



Area Church Congregations Work Together To Thrive

By: Karen Carpenter

Good health is frequently viewed only on a physical level. There is such a thing as good spiritual health. It is every bit as important as physical health and often overlooked.

At Gran-Park-Rollag Lutheran Parish and Living Grace Lutheran Church members spiritual health is a priority.

Gran-Park-Rollag (GPR) Parish is made up of three small rural congregations. Each church body is unique but tied together as one parish by the bonds of a common goal.

Pastor Jim Greene is the spiritual leader of the GPR Parish. He has been in the role for the past 17 years and he is still excited about what he does.

On March 1, 2017 GPR Parish began a new and interesting project. They began a collaboration with Living Grace Lutheran Church in Hawley. All four church bodies are still wading through the process of what a collaboration should look like.

It is important to note that they will not be a four-point parish, that isn't the plan. GPR will collaborate with Living Grace, sharing a welcoming community to reach even more people for the Lord.

The initial contract ran to the end of 2017, making it a trial period of the parish collaboration.

A dedicated group formed Living Grace Lutheran Church, a mission start church, six years ago. The congregation holds worship Sunday mornings in the Garrick Theater in Hawley.

They are led by Pastor Hope Deutscher. Ministry is a second career for Pastor Deutscher. She spent 20 years in media and communication before attending seminary. Pastor Deutscher is a native of Bismarck, ND.

"As a pastor and mission developer, visiting not only members of Living Grace, but also being out in the community meeting people is important to me.

"We don't have an office or church secretary in Hawley, therefore, I try to spend as much time as I can either at one of the local eateries or coffee shop.

"I have found that sitting and working in one of these places, allows me to engage with people from the community who may not seek out a pastor to talk to in a typical church office.

Along with preparing a weekly sermon, Pastor Deutscher prepares the bulletin and performs other office duties as needed.

"I always say people before paper!" said Pastor Deutscher. "I lead a monthly Bible study at Hartford Homes, participate in community events, lead worship services at Hawley Senior Living on a rotating basis with other pastors and lead a Bible study at Northside Terrace."

At their respective annual meetings in January and February, the four churches decided to continue the collaborative experiment.

Pastor Hope was ordained four years ago. Pastor Jim was ordained 33 years ago. Each pastor's experiences are so very different. Not only different in years in the ministry but being of different gender as well.

"When I meet people shortly out of seminary, I see how little they know about the world and it is refreshing to see how little I know about the world," said Pastor Greene.

Within the collaboration Pastor Deutscher has been focusing her time and energy on mutual women's ministry and youth ministry.

"Across the four congregations there are already Bible studies and other gatherings for women," explained Pastor Deutscher. "A newly formed Mutual Women's Ministry Team is exploring and planning events for women of all four churches to come together and



Pastor Hope Deutscher, left, and Pastor Jim Greene, right, are the two spiritual leaders who are guiding the collaboration between Gran-Park-Rollag Lutheran Parish and Living Grace Lutheran Church in Hawley. Deutscher has been ministering to Living Grace the past four years and Greene has been at GPR Parish for 17 years.

to invite women from the community to join us for a variety of events."

Living Grace has benefited from the partnership of the youth ministry. "Youth from all four congregations are participating in Luther League and other youth activities," stated Pastor Deutscher.

"In June, we will send 13 youth from our congregations to the National Youth Gathering in Houston, four of those are from Living Grace.

"Through this collaboration, we can work together to raise funds making it possible to attend a life-changing event and because of the partnership, our youth had more courage to try new things and sign up to attend the gathering."

Pastor Greene views this coming together in collaboration as a new and exciting venture. Pastors Deutscher and Greene each bring unique talents and experiences together to make all four church congregations stronger and more effective.

The concept of finding different ways to serve the congregation is not new for GPR. They hosted interns for three years. Interns are not as readily available now and they chose a different route to broaden their ministry moving forward.

The internship experience became a bridge for something new and exciting for GPR Parish.

In many ways the collaboration is a mission. Because missionaries are often viewed as only those called to minister to other countries, opportunities in ones back yard are often missed.

The collaboration allows members to see and seek to be missionaries in their communities,



Living Grace hosted worship and an open house brunch for Gran-Park-Rollag members on June 4, 2017. Living Grace Lutheran Church holds services in the Garrick Theatre in Hawley. Gran-Park-Rollag and Living Grace congregations are involved in an ongoing collaboration of ministry to their members and the community.

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