

## A chaplain's-eye view of the Good Samaritan Society

**EDMONTON** - Whether you live in a big city, a suburb or a small town, you'll notice a growing number of elders living among you. Many are active and engaged in church and volunteer activities, but a significant number need help with their health needs. One group at the forefront of providing compassionate care is the Good Samaritan Society (GSS), a Lutheran Social Service organization and one of the largest nonprofit health-care providers in Canada.

The Good Samaritan Society began with a \$7,000 donation by Gottlieb Wedman, a Lutheran farmer from Leduc, Alberta, who saw the need for an "old-folks home" to look after aging farmers who could not look after themselves. The year 2009 marks the society's official 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

GSS has grown from one facility in 1955—originally named the Good Samaritan Auxiliary Hospital—to 27 facilities located throughout Alberta and British Columbia. The mission now encompasses caring for the elderly, the disabled, and some younger adults as well. They remain true to their mission: to "extend Christian hospitality" to those in need.

Starting with one volunteer chaplain for residents, clients, staff and families, the group's Pastoral Care Services has grown to include 19 full- and part-time Lutheran chaplains. Donations from the Lutheran community and others support them.

Chaplains at each facility work with a health-care team made up of professionals such as social workers, nurses, recreation therapists, care managers and other front-line workers. Chaplains often participate in care conferences at which they give input about residents' spiritual needs. Chaplains also help seniors reconnect to their spiritual leaders and to their faith community.

Personally, chaplains take on a number of roles in their Good Samaritan ministries. They are



Pastor Robert Marshall

worship leaders, teachers, singers, caregivers, encouragers, healers, bridge builders and listeners, all the while providing a compassionate presence.

Many residents and clients cannot get to their home church on Sundays, so the chaplain provides worship opportunities. Weekly Bible studies also provide something for residents to look forward to during the week. Lively discussions ensue, in which chaplains hear how the Biblical narrative of God's Word connects with residents' life experiences, hopes and dreams.

At hymn sings, residents gather to sing old favorites that not only activate their memories but provide soul-sustenance and a strong connection to their faith. Many hymns bring back memories of Sunday school,

weddings and church picnics. An often-requested favourite hymn is "Jesus Loves Me," in which we are reminded of God's unconditional love for all His children.

Through one-on-one visits, chaplains provide a ministry of presence to those feeling anxious, worried and lonely or dealing with loss. Challenges are many, and knowing a chaplain will listen to them, pray with them and offer them God's love gives people hope for the future.

When a resident draws near the end of life, the chaplain strives to stay sensitive to his or her spiritual needs, as well as those of the family preparing to say goodbye. Through prayer, Scripture reading and perhaps holding a hand, the chaplain conveys God's grace and ultimate love. When staff mourn the loss of residents they have cared for, perhaps for many years, the chaplain can help them in their grief.

We all have a story of faith to share. Personally, as a chaplain at several Good Samaritan sites, I'm not only able to share the greatest story of all time but also have the privilege of hearing authentic and deeply moving stories of faith from the residents I serve. And I cannot help but realize I've been given a gift that strengthens my own faith.

*Rev. Robert Marshall,  
Good Samaritan Society Chaplain*

## Serving Christ in community for 40 years

**CRESTON, B.C.** - On June 28 Rev. Harry and Mary Haberstock (Redeemer Lutheran Church) received honours for 40 years of service, in an event called "Christ in Community" at Creston's recreation centre. Their three sons and daughter, grandchildren, church members and many other friends joined the celebration.



Rev. Don Schiemann, ABC District president, brought greetings, as did Creston's mayor, Ron Toyota. John Hopcraft and Brian Daybell served as masters of ceremony for the evening, guiding the flow of tributes for both Pastor Harry and Mary, including letters read from faraway friends unable to attend.

## Evangelism outside the box—and on the track

### DRUMHELLER, Alta.

- When members of Grace Lutheran Church discovered that 400 students and staff from a nearby public school planned to make seven laps around the church as part of a circuit for the Terry Fox Run, they decided to reach out in a big way to the teenagers and teachers. They set up a barbecue in the church parking lot and offered free hotdogs and pop for everyone participating.

Grace's youth band provided music, and church members handed out 400 chocolate bars—which included



Members of Grace Lutheran Church in Drumheller served lunch to 400 local participants in the Terry Fox Run.

invitations to the youth group's kick-off event a few days later.

Since the activity ran into the noon hour, many students and staff

lingered on the church lawn and neighbouring boulevards listening to the band, visiting with members of the congregation and meeting the pastor.

The congregation's kindness overwhelmed the students, who made thank-you cards later addressed to Grace. Several school staffers commented how impressed they were by the congregation's generosity,

and said they might check out a service on Sunday. For some, it was the closest they had ever been to a church in their lives.

## Of doughnuts and mustard seeds

**CALGARY** - In the New Testament, John talked about what to do when we see others in need. He told us to have active compassion: "Let us not love in word or talk, but in deed" (1 John 3:18 ESV). When we see a need it is good to talk about it, but we also must do something about it. We are instructed to be "doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22).

Grade 4 students at Prince of Peace Lutheran School in Calgary learned firsthand about doing with compassion when they collected donations recently for Calgary's Mustard Seed ministry. It all started with their teacher Mrs. Bjorgum and her "Doughnuts with Dads" program.

She explains: "It's something fun I do to get the dads involved. Every month, on a Friday morning, a different dad or two will volunteer. They'll come in and talk to the class about their job or a hobby. They'll also bring one of their favourite storybooks and read it to the class. They may bring a snack as simple as Timbits or cookies. The kids love seeing their fathers in the classroom, and it's a great way to have more of a male presence here as well."

In mid-October Grade 4 had its first dad visit: Rev. Kevin Kurtz,

who told the children about his job as chaplain of the Mustard Seed. Mustard Seed Street Ministry is a nonprofit Christian organization that meets the needs of the less fortunate through food, clothing, shelter, health care and education. Together with the community they offer guidance and support toward independence and lasting life changes. After learning more about his involvement and what Mustard Seed does, the children began to ask how they could help. Rev. Kurtz told them about many items they could donate, and of course said they

could pray for the people whose lives Mustard Seed touches.

The students decided they were going to start collecting donations and involving the rest of their school. Every day other students, teachers and parents would stop by the classroom with donations. After only a week, "our room was overflowing with so many donations!" one boy exclaimed.

Throughout the project, Grade 4 students learned it only takes one person to plant a seed, and with prayer and dedication miracles really can happen.



Fourth-graders rejoice in the generosity inspired by a visit from the chaplain of Mustard Seed Street Ministry.

## Reaping the harvest

**CANMORE, Alta.** - A seed planted in March at a Youth Ministry Institute (YMI) workshop at Grace Lutheran in Calgary, hosted by YMI director, Susan Bernhardt and led by Lynn Gergens, bore fruit this fall with the September 25-27 Canmore youth retreat for the Calgary Circuit.

Roswitha Yamamoto and Joyce Lobitz, from Canmore's Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church, were inspired by the workshop to start something for their own three youth members. With the help of volunteers, the youth retreat took shape...and grew.

The weekend included games, singing, Bible study sessions, hiking, and taking a dip in the Banff hot springs. Some 30 youth and 10 counsellors participated, staying overnight in the church and enjoying



a spaghetti supper and delectable crêpes for breakfast. The group hopes to hold future events—helping youth to get to know each other and to grow in faith in Christ Jesus.

Calgary Circuit Youth, having just enjoyed the retreat organized by Shepherd of the Valley, Canmore, AB, participate in Sunday morning worship.



### From the President

“**O**ur congregation is a sea of grey,” lamented one pastor. “I perform twice as many funerals as I do baptisms,” said another. “Most of my visiting time is spent with seniors and in nursing homes,” added another.

It is true that ours is an aging society and an aging church. Baby boomers have now reached the age when they can order from the seniors’ menu, and that demographic is certainly well represented in our church.

The second chapter of the gospel of Luke records the much-loved account of the birth of our Saviour. It also records the presentation, according to Jewish custom, of the Christ child in the temple in Jerusalem. It is in this narrative that we are introduced to two seniors.

First there is old Simeon. The gospel writer tells us “this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ” (Luke 2:25-26 ESV). When Simeon saw the Christ child, he took Him into his arms and blessed God. Luke records Simeon’s words, which are repeated regularly in our liturgy and have become words of comfort to countless Christians as they faced

their last hour: “Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation...” (v.29).

Then there is Anna. According to St. Luke, she had been a widow from the time she was a young woman. She had devoted her life to worship, fasting and prayer in the temple. Then, at age 84, she too recognized the infant Jesus as the Saviour of the world. According to the gospel account, “And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem” (Luke 2:38).

Simeon’s words of gratitude and assurance and Anna’s witness to the Gospel of our infant Lord have had lasting and even eternal impact on the lives of so many. Their “senior moments” were not ones of forgetfulness but of clear proclamation. They spoke of redemption through Christ and the eternal hope we have as Christians.

Seniors have played a special role in the unfolding of God’s plan of salvation, from Abraham and Sarah to Moses and down through history to Simeon and Anna. As we look at the seniors in our pews today, let’s give thanks to God for the role so many of them have played in their many years, passing the good news of the Gospel from one generation to the next.

*Rev. Don Schiemann*

## Canmore celebrates two anniversaries in one

**CANMORE, Alta.** - On Sunday, October 4, guests, members, former pastors and their families and friends of Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church gathered to celebrate its 25th anniversary as an organized congregation—along with the church facility's 15th anniversary since its dedication. After hearing the message "Ebenezer: To This Point and Beyond" by Rev. Mark Lobitz, worshippers joined in a luncheon that included much visiting and reminiscing. Chair Bob Felstead read letters of greeting from District President Rev. Don Schiemann and from former pastors and members. The congregation felt blessed to have Rev. Mel and Elaine Wolters arrive from Jerome, Idaho, to join in the celebration. Rev. Wolters served as Shepherd of the Valley's first full-time resident pastor. The congregation raised thanks and praise to the Lord for all the blessings of Word and Sacrament known in the Bow Valley during the past quarter-century.



After celebrating 25 years of God's faithful grace, the members at Shepherd of the Valley, Canmore, Alberta enjoy fellowship and food.

## Alberta ordination



Pastors Curtis Boehm, Clint Magnus, Rob Mohns, Michael Kuhn

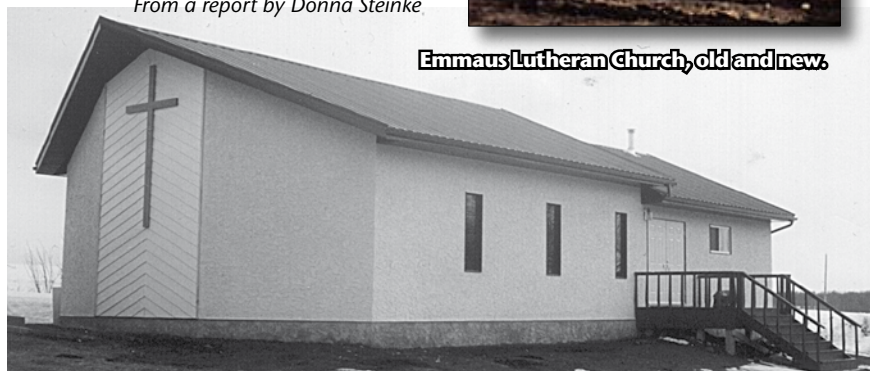
## 80 years and counting

**NORTH KLESKUN, Alta.** - On August 16 about 95 members and friends helped celebrate the 80th anniversary of Emmaus Lutheran Church in this small town just east of Sexsmith, Alberta. Friends and longtime members mingled as they also celebrated the church's Friendship Sunday. The Lord blessed the day with "fantastic" weather, said congregation member Donna Steinke, which "enabled us all to be together and celebrate His gifts."

*From a report by Donna Steinke.*



Emmaus Lutheran Church, old and new.



**DIDSBURY, Alta.** - On Sunday, June 21, 2009, Pastor Rob Mohns pastor at Redeemer Lutheran Church ordained Pastor Clint Magnus. The congregation included members of Redeemer and visitors from Leduc, Alta. and Kitimat, B.C. Pastor Magnus served his vicarage at Redeemer, Kitimat for two years, and served his field placement at St. Peter's, Leduc while attending seminary.

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