

# The Lutheran

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Features:

## Food for body & soul

### *Hometown bakery builds community, one loaf at a time*

When Paul Holje and George Kelley talk about how they changed careers midlife to start a business, they joke that their story is the one about the architect and air traffic controller who opened a bakery. Self-proclaimed "foodies," Holje and Kelley had talked for years about opening a restaurant. When they saw the need for a hometown bakery in their city, Grand Forks, N.D., they knew it was time.

"We took a look at the local market and saw that Grand Forks had lost all of its old hometown bakeries," Holje said. "In an area of the country that produces the best wheat, sugar, honey, dairy and eggs, we didn't have a local place to make those fantastic ingredients into something special."

After a year and a half of planning and test baking hundreds of goods, Holje and Kelley opened Dakota Harvest Bakers in May 2006.

"The name 'Dakota Harvest' just sort of came to us. Inspiration from above, if you will," Holje said. "We wanted to take the name one step further though. 'Dakota Harvest Bakery' just didn't have the right feel. Being an architect, sometimes the focus gets to be too much on a building and not on the people using the building. That's why we decided on 'Dakota Harvest Bakers.' It's about the people, not the building."

### 'Family' of faith

Holje and Kelley's commitment to people doesn't end with the bakery's name. It shows up in all aspects of their business — and their life. It's a value they say is part of their faith.

When Holje and Kelley were looking for a congregation to join, they wanted one that held their values of

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**Dakota Harvest Bakers**

hospitality and community. "We found Family of God Lutheran Church in East Grand Forks [Minn.], and everything about it just felt right," Holje said.

Kelley said, "Family of God has a long history of welcome and hospitality, and we've felt at home there since the first time we visited for worship. That sense of community is so important to us personally, and finding a church that lives those values was truly a blessing."

### **Keeping it local**

Part of Holje and Kelley's passion in opening the bakery was to support and bring attention to the high-quality goods being produced in their community. They source 80 percent of their ingredients from within 200 miles of the bakery. Some of those ingredients, such as the flours they use from the North Dakota Mill, are even within walking distance of their kitchen.

"Taking the time and effort to make sure that we're using the best possible ingredients is more challenging — and more expensive — but it's worth it," Kelley said. "Keeping the transportation to a minimum is part of our stewardship of the Earth and, as such, is a reflection of our faith."

For the ingredients they can't acquire locally, Holje and Kelley make sure they are purchased from fair trade and sustainable sources.

"Fair and just trade, sustainable sourcing, and low environmental impact are all values we hold dear, and we try to honor them in both our personal lives and business practices," Kelley said.

### **Giving back**

Holje and Kelley appreciate everything their community has to offer, and they return their thanks by giving back.

"A good bakery can be a destination in itself, a hub for community," Holje said. "We wanted Dakota Harvest Bakers to not only be a destination for our customers but to be a business that gives back to the community as well."

Last year Holje and Kelley were able to give more than \$21,000 in cash and in-kind food donations to local charities. Dakota Harvest Bakers regularly supports community arts and educational organizations, the humane society, and human rights and refugee groups.

Holje and Kelley also support area churches through their bakery's staple product by providing free



### ***Dakota Harvest Bakers***

**George Kelley and Paul Holje support their community and area churches through their bakery, Dakota Harvest Bakers.**

communion bread to any church that wants it, an idea that was sparked by their friend, Kathy Fick, campus minister at [Christus Rex Lutheran Campus Center](#) at the University of North Dakota, Grand Forks.

"We'd baked some communion bread for their worship a few times and she wanted to pay for it," Holje said. "It just felt wrong to sell communion bread, so we told her we would just give Christus Rex bread for every service."

Fick said she appreciated their graciousness, so she urged them to extend the offer to other churches in town.

Holje and Kelley took her up on it. With no discrimination to any denomination or faith, Dakota Harvest now provides communion bread to more than 15 area churches — Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, United Church of Christ and independent/nondenominational. The bakers have also provided challah, Jewish braided bread, to the local synagogue and have made samoon, Iraqi leavened flatbread, for the breaking of the fast at Eid al-Fitr for the Grand Forks Islamic community.

"Breaking of bread is a universal hospitality and is all the more meaningful in its religious context," Kelley said.

But Holje and Kelley serve more than bread and baked goods at their bakery.

"They're serving as witnesses through their living example of God's generous love — the ultimate sustenance," Fick said. "In our baptismal liturgy, we are called to serve as Jesus did, and to work for justice and peace, and I think Paul and George have found a really concrete way to live that out in their daily lives."

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## Comments

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