

Minutes of the Northern Assembly of Churches meeting, August 7-9, 2009

Friday, August 7 - 2:32pm call to order

Those attending introduced themselves:

Mindy Ahler Olmstead- St. Joan of Arc, Minneapolis; Mary Decorsey – staff, Louisville; Louise Eidsmoe- St. Joan of Arc, Mminneapolis; Amanda Houkum – Faith Lutheran, W. Fargo; Ellie & John Cosgrove- visitors new to Sister Parish, New Jersey; Danilo Martinez- Faith Lutheran, W. Fargo; Eluvia Morales de Leon – Tierra Nueva Dos, Guatemala; Claire Branigan- St Joan of Arc, Minneapolis; Aura Gonzales – Tierra Nueva Dos, Guatemala; Bernie Griesez- St. Joan of Arc, Minneapolis; Kathi Mitchell – First United Methodist, Decorah.

Terry Dynes from Decorah joined us during the meeting

Review of agenda

- Since only 3 churches were represented, we moved “Sharing the story” to our evening program. This will allow time to go to Postville for those of us who would like to visit. Business meeting will go until about 3:30.
- Kathi said she would like to discuss the Host Church responsibilities – with the addition of the Walk in Solidarity it is lots of work. This discussion could be done in committee
- Agreement on Agenda

Review of minutes from NAC 2008 in Valley City

Move to accept minutes – passed

Election of officers:

Presider/Convener – currently Kathi – she is willing to continue

Secretary – currently Pat

Representative to Board of Directors (or two) – Pastor Mark (resigned from this position)

Program Planner – was Claire & Ann McSparon

Nominating Committee - Louise, Danilo (they will discuss during the weekend)

Treasurer – don’t have right now because don’t need

Host Church, When to have Meeting:

- John and Ellie agreed to check with their church, St. Anselm in New Jersey, to see if they would be willing to host.
- This would be an opportunity to introduce their church to Sister Parish. This is our first choice.
- Other possible locations suggested: Downers Grove in Chicago (transportation hub), St. Francis in Raleigh, NC – we thought it might be better to have it outside the Midwest to be closer for churches on one coast or the other.

- It was decided to let the host church decide the date we will meet based on their convenience. August was not a good time to have the meeting in Decorah since many people are on vacation now due to other events earlier in the summer.

Recess to visit Postville: 3:20pm

Saturday, August 8 - 9:22 am resumed meeting

Host Church Responsibilities

- Need to make sure the dates work for the host church.
- When date set, need to set timeline for registration, program completion, etc.
- Might be better to research location and date of the next meeting before the current NAC meeting starts because it's hard to make a decision at the meeting without this input
- Invitation – sister parish staff should be involved in that – other thought is that NAC should do themselves to establish leadership of their own. Staff needs to be copied and needs to know what is happening. This year was more confusing because of changes with Executive Director.
- In the past, personal phone calls were made to invite churches – didn't happen this year due to lack of time/volunteer to do so. All churches received invitation letter in the mail. It seems that phone calls do increase attendance.
- Change 6/30 to “2 months before” (under Invitation section) and add Staff needs to be part of the team.
- Planning committee has been program planners, secretary, presiding officer, administrative assistant (staff or could be Executive Director)
- One possibility in the case of John & Ellie's location – there are many universities that might be interested in having a group use their facilities and make a connection with Sister Parish (of various denominational affiliations) – would probably be during non-school hours.
 - ☐ A copy of the original will be emailed with minutes

Walk in Solidarity

- The host church is responsible for setting route, permits if needed, reflections at stopping points, theme for the reflections. This year the walk was opened to the greater community and the registration fee for the public is being split between Sister Parish and Postville (the local community issue). There was some concern that this was not brought to a larger group to talk about the idea of inviting public and splitting funds between two things. We will see how well it works this year.
- The reasoning for the new approach is that the Walk in Solidarity is a way to introduce new people to Sister Parish. Using the local related cause (many in the Decorah sister parish are very involved in helping people in Postville) that interests the local community may attract new people to participate.
- Need further discussion after this walk to see how it works and to determine if guidelines need to be set on the kind of causes that can be linked to the Solidarity Walk.
- Original intention was that the local church would only be responsible for the route and permits if needed. Sister Parish staff/board is responsible for recruiting walkers and other logistics with input from the host church. Because these responsibilities weren't clearly defined this year, each took on responsibility and made it happen.

- The larger question is how to build participation in the Walk in Solidarity if this will continue to be a major fundraiser for Sister Parish. Churches should have a walk at their own church when they are not able to participate at the NAC. Last year, other churches did this. This year we could not get enough interest at other churches to do their own walk.
- We are talking about method here – end goal: trying to raise awareness and money for Sister Parish. The current method is a walk. When talking to other groups we may want to keep the same end goal, but allow each church to find a method to do this. Others may have new ideas not to do some other type of event or other idea instead of a walk.
- One challenge to scheduling the NAC is delegation visits. When is the peak time for delegation visits? It varies from year to year. Definitely peak time is summer – June, July, August. Sometimes lots around Easter/spring break. Generally have 1-2 at the end of the year for Thanksgiving or New Years.
 - ☐ Kathi and Mary and Danilo and John will work on rewording this and post to basecamp for other input by Sept 15.

Report from the Board

Report given by Louise Eidsmoe, President of the Board of Directors

Executive Director position

- Much board time has been spent trying to replace the Executive Director.
- Ellen has accepted the position of Interim Executive Director, but does not want the position long-term.
- Have received another application, but haven't yet established a new time line for accepting other applications or extension of timeline.
- The job was posted on Craig's list and Idealist (too expensive to renew). It may be too difficult to find someone who meets 100% of the qualifications. The bi-lingual aspect is very important. Personnel Committee is currently in charge of the search.

Annual Linkage fee for churches

- Board wants NAC feedback on this issue.
- The board is looking at the increasing cost of operations.
- The cost of transportation for staff to visit communities has increased. They try to get to communities at least once every two months. There is more concern with staff safety with increasing crime in Guatemala which leads them to take cabs rather than buses.
- The value of the Guatemalan and El Salvadoran currency against the US Dollar has decreased and inflation in these two countries is also a factor.
- Increased costs in administrative, operating and transportation.
- Since its inception the linkage fee has not been raised (about 10 years) – set at \$500/year.
- We are pretty much the lowest of similar organizations.
- Proposal is this: Over the next two years, raise that fee gradually. \$250 increase/year over the next two years.
- Sliding scale fee has been brought for consideration, but need to have guidelines as to the scale to consider (number of church members, sister parish committee budget, overall church budget, church income, etc.).
- What would be the impact on the churches?

- Even with this increase would be on the low end of the spectrum compared to similar organizations.
- Concern is for the smaller churches who are also facing higher costs associated with delegation travel, etc.

Discussion

- There is some frustration that we don't get broad representation at NAC – we have only 3 churches here. Hard to have churches from coasts come. Southern churches have excellent representation at their meetings.
- Should we offer a discount on the annual linkage fee if the church participates in the NAC when the increase in linkage fee goes in effect? Example of \$50/person who attends or some amount per church represented.
- Another option recommended would be to increase the linkage fee by \$100/year for 5 years.
- There are some churches that are really on the edge struggling right now.
- John: likes sliding scale church revenue to number of people in congregation. Another option would be based on the size of the congregation. Another option would be based on the budget of the church.
- What about churches that have small participation in SP committee for the size of their church? Amanda gave example of Faith Lutheran in West Fargo that has only 6 people on the sister parish committee with a large congregation that is active in many things with many different groups. So, just looking at the size of congregations seems unfair. Their delegations would probably be smaller if the linkage fee went up – send 5 rather than 8. People pay as much as they can, but if anyone feels called to go, the group fund raises for the rest. It doesn't seem unfair to raise the linkage fee, but this is the problem that would probably result. We would deal with it as needed.
- Danilo: This needs to be discussed with all the sister parish groups – not just those present at the NAC. Need all the churches to put on their agenda.
- Another model proposed is to base fees on services used by an individual church – visits to community, translating a letter, etc. Terry doesn't think it would work. Could cause problems in communication (which we all agree is critical to a healthy relationship) because a church might not send as many letters or could send bad communication that is not appropriately translated. There is concern about consistency of quality of translation or appropriate communication. Risk of compromising quality of relationship based on staff judgment of what would be needed.
- Decorah has done special donation to Sister Parish for sponsorship of administrative things such as newsletter. This is another option for additional fund raising by suggesting donation amount for specific things.
- It's challenging when we put the dollars before the spirit and vision. We recognize the dollars are needed in addition to the spirit and vision.
- Claire: can we give a proposal to each church to consider? Can we create a survey based on these proposals?
- Danilo also like idea of survey.
- A survey will take time to get church feedback. Linkage fee bills go out in October board meets/votes in November. What should be the timeline for the survey?
- Survey needs to be specific. This is what we need to continue the mission. Of these options, how can we raise this money?

- ❑ Mary will create this proposal and contact churches.

Board of Directors

- Board tries to have representatives from as many churches as possible.
- Don't currently have representation from W. Fargo.
- Looking for new board members – 3 will be retiring this year.
- Need finance, fund raising, recruitment skills. Challenging because we don't have the budget for board members for travel (each pays their own).
- Think if you know anyone who would be interested in participating.
- Email invitation to all churches to nominate someone.

Church Recruitment

- Also need to recruit new churches.
- Packets are available to go talk to anyone that is interested.
- If you know of a church, please send the information to Mary and she will contact.

Took break for supper and resumed discussion at 6:09pm

Staff Report:

El Salvador- Ashley (new staff). We work with CCR.

The only delegation scheduled in El Salvador this year was a very successful visit to Decorah by 6 representatives from Potrerillos. In Guarjila, Wallingford United Methodist Church supports a scholarship program for 18 high school students and 4 university students. The First Lutheran Church of Duluth funds a university scholarship program in San Antonio Los Ranchos - funds are split evenly between eligible students (11 this semester). San José de la Montaña and the First Lutheran Church of Pittsburgh are in the process of beginning a project to support the construction of the church in San José.

Elections

In January 2009 legislative and municipal elections were held. In March Mauricio Funes was elected at the first leftist president in the history of El Salvador. He was inaugurated June 1st and the transition to power has been peaceful. However, control of general economic and legislative remains largely unchanged.

Mining

During the campaign season both former-President Antonio Saca and Mauricio Funes said they would not allow mining in El Salvador. The week Funes was inaugurated, the Canadian mining company Pacific Rim filed a \$77 million suit against the Salvadoran government, which was shortly followed by a \$100 million suit by Wisconsin-based Commerce Group. Both claim they were unfairly denied exploitation/extraction permission. These suits are being pursued under the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA).

Mining remains unpopular nationally and people continue to organize around the issue and advocate for policies that reflect the will and interests of the Salvadoran people. At the invitation

of the CCR, Sister Parish participates in the Departmental Working Group against Mining, with other NGOs and Solidarity organizations that work in the region.

Marcelo Rivera

July 18th Marcelo Rivera, a community leader and activist from San Isidro, Cabañas, disappeared. He was an outspoken opponent of mining in the region and was among the leaders that denounced electoral fraud. Two weeks later his body was found, with evidence that he was tortured. The case has been dismissed by authorities as common crime, while evidence suggests his murder was politically motivated. The coalition of solidarity organizations, in which Sister Parish participates, promoted a letter calling for an impartial investigation.

CCR

The Association of Communities for the Development of Chalatenango-CCR, with whom Sister Parish coordinates in El Salvador, continues their important work in community organizing in the region where the four Sister Parish communities are located. In October, a new board was elected, and Santiago Serrano was elected as the Sistering Representative. Santiago previously served as the sistering representative (2002-2004) and the president (2004-2006) of the CCR.

The CCR continues their work in youth, health, education, and helping the war wounded. They are one of the principal organizers of the Departmental Working Group against Mining. The CCR also collaborates with Caritas and Oxfam America on a savings and loans project, in which they have organized around 3,000 women. They also organized an encounter for university scholarship students that included 100 youth from the region held on August 2nd, including scholarship students from Los Ranchos and Guarjila. The solidarity walk was held during this encounter.

Guatemala –

2009 has brought many changes to the Guatemala Sister Parish office. Since moving into the new Sister Parish office in Zone 2, staff in Guatemala have been working hard to bring in outside groups in order to take advantage of our amazing space, and to help offset our operational expenses. So far we have received groups from a number of organizations, including Witness for Peace, the Guatemala Human Rights Commission and Guillermo Toriello Foundation.

At the first Guatemalan Representative's Meeting, attendees said goodbye to Shannon and her family and thanked her for her years of commitment to their communities and to the organization.

In May, representatives from Guatemala travelled to Chichipate to celebrate 20 years of Sister Parish delegations. The Sister Parish committee in Chichipate organized housing, food and activities for the representatives. Youth from the SP committee run typing school prepared a cultural night that included Mayan Q'eqchi dances, fireworks and music.

The community of Chontalá welcomed a delegation from Incarnation Lutheran in Shoreview, Minnesota. This is a new relationship complicated by language barriers, rough terrain and an aging Sister Parish group in Chontalá. Despite the obstacles, both groups grew in their

understanding of each other's culture and spirituality, and were successful at involving new people in both communities.

Las Margaritas 2 hosted a delegation of their brothers and sisters from St Francis in Raleigh during Holy Week. The combined scholarship project/program for Junior High and High School students is flourishing in its second year. The communities have also improved their communications through monthly teleconferences with the help of Staff.

Tierra Nueva II visited St. Joan of Arc at the end of July, carrying on their 15 year tradition of solidarity through travel. St Joan celebrated this mile-stone, and the 20th Anniv of Sister Parish earlier this year with a dinner fund-raiser, and slide shows commemorating 20 years of Sister Parish delegations and their own 15 year relationship with TN2.

Sepalau was excited to receive 5 parishioners from their Sister Parish in Corpus Christi this past week. The communities have also embarked on their first project – a series of workshops on how to start and manage a chicken farm.

In September, five compañeras from UPAVIM will travel to Downers Grove First United Methodist on their first delegation north with their new linkage. The linkage is working on solidifying a common mission and vision specific to their relationship.

Seritquiche and Our Saviour's Lutheran Church are working on their second project - which will teach people in Seritquiche how to tend a vegetable garden that will serve as a supplemental food source for the whole community. A delegation from OSLC will travel to Seritquiche in November to see the project's progress and visit with their brothers and sisters.

The Sister Parish committee in San Andres Itzapa, with the support of their brothers and sisters at Christ Episcopal Church in Blacksburg, VA, has extended their responsibilities in service to their community by taking on an additional 20 scholarship students for the next three years. The 20 new primary school students will join the 20 original students from the project, who are now in secondary school.

The community of Tierra Nueva 1 has had several changes to their Sister Parish committee, and have recently welcomed a new priest to the community. Their current project focus is working with the elderly.

US

- Executive Director search in progress.
- Bethlehem Lutheran, St. Cloud, MN is no longer pursuing their sister parish relationship due to lack of communication from El Pariso – 2nd relationship that has failed. Staff and Guatemalan directiva went to visit the community to try to repair the relationship with no success.
- Communication between delegation visits. Decline in delegations is understandable in this economy. However, there also has been a decline in communication between sister churches – this should increase when there is less face to face communication (delegations).
Suggestions from staff to improve communication:

- Have committee members take turns monthly in writing letters
- Agenda item at meetings of what to share with southern sister parish
- Regular members of committee who have communication outside the committees, encourage bringing this to the committee so that it is shared.
- Also remember to send prayer requests.
- Copy staff if messages are being sent directly so they know communication is happening and what is happening in each community.
- Discussion of one challenge is that not all churches have monthly meetings. How to bring new life into committee by encouraging involvement by new people?

Solidarity delegation

- Date is set for October 21 – 30, 2009, but need at least two more participants to make it happen. 4 people are committed and others have expressed strong interest.
- Great tool to recruit new church.
- Good chance for family or friend from another church to go and understand what sister parish is all about.
- Will probably be lead by Ashley from El Salvador with Ellen to offer perspective from both countries. Date set for Oct 21-30.
- This delegation will visit Chichipate, UPAVIM and TN2.

Nominating Committee:

Presider – Kathi will continue

Secretary – still need

Program – Louise will ask Ann to continue

Board Rep – still needed

- Will vote on this via base camp

Further Discussion on NAC Meeting participation

- Should we do NAC every two years not every year?
- Might be better until we have a larger church base.
- Could do it on the same years that southern assembly.
- If we have it every two years we risk loosing touch. The lives of everyone are very busy and hard to get all to commit.
- Seems that there are not enough churches represented here to make this decision.
 - Mindy will post this question on Basecamp
- Other years have had better participation – 11 in 2006, 5 in 2008.
- May make agenda item at next NAC meeting.

We need to start collecting email addresses to try to save postage.

- Send email addresses to Mary maria@sisterparish.org along with paper address to be deleted.

Move and second to adjourn. Passed at 7:09pm

Respectfully submitted,
Mindy Ahler Olmstead