

FROM PASTOR YEISER'S DESK:

Last month, I had the opportunity to once again attend a Senior Pastors' Conference that is held annually for pastors, and their spouses, of congregations that average 500 or more worshipers per week. All told, about 120 persons participated this year, including the presiding bishop of the ELCA and his wife. This was the second year that Christy and I took part and we really appreciate the opportunity given to us to participate in such an invaluable event. Among other things, the conference features presentations by renowned church leaders and plenty of opportunities to converse with colleagues and spouses in similar sized congregations. We discover that we have a lot in common 卍 some of the same joys and concerns. In conversation, we learn much from each other.

In one of our sessions, an expert on church growth, the Rev. Larry Osborne, stressed focusing on the discipleship of those who are already members of our churches. The question was "how do we take the people we have in our congregations and grow them, while inhibiting their desire to possibly leave the church." One of Pastor Osborne's key concepts is to foster long-term relationships that keep people excited about coming to church. I believe he is on target here. In our busy hustle bustle world many of us long for some sanity and constancy. Having Christian friends that we can pray with, talk to,

engage in fellowship with, and share life's joys and struggles can be very edifying for us. There are different places in our church to find and develop relationships with others, while being open to meeting and growing with new and additional people. For example, friends can be found in small groups where the members plan on staying together and are intent on continuing to engage each other in prayer, conversation, and activity. Here in church we can meet and grow in relationships with others who are of similar faith and convictions. As our communal God is present with us in this church, we are blessed to be moved and enabled by the Spirit to be present with our sisters and brothers in Christ.

A second item of discussion from our conference that I will mention here is the matter of church finances. Many of my colleagues join me in being concerned about our congregations meeting our budgetary needs. As recent reports in the bulletin and newsletter have made quite clear, our giving is significantly down this year. At the conference, we mentioned the necessity of strong stewardship even in economically lean times. This got me to reflecting on the fact that we bring nothing into this world and we take nothing out of it. All that we have while we are here comes as a gift from God. In appreciation for the gifts that God gives us we choose to...

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