

GENEROUS PEOPLE LIVING GOD'S LOVE...BY BEING ENERGIZED AND ENERGIZING

Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Hebrews 10:23-25

I love the word “provoke” in this passage. For us it is usually a negative thing to “provoke” someone. One who “provokes” me irritates me, creates in me a negative energy. But the Letter to the Hebrews uses a more positive sense of the word: to “provoke” someone is to **call** them (voke – vocal – vocation/calling), to **push** them, to **energize** them *to love and good deeds*.

Hebrews assumes that **connections** are important, that meeting together is a source of encouragement and energy.

I want you to know about **Church Together**, a new ministry in our synod. **Church Together** is a monthly (or so) electronic newsletter whose purpose is to share stories among synod congregations, stories of faith and faithfulness that could inspire (provoke? energize?) other congregations to think new thoughts or do new deeds. **Church Together** is a way of making **connections** in our synod that will *provoke one another to love and good deeds*.

There is power in stories, Holy Spirit power that can energize imaginations and encourage other generous hearts. Here is an example.

FAITH ALIVE SUMMER DAY CAMP

Faith Lutheran Church in Pioneer, in conjunction with Mt. Cross Ministries, just hosted 37 kids at the Fourth Annual Faith Alive Day Camp, July 4-8. What makes this remarkable is that Faith's congregation consists of about 90 mostly retired people and a Sunday school population of one. (Our youth group consists of the 50-year-olds.)

Four years ago our Sunday school rooms were being used mostly for storage, a prayer and meditation group had taken over the nursery, and no one could remember the last Christmas pageant or children's sermon. “How can we attract more young people” was a constant topic of discussion. We tried family game nights, summer fun days, Friday night pizza parties, movies in our outdoor amphitheater, investing in new Sunday School curriculum, etc. But, other than sponsoring a very active Cub Scout pack, our efforts at bringing children and young people into the church were mostly unsuccessful and short-lived.

It became obvious that we needed to go outside the church to serve the children in our community. So, when we applied to the Mission Coalition of the Central Valley for a one-time evangelism grant in 2012, we stepped out on a limb and included \$2300 for vacation Bible school — the base amount Mt. Cross Ministries charges for doing day camp at a church facility.

The Holy Spirit at work: We received the grant! And our first annual Faith Alive Day Camp was held in summer 2013. The Mt. Cross counselors brought the curricula, the supplies, the music, and the energy. We brought the enthusiasm. With the direction of our site coordinator Tasha Burkett, the time and talents of many people in the congregation, and the contribution of sundry grandchildren, that first camp was a huge success. Twenty-eight children had fun, made friends and heard the gospel. Many of those 28 have returned to camp every year since. And when they “aged out,” they came back as junior-high helpers or senior-high junior counselors. This year we had five helpers and six junior counselors. And we voted to send one of the junior counselors to Mt. Cross Counselor-in-Training camp for two weeks.

This year, our fourth, we had 37 kids registered. The Mt. Cross counselors said we had one of the largest camps and could not believe it when we told them that none of the kids were from our church. “How did you get all those kids to come?” We didn’t. It was, and continues to be, the work of the Holy Spirit.

The highlight of this year’s camp was the surprise arrival of local firefighters to spray the kids on “water day.” Several alumni volunteers showed up that final day to join in the fun. Every January, we start collecting school supplies so the campers can put together school kits. This year we sent 33 kits back with the Mt. Cross counselors for shipment.

We were able to hold our second annual day camp with a Warner Grant from the Synod, but we are only eligible to apply every other year. The Holy Spirit showed up again with a large individual donation to the youth activities fund that enabled us to host our fourth annual day camp. We also hold a very successful fundraiser/camp kickoff in March — a Potato Head Dinner (baked potatoes with all the trimmings, salad, dessert and lots of potato games.)

Faith Lutheran Church is located on Highway 88 east of Jackson in Amador County. Our new permanent pastor is the Rev. Janna Mikkelsen. She and her husband Mark live in the parsonage next to the church.

We are fortunate to have nearly four acres of wooded land around the church. In addition to our outdoor amphitheater on “Easter Hill,” we have walking trails, a labyrinth, and even an ancient Miwuk grinding rock. The perfect setting for camp. For a whole week every year, the shouts and squeals, laughter and song ring out throughout the church and echo throughout the year — not only at Faith Lutheran but in the hearts and lives of the children of our community.

By Karin Heikkila

For other issues of **Church Together** (for more energizing) visit the synod website.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTING

1. Who are the people in your congregation who *provoke [others] to love and good deeds*? Whose generous sharing of time or money inspires others to do the same? Who gets projects going and always finds partners to work alongside?
2. What ministries in other congregations have you heard about that provoked you to think, "I wonder if we could do something like that?"
3. Is a mostly full church on Sunday morning more encouraging and energizing than a mostly empty church? Why do you think that is or is not so? For you, what interferes with a habit of *meeting together*?
4. What did you especially notice about Faith's summer day camp story? What struck you?