

# Seminary student reflects on call to ministry and journey through seminary

One of the key goals of the Thrive plan is to raise up the next generation of spiritual leaders. Jordan Louks is on a journey to become one of those leaders.

Following God's call to ordained ministry is not always easy. For Jordan, the support that he received from his friends, family, church and the conference has made a difference.

Louks is a member of Spearfish United Methodist Church. He really did not participate in youth activities. Instead, after being invited, he became a member of the church choir. He was sixteen and the average age of the other members was 60. Jordan became involved in other musical groups at the church, bell choir and praise band. It was during this time he felt God calling him to ministry, but he pushed it away.

"I really was not sure. In my teenage mind, I envisioned church leaders as people who were bold and strong in their convictions, without any doubt or fear. But I was a teenager, forming my identity and was full of fear and doubt," described Louks.

Jordan went onto college and joined a small group that met at the Rev. Scott McKirdy house, every Sunday evening for supper, games and conversation. At the college-aged small group, Louks explored with others what it means to be human and how God plays into that. He met his wife, Alyssa, in that small group.

His call to ministry became more vivid.

Pastor Scott McKirdy and his wife Colleen, became great friends, colleagues and mentors. God continued to call Jordan. A mission trip to Honduras, his continued involvement at Spearfish UMC, and support from family solidified his call.

After exploring and receiving scholarship offers from three seminaries, Jordan is attending Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois. His wife Alyssa is with him and is a tremendous support system.

Additionally, Louks has been supported spiritually and financially by the Dakotas Conference. He has ongoing contact with his mentor Rev. Scott McKirdy, district superintendents have visited him at Garrett-Evangelical Seminary and he has received scholarship support.

Jordan has this to say about the financial assistance he has been provided. "The financial assistance is simply spectacular. I would not be able to do this without all of the financial support. Because of it I will personally leave seminary debt-free. That is simply amazing, especially today when most graduate students are enormously in debt by the time they graduate. Because I am debt free, it will ensure that there is not a large cloud hanging over my head as I begin pastoral ministry."



Photo courtesy of Jordan Louks.

He will finish seminary this spring and hopes to be commissioned as an elder in the Dakotas Conference.

"The support I received inspires me to be a continued advocate for financial aid to students and higher education. All people should have the opportunity to have an education, and those called to ordained ministry should be able to attend seminary without taking on exorbitant debt," said Louks.

Financial support, spiritual support and mentoring are all key parts of the Thrive plan to raise up the next generation of leaders.

# Thrive on the Move

January 2018



## Looking back on what we have accomplished



### Since 2015...

**30** Churches are multiplying disciples through MCCI and Journey Renewal. These churches are implementing **183** new ideas and initiatives to reach new people for Jesus through effective, impactful ministry in the 21st century.



**20** The Dakotas Conference is caring for 20 students who are in seminary on their journey to becoming an ordained elder or deacon.

**376** clergy across the conference engaged in **4,368** hours of coaching and training this past year.



**11** *New Church Starts*

#### Feasibility: Years 1-2

- Box Elder—The Bridge
- Embrace Sertoma campus (Sioux Falls, SD)
- Salem Unite (Salem, SD)
- Spirit Lake (Sheyenne, ND)

#### Viability: Years 2-5

- Embrace Downtown campus (Sioux Falls, SD)
- First African (Fargo, ND)
- ReNew (Kenmare, ND)

#### Sustainability: Years 5-7

- Embrace Tea campus (Tea, SD)
- Embrace online
- Encounter (Watertown, SD)
- Fusion (Mitchell, SD)



The Thrive campaign will enable the conference to: start **10** new faith communities, assist over **112** churches in revitalizing their ministries and develop leaders for the future.

In 2018, over **\$220,000** of Thrive funds will be spent on establishing new churches (**\$155k**), coming alongside existing churches to enter a new era of growth (**\$32k**), and raising up and developing leaders (**\$33k**).

Total Pledged	\$3.6M
Total Collected*	\$1.55M

\*as of December, 2017

*Thank you for your continuing support to Thrive!*

# MCCI revitalization process inspires 29 new members at Madison UMC

"We have been blessed by God's presence within our church and our community," said Rev. Barry Whipkey, Madison UMC. "We continue to reach into our community through our 'We Love Madison' outreach. We also have a significant presence and ministry on the Dakota State University campus. It is not about me and not about the church. It is about God working through us, and the power of the Holy Spirit."

On November 12, 2017, Madison United Methodist Church welcomed 29 adults into membership along with 15 children.

## MCCI creates new life cycle

It all began with the Missional Church Consultation Initiative (MCCI). MCCI is a process that resources churches and their pastors with an intensive consultation and clergy-coaching model. The process is designed to discern what should come next and jumpstart a new life cycle of ministry fruitfulness.

A MCCI Consultation Team visited on-site at Madison UMC for three days. The team conducted interviews, reviewed data and met with various groups. At the end of the visit, the team presented the congregation with five unique "prescriptions" (recommendations), for next steps the church needs to take. One of them was the "We Love Madison" prescription.

The "We Love Madison" prescription is all about evangelism. The congregation has spent lots of resources reaching out to students at Dakota State University and members of the community with the love of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. "We hired a second pastor who focuses on outreach at Dakota State University, young adult and youth ministry," described Whipkey.

Another approach that Madison UMC has taken is known as the triad series, introduced by Rev. Joseph Bishman of the West Ohio Conference of The United Methodist Church. Bishman encourages churches to look around their community and plan a series of intentional, stepping stone events that move a targeted population to a closer relationship with



Reverend Barry Whipkey (right) invites 29 new members to Madison UMC, during a worship service, as a result of the "We Love Madison" MCCI prescription. Photo by Glenda Blom.

a community of faith and relationship with Jesus.

Madison UMC planned a triad series around families that were recipients of back-to-school supplies from the community. The first event was held in a park, right across from the place where families came to pick up their backpacks for school. Members of the church served hot dogs, had some entertainment and invited family members to participate in games. The first event focused on forming a relationship with each other.

The second event was a parents' night out. Parents could drop off their children at the community center. Madison UMC provided food, games and entertainment for the children while parents spent time shopping or going to a movie. The focus of this event was demonstrating love and care for each other.

The third event was a family fun night. Those that attended enjoyed pizza and played games. The conversation at the third event was all about relationships with others, the community and God.

There was only one service on the Sunday of the new members. "We wanted to make it a celebration," said Whipkey. "It was a true feel-good moment and a jubilant celebration." After the service there was a chili cook-off to help add to the celebratory atmosphere.

## Looking ahead

Now Madison UMC is starting the next triad series. The next series is based on feedback from families. "We will be focusing on family dynamics, faith issues and financial issues," explained Pastor Barry. "There are some single parents and blended families in the group that we are inviting to the events. We hope to connect them with resources in the community and the church. We will introduce a small group called Helping Hands small group."



Rev. Barry Whipkey

The church has seen a growth, not only in professions of faith and transfers from other churches, but in a general call to do Kingdom work. The outreach dynamic of doing work for His Kingdom has led to more people being in worship and a larger number of volunteers for committees and church leadership roles. People are feeling empowered to do things for others and to do outreach.

Whipkey explained the shift in this way. "The people in the church and community who we come in contact with trust us, appreciate us and are now willing to take the next steps with us. We will have another group event in the future. The Holy Spirit truly is at work in Madison!"

# Looking ahead: Accelerating our rate of launching new congregations



**The challenge:** The Dakotas Conference has been reproducing (or launching new congregations) at a rate of about half of 1 percent annually. "We aren't reproducing at a rate fast enough to take advantage of opportunities or to offset our own decline," explained Rev. Ben Ingebretson, Dakotas-Minnesota director of new church development.



**The opportunity:** Ingebretson is working to accelerate that growth rate to 3 percent. This is generally recognized as a rate that allows a regional body like an annual conference to hold steady in terms of membership and worship attendance or even to grow slightly.

**What this means:** There are about 250 churches within the Dakotas Conference. So growing by 3 percent of that number annually would translate

to starting roughly 8 new congregations each year.



**The goal:** Ingebretson aims to gradually ramp up until the Dakotas Conference is starting 8 new congregations each year, with the understanding

that getting to that point will take time. His plan is to start two new congregations in 2018, then three in 2019, and four in 2020—and so on. The hope is to increase the number of new congregations by one each year until we're consistently starting 8 in a given year.

**What this looks like:** A new congregation doesn't necessarily translate to a new chartered church. A congregation that starts a second service or a second site, a group of congregations that

work together to start a new congregation, and a church planter launching a new start all would be counted toward this acceleration goal.



Rev. Ben Ingebretson

**Preparing for success:** "It's an achievable goal," said Ingebretson. Many other denominations are planting at rates of 3 percent or higher, and Ingebretson himself once helped the Reformed Church in America—which was comprised of 1,000 individual congregations—to plant 248 churches in 10 years. "It's very do-able," he said.



## Elisha connects engineering and ministry

"It was truly cool to see how my classes in industrial engineering, especially those that focus on starting a new business, fit with starting a new church like The Bridge," said Kara Togel, 2017 Elisha intern at The Bridge, senior at South Dakotas School of Mines and Technology (SDSM&T).

For Togel, it was a time for her to explore "her fit" and call to ministry. "I think you have to go for it. You have to be open and see what happens. Even if you are not going to be an ordained pastor. You can find your fit," said Togel about the Elisha internship program.

"Bouncing in the Neighborhood" was one of the activities Togel assisted with. Several evenings throughout the summer, a bouncy house and yard games were set up. Families were invited and gathered at selected parks for grilling, music and family fun.

The opportunity to preach was something the Togel found she felt pretty good about.

"Preaching for my first time I felt unsure that I was able to do that. I had a bunch of classmates tell me things like—'You were meant to do this.' 'Are you reading your call right?' I was so pleased that the students accepted me. I liked preaching," Togel said.

The content for her sermon came from a youth mission trip to a reservation in Montana. Togel led the mission work with Dylan Deflethsen, a fellow Elisha intern and leaders from Rapid City First. The mission team built a shed, did some winterizing and built a round pen.

"I hadn't gone on a mission trip for several years. I was surprised by all that we are able accomplish," described Togel. Photo by Dave Stucke: Kara Togel, right, visits with other Elisha interns.

Togel also led Vacation Bible School in Box Elder. She noted that VBS was not what she expected. "I thought I was going to like children's ministry more. I really struggled with all of things involved with VBS happening at once. I learned that it was not my favorite."

Togel will head to seminary in the fall of 2018. The connection between her industrial engineering major and ministry is something that Togel hopes to continue to explore. "I think I will continue to be surprised about how the two connect in areas like management, startup and facilities planning."

