

Bethany Lutheran Church, Lindsborg, KS
18th Sunday after Pentecost, October 16, 2011
Bethany College Sunday

Happy birthday Bethany College! For 130 years we have been changing lives and making an important contribution to the Lindsborg community.

Please stand as you are able if you have ever attended an event at Bethany College - Messiah, sports, concert, play, etc.? Please remain standing if you ever took a class at Bethany College? Please remain standing if you are a graduate of Bethany College? Thank you. You may sit down.

I think it's quite obvious how important the relationship and connections are between this church and the college.

As a college of the church, perhaps a paraphrase of today's Psalm says it best:

"O Bethany sing to the Lord a new song;
sing to the Lord, all alumni, students, faculty and staff.
Sing to the Lord, bless his name;
tell of his salvation from day to day.
Declare his glory among the colleges,
his marvelous works among all the peoples."

I cannot think of a more appropriate place for me to be on the weekend of Bethany College's 130th anniversary than to be worshipping at Bethany Lutheran Church. For truly, Bethany College was born in the church - this church in that sacristy. We remind ourselves and our graduates of that linkage each commencement as the baccalaureate procession begins here at Bethany Lutheran Church. What a wonderful tradition and message to our graduates that we are a college of the church.

But have you ever wondered about that day, October 15, 1881? Ironically, like yesterday, that day was a Saturday. Not that I buy into that old Mother Goose rhyme, but how prophetic, "Saturday's child works hard for a living."

As I learn more about this church's second pastor and the college's founder and second president I continue to be amazed and in awe. Emory Lindquist captured it best in his history of Bethany College: "Carl Swensson was not only a dreamer but a man of dynamic action. He soon disclosed his aspirations to pastors and laymen in the Smoky Valley. The response was heartening. The young pastor decided immediately to found a Christian school at Lindsborg, a village with 700 people. This action was on his private initiative and responsibility since no church, conference, or synod had promised support."

Inspired by Swensson last week I shared for the first time publicly our bold and compelling vision for Bethany College. I believe Swensson would approve.

Let me let you in on a secret.

Over the last several years, as we worked to imagine Bethany's future, we followed a process that I have since realized is the same as a church's missional discernment process. To paraphrase Alan Roxburgh & Alan Romanuk in their book, *The Missional Leader*, "being missional is being a community of God's people who live into the imagination that they are, by their very nature, God's missionary people living as a demonstration of what God plans to do in and for all of creation." That is, being missional means to stop, listen, and imagine what God is up to.

Throughout our discernment process we listened to hundreds of stakeholders' stories and listened to our history and heritage to imagine what plans God might have for Bethany. As the still, small voice began to be distinguished from the noise, what became clear was our future should focus on *Student Engagement, Discovery* and the attributes that shape what we call our *Saga*, the meaning derived from the Norse word for heroic or legendary events. Bethany College's *Saga* consists of *Lutheran, Swedish, Place, and Participation*.

What we heard and imagined from the stories informed and shaped our future. More importantly, what we heard and imagined informed what today I'll call our missional directions. These missional directions will then inform and shape our student's journey through Bethany and will guide us to our vision.

The first missional direction is discovery, reflection and vocation. It drives students' learning where success will be marked at graduation by critical thinking, effective communication, information literacy, intellectual curiosity and employment or graduate school entry within six months.

Through this missional direction our graduates will experience our expression of Lutheran-ness. That is, through discovery, reflection and vocation our graduates will be prepared for a career of consequence because they have discovered their passion and are able to reflect, "So, what does this mean?" and to discern, "Now, what path will I take?"

The second missional direction is servant leadership and follows the example of Jesus of Nazareth who led and served, spanning boundaries in service of a larger vision. Our graduates will go out spanning boundaries to create new visions as educational, business, entrepreneurial or missional leaders.

Global citizenship is our third missional direction and prepares our graduates to function successfully in a "flattening world," enabling each graduate to appreciate a world view and to develop the ability and desire to become engaged in global issues.

The final direction is sustainable living and defines success as actively integrating social responsibility, economic prosperity, environmental stewardship and spiritual renewal – people, profit, planet and prayer – meaning our graduates successfully understand how to live a sustainable life and how to lead a sustainable organization.

In addition to these missional directions, as students journey through Bethany in the future they will be further guided by faculty and staff serving as discovery partners and each student's progress will be tracked by a portfolio. Taken collectively, we are calling this college-defining initiative *Bethany Pathway*. If this seems new, it is. If this seems distinct and compelling, we hope it will be. We are expecting *Bethany Pathway* to allow Bethany to be heard in a noisy marketplace - to sing to the Lord a new song!

Let me conclude by quoting one of Lindsborg's newspapers, the *Lindsborg Localist*, from June 1882 - just eight months after our founding - "There is an enterprise underway here that should not be forgotten by our people, namely the Lutheran Bethany Academy. No enterprise could be of greater importance to our city. Talk it up."

So, in fine Lutheran sending ... Go Swedes. Serve the Lord. Talk it up.
Thanks be to God.