

NORTH AMERICAN MISSION

REV. STAN OLSEN

The Regional Pastor team consists of the following pastors: Warren Geraghty, Eastern Region; Stan Olsen, Central Region; Gary Witkop, Western Region; Phil Heiser, Pacific Region and Roger Olson, CLBC. About two years ago, a realization began to emerge of the need for each RP to become somewhat more specialized in different ministry areas. This Regional Pastor specialization process is continuing as we discover new and additional resources (books, training events, possible partnerships etc.) to help us in our areas of specialization. These areas of specialization are as follows: Warren – Pastoral Care; Stan – Church Health; Gary – Church Planting; Phil – Reconciliation Ministry; and Roger – Pastoral Candidate Program, Training and Youth. These areas of specialization are not exclusive, meaning that all of the RPs are also involved in each of these areas in their regions. Regional Biennial conventions are scheduled during 2019 as follows: Pacific Region – May 31-June 2 (Olympia, WA); Central Region – June 7-9 (iPoint, MN); Western Region – June 14-16 (Williston, ND); Eastern Region – June 21-23 (Tuscarora, PA); CLBC – TBD.

CHURCH PLANTING

Epiphany Lutheran Church is the CLB church plant in Manhattan, NYC. Pastor Erick Sorensen is the church planter who is starting this church. NAM is significantly contributing to the funding of this church planting effort. Epiphany launched weekly Sunday services in April 2017 meeting at 5:00 p.m. in their rented space—a local Slovakian Lutheran Church. Pastor Erick Sorensen writes, “Epiphany is very young, diverse and transient. Epiphany is growing and has a significant percentage of non-Christians

attending regular meetings with about 60 people calling us their church home (our average Sunday attendance is half that number). Epiphany’s financial situation is getting stronger, but there is still not nearly enough local giving to sustain our ministry in the future. To remedy this, we are praying for a significant number of more mature Christians to join our church’s mission to the city. Some of these people may come from our partnership with Hillside, but most of this necessary growth must come from the local area.” As Pastor Erick referenced, he and his family have moved their residence to Succasunna, NJ for both financial and family reasons. Erick and family are living in a Hillside parsonage and he is ministering part-time at Hillside.

The River, a church plant of the CLBC, continues to meet for worship and supper one Sunday evening each month in rented space in the center of Red Deer, Alberta. Although attendance has been smaller after Christmas, the attenders (potential core) are from the city and surrounding area rather than including many driving from other LB churches in Camrose, Calgary and Edmonton. The group continues to build relationships with “new” Canadians: refugees from Syria, Congo, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Iraq, and Kyrgyzstan, through a weekly gathering at a contact’s home, as well as connecting with students at a home gathering for food and study in Olds (45 minutes south). Harold and Joyce Rust continue to give thanks for Lutheran Brethren individuals that God has brought to assist in this work.

Bethel Battle Lake, MN is the multi-site effort of Bethel LC in Fergus Falls, MN with Kevin Foss as the Battle Lake campus pastor. This effort started

meeting early in January 2015. The work is going well with over 100 people in regular attendance, many from Fergus Falls, but also with a growing number of families and individuals from the Battle Lake community becoming a part of the church. A recent development is that a former youth center in Battle Lake located near the meeting place of the congregation has been donated to Bethel as a place of ministry for its youth. This Youth Center has been in some disrepair, but Bethel has budgeted the necessary funds to address the needed repairs. As you are likely aware, Campus Pastor Kevin Foss has been receiving treatment since he had a tumor removed from his neck in 2016. Please continue to pray for Kevin.

Parker, CO outreach. A Bible study in Parker, CO, a southern suburb of Denver, has been meeting for more than a year and is led by Pastor Jason Rogness of Community in Christ in Arvada, CO. Pastor Rogness has put together a proposal for transitioning that Bible study into a church plant under the guidance of NAM and Generate, a church planting ministry. Pastor Rogness has been meeting with RP Gary Witkop and has begun training provided by Generate and believes this summer/fall is the time to start an official church plant in that area. This proposal was accepted by the COD in March contingent on available funding from the CLB.

Grace LBC of Bismarck has been providing a children’s ministry in nearby Lincoln, ND for a few years, but the consensus is that it is moving closer to transitioning into a church plant headed up by NAM. Pastor Ryan Nordlund has put together a proposal that has been brought

to NAM to move this work forward. Originally this initiative was intended to be a multi-site effort by Grace LBC, but due to Grace's own strong congregational growth the conclusion is that it would be best led by NAM.

Fifth Act is a CLB-affiliated ministry whose purpose is to be a catalyst for starting LB churches in major urban areas in North America. It was started by seven LB pastors from the Eastern Region. The current director is Ryan Nilsen. Fifth Act continues to explore partnerships and other possible church planting locations in North American urban centers, as well as providing ongoing coaching and encouragement to Epiphany Lutheran in Manhattan (see above).

CHURCH HEALTH

The primary components of a healthy church are a healthy pastor, healthy internal congregational ministries and healthy external outreach. The Regional Pastors are involved in resourcing CLB churches in all of these areas in an ongoing way. But for more than a year the RP team has recognized the need to place a higher priority on church health and vitality in our churches. We have recognized that there are a great many CLB churches that have been in plateau or decline that exhibit the need of assistance to achieve greater health and vitality so they can more effectively connect with their communities to reach people with Jesus. We are developing both diagnostic and remedial tools to help churches address these areas. Additionally, the RPs have composed a draft of a proposal for a long-term revitalization plan for the denomination. In addition the Arrow Corps initiative and Reconciliation ministry are both in development phases

of our efforts to support greater church health and vitality.

YOUTH MINISTRY

The denominational youth convention occurs every other year, so there is no convention in 2018, but YC'19 will occur on July 20-24, 2019 at the YMCA of the Rockies in Estes Park, Colorado. The theme is "Revealed" based on Romans 1:17, and the plenary speakers are Dr. David Veum and Rev. Troy Tysdal. Pastor Brandon Pangman leads this important denominational youth event working with an active planning team. The attendance goal for the next convention is 625-650 youth.

The RP team has sensed a need to more effectively minister to and engage our CLB young adults, so as a result we initiated a group of young adults and people engaged in young adult ministry to form a think tank to formulate possible ways to address this need more effectively. The think tank met monthly beginning in January 2017 with its final meeting at YC'17 in July. Roger Olson and Gary Witkop have been the RP representatives to the think tank, and they will be following through on communicating the think tank recommendations to the COD. YM Communications: Mark Johannesen continues to serve as the NAM point person in communications with LB youth leaders, offering training and ongoing contact and encouragement.

REGIONAL PASTOR MINISTRY

The Regional Pastors continue to meet bimonthly with President Larson in an online video conference for team building and prayer, planning, and discussion of regional issues including pastoral and congregational transitions and issues, and "big rock" opportunities that occur.

We also assist the Office of the President with the Pastoral Candidate Program that we facilitate mentors for the pastoral candidates and a retreat each January for each candidate and spouse. As always, the RPs have assisted in numerous pastoral placements, installations, and ordinations. We have also been a part of regional and congregational retreats and conferences, as well as preaching and teaching in CLB churches in our regions.

The Regional Pastors (and their wives) continue to provide pastoral care and encouragement to our CLB pastors and wives, as well as to our congregations. We have facilitated in conflict resolution situations, encouraged cluster ministries, provided mentoring, church assessments and church health surveys and generally worked with congregational pastors and leaders toward greater church health and vitality.

Rev. Stan Olsen serves the Church of the Lutheran Brethren as Central Region Pastor.