

Fall Conference renews faith

More than 90 people from the six Seward Peninsula congregations and beyond gathered in Wales, Alaska for the Seward Peninsula Lutheran Ministry Fall Conference. Held in the spring and fall each year and hosted in rotation by congregations, the conferences are multi-day gatherings which include daily worship, testimony, fellowship and the business of the cluster.

For Joanne Keyes, congregational president of Thornton Memorial Lutheran in Wales, conference was a time of spiritual renewal. "At time we need to rejuvenate our spirits with others who need to hear the word of God and to sing and listen to gospel songs. These help us much in our lives," Keyes said. Read more here about the impact of conference gatherings and to participate next time.

The theme for the conference, held September 11-13, was Proverbs 3:5, "Trust in the Lord will all your heart and do not rely on your own insight." (NRSV) Pastors typically take turns preaching at the evening services, while lay leaders lead the worship and facilitate prayers and testimonies. Anyone can request a song by submitting a written request and congregational choirs offer songs in rotation. Many hymns are sung in both English and Inupiat, with singers of all ages and abilities joining in. An elder typically leads a prayer in Inupiat and offering is always part of the worship experience.

Keyes said that while hosting conference is a big responsibility – host congregations provide transportation to/from the airport, housing and food– the impact of conference in the congregation remains long after the guests return home. "Our young children learn from us," Keyes said. "After conference we had three young children (start)coming to our choir practices. This tells me they watch and want to learn what we do."

Keyes extends a special thank you to all who attended conference in Wales, especially the elders, adding, "May each and every one of you have a blessed Christmas season and enjoy the real meaning of Christmas."

The next conference will be Spring Conference in Shishmaref, tentatively in April 2016, dates to be determined. Consider attending this unique and inspiring event.