

## Reflections on Small Groups and Large Groups

I've been thinking about groups a lot lately. Small groups and large groups are mixed and matched throughout life, and throughout the life of the church. Both kinds of groups offer benefits as we seek to learn, to build relationships, and to be pushed beyond our limits.

A half dozen of us went to either the Virginia Synod Assembly or Youth Assembly this year. We found ourselves in small groups: workshops and discussions groups. We found ourselves in large groups: gathered on the floor of the assembly hall as the congregations of the Virginia Synod, ELCA, and gathered for worship as three young people were ordained into the ministry of Word and Sacrament.

Some of what we discussed and voted on had to do with how we relate as a group, and who is in and out of the group. We voted on a full communion agreement with the United Methodist Church that would expand the ways we can do ministry together. We discussed the Human Sexuality Study and the task force recommendations. "How do Christians with a same sex orientation fit into the larger group? How should they? How can we best provide pastoral care-giving for them?" are questions that continue to defy easy answer. But they are questions that have to do with the group. We as a church (and in our society) have to grapple as a group with hard questions such as these. Our ELCA Church-wide Assembly will continue these discussions in August. There is a summary of Assembly events later in this newsletter. Also, [www.elca.org](http://www.elca.org) is a helpful online resource to find the text of our present and previous studies and social statements. Over the years we have hammered out social statements on abortion,

capital punishment, etc. Documents such as these can be helpful in our group struggle with the social issues of the day.

Large groups and small groups are the basis of the model for our synod youth ministry, and that model continues on the national level as we prepare to send a group to the ELCA National Youth Gathering, this time in New Orleans. Likewise, large groups and small groups are replicated in the way we do Vacation Bible School.

A small group ventured out into the community, representing Salem Evangelical Lutheran Church at the first of our Tuesday night staffings of the Verona Community Food Pantry.

A small group or groups will venture out again, joining up with other congregations for another Thrivent Builds home construction project. We will hear much more about this opportunity during our outdoor worship on July 5<sup>th</sup>.

Jesus gathered folks into large groups for preaching and teaching, but also taught the disciples in small groups. He commanded them to gather for worship, but he sent them out in pairs to be witnesses of the good news.

If you are regularly attending worship, that is a good large group. If not, I recommend it. But what small groups are you involved in? Where are you deepening spiritual connections, and relationships with fellow believers? Where and in what groups is Jesus sending you out to serve?

Peace, Pastor Chris

