

COMMAntary: an e-newsletter of the Minnesota Conference - United Church of Christ

God is still speaking,

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25 February

Dear Colleagues in Ministry,

Grace and peace to you on this Ash Wednesday! As Maren Tirabassi observed in this morning's Stillspeaking Devotional: "The forty days of Lent begin today. Lent is observed by some with a season-long abstinence from chocolate, thoughtless remarks, exceeding the speed limit, or cell phones! Others supplement their daily lives by reading an inspirational book, prayer or meditation, taking public transit to work, or writing a letter each week to someone who matters. Some congregations mark Ash Wednesday with a sanctuary open for silent vigil. Others draw a cross of ashes burned from last year's palms on one another's foreheads or hands in a reminder of human mortality, while still others write words of remorse on index cards and burn them in a wok."

The newsletters that come to the Conference office from member local churches reveal a rich variety of ways in which the Lenten season will be kept. Many congregations have Wednesday evening soup suppers followed by conversation around a common reading. One of our local churches, First Congregational UCC, Austin, will participate in Taize worship. Another, Pilgrims UCC in Maple Grove, is going to carry out its Lenten study/discussion group on Facebook. This coming Sunday they'll host a "Laptop Sunday" session during the adult education hour where members will be taught how to get connected on Facebook and use it to join the group. Every Wednesday in Lent, they'll post scripture for reading, reflection and comment, as well as discussion questions to get people talking about topics relevant to the season throughout the week. Pilgrims found this approach a good way to involve members who are away at college or required to travel for their work, but who can still access the internet.

The Northern California Nevada Conference UCC, where our Ashley Minister, Wade Zick, and one of our Associate Conference Ministers, Rev. Elena Larssen, have history, is embarking on forty days of fasting and prayer for the economy. In addition to sponsorship of a 100K run to raise \$100,000 to balance its budget, members from throughout the Conference will receive daily e-meditations. This morning's was a beautiful adaptation from Psalm 51, which I share with you:

*When my heart ruptures with grief and loss,
when my spirit shrivels,
when my hopes are feeble and my faith forlorn,
have mercy on me, O God,*

*in keeping with Your steadfast love,
You have shown me the path to Life,
life that is full and unbounded,
dizzy with delight,
saturated with significance.
You have pointed out to me time and time again,
that generosity and compassion are my guides
on that journey.
And now I come to You,
broken of spirit and heart,
ready to huddle and cower,
before the howling unknown,
to disregard Your presence
in my past and in my future,
and in this turbulent time zone of NOW.
Yet You desire that I be true and reliable
in my inward being;
therefore, sow in my secret heart
the wisdom to know my utter dependence on You.
Keep me focused, even in the gray fog of defeat,
on the steady beam of Your steadfast love,
on the me You have called and dreamed me to be,
on the blessed community through which You are revealed.
Let me act with the generosity and compassion
you have lavished on creation,
lest I blight my life and my companions
with bitter coldness and arid anxiety.
Create for me a new beginning,
and put an unshakeable spirit within me ...
a supple spirit, open to God's ways.
A heart that has broken,
and that has broken its hold on conceit
is a heart You will not spurn, O God.*

From Redemption Songs-A 21st Century Descant on the Psalms

Prayers and blessings to each and all during this season of faith-deepening!

Karen Smith Sellers, Conference Minister

News of the Conference

The Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ has a new website!

If your bookmark is still set to the old website, make the switch now to [.uccmn.org](http://uccmn.org). You'll be glad you did. Surf around and see what you think.

Featured function: Worried about "Going Green" with your copy of UCNews and losing out on important information from the Voyager? Well, fear no longer. The new Minnesota Conference Website now hosts a "Green" version of the Voyager! [it out by clicking here.](#)

Joys and Concerns

1. At the recent Board of Directors meeting for the Resource Center for Churches, the Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ was recognized for its outstanding support of the Resource Center. If you haven't had a chance to stop by in person, take a moment to [their website](#), and keep up the good work!

2. Cottage Grove United Church of Christ invites friends and colleagues in the Conference to the farewell celebration for Rev. Bryan and Emily Olson, Sunday, March 1st. Worship is at 10:15, followed by fellowship in Bryan's honor. There will be a dinner at 5:00 p.m. Sunday evening at Mississippi Dunes in Cottage Grove. Please RSVP [@usfamily.net](#) for the dinner. (Dinner is \$15/adult, \$7.95/child.) Bryan will become a new church start pastor in the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference UCC.

3. Rev. Paul Scaringi (American Baptist Church) will be installed as pastor and teacher of the United Protestant Church in Silver Bay, MN, March 1 at 2:00pm. Rev. Kathy Nelson of Peace UCC, Duluth will represent the Minnesota Conference UCC.

4. Prayers are requested for the Rev. Bob Broeder, Minnesota Conference UCC Volunteer Disaster Coordinator, who will attend the MNVOAD (Minnesota Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters) seminar at Fort Ripley on Friday and Saturday, February 27-28.

Our Whole Lives (Sexuality Education) Training

Elementary Training (Grades K-1, 4-6) Feb. 27-28 at Westminster Presbyterian, Minneapolis

Middle/High School Training (Grades 7-9, 10-12) May 1-2 at First Congregational UCC, Anoka.

Contact [Todd Roska by email](#) or 612-870-0974 for more information.

Antiracism Study Dialogue Circle openings!

Antiracism Study Dialogue Circles still has openings for a circle beginning on March 20th at Cherokee Park United Church. [linked flyer for more detailed information](#) about dates and times. To register contact Pastor Tim Johnson at 651-227-4275 or [@usfamily.net](#).

Youth and Children's Formation News

Youth and Youth Leaders:

Please take the time to do this 10 minute survey from the UCC National office <://uccyyasurvey.questionpro.com>

Out with the Green and in with Earthwise!

Beginning this June at the MN Conference UCC Annual Meeting, the Justice and Witness Team will be recognizing Earthwise Congregations as determined by the

[Congregation Resolution](#) passed at last summer's annual meeting. The Justice and Witness Team will no longer be recognizing "Green Churches" as it did previously. Please see [Chandler](#) or [Gary Titusdahl](#) of the Justice and Witness Team with your questions.

Justice & Witness Special Offering

Thank you for supporting the 2009 Justice and Witness Special Offering. Most of the churches held that offering back in January, but it's never too late to make this appeal to our churches. Please find bulletin inserts and envelope labels in the [Justice & Witness Resources Library on the new Conference website](#). Money raised in this offering is placed in the conference's Peace Fund, with proceeds to be used for peace and justice initiatives in our conference. Go to the [Conference UCC website](#) and look under Forms if you are interested in applying for a grant from this Peace Fund. Thank you from your Justice and Witness Team!

Pilgrim Point Camp News

The Pilgrim Point Camp program brochure is in the mail. Church packets are on the mail truck and heading out to your church. Watch for it soon. Individual camp brochures are being sorted now and will be mailed to every camper that has been to PPC over the last 3 years. They will be ready to go on the mail truck on Friday. In the meantime you can find all the information and more [the Pilgrim Point Camp web site](#).

Come to Clergy Camp!

Clergy Camp - Pilgrim Point Camp August 16-21, 2009

All Authorized Ministers and their loved ones to spend a week together at Pilgrim Point! Come solo, bring your spouse, partners, kids and anyone else (ecumenical colleagues are welcome!) to share a relaxing, fun-filled week with opportunity for continuing education. The Rev. Dr. Richard Swanson from Augustana College in Sioux Falls, SD will lead us in a spirited study of Matthew (upcoming lectionary year C) based on the format of his three book series published by Pilgrim Press, *Provoking the Gospel of Mark (1), Matthew (2), Luke (3)*. Enjoy free time, lakeside recreation, activities for children and youth, and good conversation with colleagues and new friends. More information can be found [the Pilgrim Point website](#), and you can [with the form linked here](#).

A Minnesota Without Poverty

[here to download](#), sign and send in a resident's commitment to end poverty in Minnesota by 2020. [here for more information](#) about A Minnesota Without Poverty.

Upcoming Events

UCC 20/30 Fellowship Gathering

**Thursday, February 26, 8:30pm
The Walker Art Museum**

The Walker Art Museum is showing the film, *Imagining October* at 8:30pm for free! The 20/30 Fellowship will gather in the Walker lobby between 8:00 and 8:15. Find more information [the Walker's Calendar](#). If you're joining the group for the first time, give Amy Wick Moore a call at 651-645-3765.

Where are the 20-Somethings? Webinar

Jump on this chance to participate in this ministry-altering webinar: *Where are the 20-Somethings?*

Tuesday, March 3, 2009, 6:00-8:00pm

Cost is a mere \$9.99

[and find more information at](#)
[Grow the UCC website.](#)

Together, we will explore where the 20-somethings have gone, how they are meeting their spiritual needs, and what the Church should recognize in the shift of behavior. We will explore creative opportunities for reconnecting with younger generations while honoring their spiritual journeys. This webinar will feature distributable resources, online interaction, as well as structured discussion with other participants.

Installation Service - Spirit of the Lakes UCC

Service of Installation for James Pennington

Sunday March 8, 2009, 2:00pm

Spirit of the Lakes UCC

2930 13th Avenue South

Minneapolis, MN 55407

We urge you to have your church represented by lay and clergy persons. All clergy are invited to wear red stoles.

Children & Youth Formation Events

**Children & Family Faith Formation/CE Leader
Gathering - March Mixer**

Thursday, March 5, 2009 - 10:00-2:30pm

Union Church in St. Louis Park

More information available [the Conference Website](#)

Middle School Road Tour

March 21 at Fergus Falls Federated Church

9:30-3:00pm ONLY \$5/person (includes lunch)

RSVP with [Zick by email](#) by March 16 and contact [by email](#) for overnight info. [out the YouTube video!](#)

2009 Minnesota "Open & Affirming" Celebration

Living the Faith: Called Out, Sent Forth The 2009 Minnesota "Open and Affirming" Celebration

Sunday, April 26th

Workshops @ 2:30 pm | Worship @ 4:00 pm

hosted by Pilgrims United Church of Christ
8801 Rice Lake Rd, Maple Grove

[the poster here](#) and help to promote this event!

"Faith and Film" a four-day series

Beginning **Sunday, March 1st 1:00-3:00pm**,
continuing **Monday-Wednesday evenings**,
March 1-4 6:30-8:30pm

Plymouth Congregational Church
1900 Nicollet Ave, Minneapolis, MN 55403

Dr. Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki - an authority from California on film and theology, and a leader in the field of process theology - will lead a four-day series, "Faith and Film." The Sunday topic will be "What Makes Us Real?" based on film clips from *Lars and the Real Girl*. More details on the discussion schedule and Dr. Suchocki can be [at Plymouth Church's website](#).

For the Bible Tells Me So screening at Cherokee Park

The groundbreaking documentary *For the Bible Tells Me So* by Daniel Karslake will be presented by Cherokee Park United Church on **Saturday, March 7th at 6:00pm**. The evening will begin with a meal of chili (traditional or vegetarian) for all attendees. A free-will offering will be taken to cover expenses. The video will be shown at 6:30pm. *For the Bible Tells Me So* examines how several Christian families experience the sexual identity of their children. The film brilliantly reconciles homosexuality and Biblical scripture and exposes the misinterpretations some church-sanctioned anti-gay bias is based upon. The subject of the film is geared for adults and mature teens.

Cherokee Park United Church
371 W Baker St, St Paul, MN

5 minutes from Downtown, 1/2 block east of Smith Ave
651-227-4275 | [@usfamily.net](#)

Audacious Hope, Active Courage

**Stories of the Human Rights
Struggle in the Philippines**

Tuesday, March 10, 7:30pm

Bigelow Chapel, United Theological Seminary

The war on terror has produced new and alarming acts of

human rights abuse throughout the world but particularly in the Philippines. Since 2001 there have been over 900 recorded victims of extra-judicial killings. Extra-judicial killings do not distinguish between prophetic civil citizenship and armed combatants; pastors of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines are among the victims. In this evening program participants will hear both personal stories and reflections on national trends by two persons from the Philippines who are keenly aware of the struggles and persecutions currently taking place in their homeland. Ideas and information about how churches can respond will be offered.

Fee: \$10.00, Students: No charge

For more information and to register, [the website of United Theological Seminary](#).

Bishop John Shelby Spong to speak in Duluth

Save these dates: March 13, 14 and 15, 2009!
Opening our Doors, Opening our Hearts Conference
Keynote Speaker: Bishop John Shelby Spong

"Congregations Working Together to Create Cities of Welcome" An event for all people of all faiths who desire welcoming communities for all people regardless of sexual orientation.

Friday: Peace UCC, Duluth, MN 7:00-9:00pm

Keynote by Rt. Rev. Spong and Concert by Clear

Saturday: Marshall HS, Duluth, MN, Fregeau Auditorium, 9:00-3:00pm

Lecture, Panel Discussion, & Question and Answer Session

Sunday: St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Duluth, MN 10:00am
Worship

Peace Church can help with some housing of UCC folks!
Be on the look out for registration materials. Visit .peaceucc.org for more information.

Guatemala Celebration

An evening celebrating Guatemala and its people

In January students and friends of United Theological Seminary journeyed to Guatemala, meeting and learning about the people of that tragic yet hope-filled nation.

Join us in a celebration of that journey:

Friday, March 13, 2009, 6:00-9:00pm

United Theological Seminary

3000 5th St NW, New Brighton, MN

6:00-7:00pm: Meal (\$10 ticket required)

7:30-8:30pm: Worship & group trip presentation

Silent Auction of Guatemalan/Mayan items, all proceeds go to support organizations and projects visited on the students' trip. Auction and presentations are free of

charge.

For tickets or information contact [Guttermann by email](#) or at 651 485-3104 or [Schilling by email](#).

International Women's Day

14th Annual International Women's Day Transforming the World through Women's Voices

Saturday, March 14, 2009, 8:00am - 3:30pm
Coffman Memorial Union at the University of Minnesota
This event is free and open to the public

The day will include workshops on women's human rights issues, film screenings, music, visual arts, arts and crafts vendors, information tables from over 65 co-sponsoring organizations and a keynote presentation on women and war by Fahima Vorgetts, Afghan Women's Fund and Women for Afghan Women and Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, U of M Law School.

Presented by The Advocates for Human Rights and The Human Rights Program at the University of Minnesota
For complete schedule and more information, visit theadvocatesforhumanrights.org

Rock the REHAS

Documentaries of Prison Systems in the Philippines in Four Short Films

Produced by Rock Ed, a film project by a group of young adults who use film to express what they have learned about Philippine jails and about justice Philippine-style. The films began a series of projects that support inmates' rights and safety.

The four short films, about 15 minutes each, include the international sensation (thanks to YouTube), Dancing for Discipline, a documentary inspired by Michael Jackson's Thriller video performed by the prison inmates of Cebu. Information about Rock Ed can be found at rockedphilippines.org.

Showing **Saturday, March 14 at 2:30 p.m.** in the Steckel Learning Center of United Theological Seminary. There will be light refreshments before the movie and discussion following. Sponsored by the Philippine Study Group of Minnesota, there will be no admission fee.

Employment Opportunities

Associate Pastor Position

Three-quarter associate pastor position for transition period of 6-12 months to be filled after March 15, 2009. We seek a partner in sustaining a dynamic ministry at

Falcon Heights UCC in Falcon Heights, Minnesota. [full position description and contact information here.](#)

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