

**The Eastern District helps train and equip missional leaders to discover and cultivate resources in order that**

**Congregations become spiritually stronger, better equipped, more outwardly focused, fiscally sound**

**Mission Outposts that identify and embrace outreach opportunities in their community, their region & throughout the world to...**



## *The Challenge Before Us*

"Missional congregation" is the phrase we hear more and more these days. It's been around for a few years, but God's mission and His church are as old as the hills. Nothing new there.

I am ever grateful for those congregations that give "missional" a good representation. They are on my ever increasing list of people who "get it" by word and example. Along the way I have seen many congregations in the Eastern District doing projects and programs that are community focused. Centered on the cross, they are doing little (and not so little) things that reach into the lives of neighbors in a friendly and caring way - just to get a "foot in the door." Along the way, they tell these neighbors about the love of God in Christ Jesus and/or they invite them to their fellowship of worship, Bible Study, and the like. That's where the work of the institutional church is after all, in the local congregation.

We know that the attractional model for the local congregation will not work in a culture that is suspicious and into themselves (ah, the Old

Adam rears his head again). People simply do not and will not seek out the church. Understanding that there are obstacles, real or imagined, missional people and churches go to where people are, much the same way God did not wait for fallen sinful man to come to Him when He sent His Son to this Earth to reconcile us to God. Missional people are sent people. They go and they share the Good News in winsome ways.

The culture around us is different than 30 years ago. The speaker at a recent conference of nearly 700 high profile, active, and dedicated churchmen and women was a national celebrity who was raised in a LCMS home. Her family took this young lady to church all through her young life. She went to Sunday School faithfully, was confirmed, was active in her youth group and rarely missed a Sunday morning church service until a year ago. But now, because of her hectic appearance schedule, she was unable to attend church services. "That's OK," she commented, "I don't believe you have to go to church to be a Christian," and then

she went on with her presentation. Heads turned, people bent down low to whisper to their neighbor, and afterward some were vocal in their disapproval of this young lady's declaration. Well, like it or not, that's where many people are these days, and many more so than years ago. She made a representative statement about our culture and her age group.

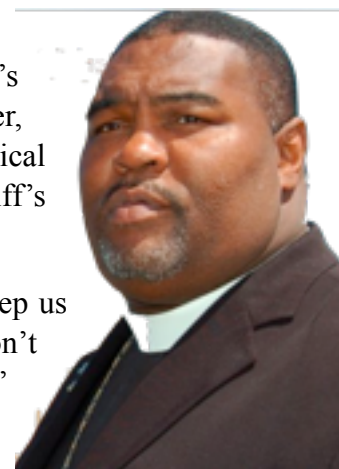
People are seeking the church but they are not looking for it in church buildings. Some people want a closer walk with the Lord and they are not finding it in conventional and traditional ways. I admit, it's difficult for me to get my head around this, but in order for me to be a more effective missional person I need to come to terms with it and respond in an inviting way. That's the challenge before us. The greatest competition to your congregation is not the Christian church down the street any more. It's Walmart and the ball field and the community and civic events that replace your congregation's joyous actions for the Gospel.

***Rev. Chris Wicher, President,  
Eastern District, LCMS***

Across the District	February	March	April - June
<p>The following are dates of interest from congregations and organizations across the district. Telephone numbers or website information have been provided for further information.</p>	<p><b>Feb. 5-6</b> Eastern District Board of Directors First Trinity</p> <p><b>Feb. 9-10</b> Circuit Counselor/VP Retreat, Notre Dame (716.634.5111)</p>	<p><b>Mar. 7-13</b> National Lutheran Schools Week (www.lcms.org)</p> <p><b>Mar. 6 - 28</b> "For the Sake of the Church" Regional Focus Groups</p>	<p><b>May 28-31</b> Family Work Weekend Pioneer Retreat Center (www.PioneerCamp.org)</p> <p><b>June 18-20</b> ED LWML Convention Pittsburgh, PA</p>

### ***Rev. Cobb Receives Award***

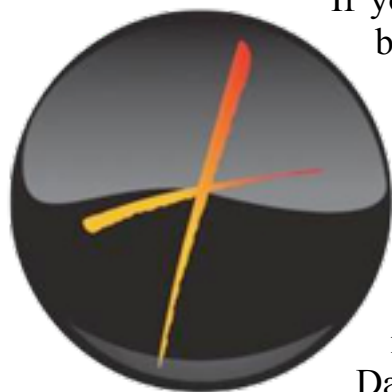
The Rev. Kenyatta T. Cobb, pastor of Hananiah Lutheran Church, Buffalo, NY recently received a special award from the FBI. Cobb, received the 2009 FBI Director’s Community Leadership Award, presented at a ceremony in Erie County Medical Center, where Cobb serves as the senior trauma chaplain. In addition to his duties at the medical center, Kenyatta was honored for his roles as senior chaplain for the Erie County Sheriff’s Office and a chaplain with the Buffalo Police.



Says Cobb, “I believe that those who stand behind the badge to risk their lives to keep us safe and secure deserve all the thanks we can give them. In my work at ECMC, I don’t even want to try to count the number of young men I’ve seen go off to the morgue,” Cobb added. “The young men think the gangs are a way of life, but they’re really a pathway to jail or to the morgue.”

Cobb and others from across the country will attend an FBI ceremony in Washington, D. C. in March.

### ***TRANSFORMING CHURCHES NETWORK***



If you desire to grow a missional-minded congregation as discussed by President Wicher in the lead article of this issue of “Share the Light,” the Eastern District does have a process that will move you in that direction. It’s called “revitalization” or Transforming Churches Network, for those who like the bigger title. A number of congregations in our Eastern District have already gone through this TCN process and some are currently in the process. We’d like to see more congregations do so and are ready to get your request. For more information contact Rev. Dave Bernard at [Dave.Bernard@lcmse.org](mailto:Dave.Bernard@lcmse.org) or 716.634.5111 x 19.

## *An Invitation from President Wicher*

I would ask that you would take a few hours of your time to meet with me and with others in your region during the month of March. I will be conducting two identical meetings in your region and I hope to see you and a few others from your congregation at either of those two gatherings.

My time with you will be spent sharing the 2010 Eastern District budget and our partnership work together. I will also present to you what is my vision for the Eastern District called “**Breaking New Ground for the Mission of Christ.**” Even though it still is a work in progress I do have many ideas for our future and frankly I’m looking for your feedback at this time. The times and places are as follows:

**Pittsburgh Region:** Sat. 1:00 P.M., March 6 – Christ, New Castle PA  
Sun. 3:00 P.M., March 7 – St. Paul, New Kensington PA

**Buffalo Region:** Sat. 1:00 P.M., March 13 – Salem, Springville NY  
Sun. 3:00 P.M., March 14 – First Trinity, Tonawanda NY

**Rochester Region:** Sat. 1:00 P.M., March 20 – Pinnacle, Rochester NY  
Sun. 3:00 P.M., March 21 – St. Paul, Cortland NY

**Philadelphia Region:** Sat. 1:00 P.M., March 27 – St. Mark, Ridley Park PA  
Sun. 3:00 P.M., March 28 – St. Peter, Wilkes-Barre PA

I have been impressed and encouraged by what I see happening in our congregations and regions. I believe that we can and will continue to impact many lives through the Gospel of Jesus Christ in perhaps new and innovative ways. I look forward to meeting you, renewing our acquaintance, and listening to you.

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### **A Healthy Small Church**

There is something very special about a small church. It creates opportunities for fellowship, community and intimacy. Called by the Great Commission to bring people to Christ through their ministry, small congregations take their directive very seriously. But they often struggle with how to “add to their number” as Acts 2:47 says, not just for the sake of becoming larger, but as an effect of truly reaching more and more people for Jesus.

An extensive 2007 study indicates that 55.7% of all congregations in the United States are under 100 people in regular attendance (inc. children); 84.1% of churches are under 250. Here is a statistic that is most interesting: Of the churches with 50-100 in attendance, 32% of those were founded before 1900, and

77.5% of churches from 50 to 100 were founded before 1970. Apparently, if a small church stays small for too long, it’s likely to stay small for decades.



Conversely, if a church can break the 100 mark early in its life, it’s more likely to keep growing.

If you are interested in more of the above, be sure to check out the article (posted under “What’s New” at [www.lcmsed.org](http://www.lcmsed.org)) by

Joe McKeever entitled “Ten Reasons Small Churches Tend to Stay Small” – it may provide some insight to your church in order to reach more people and grow them into mature disciples of Christ - because the local church really is the hope of the world!

### ***Farewell Linda Smyth!***

As of March 1, 2009 our friend and colleague, Linda Smyth, will begin the new life that God has in store for her called “retirement.”

Linda will be sorely missed as friend, colleague and administrative assistant extraordinaire! May God’s blessings and joy encompass her and husband Tim as together they enter this new phase of their life.

## ***Welcome Mary Ellen Sima!***

The Eastern District, LCMS is pleased to announce the addition of Mrs. Mary Ellen Sima (pronounced sigh-ma) as the administrative assistant to District President Chris Wicher. As you call the District office, please be sure to introduce yourself and welcome Mary Ellen as she continues her transition into this office.

You may reach Mrs. Sima in the President's office via phone at 1.716.634.5111 x13 or via email at [MaryEllen.Sima@lcmsed.org](mailto:MaryEllen.Sima@lcmsed.org).

## ***In the Midst of Tragedy, a New Life***



*Lovelie, 11, left, and Wisken, 7, play in the snow, something they had never seen before arriving in Buffalo, outside First Trinity Lutheran Church in the Town of Tonawanda, NY*

In the midst of one of the worst catastrophes to strike the Western Hemisphere in the past century, something wonderful happened to the Rev. and Mrs. Charles Whited, of First Trinity, Tonawanda, NY.

Whited, who has done volunteer work in Haiti for years, was there when the massive earthquake rocked the nation. The quake caused misery for millions, and Whited will never forget all the tragic scenes he witnessed — from the smell of decaying bodies to the screams of injured people.

But he also will never forget something else — that the chaos of the quake enabled him to finalize two adoptions that he and his wife, Susan, spent four frustrating years trying to complete.

And when an exhausted mission team comprised of members of First Trinity and other Buffalo region congregations returned to Buffalo, the couple's two new children — Lovelie and Wisken arrived with them.

(For the Buffalo News story, go to: <http://www.buffalonews.com/cityregion/story/931004.html>)

