

Lutheran Lay Fellowship of Metropolitan Washington DC



LUNCHEON MEETING Thursday, January 3, 2013 – 12:00 noon

Saint Luke Lutheran Church
9100 Colesville Road at Dale Drive
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Opening Announcements

Bob Sargeant opened the meeting promptly at noon. Norman Larson turns 80 this month. Betty Fredericks was also a birthday girl. There were no anniversaries or newcomers. Happy New Year to all.

Bob invited people to share stories of their Christmas. Dave Lambert recalled Swedish Smörgåsbord, mentioning unique dishes. John Priebe recalled a Norwegian celebration. Ellie Wegner was near Idaho ski country. Faye Codding experienced a Southwest barbeque, and her father-in-law's 90th birthday. Larry Schmidt recalled Santa Claus coming after the Eve service. Santa would always ask a young child to sing Away in A Manger. Dave also recalled how his father had to work on Christmas Eve – turns out he was Santa Claus. Dan Bella shared his emotions in actually “being” Santa Claus. Trudy Koucky received a homemade card from her neighbor boy that he made in Boy Scouts.

Today is the first meeting of the new membership year; members are reminded to renew membership. The question was raised as to how we increase awareness of our scholarship program. In recent years we haven't had a competitive number of applicants. Ellie announced that the Georgetown memoir writing group starts up tonight. The First Trinity employment group is resuming with new leadership. Carolyn Swolinski shared that she expects that Gifts of Hope results will be available within the next month. She thanked all who helped make the program successful this year. Everything is online and “it's not just for Christmas any more.” Faye announced that George Davies has been named Interim Director of Fellowship Square.

Next month's presenter is Pastor Amsalu Geleta, March will be the Rev. Dr. Maria Erling, and April will be the Executive Director of the InterFaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington, the Rev. Clark Lobenstine.

Devotions

Pastor Blume led a Litany for Wholeness she prepared . (*see attached*)

Introduction of Speaker

David Berg preceded his introduction of the speaker, Pastor Susanne Blume, with his usual interjection of humorous stories: this time unique prayers of children. Our speaker is Executive Director of Lifeline Partnership, a part of First Trinity Lutheran Church's ministry, involving persons with developmental disabilities. Her career includes being a lawyer before entering the pastorate. She is a graduate of Antioch Law School and the Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary.

Presentation

Pr. Blume began with a story from her beginning at Lifeline. The tradition of Lifeline has been for participants to present a skit of the Gospel for the day. She admitted to apprehension about this at first for a number of reasons. She quickly learned to never make assumptions. God continues to surprise us.

She distributed scripts for us to participate in a skit about Christmas, this one showing that the person we sometimes think knows the least, is actually the smartest. There are lots of surprises in the Christmas story.

Lifeline was founded in 1954 by Catherine Meyers who had two children who were then known as "mentally retarded." Her children were not welcome at regular Sunday School so she started her own program. At the time it was an interfaith program, beginning at another church, but then moved to First Trinity.

The vocabulary related to this population has changed over the years, but there are some key legal and diagnostic definers. In 1990 the Americans with Disabilities Act gave civil rights that prohibit discrimination and requires reasonable accommodation and ability to live as independently as possible. The ELCA has a Social Message (2010) on People Living with Disabilities. The basic tenet is that the church is diminished when not all of God's children are involved.

L'Arche is an international program, including one in D.C. that provides housing and services to persons with disabilities. L'Arche believes that those with disabilities should be central, not peripheral partners.

Pr. Blume approaches this ministry as a way to build community. Many participants are at the stage of life after their schooling, but before moving onto other life-focused endeavors. Food and art-work are activity focuses. Worship services are held bi-monthly, with the goal to move to monthly services. She showed photos of her installation service and other community activities. Dances are held three times a year, which draw up to a 100 people. These events allow for socializing beyond the group homes that many live in.

A grant from WELCA has allowed the development of a nutrition and cooking program. Participants are learning to prepare meals on their own, often for the first time. They are preparing a book of recipes. Many live quite sedentary lives, so active activities are planned, including a day at Nationals stadium, an outing to Baltimore's aquarium. Members participated in the Help the Homeless Walkathon. Members from Trinity Arms, First Trinity's transitional program, were also invited to the Harvest Fest.

"Typical" is the preferred replacement for "normal." The Washington Interfaith Network (WIN) is assisting with advocacy in job-development, helping employers look at ability, not disability.

Pr. Blume asked us to survey our own congregations to see how inclusive we are, she invited people to volunteer at Lifeline's activities. She encouraged people to think of evangelism with this group. There is a website and newsletter, as well as a Facebook page. She is looking for entrepreneurs who can help change the culture and help Lifeline develop job opportunities.

Pr. Blume's first law school work involved working on disabilities rights. Her seminary internship involved working with persons with disabilities. She had not been aware of Lifeline, but feels that this is one of God's surprises in her life, and where she is called to be.

John Priebe invited contributions to support this program.

Chaplain Schmidt engaged us in a dismissal "surprise" – a conga-line dance to "We are dancing/marching in the Light of Christ."