

MISSION BITE by Rev. Dr. Karen Smith Sellers, Conference Minister

For COMMAntary 05.05.10

During May, the MISSION BITEs will focus on four mission partners with whom the Minnesota Conference has long been in relationship, that we continue to support financially, and on whose boards we have representation not only through our staff but also through elected offices or appointed positions. These are:

- *Minnesota Council of Churches* – Board members include Conference Minister Rev. Dr. Karen Smith Sellers
- *Resource Center for Churches* – Board members include Ashley Minister, Wade Zick, who serves as Treasurer
- *North Central Ministry Development Center* – Board members include Associate Conference Minister, Rev. Rick Wagner
- *Minnesota United Ministries in Higher Education* – Board members include Associate Conference Minister, Rev. Elena Larssen.

Minnesota Council of Churches

The Minnesota Council of Churches (MCC) was founded in 1948 as an inclusive Protestant body in Minnesota. Predecessor organizations include the Minnesota Sunday School Association (later the Minnesota Council on Religious Education), founded in 1859, which registered at its first convention the following: Plymouth Congregational in Minneapolis, Plymouth Congregational in St. Paul (now Macalester-Plymouth United Church), and Glencoe Congregational. Through our Congregational forebears, then, the Minnesota UCC has been involved with the MCC for more than 150 years!

Today the MCC includes 24 regional denominational leaders representing 1.1 million members from across the state. The Council partners with others to offer many ministries, including:

- Refugee Services – works with Church World Service and in 2009 welcomed 255 refugees into new lives of freedom, hope and opportunity in Minnesota;
- Minnesota FoodShare – partners with the Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches to annually mobilize 2500 congregations, businesses, schools and civic organizations to collect food and money to support more than 300 food shelves that serve individuals and families; in 2009 more than 9 million pounds and dollars were raised;
- Joint Religious Legislative Coalition (JRLC) – in concert with the Minnesota Catholic Conference, the Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota and the Dakotas, and the Islamic Center of Minnesota is the first, largest, and most inclusive interfaith public interest group in the country; it has developed an extensive body of public policy statements and continually influences Minnesota legislation in such areas as welfare reform, housing, health care, human rights, criminal justice environmental stewardship, etc.

Rev. Chris Fazel (First Congregational UCC, Anoka) represent the MN UCC at the Muslim-Christian Dialogues, another program of the MCC. For two decades this group has been meeting monthly for two-hour sessions during which theological scholars present an aspect of their faith and participants ask questions. Through the MCC, a number of our local UCC churches participate in “Taking Heart,” which brings Christians and Muslims together for food and conversation.

Rev. Tim Johnson (Cherokee Park United Church, St. Paul) represents the MN UCC on the Program Council of the Minnesota Council of Churches. Among the programs they oversee is "Ending Sexual Misconduct in the Religious Community," through which all of our authorized ministers (ordained, licensed and commissioned) receive required boundary training.

The Minnesota Council of Churches sponsors "Healthy Homes, Healthy Congregations," which empowers congregations and faith-based organizations to make positive choices that minimize exposure to toxic chemicals in children, families and congregations, and "Rural Churches, Rural Communities," through which churches work together to strengthen local communities. It is also a collaborating organization for "A Minnesota without Poverty," in which we are a participant through a resolution at our 2008 Annual Meeting.

The list of programs and partnerships of the Minnesota Council is long. To learn more, visit www.mnchurches.org. And, if you'd like to receive a weekly email filled with news, programs, and offerings contact news@mnchurches.org.

Rev. Peg Chamberlin, Executive Director of the Minnesota Council of Churches, and current president of the National Council of Churches, has dual standing in the United Church of Christ. Many of you will remember hearing from her at Annual Meeting 2009. Through the Minnesota Council of Churches, we in the Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ greatly increase our connections and capacity, making it possible for us to do MUCH more together than we could do alone.