisees ordered him to quiet the loud praises from the crowd. Jesus replied that the shouting couldn't be silenced: "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out" (Luke 19:40). He knew the word couldn't be

contained.

After the Word-Made-Flesh was gone from the world, still the word would not be silent. Jesus' words, remembered by those who knew him, lived on and gained momentum as they were told by one believer to another. When the Jewish elders ordered Peter and John to stop teaching in the name of Jesus, they answered, "We cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). Nor could the new believers in Thessalonica and other places where Paul founded believing communities restrain themselves from joyfully passing the word along. Their persistence in telling the story proved to Paul that their words were in fact God's word at work in them.

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Excellent senior high/young adult ministry.

An excellent senior high/young adult ministry does not mean entertaining kids or forcing them to learn information that most adults in our congregations don't know. It simply involves loving and caring for them, nurturing their faith, helping them discover the gifts God has given them and ways in which they can use those gifts to touch the lives of others.

The biggest challenge in providing this kind of ministry is not working with the youth, but find-

ing adults who are willing to make a commitment to pass on the faith to the next generation. This kind of ministry cannot be accomplished by just a handful of people committed to youth. Excellence in the youth ministry needed today involves surrounding our youth with adults who love and care for them and are willing to nurture their faith. The most important place this nurturing occurs is at home; however, many of our children, even in intact families, live in homes where the faith is not being effectively passed on to them. This presents our congregations with a tremendous

Excellence in the youth ministry needed today involves surrounding our youth with adults who love and care for them and are willing to nurture their faith.

challenge, the challenge to form relationships with youth in which we love and care for them, nurture their faith, help them discover the gifts God has given them and ways in which they can use those gifts to touch the lives of others.

In order for our youth to experience and catch the faith so important to us, they need **AAA adults**. These are people who are **authentic** (they are spiritually growing), **available** (they are willing to give time to young people) and **affirming** (they are willing to support and encourage youth). Put simply, these are people are willing to be Jesus for oth-

authentic (they are spiritually growing), **available** (they are willing to give time to young people) and **affirming** (they are willing to support and encourage youth).

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Stephen Ministry

A Tale of Two Brothers

As he got off the plane, Ron knew this was probably going to be the last time he'd see his brother, Jeff, who had been fighting cancer for nearly a year. A few days earlier the call had come from Jeff's wife, Cindy: "If you want to see Jeff one more time, you'd better get down here fast." Ron had quickly arranged for time off work and headed off to see Jeff.

Ron was quite apprehensive as he walked into Jeff's room. He hadn't seen his brother for six months, so he was sure Jeff had declined physically. Even more, though, Ron worried about how his brother was holding up emotionally.

Expecting the worst, he was pleasantly surprised. "I could definitely see the physical deterioration, but he greeted me with a warm grin," said Ron. "He was tired and weak--but in good spirits." Right away Jeff introduced Ron to another man in the room--a Stephen Minister named Cal.

"I hadn't ever heard of Stephen Ministry, but I learned a lot about it just by watching Cal. He was so obviously a source of strength for Jeff just by being there. I could see right away what a difference he was making in Jeff's life. I figured he must be a pastor. So I was a little surprised to learn he was an electrician, who had been trained at Jeff's church to be there for other men who are going through a difficult time."

During the next three days Ron was able to spend precious time

with his brother before Jeff died. He also saw Cal a few more times, as the Stephen Minister was stopping by every evening during those final days.

"After Jeff died, Cal was concerned about how I was doing," said Ron. "He checked in with me and prayed with me a couple of times during the days between Jeff's death and the funeral. Cindy also had her own Stephen Minister, and introduced me to her at the funeral. So I felt good knowing that Cindy was well taken care of, too."

The day before Ron flew back home, he received one more call from Jeff's Stephen Minister. "Cal told me his pastor had learned that there was a church with Stephen Ministry not far from where I lived. He wanted to know if I'd

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The Pastor's Pen

ers.

It has been exciting to see new faces at **FUSION** every week. Some of those faces are adults; most are youth. Many of them are youth who have no formal connection with the church. They come because their friends invite them or because they have heard it is cool. Many of these children come from families where faith is simply not part of their lives. We have a tremendous opportunity to shower them with the love of Christ and to make a difference in their lives; however, in order to do this we need adults who take their faith seriously and are willing to model that faith by loving and caring for these youth.

We are continuing to make progress toward providing excellent

senior high/young adult programming; however, in order to provide an excellent senior high/young adult ministry we need far more adults than we currently have involved. We need to move beyond the mentality of dropping off our kids and allowing someone else to do ministry with them, to joining our kids in doing ministry to others. We need adults (parents, grandparents and others) who are willing to get involved in all aspects of youth ministry and who are willing to walk side by side with youth as they discover the gifts God has given them and ways they can use those gifts to touch the lives of others.

The key to an excellent senior high/youth ministry is not a charismatic youth leader or flashy programming, it is your willingness to love and care for youth, nurture their faith, help them dis-

cover the gifts God has given them and ways in which they can use those gifts to touch the lives of others.

If you want an excellent senior high/youth ministry, call us to find out how God can use your gifts.

—Pastor Jim

Excellent senior high/young adult ministry is the sixth of eight "Faith Factors" that has been the focus of this column for the past several months.



HAVE YOU SEEN GOD LATELY? TELL ME ABOUT IT!

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Outside the Box

Grandmothers understand

The word continues to intersect with the human story and work within it. Great writers have known that truth and for centuries have used it to depict humans grappling to make sense of God's story in the face of their own.

Grandmothers know that truth too. I remember my grandmother who held passionately to her family stories. She realized, I am sure, that the key to her heart and the heart of God lay in stories. She knew Jesus as a daily companion, and in many of her narratives her words and the living Word that is Jesus came together.

Many of us love our

grandmothers' stories. Most of us tell stories to our children, grandchildren and godchildren. Family stories and Bible stories: We love them — in their place. Sadly, many adults assume that the place for stories is only in the lives of children. They suppose that once children grow up and become thinking beings, they will "stop telling stories and start telling the truth," as Thomas E. Boomershine wrote in *Story Journey: An Invitation to the Gospel as Storytelling* (Abingdon Press, 1988).

Even we adults who, like my grandmother, know that stories hold truth often resist the notion of telling Bible stories in the way they tell family tales.

To do what my grandmother did with a family narrative — ease into it by setting the scene,

embellish as seems appropriate, play and laugh with the characters, move smoothly from that story into others with similar antics and related characters — to do that kind of telling with a Bible story seems to us ... well, wrong, somehow. Most of us prefer to leave the word safely in its box, the pages of the Bible, where it remains solid and reliable.

Exploring the stories

At Zion, we agreed to explore Bible stories together — not discuss them, but read them aloud, take them apart and put them back differently. We would live with them a few days and look for ourselves in them. We started with a list of narratives that included miraculous healings, close brushes with unclean characters, sibling

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OBSERVING LENT

The custom is to mark the season of Lent by giving up some things and taking on others. Both can serve to mark the season as a holy time of preparation. Some examples of things people give up for Lent include sweets, meat for all or some meals, and alcohol. In most cases, giving up something for Lent can be made more meaningful by using the money or time for another purpose. For example, meal times on fast days could be spent in prayer. Another example is that if you give up meat during Lent, the extra money that would go to meat dishes can be given to a group, such as World Hunger, which works to end hunger worldwide. Some things added during Lent are daily Bible read-

ing, fasting on Fridays, times of prayer, taking a course of study related in some way to spirituality.

Note that the season of Lent is forty days plus the six Sundays. This is because Sundays are celebrations of Jesus' resurrection and are always an appropriate day to lessen the restrictions of Lent. So that if you have, for example, given up chocolate for Lent, you could indulge in a weekly candy bar on Sunday.

Lent is also an especially appropriate time for confession. While confession to another person is not required to receive God's forgiveness, it can be a meaningful rite of reconciliation to God.

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like his pastor to call to see about my getting my own Stephen Minister back at home," said Ron. "The thought hadn't crossed my mind until that moment, but I had just seen two Stephen Ministers in action, caring for my brother and sister-in-law, so I said yes."

The day after Ron returned home, he received a phone call from a Stephen Leader at the nearby church. The next day he met with that Stephen Leader, and two days after that Ron began meeting weekly with his own Stephen Minister.

"I can't tell you what a difference he's made in my life," said Ron. "Not only was I grieving for my brother, but I had been struggling with the whole 'God-thing' for a long time. I believed in God but had just been too busy to make room for him in my life. Jeff's death brought all of that to the forefront. My Stephen Minister did a great job of just listening to me and letting me work through the issues without judging me or pushing religion on me. Through him I discovered God in a new way, in a very personal way. I saw that my brother died with 'the peace that passes all understanding,' and I'm quickly discovering that peace myself. I'm so thankful for Stephen Ministry--for my brother, my sister-in-law, and for me!"

*"Bear one another's burdens...
and so fulfill the law of Christ."
GALATIANS 6:2*

*The best way to forget
your own problems is
to help someone else
solve theirs.*

GOD SIGHTINGS

"To Care For All God's People, One by One," do we **feed greed** or **heed need**?

Recently, I learned of a child's birthday party where the invitees had been asked the following: "Instead of bringing a gift for Johnny, each of you please bring a book appropriate for a young person. The day after the party we will distribute all the books to disadvantaged children."

Remember those
who are less
fortunate



The birthday party, instead of being an occasion where **receiving** was the focus (feeding greed), was rather an occasion where **giving** was the focus (heeding need). Everyone, including the birthday boy, participated in **giving**, in **loving each other**, in **caring for all God's people, one by one** – in this case, disadvantaged children, **whose needs were being heeded**.

We all have choices. In the fierce competition for our priorities, do we feed our greed, or do we heed the needs of others? What are we called to do?

—Dennis Barnum
Zion Lutheran Church

Lenten Service Schedule

Zion Lutheran Church

March 3—6:00 p.m. soup supper at Zion, 7:00 p.m. worship at Zion

March 5—9:00 a.m. World Day of Prayer at UMC

March 10— 6:00 p.m. soup supper at UMC, 7:00 p.m. worship at UMC

March 17—6:00 p.m. soup supper at Zion, 7:00 p.m. worship at Zion

March 24— 6:00 p.m. soup supper at UMC, 7:00 p.m. worship at UMC

March 31—6:00 p.m. soup supper at Zion, 7:00 p.m. worship at Zion

April 4—10:30 a.m. Palm Sunday worship

April 8—7:00 p.m. Maundy Thursday worship

April 9—7:00 p.m. Good Friday worship

April 11— 7:00 a.m. Easter Sunrise service followed by breakfast served by the senior high youth at 8:00 a.m., 10:30 a.m. Easter worship service.

Fulton, Calvary, & U.C.C.

March 4—7:00 p.m. at UCC

March 11—7:00 p.m. at Fulton

March 18—7:00 p.m. at Calvary

March 25—7:00 p.m. at Fulton

April 1—7:00 p.m. at UCC

April 8, Maundy Thursday—7:00 p.m. at Calvary

April 9, Good Friday—7:00 p.m. at Fulton



What is Lent?

Lent is a season of preparation leading up to Easter. It is the forty days plus the six Sundays before Easter. For centuries, it has been observed as a special time of self-examination and penitence. Lent is a time for concentration on fundamental values and priorities, and is not a time for self-punishment.

Throughout Lent, the worship services of the church take on a simpler tone, appropriate to this season. Banners are removed from the church. Crosses showing the risen Christ are veiled. The word "Alleluia" is not used in the words of the liturgy or hymns. These practices help the worshipping community to mark this season of renewal as a special time in the church year.

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Outside the Box

rivalries, post-Resurrection encounters with the Risen Christ, feedings of great crowds and the callings of prophets.

The group began with the story of Jacob and Esau, starting by simply reading it together, each voice taking a different part. We read the text from typed pages instead of opening the Bibles in front of us, a first step in inviting the story out of its box. It was during that first reading that Albert heard Esau's pleading as his own.

After we read the story, we each committed to live with it a few days, then dismantle it and examine the pieces, lovingly but forcefully. Each of us would reassemble the story

differently. One would recast it through a chosen character's eyes; one would change the outcome and reflect upon its impact; one would be relentless in asking hard questions of the story; one would commit the narrative to heart; one would retell it as if for an audience of 5-year-olds. Another would search for and describe connections between this story and his own — this one was Albert.

At our next meeting Albert's work led him to tell his own story, speaking openly of his father's favoritism and the feelings of worthlessness he still carried. His boldness made a space for others to describe how they had played with this story. Fearlessly and with surprising ease, participants began to set plot and characters free from the

page, calling us back to the text before us when someone went too far afield in reshaping the story.

As one person told the narrative through Isaac's eyes, Albert's story emerged again and took an unexpected turn.

The storyteller repeated the plea of the cheated Esau and then Isaac's response, narrated in the voice of the penitent father:

Esau: "Have you only one blessing, Father? Bless me, me also, Father!"

Isaac: "See, away from the fatness of the earth shall your home be, and away from the dew of heaven on high. By your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother; but when you break loose, you shall break his yoke from your neck" (Genesis 27:39-40).

As the story was told, the son's desperation and the father's sadness

(Continued on page 7)

LEGACY



Remember and rekindle our legacy from God, our holy calling.

Spirit and Fire

“Rekindle the gift of God that is within you (2 Timothy 1:6).

Timothy may have been afraid or disillusioned. Paul trusted that a spark of faith still endured. “Rekindle!” Paul encourages. Let the fire burn again!

The story of human faith is full of ups and downs. Faith can

be strong and hot or dim, weak, and distant. Even faith is vulnerable to burnout. Our enthusiasm for the Christian life of worship, study, community, and service can become exhausted. Life is full of distractions and pressures. We all need encouragement.

Reassured by the gospel, we are called to look within to that gift of faith given by God and passed down to us by those who loved us and those who loved the church. There is a legacy to receive and share, a gospel to proclaim. We have important work to do, but we do not work alone.

Cooperative Youth News

February was a full month for the Cooperative Youth. February 1, the Cooperative Youth collected money and soup for **Souper Bowl Sunday**. **Souper Bowl Sunday** has been held on Super Bowl Sunday for the last fourteen years. Youth groups collect soup and dollars bills to donate to local food pantries to feed the hungry. This year, 11,625 organizations collected \$3,992,807 to feed hungry people. We collected \$207 in the Countryside Cooperative Ministry. Thanks to the youth and all of you for participating.

The Cooperative Youth also hosted a Super Bowl party on February 1 at **FUSION**. Approximately 30 youth enjoyed food and watching the Super

Bowl on the big screen with big sound.

The Cooperative Youth hosted a Valentine’s Dinner on February 15. Approximately 90 people enjoyed fine dining and a wonderful evening of music. The Prairie Valley Jazz Band played at the event. Guests donated over \$300 to support the music program at PV.

The Cooperative Youth will soon be going to Mel Gibson’s “Passion.” The movie and discussion should be a powerful experience.

If you would like more information about the Cooperative Youth Group or would like to help, please contact the Cooperative office.

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Outside the Box

filled the room. But Isaac's concluding line came triumphantly, with startling energy and hope. As it spilled out, Albert, who until then was listening intently with lowered eyes, lifted his head and smiled. In that moment he *was* Esau, hearing with mounting hope his father's words: "And you shall serve your brother; but when you break loose, you shall break his yoke from your neck." This was Albert's story — the hope Isaac had offered Esau became hope for him.

What's at stake?

Faithful Christians long for the word to take root and grow in their lives. In fact, believers who hunger to know the Bible's mysteries fill the pews in our congregations. You may be among them. Many don't know the stories and are embarrassed by their ignorance. Some feel unequipped to teach the Bible or even study it in Sunday school. Most would gladly unleash the power the stories hold if they only knew how.

Yet without encouragement from someone else who is willing to speak of this deep need, most will never try. You could be the one to invite them into the journey of Bible storytelling — if you're bold enough to welcome the unexpected, work through the close encounters and channel the energy that will explode when your stories intersect with the word outside the box.

—Jennifer Ginn

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Cooperative Worship Times

Calvary, Barnum	10:30 a.m.
Faith, Harcourt	9:00 a.m.
Fulton, Roelyn	9:15 a.m.
Trinity, Boxholm	10:30 a.m.
UCC/Cong., Moorland	8:00 a.m.
Zion, Gowrie	10:30 a.m.
1st and 3rd Saturdays	5:00 p.m.
FUSION Wednesday Evenings	7:30 p.m.

(at 1107 Market Street)



Website Address: www.wccta.net/gallery/coop/

If you have an article or pictures that you would like to submit for the Cooperative newsletter, please send them to the Cooperative office and we will try to put them in as time and space permit.