

## **New term for “Local Church” speaks to Conference Annual Meeting theme**

A November 2009 Minnesota Conference of the United Church of Christ letter to our local congregations mentioned a new nomenclature that has been recommended to replace the term “Local Church” with the wider conception **“local community of ministry and mission.”**

These words are authored by the eminent church theologian and scholar Rev. Dr. Clyde J. Steckel, a member of the First Congregational UCC of Minnesota and Professor Emeritus at the United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities.

Dr. Steckel, in his new Pilgrim Press publication, *New Ecclesiology and Polity: The United Church of Christ*, recommends that the term **“local community of ministry and mission”** replace the more limited and limiting designation of “local church”.

My response as I now re-read the November epistle is that this new term would both enhance the concept of what it means to be the church in regard to the ever-expanding relationship we have with the church universal and the realities of “Globalism” and its interdependence with our lives in the twenty-first century.

When we gather for the Minnesota Conference Annual Meeting, June 11-13, at the College of St. Benedict, we will be a gathering of local communities of ministry and mission seeking to explore our roles and responsibilities throughout our conference and throughout God’s world.

This new term for the “local church” certainly speaks to the Conference Annual Meeting theme: **“WITNESSES... TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH!”**

Rev. Xiaoling Zhu, Wider Church Ministries Area Executive for East Asia and the Pacific, will address our connection to the ministries in that part of God’s world. His office encompasses a vast region. It ranges from Mongolia to New Zealand and from China to the Pacific Island nations. One quarter of the world’s population – almost 1.6 billion of God’s children – live there, a region encompassing one-sixth of the landmass of the world.

Global Ministries has partners and projects with China, Taiwan, Korea, the Philippines and other countries. It has 16 missionaries in seven different countries.

Rev. Zhu will provide valuable insights into our relationships with this part of the world as we, informed by a new and more visionary concept of what it means to the church – **“local communities of ministry and mission”** - seek to explore ways of serving God together as member congregations in the Minnesota Conference of the United Church of Christ.

By Rev. Dick Fyelling, Annual Meeting Planning Work Group