

Dear Colleagues in Ministry,

At last week's meeting of the Minnesota Council of Churches, Christian leaders from across the region, representing a dozen denominations, sang the Advent hymn, "All Earth Is Waiting," including these words:

*"Open new highways, new highways for the Lord,
he is coming closer, so come all and see
and open the doorways as wide as wide can be."*

As the meeting progressed, those present were made wonderfully aware of several **opportunities to open highways and doorways for the One to be born among us.**

REFUGEE SERVICES

For the first time in nearly a decade, Minnesota will welcome refugees without family or friends in the state. These "free case" refugees need extra support for tasks like finding an apartment, registering their children for school, going to the grocery store, and connecting to their new community. The Refugee Services program of the Minnesota Council of Churches is adept at supporting new arrivals, but cannot provide **social support and friendship** in the same way as **SUPPORTIVE CONGREGATIONS**, who are uniquely gifted to provide hospitality.

Accordingly, Refugee Services is seeking local churches within a fifty-mile radius of the Twin Cities who are willing to enter into a four-month co-sponsorship. Participating congregations will welcome the refugee at the airport and work with them for one-third of a year, when a closing ceremony will take place. If your church would be open to this life-changing, door-opening experience of *extravagant welcome* and radical hospitality, please call Kristin Zoellner at 612-230-3219.

If this is not an option for your congregation, consider collecting and assembling "welcome kits" for refugees (dishes, linens, and cleaning supplies, etc.), sponsoring the computer lab or "shoe spree" (new shoes and socks), or help deliver furniture to refugee clients. To learn more and/or to invite a Refugee Services staff person to speak in your context, contact Rachele King, Director of Refugee Services, at 612-230-3216.

JOINT RELIGIOUS LEGISLATIVE COALITION

The Joint Religious Legislative Coalition (JRLC) presented and received approval for a position paper on poverty, "**No Poor Among You...**" The paper has the endorsement of all four of the coalition sponsoring members: the Islamic Center of Minnesota, the Jewish Community Relations Council, the Minnesota Catholic Conference, and the Minnesota Council of Churches. While at www.jrlc.org, take a look at the piece called "Just How Big is the Budget Deficit?" (**see this blog entry on their website**).

These and other issues will all be "on the table" at the annual JRLC "**Day on the Hill**", set this year for Thursday, March 25, 2010. The Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ is a co-sponsor, and each year we have a strong contingent of UCC folks present. [Linked is a "save the date" postcard](#), which you can use in your local church. Paper postcards are available from JRLC. Plan to attend and to visit with your legislator about issues of agriculture and rural communities, criminal justice, early care and education, economic security, environmental stewardship, health care, housing and healthy neighborhoods, hunger, poverty, and tax policy. Of particular concern this year will be proposed expansions of gambling and increased state reliance on gambling proceeds and the matter of an impartial judiciary. Be there to open highways and doorways of compassion and justice.

CHILD SPONSORSHIP

Finally, a particular way to welcome the child(ren) among us and to open doorways and highways for more promising futures for them, is by sponsoring a child through our Global Ministries Child Sponsorship Program, a global children's ministry of the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). For more than 40 years assistance has been provided to destitute children in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, the Middle East and Europe.

The program works closely with private centers that have long-established links with a UCC or Disciples global ministry partner. It helps to provide basic meals, clothing, shelter and health care to children in orphanages and shelters for homeless children. In some cases partial school fees and uniforms are provided through support of sponsors.

Sponsorship fees range from \$25 to \$40 per month, varying according to the services a center provides and the cost of living in that country. No funds are sent to government institutions or individuals. Sponsors receive a letter, with a brief biography and photo of their child. If the child is old enough to write, sponsors can expect a minimum of two letters a year, and/or periodic progress reports from the center's administrator.

For more information about the program, please contact:

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As part of our Advent discipline this year, my husband and I have committed to sponsor a child through this program. We have specifically requested a child from Mt. Selinda, Zimbabwe, where missionaries Don and Maryjane Westra (Federated, Fergus Falls) are serving. Maryjane has written to say, "The orphanage is only a few blocks from my home, and I visit several times a week. I will keep you in touch."

In whatever ways you are preparing the way of the Lord this Advent season, please know that you have the prayers and blessings of the Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ. Thanks be to God for our covenant partnership and for our different but kindred ways of opening new highways and doorways in Christ's name.

Karen Smith Sellers
Conference Minister