

Rev. Gary K. Peterson, 1938-2026

A LASTING LEGACY



Marilyn and Gary with their lovely family during their time in Mount Vernon. The children, from left: Shari, Sonja and Tim. Gary and Marilyn served Bethany Covenant from 1967-1973.

Bethany's beloved former pastor passed away in June. Even though his ministry here was relatively brief, his influence was immediate, and it continues today

By Rick Lund

Although he was only here for a short time, Rev. Gary Peterson created a long-lasting impact at Bethany Covenant. His legacy still flows from decade to decade, like ripples on a pond.

Gary was only 29 years old and just two years removed from seminary when he, wife Marilyn and their two young children arrived in 1967 at the old church on Evergreen Street. By 1973 he was gone, off to a Covenant church in Minnesota. But not before he created a ripple, influencing many lives and helping strengthen the character

and culture of Bethany Covenant Church as a warm and welcoming congregation.

Gary died on June 11 at Wesley Rehabilitation and Care Center in Des Moines, Washington, at the age of 88. His passing seems like a good opportunity to reflect on a man who inspired waves of people to commit their lives to Christ.

The ripples on the pond were immediate for those of us who were here during his time at BCC. Gary was a strong leader. He was enthusiastic. He was fun-loving.

He was encouraging. He related to young and old. Gary was the pastor for three young people

See **GARY PETERSON**, Page 4



The original church on Evergreen Street.

How shall we worship?

By Pastor Bradley Bergfalk
BCC Lead Pastor

As we begin another fall season of ministry at Bethany, in addition to the return of Christian



Formation classes for all ages, small groups, and Wednesday evening activities, we will be focusing on worship. Worship is the central activity of our church. As we anticipate a transition in personnel in worship next summer, it seems fitting that we would dedicate some of our worship life to a conversation about worship itself.

For that reason, under the guidance of Alan Muia, we will be holding listening groups for members of the congregation to discuss and reflect upon the results of our congregational survey. The leadership team will be attending as many existing small groups as we can to get direct feedback and answer any questions you may have about the results of the survey, and the process we have embarked upon leading up to Pastor Randall's retirement.

In addition, Pastor Randall and I will be preaching a sermon series in the fall entitled, "How Shall We Worship?" We will preach on different aspects of worship including, "The Posture of Worship", "Worship in Spirit and Truth", "Worship as Living Sacrifice", and "Worship as One

See **WORSHIP**, page 3

And the survey says ...

We value “preaching and teaching” above all, followed by “congregational singing”

By Alan Muia

It’s exciting to start the process we’ll be using to chart a course for worship ministry at Bethany in the years to come. Pastor Randall’s retirement next year is a great impetus for some needed reflection and discernment about worship ministry and the direction of our church.

To start this process, we conducted a congregational survey to explore our preferences related to worship and what we’re hoping for in future staffing in the worship area. What follows is an overview of what we found.

Caveats and limitations

It’s important to discuss the limitations of these survey results. First, the survey is not comprehensive—we could have asked a lot more questions. Second, it isn’t prescriptive of what we should do in the future as a church. It only tells us who we are in a limited way, and it mainly sheds light on what we prefer. We should be careful when reading results that we don’t overgeneralize them and come to conclusions that aren’t supported. Finally, another limitation of this survey is that it’s a little artificial to ask people to make choices between a set of important values—like being theologically grounded and being visitor-friendly. We must realize that our results will reflect the difficulty of such choices.

Who responded to the survey?

We received 212 responses over a six-week period of time. We have about 400 people of all ages on our attendee list, so this is a helpful sample size. We’re an older congregation. Almost half of the respondents were over 70 years old; 30 percent were 55 – 69 years old; 12 percent were 40 – 54; and only 9 percent were



A majority of responders to the survey said they prefer a blending of traditional and contemporary music.

under the age of 40.

Seventy-one percent of respondents have attended Bethany for more than 10 years; 14 percent from 6 – 10 years; and 15 percent for less than six years. This tells us we don’t have many new people and/or that new attendees didn’t choose to take the survey.

Sixty-one percent of respondents were female and 39 percent were male. This split doesn’t seem too far off from what we see on Sunday mornings. It’s interesting to note that men and women didn’t differ too much in their responses, except that men tended to prefer contemporary worship a little

more than women.

What were our preferences?

When asked, “Which elements of worship most help you engage with God?” the most chosen option was “preaching and teaching” followed by “congregational singing”, “Scripture reading,” and “prayer”. Among many other write-in answers, respondents listed special music, worshipping together in community, more organ, and interestingly less organ.

Respondents reported that their most important elements of worship in order were “grounded Biblically and theologically”, “teaching /instructing”, and “being Spirit-led”. I think it’s notable that being “visitor-friendly” only showed up in 6 percent of responses. This is interesting when we consider how few newcomers are attending Bethany these days. We shouldn’t make too much of this or too little of these responses.

Continued on next page



Associate Pastor of Worship and the Arts Randall Wilkens will retire in August 2027. His pending departure is an opportunity for discernment about what worship should look like at Bethany going forward.

Continued from previous page

When asked about the balance respondents hope for between tradition and innovation in worship, responses showed a high preference toward blended worship, 62 percent overall. This makes sense since this is what we currently have in place. The roughly half of respondents over 70 years old lean more heavily toward traditional style and the younger half lean heavily toward innovative/contemporary worship.

Far more than half of respondents said they were either “enthusiastic”

or “open but cautious” about new songs or styles of worship. Only 11 percent said they were either uncomfortable or resistant. Given the ages of respondents, I believe our openness to new things flies in the face of some age-based stereotypes. Good for us!

When asked which qualities do we believe are most important in a pastor of worship and arts, our top two responses were musical excellence and spiritual maturity. That said, respondents had a hard time choosing between all the characteristics they would like to see.

Responses to the open-ended questions are harder to summarize. Many of your answers will be left out of these summaries, but they will be passed along to the search

committee when it’s formed.

When asked, “What does meaningful worship look like to you?” attendees responded that meaningful worship is more than performing religious activities—it’s an intentional, heart-level engagement with God. Many describe worship as being fully present and reverent, with sincerity rather than routine, and as involving honest communication with God (including gratitude, humility, and trust). Overall, the answers connect worship to a real relationship with God—



Some people in the survey said they view worship as an intentional, heart-level engagement with God.

something that flows from the heart and continues beyond a service, bringing transformation over time rather than staying at the level of words or music.

We hope the new pastor of worship and arts will protect the heart-level focus of worship—an intentional, reverent engagement with God rather than something routine—and challenge the congregation to cultivate sincerity, presence, and honest communication with God. We also hope the pastor will help

worship extend beyond services into daily life, so that worship shapes attitudes and behavior in tangible ways, influencing how people treat others, make choices, and grow in obedience. A number of respondents hoped the pastor will lead decisively, while maintaining the worship style balances we’ve enjoyed.

What’s next?

Remember that this survey doesn’t tell us what we feel called to be about as a church in the future. It doesn’t tell us what our staffing mix should look like—part-time vs. full-time worship pastor or what responsibilities should be assigned to whom in a new mix of pastors,

We’ll be having these and other more broader conversations in small groups in the fall and winter. Members of the Leadership Team and I will be visiting your small group and asking for your input. In the meantime, we’ll be shaping these sessions and working to be sure we give everyone a chance to participate. If you’re not in any sort of small affinity group, we’ll invite you to sign up for a focus group for this purpose.

After we’ve gathered all this feedback, we’ll start the formation of a search committee that will take all of this and create a church profile that will guide the search. Thanks in advance for your prayers and participation in the process.

WORSHIP,

Continued from the cover

Voice.” During this series, we hope to create an opportunity for conversation around worship that deepens our appreciation of and desire for meaningful worship at BCC.

For those who want to investigate the meaning of worship in greater depth, the library will make available several books about worship. These books will be available

for you to check out, use in your small group, or simply read as part of your own spiritual discipline throughout the fall.

“Why are we doing this?” you might ask. The simple answer is because it is good for us to give our attention to something that is as integral to the life of our congregation as worship. Secondly, we want to provide opportunities for you to engage in reflecting about worship that goes beyond simply expressing

what we like and what we don’t like.

Finally, because worship is a central activity of our life together, we hope that this deliberate and intentional focus on worship will help us reimagine and practice worship that ultimately expresses our heart for God right here in Skagit Valley.

Worshiping with you,
Pastor Bradley Bergfalk

CHURCH CALENDAR

SEPTEMBER

- 2** Adult choir practice resumes, 6:15 p.m.
- 4-7** Labor Day Family Camp @ Cascades
- 6-27** Sign up for “Dine with Nine”
- 9** Wednesday Night Dinners begin
• Youth group resumes
- 11** Heart2Heart women’s Bible study resumes
- 13** Fall kickoff/Rally Sunday: Christian Formation classes begin, 9:30 a.m.-10:15 a.m.
• Confirmation classes begin, 9:30 a.m.-10:15 a.m.
- 14** Bethany Bells practice resumes
- 16** GLOW Kids Ministries resumes
- 18-20** PacNWC Women’s Retreat @ Cascades
- 20** Taizé service, 6 p.m.

OCTOBER

- 5** “Dine with Nine” gatherings begin
- 9-11** Middle School “Thunder Retreat” @ Cascades.

NOVEMBER

- 1** Hymn Sing fundraiser, 4 p.m.
- 13-15** High School “M.U.D. Retreat” @ Cascades
- 25** Thanksgiving Eve service, 7 p.m.
- 29** First day of Advent

DECEMBER

- 4** Noel Concert fundraiser for New Earth Recovery, 7 p.m.
- 18** Christmas Musical, 7 p.m.
- 20** Christmas Musical and singing of “Lyssna”
- 24** Family Candlelight service, 4 p.m.
• Lessons & Carols Candlelight service, 9 p.m.

LASTING LEGACY

GARY PETERSON,

Continued from the cover

at Bethany who would answer the call to ministry: Steve Elde, Don Robinson and Sharon (Hanstad) Anderson. All three had significant ministries in the Covenant.

Don, a former associate superintendent of the Pacific Northwest Conference, began attending Bethany as a high school student during Gary's ministry.

"Doug Schnell invited me to attend Bethany as he and his family were particularly enthusiastic about Pastor Gary," said Don. "Gary was very welcoming to me and I soon found myself part of a congregation that brought me to make a commitment to be a Jesus follower. I grew in my faith under Gary's encouragement and leadership, and became a part of a congregation that sent me out to serve in pastoral ministry."

Yours truly was an impressionable teenager during Gary's time. He energized my faith. He Confirmed and baptized me. Because he was young, he was also relatable. He played pickup games of basketball with Doug Schnell, Mark Fisher, my brother John, and me as if he was one of us. He encouraged me to pursue ministry. Although I didn't sense God calling me to be a pastor, I never forgot that he impressed on me that God had a specific purpose for my life.

Gary also had sway in my choice of a college education. He was a big advocate for North Park, our Covenant college in Chicago. I was all set to attend Seattle Pacific College until Gary convinced me North Park would be a better fit.

And that's where one stone created ripples that reach places it never touched directly. Had I gone to Seattle Pacific, there would be no Pastor Vicki at Bethany. We never would have met.

The "ripple effect" of waves took a while but eventually reached Kristi Byford Johnson, our sponsored missionary to Thailand. Although Kristi wasn't born until after Gary's time at BCC, his ministry had greatly influenced her parents, Dick and Ginny Byford.

"I grew up hearing stories about Gary and Marilyn," Kristi said in



Gary Peterson arrived in Mount Vernon very early in his pastoral ministry, only two years out of seminary.



The "parsonage" next door to the church, where the Petersons lived, as did many pastor's families over the years.

a Facebook post. "Pastor to two young parents just starting out on their own personal faith journeys, whose daughter (me) later became a Covenant missionary."

Longtime BCC member Carolyn Swanson remembers Gary as a pastor who wanted to be a part of every aspect of church life.

"He was very social, very outgoing," she said. "He wanted to be a part of all the activities in the church, not just some. He loved sports. He had a tender heart, was very encouraging, and I can't remember anyone talking about him in a negative way."

"He also grew as a preacher. He kept getting better the longer he was here. He wanted to learn."

Gary and Marilyn were a great team. Both of them were also youth group leaders. Carolyn remembers Marilyn as being heavily involved in all the women's ministries.

"She had this presence about her," Carolyn said. "She was always happy, and willing to help. She was kind of like Kathy Nelson that way."

Bethany experienced significant growth during the Peterson era. So it was a bit of a surprise when Gary resigned in '73 to become pastor at Trimont Covenant in Minnesota, where Marilyn's father had once served.

Gary would later tell me some of his fondest memories in ministry

were in Mount Vernon. It almost seemed like he didn't want to leave.

"On our way to Minnesota," he said, "I cried all the way to Snoqualmie Pass."

The Petersons' oldest child, Shari, was 8 years old at the time. Fifty-three years later, she recalls the chill in the air on the drive east.

"I remember the solemnity of the first hours of our drive toward Minnesota," Shari said. "Leaving in the middle of my second-grade year was hard for me."

Memories of Mount Vernon

While Mount Vernon faded from view in the rearview mirror of the eastbound family station wagon, the "Peterson kids" never lost sight of their time at Bethany. Youngest daughter Sonja wasn't even 2 when the family moved. But for Shari and Tim, their memories are indelibly etched in their minds.

"I have nothing but good memories of Bethany Covenant, especially the people," said Tim, who was 6 when the family moved. "Everyone in the church, I felt, was kind to me as a little redhead explorer. I loved that so many women brought food, and so many men

were able and willing to help Dad with different things.”

The Peterson family practically lived at church, and when they weren’t, they were only steps away. That’s because the family lived in a small, modest house next to the church in what was known as a “parsonage.” The house was owned by the church and provided rent-free to its clergy as part of their compensation package. Most clergy today either own their own home, or pay rent for one.

Their dad’s 10-second commute to work had its benefits. For one, he was almost always home for lunch. Tim recalls eating grilled cheese sandwiches and tomato soup with his dad while he listened to Paul Harvey’s “The Rest of the Story” on the radio.

“I somehow believed, until told otherwise by Mom and Dad, that Dad owned the church because he had a big office there, and as far as I knew, no one else did,” said Tim. “I loved to explore the church. But I found out early on I didn’t have full access.”

Said Shari:

“Dad was always available to us, and I felt our parents included us in ‘church life,’ which made it special instead of being our dad’s job. He helped us feel we had some purpose and a role to play as well. Living next door to the church certainly helped that.”

The Bethany family embraced Gary, Marilyn and their young family. Mel and Myrtle Elde would become surrogate “grand-parents” to the kids, inviting the family often to their farm on McLean Road west of Mount Vernon.

“I probably have the most vivid memories of the Elde family, probably because so much time was spent in adventures on the farm,” said Tim. “It was also significant and personal that Mel had a birthday that was very close to mine. He became a local grandfather to me. That’s the first time I ever saw a cow being milked. And I loved picking the apples.”

When Gary and Marilyn needed a break from the kids, the



The Hanstad family was a fixture at church, and their girls were welcomed babysitters in the Peterson home.

family also had built-in babysitters. That would be Milt and Gudrun Hanstad’s daughters.

“The Hanstad girls were our regular babysitters and we LOVED having them take care of us!” Shari said. “I guess it helped that we saw them on a regular basis at church, and other functions, so they seemed like big sisters to me.”

Shari recalled her Mom as being a wonderful hostess.

“I remember our house being filled with people, both church folks and our relatives, many times,” she said. “She carried on many Swedish traditions, which

I now appreciate more than I did at the time.”

Home was a happy place, say Shari and Tim. Home was also a place where Jesus’ love was modeled.

“Laughter often filled our house and play with Dad was regular in one form or another,” Tim said. “Yet, he was always guiding us back to Jesus and modeling what that meant. Compassion was high on both Mom and Dad’s hearts.”

Tim recalls walking into a room on more than one occasion and finding his parents kneeling in prayer.

“Both Mom and Dad were wonderful role models of Jesus’ love and compassion,” Shari said. “They were a team in many respects. I have spoken with many PKs (pastor’s kids) over the years,



Gary and Marilyn Peterson in their later years.

and have heard that their experiences were very different. I never felt the church pulled Dad and Mom away from us. We were all in it together.”

Life after Bethany

That move to the Midwest in 1973? They didn’t stay long. Four

Bethany’s 12 senior pastors

Name	Years
P.M. Fosse	1922-1925
Erick A. Ohman	1927-1929
C.D. Swanson	1930-1946
C. Reuben Anderson	1947-1952
William Doughty	1953-1959
Worth Hodgkin	1960-1966
Gary K. Peterson	1967-1973
G. Carl Main	1973-1977
Dwight Nelson	1978-2002
Kent Egging*	2002-2014
Ryan Eikenbary Barber	2015-2022
Bradley Bergfalk^	2022-

* Interim lead pastor from October 1, 2002-August 31, 2003.

^ Interim lead pastor from November 1, 2022-October 28, 2023.

years later, the Petersons were back in Washington. In 1977 Gary was named senior pastor of Midway Covenant in Des Moines, where he stayed for 17 years.

I have no doubt Gary influenced many more lives after his time at Bethany. He served five Covenant churches during his full-time career in ministry. Besides Bethany and Midway, he was associate pastor at Seattle First Covenant (where he was youth pastor for our own Dwight Nelson), and senior pastor at Trimont Covenant in Trimont, Minnesota, and Powell Valley Covenant in Gresham, Oregon. After his retirement in 2003, he served as associate/visitation pastor at Summit View Covenant in Portland, and interim pastor at West Hills Covenant in Portland, Mercer Island Covenant, River Ridge Covenant in Olympia and Newport Covenant in Bellevue.

Gary gave generously to the Pacific Northwest (formerly North Pacific) Conference and denomination.

For the conference, he served on the Evangelism Committee, the Ministerium (as secretary) and Committee on Ministry (secretary and chair). He also served on the Executive Board, Cascade Camp Board and Camping Commission.

As Don Robinson moved from parish ministry to a leadership role with the PacNWC in 1996, the two overlapped even more on a conference level.

“Later I served with Gary on the Pacific Northwest Conference Executive Board and he was part of the team that interviewed me for the position of associate superintendent,” Don said. “Gary was a consistently loyal and supportive colleague to many in pastoral ministry. He brought wisdom and discernment to hard decisions and could always be counted on for spiritual sensitivity. Gary was an encourager and I will always appreciate both his modeling and mentoring leadership.”

Gary and Shari were present for our church’s Centennial celebration in 2021. By that time, Marilyn had passed away (in 2017), a loss Gary struggled with until the end. Marilyn was truly Gary’s partner in ministry.

Gary’s memorial service will be held on Saturday, September 12 at 2 p.m. at Midway Covenant Church.

Peace be to his memory, and continued blessings on all the lives he impacted.



That’s me at my high school graduation party, a couple months before I left home for North Park. I was greatly influenced by Gary Peterson.

50th anniversary of ordination of women celebrated in Arizona

By Jo Wolfe

It was once again my privilege to be a delegate from Bethany Covenant to the annual meeting of the Evangelical Covenant Church.

It was a HOT time in Scottsdale, Arizona, with temperatures around 110 degrees. Fortunately, all of our meetings were in the same hotel, so it was just a quick elevator ride in lovely air conditioning!

Our denomination's 141st annual meeting June 25-27 was an occasion to celebrate 50 years since the approval of the ordination of women. All the speakers were women from a variety of areas of ministry – including Rev. Dr. Carol Shimmin Nordstrom – one of the first two women ordained in the Covenant in 1978.

The meeting drew 362



Bethany lead pastor Brad Bergfalk, here hugging Covenant President Tammy Swanson-Draheim, received a Clergy Vocational Service award at the Covenant Annual Meeting in June in Scottsdale, Arizona.

delegates – 290 in person and another 72 participating virtually.

Some highlights for me:

- Spending time with old friends – and meeting new people from throughout the

denomination.

- Volunteering at registration and during the sessions as a Sergeant-at-Arms. Fabulous ways to meet people!
- Hearing from President

of the Covenant – Tammy Swanson-Draheim – elaborating on the theme of “One Another.”

- Rev Dani Kilgore preaching on the first evening when the power went out with a loud bang and flash. But she kept right on – without a microphone or projection – dim emergency lighting glowing in the room as she kept sharing on her subject “Lord, Is It Me?” She challenged us to stop scanning the room for who else needed to change and to start searching what changes we need to make within ourselves.

- Forty-seven ministers were honored with Clergy Vocational Service Recognition, including our own Pastor Brad.

- The ordination service where 50 percent of ordinands were women!

The event is called ‘Gather’ and that we did. Gathering from throughout the world with fellow Covenanters. Learning about the good and the challenging – but all the amazing work of the Lord through our denomination. Love the Cov!

YOUTH NEWS

A summer of service, faith, fellowship and fun

By Emmalin Goodman

Bethany's summer youth group kicked off the season with a Worship Night in Shoreline, Washington, attended by Kim Goodman, Tim Goodman, Elsie Goodman and myself, Jarod Cooley, Evan Jennewein, Jana Staundenraus, Manny Swearengin and Connor McCool. It was a wonderful way to begin a summer focused on faith, fellowship, and fun!

Our next gathering was a Service Night on June 3, where the youth created care cards and handmade flower pots for members of our church family, and delivered them personally. It was a meaningful evening of sharing God's love and encouragement with others.

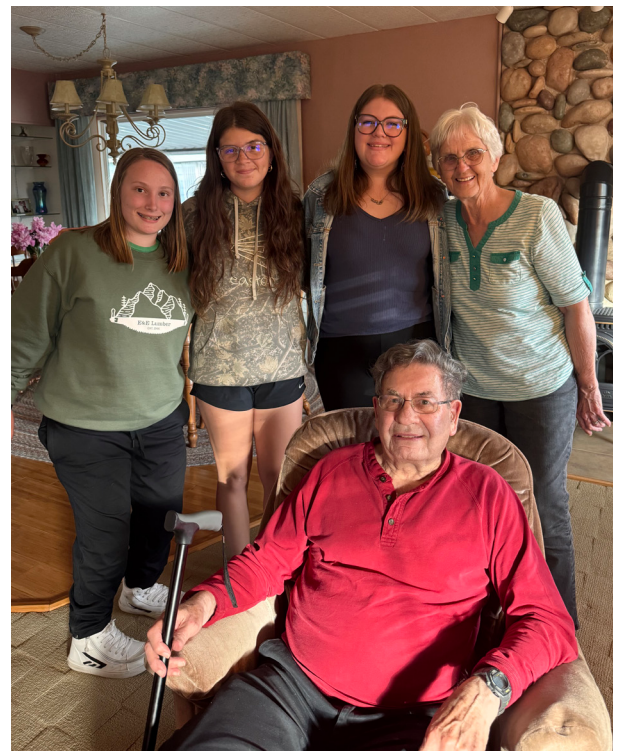
On June 17, we hosted a

Multigenerational Game Night in the church youth room, drawing 50 attendees. Everyone enjoyed learning new games, including me learning Cribbage from JR Cornish – and somehow managing to beat him! (Sorry, JR!) Anne Salley also taught a large group how to play Skyjo. The evening was filled with a variety of board games, trivia, laughter, and great fellowship.

The Goodman family opened our home on July 1, hosting a summer barbecue and bonfire night. About 30 youth and adults attended. We enjoyed delicious food, backyard games, and plenty of great conversation.

The Rozema family graciously hosted GLOW (grades 4-6) and the

See **YOUTH GROUP**, Page 8



Youth group members, left to right, Jana Staundenraus, Kellie Cayou-Lockrem and Emmalin Goodman visit Don and Louise Bottles on “Service Night” on June 3.



Praying over our Confirmands

From left: Titus Weston with parents Dan and Elizabeth; Dylan Jimmicum with parents Augustus and Jennel; Lucas Keesler with parents Gordon and Jennifer.

From left: Pastor Brad Bergfalk, Lincoln Cisneros with parents Peter and Tricia; Julie Price with parents Frank and Shelley.



From left: Teacher Bill Duley, Confirmands Titus Weston, Dylan Jimmicum and Lucas Keesler, Teacher Jon Schubert, Pastor Brad Bergfalk and Confirmands Lincoln Cisneros and Julie Price.

‘Savior, While My Heart is Tender’

For many years, this hymn has been sung at the conclusion of the Confirmation Sunday service.

On May 3, five eighth-graders participated in this sacred rite as they publicly proclaimed their personal commitment to faith in Jesus Christ.



Confirmands helped the Deacons distribute the elements for Communion, just one way to get youth more involved in Sunday worship. Here, Lucas Keesler prepares to hand off the juice tray.

BETHANY COVENANT CHURCH

1318 S 18th ST
MOUNT VERNON WA 98274

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

NONPROFIT
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
MOUNT VERNON, WA
PERMIT NO. 19



The youth group hosted a Multigenerational Game Night in the Youth Room on June 17. Clockwise, beginning at the lower left corner of the table: Gordon Keesler, Krissy Duley, Cindy Cummings, Hannah Silzer, Roxi Bergfalk, Anne Salley, Karen Cornish, Sam Duley and Bill Duley.

Youth group

Continued from page 6

youth group (grades 7-12) on July 15 for a pool party and soft serve ice cream, where about 20 youth and adults gathered for an evening of swimming, treats, and fellowship. The Rozemas have continued to host weekly pool parties for the GLOW kids throughout the summer.

Most recently, we spent a beautiful evening at Big Lake at the Johnson family's home on July 29. Around 15 youth and adults attended, including several new faces, making it another wonderful opportunity to build friendships and welcome others into our youth community.

Throughout the rest of the summer, we'll continue gathering bi-weekly on Wednesday evenings at locations around Skagit County. We love spending time with our youth and their families, and are grateful for everyone who has helped

make this summer so special.

We look forward to seeing everyone back this fall as our regular Wednesday night youth gatherings resume in the youth room at Bethany. We can't wait for another exciting year together!



Clockwise from left at Multigenerational Game Night: Evie Duley, Jennel Jimmicum, Claire Duley and Joan Pederson.