



Going Deeper in Faith, Reaching Out in New Ways

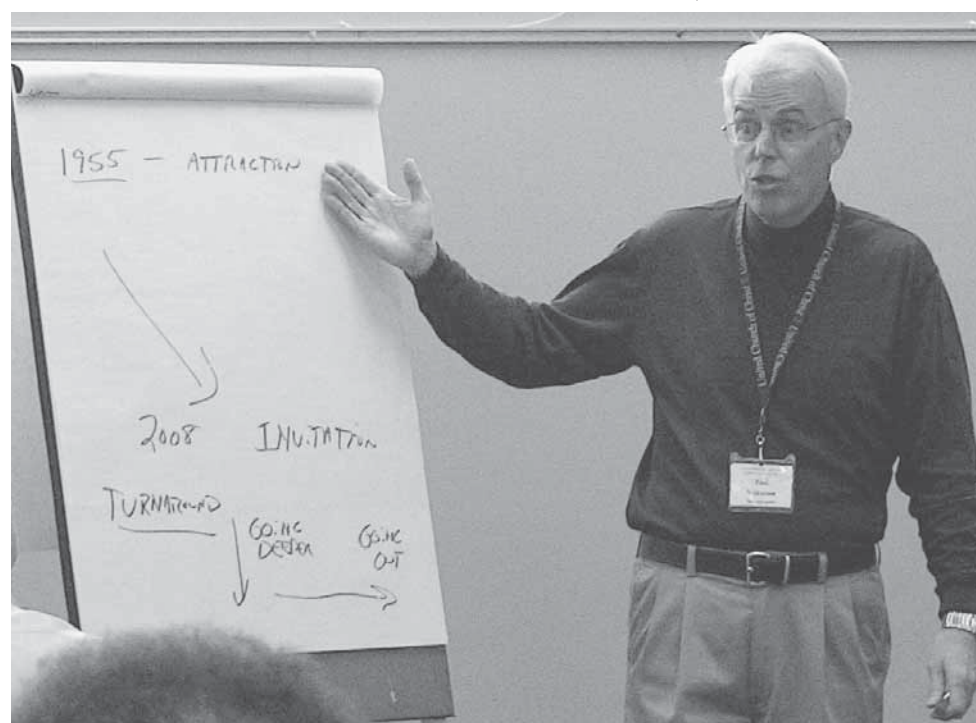
More than sixty people from about thirty local churches gathered on November 5 at Mayflower Church, Minneapolis, to answer the question, "Is your church ready to be renewed?" The facilitator was Rev. Paul Nickerson, Minister of Evangelism, Vitality, and New Church Starts Ministry for the Massachusetts Conference United Church of Christ and a consultant partnering with Local Church Ministries of the United Church of Christ.

Assisted by a workbook with strategies for leading congregations from decline to new life, participants learned that **vitality is fostered and sustained by going deeper in faith and reaching outward in mission.** After completing an inventory to assess the spiritual aliveness of their congregation, teams from congregations across the Minnesota Conference UCC — Brainerd and Eitzen, Duluth and Gaylord, Minneapolis and St. Paul — discussed what they discovered, including this key fact: "Turning a congregation around is hard work. It requires a 'new' pastor — either someone new to the position or an established pastor who

has grown to a new place in his/her ministry." Pastors then take a group of lay leaders deeper in faith.

Among the suggested resources for this part of the journey is Martha Grace Reese's Unbinding the Gospel and the accompanying planning manual Unbinding Your Church. Congregations that engage this process participate in a 40-day "sabbatical" — often during Advent or Lent — during which all committee meetings and programs are put aside as members pray and meet in small groups. From this process comes tremendous energy for faith sharing.

Workshop participants also learned the critical importance of reaching out into the community and aligning each congregation with its mission field. Nickerson countered several myths about church growth: 1) that folks will come to church out of denominational loyalty; 2) that folks will visit once or twice, then immediately join, sign up for a committee and tithe; 3) that general advertising will attract new members; and 4) that "if first we get back our inactive members, then we can reach



Rev. Paul Nickerson speaks to church leaders at Mayflower Church in Minneapolis

new people." Instead, he asserted that **GROWING A CHURCH IS A CONTACT SPORT!** It cannot be done from the church parlor. In fact, 87% of those who come to church and stay do so because someone invited them. Says Nickerson, "The E-word, evangelism, is really about E-work — the elbow work of hooking someone in your

arms and bringing them along with you." But it is also about assessing the mission field of your congregation — its religious heritage and geographic background along with its cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic issues. Then comes networking, networking, networking.

(Continued on pg. 4)

Together, we will be renewed!

Renewal is a process of nature, a course of spiritual development that healthy human beings experience regularly. "It is renewal," writes New York Times political columnist, Roger Cohen, "the place where impossible stories get written." We must *be renewed* to embody vitality for ourselves and our churches.

Renewal is the focus for our 2009 Minnesota Conference Annual Meeting at the College of Saint Benedict, St. Joseph, MN: "Together, we will be renewed!"

Our speakers are Rev. Dr. Susan K. Smith, lead pastor of Advent United Church of Christ in Columbus, OH, and Rev. Paul Nixon, founder and pastor of Epicenter Church in

Washington, DC. Both are involved in the work of renewal.

Susan K. Smith, a former reporter and intern with Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Wright, has taken Advent from 5 to 300 members, guided by their mission: "To move people from being church members to being disciples!"

Smith's passion is for inspiring children and youth and energizing all with the drama of the Gospel. Smith is the co-president of BREAD Ministries: Building Responsibility, Equity and Dignity. BREAD is "a multi-racial, multi-ethnic social justice organization comprised

of over 50 different religious denominations in the city of Columbus. That organization was recently instrumental in getting the Ohio Legislature to sign into

law a measure which prevents pay day lenders from charging its clients exorbitant interest rates." What was renewed? Justice. Trust. Dignity.

What Smith and Nixon have in common is their passion for discipleship, renewing church life, and congregational vitality within the context of a larger community dedicated to justice for all God's people.

June 5-7, 2009

Paul Nixon's 2007 book, *I Refuse to Lead a Dying Church*, carries much of the focus of the time he will spend with at our Annual Meeting. Churches that have completed the 4-week study program outlined in his book preceding Annual Meeting will be invited to meet and consult directly with Paul in a special session. Watch for more information about this in your first Annual Meeting mailing, but get the book and begin your research now!

Whatever the next several years hold for our country and the world, we the people of the United Church of Christ can choose to be renewed in countless ways. Let us begin, now — *together!*

Secretary — Ron Stricker

My name is Ron Stricker and I'm a member of Union Congregational Church in Elk River. My wife, Gloria and I joined the church before our daughter, Kelli, was born in 1978. Nancy Scheerer, a co-worker at Cedar Log and Timber Homes in Elk River, invited me to come to choir at Union. After joining the choir and making new friends, we knew we had found our church home.

Our son, Ryan, was born in 1981, and it wasn't much longer before I became involved with the church school program. I've served as the church treasurer, financial secretary, worked with the Board of Trustees, and served many boards and committees. I'm particularly proud of being a member of the Search Committees that called Rev. Trish Greeves in 1990 and Rev. Dr. Dana Mann in 2007. I currently serve as church moderator.

I come to the Board with little conference experience. I was a delegate to the annual meeting years ago and appreciated the support of the Conference in two searches at Union Church. I look forward to the challenges ahead and will lend my experience in the local church to contribute to the Board. I've already met terrific people and look forward to meeting many of you during my term.

I am the Office Manager for Terra General Contractors. Most of my duties involve finances and human resources. I enjoy canoe trips with my son, brothers, and nephews in the BWCA. My family also enjoys summers at "the lake". I love sacred music; it has been a special part of my life from Sunday School class until now as I continue to sing in the choir.



Treasurer — Phil Hatlie

My name is Phil Hatlie. I am a member of New Spirit UCC (formally Apple Valley UCC) in Savage, MN, where I also serve as the Treasurer. Although my formal education is not in business, I have worked in nonprofit finance for the past 20 years. I am currently employed at the Nonprofits Assistance Fund (NAF) as a loan officer and financial trainer. NAF provides loans to nonprofits in Minnesota and training to boards and staff on various financial subjects. Previous to my position at NAF, I worked at Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs (HECUA), Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity, and the Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches. I serve on several other nonprofits boards/committees including Habitat for Humanity of Minnesota, Hearth Connection, and, of course, New Spirit UCC. Prior to joining the Finance Committee of the Conference, I was a member of the Personnel Committee.

My spouse (and best friend) is Sue Allers Hatlie. Sue is a graduate of UTS and currently is the CPE Director at the Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches. She also has over 20 years of prison chaplaincy experience. We have two sons. Jesse is a senior at the University of St. Thomas and Jacob is a senior at Lakeville South High School. I cannot forget Hershey, our Portuguese Water Dog, who walks us 2 miles every day, rain or shine, and Zippy the cat, the fast one in the family.



Welcome to Marita Karlisch

In late September, we welcomed Marita Karlisch into the role of the Administrative Assistant to the Associate Conference Ministers. She comes to us with a library science background having most recently served as the librarian and archivist for the American Swedish Institute in Minneapolis until that library ceased operations. Marita speaks fluent Swedish and German and is a marvelous cook and baker. She is a graduate of Gustavus Adolphus College and the University of Minnesota. She enjoys traveling and spending time with friends and relatives. Marita can be reached at maritak@uccmn.org. Welcome, Marita — it's great to have you with us!

Justice and Witness Offering

January 18, 2009

Greetings to you from your Justice and Witness Team of the MN Conference UCC! Each January around the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. weekend our MN Conference UCC makes a special appeal called the Justice and Witness Offering. In 2009, this special offering is designated for Sunday, January 18. However, please pick a Sunday that better suits your congregation's needs if not that Sunday.

Contributing to the MN Conference UCC Justice and Witness Offering helps accomplish the ministry of justice, peace keeping, and community building. From this offering, 25% remains in your local church to support your own justice initiatives. The balance goes to the Peace Fund of the MN Conference UCC.

The MN Conference UCC Justice and Witness Team provides monetary grants to MN UCC churches, members, and church-related organizations working in the areas of social justice concerns. The application form for a grant can be found on the MN Conference UCC website www.uccmn.org. Look for the tab called "Forms." You can also apply for grants from the national UCC Justice and Witness Ministries fund. See <http://www.ucc.org/nin/>

[application.pdf](#).

In 2008, the Peace Fund of the MN Conference UCC supported the Anti-racism weekend events of Nov. 7-9 at Peace UCC in Rochester, the Public Forum and Semi-annual Dakota Commemorative March in the fall at New Ulm, and the resource packet for the establishing of ongoing relationships with MN Native American communities.

Your donations are vitally needed now to insure that this crucial ministry of peace and justice will continue in the life of our conference. In this way we live the timeless commandment of Jesus Christ to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Please contact the MN Conference UCC office for bulletin inserts, graphics, and offering materials related to the Justice and Witness Offering. You can reach the conference office at 612-871-0359 or 800-684-1718, or by emailing alisonb@uccmn.org. Also see the website www.uccmn.org.

Members of the Justice and Witness Team are: Rev. Dr. Gary Titusdahl (chair), Rev. Jo Clare Hartsig, Rev. Dr. Chris Smith, Rev. Don Britt, Jack Chandler (secretary), Mike Willoughby, Rev. John Guttermann, and Dwight Wagenius. Staff adviser is Rev. Elena Larsen.

Day on the Hill: Minnesota's Interfaith Lobby Day for Social Justice

Tuesday, February 3rd, the Joint Religious Legislative Coalition (JRLC) will be holding its annual Day on the Hill legislative day at the Minnesota State Capitol. The initial gathering and learning will happen at the St. Paul RiverCentre, and then shuttle busses will take people to the capitol to speak with their legislators. This year's keynote speaker is Dr. Ingrid Mattson, Director of the Macdonald Center for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations and Professor at Hartford Seminary in Hartford, Connecticut. Dr. Mattson is the first convert to Islam and the first woman to lead the Islamic Society for North America.

Plan to attend and join the JRLC for a day of social justice work and learning. Registration and further information can be found at www.jrlc.org or by calling 612-870-3670.

The Joint Religious Legislative Coalition consists of the Minnesota Catholic Conference, Minnesota Council of Churches, Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota and the Dakotas, and the Islamic Center of Minnesota.

UCC New Ulm hosts Sesquicentennial Forum

The United Church of Christ New Ulm sponsored a forum entitled "Minnesota at 150: Looking Back and Looking Forward in Relationships with our Native American Neighbors," on Wednesday evening, September 24. The presenter, introduced by UCC New Ulm pastor Henry Campbell, was Colette Hyman, PhD and Professor of History at Winona State University. The program was partially supported with a \$200 grant from the Minnesota Conference Justice and Witness team from funds given by member congregations to the Conference's Justice and Witness offering. It continues a UCC New Ulm tradition of similar forums, last year's on immigration issues.

Professor Hyman presented an overview of settler-Dakota treaties and relations that led to what is variously remembered as the Dakota War of 1862, the Dakota Conflict, the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 or the Sioux Uprising that began on August 17, 1862, along the Minnesota River in southwest Minnesota. New Ulm was itself besieged by the Dakota during the war. Until the 9/11 attacks, the estimated 300 to 800 civilian deaths was the highest war related civilian death toll in US history.

The Dakota people remember the time before and after the war as one of racism, hunger, betrayal, broken treaties, failed payments for the land they ceded to the United States (land comprising almost half of Minnesota), and brutality. After the war, 38 Dakota warriors who had surrendered in good faith were hung in Mankato, the reservation was taken, and the remaining Dakota imprisoned or exiled to areas

without arable land or decent water. During the winter of 1862-1863, 1,300 to 1,700 Dakota were held in a concentration camp on Pike Island near Fort Snelling. In a video included in the presentation, a now deceased Dakota elder reported daily deaths in this camp.

Dr. Hyman suggested that the treatment of the Dakota conforms to article two of the United Nations 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. This includes, for example, "deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; and "Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group."

In conversation following her presentation, Dr. Hyman responded to questions. Audience members struggled to deal with their response to this legacy. About twenty people attended, with two coming from the Twin Cities area.

Pastor Campbell hopes to be among those walking a portion of the the bi-annual Dakota Commemorative March that passes through New Ulm and several other communities along the Minnesota River (the March occurs around November 12). The march recalls that on November 7, 1862, a group of about 1,700 Dakota, primarily women, children and elderly, were force-marched in a four-mile long procession from the Lower Sioux Agency to the Fort Snelling concentration camp. A Native American website states the purpose of the march: "For the Dakota this commemoration signifies an opportunity to



Rev. Henry Campbell and presenter Dr. Colette Hyman lead the forum

remember and grieve for the suffering endured by their ancestors as well as to relate a perspective of the event which has rarely been told." Walking with the Dakota is an opportunity to listen, converse, and be with them.

The program is one response to the resolution passed at the 2008 Annual Meeting of the Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ regarding our state's 150th anniversary and calling for "establishing ongoing relationships with Minnesota Native American Communities."

Churches interested in a Justice and Witness grant can download the application at the Conference website www.uccmn.org.

— by Rev. John Guttermann

New Earthwise Congregation Recognition

The Earthwise Congregation: A Resolution on Mediating Climate Change, was submitted by Mayflower Community Congregational United Church of Christ and its Church Council, and passed on June 8th, 2008. It is being forwarded for consideration at General Synod XXVII in Grand Rapids, Michigan June 26-30, 2009

For churches that want to be "Green," the Earthwise Resolution offers a clear process and also a means of recognition for individual churches. It contains a list of actions that churches and individuals can take, and promotes public dialogue around environmental issues that emphasizes our interconnectedness.

It affirms the United Church of Christ as an environmentally conscious entity and provides a framework for individual congregations and the UCC as a whole to show unity and solidarity in



Present at the conference were (from L to R) Joe Newberg, Jim Anderson, Peggy Brown, Teddie Potter, Terri Rivard, Marty Haugen and Sandy Knoche. Not pictured: Linda Haugen, Grant Thrall, Dick Veien and Alice Veien Teddie

mediating climate change and advancing justice through sustainability.

The entire Earthwise Resolution may be downloaded at the Minnesota Conference website at www.uccmn.org.

The Justice and Witness Ministry Team looks forward to recognizing Earthwise Congregations at next year's annual meeting.



Got COMMAntary?

Don't you wish you could receive news like this more frequently? There's a way! Sign up to receive COMMAntary — the weekly e-newsletter of the Minnesota Conference of the United Church of Christ. The newsletters come out every Wednesday afternoon, and COMMAntary is a great way to stay connected to the Conference. To sign up, simply visit the webpage at www.uccmn.org and follow the link, or email Alison Bents at alisonb@uccmn.org and ask to be added to the list.

Paul Nickerson, continued. . .

Those who were not able to attend can learn more by emailing Alison Bents (alisonb@uccmn.org) to receive a copy of the "Turnaround Congregations" workbook. A digital recording of the workshop is also available. Contact your Associate Conference Minister — Northern Area, Rev. Rick Wagner and Southern Area, Rev. Elena Larssen. And watch COMMANtary, The Voyager, and the Conference website www.uccmn.org for "next steps" in this process of building an indigenous Conference system of church vitality and new church starts.

Resolution Reminder

Local churches and committees should have recently received a call for resolutions for the 2009 Annual Meeting. Please be mindful of the deadlines and instructions. We look forward to a great meeting, and the resolutions are an invaluable part of our work together as a conference.

What a jewel we have in Pilgrim Point Camp and the dedicated volunteers and staff that are a part of the ministry here. What a great place to come to for either a weekend adventure or a weeklong camp!! What a great place to bring your church for a weekend family camp!! What a great place to work!!! What a great place to do ministry!!!!

My first year as your Managing Director was not without its kinks. We had a (mostly) brand new staff — both our local help and the summer staff of twenty-somethings. As the (also) brand new Managing Director, this presented some challenges and some very real opportunities. What we ended up with was an exceptionally good staff with a heart for ministry. As one of our Volunteer Program Directors said toward the end of her week, "Dale, I think, no, I know this is the best staff ever!" Perhaps she was just flush with the feelings associated with a successful week of camp, but I took her word for it and shared her compliment with the staff. And they responded with even more smiles for our guests and going the extra mile to see that their stays here were enjoyable.

The staff worked hard but the real work at camp comes from the many,

We Are So Blessed



Vesper Point at Pilgrim Point Camp

many volunteers that dedicate a week of their summer, often taking vacation time or even losing a week's pay, to be here to do ministry among the youth, families and adults of the Minnesota Conference. Campers have fun at camp, but there is no doubt that the really important ministry that happens at camp are the relationships that are formed between the campers and between the campers and the volunteer counselors, directors and others who work more directly with them.

I was asked to attend the Senior Vespers Thursday night of Senior High Camp. There were plenty of chuckles and jokes as each graduating senior rose to speak about their years at Pilgrim Point and the friends they made (and the pranks they pulled). But every one of those who spoke, grew serious and told of the friends they made and the how they grew in

their faith and the sense of Christian community that will stay with them the rest of their lives.

This kind of community building starts early. I have to share with you some comments from one of our younger campers, who at an early age, has discovered things about herself that are "truly" remarkable. "This year I truly found out who I really am and that I don't need to act all weird just to make friends. I also truly found out how much God loves us and made me to be myself and make tons of friends while I'm here... I love PPC!"

Pilgrim Point Camp is a jewel sitting on Lake Ida and it belongs to YOU. Bring your family to family camps, bring your church for a weekend, send your children if you can't come yourself. We'll see you at Pilgrim Point Camp next summer!!!

Dee Dressler, Managing Director of Pilgrim Point Camp

Conference Women's Retreat: Creative Peace

The car tires crunched onto the gravel as we entered the quiet arch of trees and passed by the sign reminding us to "observe Pilgrim Point Camp as a sacred place." As we stepped out of the car, the sun warmed our faces with the intensity of summer but the air carried the clean, cool scent of fall.

On the weekend of September 19-21, sixty women from around the Conference gathered at the camp to explore the retreat theme "Creative Peace". Together we considered the many dimensions of peace: inner peace, peace in relationships, peace in neighborhoods and between

nations. Women from Falcon Heights UCC and Macalester Plymouth United Church collaborated in planning this year's retreat.

Each participant received a copy of Walter Wink's book, *Jesus and Non-Violence*. Some embraced the book with enthusiasm while others struggled to connect with its concepts or format. Yet, most readers seemed to agree that the book brought up good questions, and provoked thoughtful, challenging conversation.

The retreat time also included workshops. One group made soup for Saturday lunch with local, seasonal ingredients. Another workshop practiced a type of meditation on scripture known as "lectio divina" or "divine reading". A third gathering wrote letters to elected officials expressing their views on peace.

Watching and discussing the movie, *The Peace Patriots* proved to be a highlight of the weekend. *Peace Patriots*, produced by "Turning Tide Productions" is a documentary about dissent in time of war. It follows



Women from across the conference gathered to discuss and enact peace

individuals ranging in age from 14 to 75, including students, teachers, clergy, and war veterans from Korea, Vietnam and the Persian Gulf, as they take part in vigils, marches, theater performances, and civil disobedience sit-ins to protest the U.S. war in Iraq.

The weekend found its grounding in meditative Bible study and prayer. Saturday evening's communion service included music from Taize, and various stations for reflection: healing prayer and anointing, watercolor painting, drumming, and space to light candles and pray at the cross.

Of course, the schedule also allowed for peaceful relaxation — plenty of time for hiking, bonfires, late night chats with old friends and new friends, napping in the sun or reading beside the lake, and traveling to Alexandria or the nearby winery.

We are grateful to Dee Dressler and all the Pilgrim Point staff for their hard work and warm welcome! We give thanks to God for the "sacred space" of community that provides a place for us to grow and be challenged, to heal and be healed.

— by Rev. Jane McBride



Participants cooked meals together

Minnesota Seminarians travel to Cleveland

In early October three Minnesota Conference seminarians headed to Church House, the National UCC headquarters in Cleveland, Ohio for the Midwest Regional Seminarians Gathering. The Minnesotan seminarians are pictured above with Iowan seminarians and Rev. John Thomas. From left to right are Luann Suilmann (MN), Dwight Wagenius (MN), Dawn Halstead (IA), Rev. John Thomas, General Minister and President of the UCC, Dixie Laube (IA), Gage Church (IA), and Bob Fellows (MN). All take or have taken courses at United Theological Seminary.



Our Whole Lives — the Intersection of Spirituality and Sexuality

A Class for Educators in the Minnesota Conference

I was sitting in the airport on a too long layover when my phone rang. The caller ID let me know that it was Kiely Todd Roska trying to reach me. It could have been any number of things as Kiely and I are friends and I serve on her Board of Directors. But on this day, she wanted to dream a little bit. She had been trained in Our Whole Lives, had been teaching Our Whole Lives and knew we shared the opinion that it was one of the best programs in existence in the United Church of Christ. Kiely had already dreamed this idea up with Wade Zick, our Ashley Minister, and also a person trained to teach the Our Whole Lives program. The dream was not just another training, but an immersion in the values and spirit of this program. The dream was to get some of the best educators in the Minnesota Conference into the same room for a semester and deepen the understanding of this program and why this matters in the faith formation of being a minister to youth and children in the local church. This dream was about adding to the culture of the Minnesota Conference yet another way to live our faith, deepen our faith, and create a place for others to traverse this sacred intersection of sexuality and spirituality.

We had to work out some logistics of a deep experience and a practical

training schedule, and we had to make sure this class fulfilled the vision of the Minnesota Conference and the generosity of the Ashley Endowment. So, we prayed and planned and I was able to bring in my co-writer and co-trainer, Lynn Young from Colorado Springs, CO to create this experience with me. With Wade's help we recruited some of the best and brightest educators in the Conference. We began the semester with a two-day retreat and have been meeting every Monday on the campus of United Theological Seminary. During this class we have been able to move through the Our Wholes Lives program, but also bring in the elements of a Sexual Attitudes Reassessment program, and training in facilitation. At the end of our semester we will have a group of folks ready to administer the Our Whole Lives program for every age level, but more importantly, these educators will have engaged in a process that will deepen their faith and be able to model an integrative theology. It has been a privilege for Lynn and me to lead this program, and I believe our Conference is blessed both by the generosity of Floyd Ashley and also by the faithful women and men who have been called to serve our local churches in this way.

— by Rev. T. Michael Rock, Robbinsdale UCC

Bringing Jubilee into Relationships and Institutional Norms

The Committee on Ministry (COM) gathered on a beautiful, pleasant weekend, August 24-26, 2008, to focus on the how to build a multicultural, multiracial, antiracist church in consideration of the ministerial charge of COM. The agenda for the weekend included a Sunday evening prayer service, *A Service of Unity and Reconciliation*; presentations from three pastors active in multicultural and antiracism transformational work (Revs. Kathy Nelson, Dave Stewart, and Tim Johnson); several large and small group facilitated discussions; reflection and journaling time; and ample time for rest and joy-making (thank you, Beth Donaldson).

The three presentations were particularly well received. Each presenter focused on five areas: theological foundations; context and history; realizations of, and prospects for, multiculturalism and antiracism; and lessons learned and lessons for sharing. From these presentations, participants were able to see possibilities for working on issues of multiculturalism even in all-white congregations by taking intentional small steps—changing attitudes and taking concrete actions. Participants were able to see what they were already doing that could be re-framed to highlight the multicultural and antiracist aspects of ministry. Participants found hope and inspiration in the practical, do-able programs the presenters laid out.

Almost every discussion was punctuated with such questions as, "So where does this fit or how can this be adapted to address the

concerns and functioning of the Committee on Ministry?" "Does this discussion lead to a particular recommendation we would wish to make to COM or the Minnesota Conference?" "How do we bring a multicultural, antiracist lens into our work?" "What are the implications for how we do ministry in the Minnesota Conference?"

Through our presentations, readings, and discussions, we were engaged in a Sacred Conversation on Race. In that conversation, we widened our vocabulary and deepened understanding through new and familiar concepts—cosmopolitan multicultural church, double consciousness, and the dubious "privilege" to think that race matters for certain others but does not need to matter for us. We drew on sacred scripture, especially Luke 4: 16-19, to remind ourselves that the Christ who calls us to participate in his ministry, proclaimed Good News to the poor and oppressed. That News, his ministry, was centered on Jubilee—a time of justice making, restitution and reconciliation. Doing multiculturalism and antiracism is doing the work of Jubilee. Lifting oppression and setting each other free from what has most deeply broken us all is sacred work. Our ministry, to be the ministry of Jesus, must be about Jubilee. The COM Retreat was a conversation about how we may bring Jubilee into our relationships and institutional norms.

The retreat was lead by ASDIC facilitators and sponsored by the Emmaus Antiracism Team.

— by Herb Perkins

Introducing Click & Give!

There's a new and easy way to support the Minnesota Conference. All you need to do is surf over to the Conference website at www.uccmn.org and click on the "Donate Now" link to see what it's all about. It is currently set up to allow for Friends of the Minnesota Conference donations and we hope to expand functions and options of this service in the near future. Donations can now be made on a credit or debit card, or can be set up as an automatic withdrawal from a checking account. The conference is excited to offer a completely safe and easy-to-use way to donate to Friends of the Conference.



Cathedral College Balances Study and Renewal

From its founding in 1927, the Cathedral College has offered rich opportunities for personal renewal and professional growth in the area of preaching. Located on the beautiful grounds of the National Cathedral in Washington DC, the college hosts 25 conferences annually. The college continues its long tradition of drawing leadership from many of the finest teachers and preachers around the globe.

My first hand experience of the college has been through participation in two preaching conferences the most recent in October. In each I found a good rhythm of worship, lectures, discussion, free time and shared meals. The courses were structured to invite intellectual exploration as well as provide practical tools for application back home at Linden Hills UCC. While I admit to being anxious about the small group preaching practice, I found them to be fun. Each time I received affirmation and authentic feedback. My Cathedral College colleagues were from across the country, served in many denominations but shared a desire to strengthen their preaching.

In addition to individual conference offerings, Cathedral College provides clergy the option of participating in a multi-conference certificate program designed around five areas of homiletics. The intent of the program is to improve preaching skills, nurture preachers and promote the quality of the entire worship experience for congregations. As part of the certificate program, participants recruit a listening committee from their parish to aid the effectiveness of preaching in the local church. This is a great way to include the congregation in the pastor's professional development.

While preaching remains at the core of its mission, the Cathedral College is responding to the evolving shape of Christian ministry by including an increasing number of programs in spirituality, global justice and reconciliation, and Christian formation. These programs are open to clergy and laity. The "Readers Program" is for clergy or laity doing independent study, planning or desiring quiet, sacred space for renewal. The "Fellows Program" provides the opportunity for up to six visiting scholars to come for a Sabbath time of research, writing and rest. Past scholars have included pastors, specialized ministers, authors, artists and lay leaders.

To be a guest within the sacred space of the National Cathedral and to experience the warm hospitality of the Cathedral College is a treat unto itself. The stately gothic building situated amidst the gardens and in the shadow of the cathedral provides a setting which allows guests to create their own blend of solitary and communal time. Bedrooms and shared living spaces are spotless, comfortable and aesthetically appealing. There is an extensive library available. Meals are bountiful and delicious. Conversations at mealtime are an informal opportunity for learning, sharing and laughter. Guests of Cathedral College are welcome to worship, concerts and public forums offered by the National Cathedral. (The Tuesday evening forum I attended was on the future of US Foreign Relations featuring Brent Scowcroft, Thomas Friedman and Zignew Brezinski.) The National Cathedral Store and tours of the cathedral are also worthwhile.

Attending a Cathedral College conference also allows you to enjoy all of Washington D.C.'s attractions. Many are free of charge and most are easily accessible by bus or subway. It is easy to get around the Washington Mall to all the memorials. The White House, the US Capital, and the Smithsonian and Holocaust Museums are also nearby. The National Cathedral is also close to Georgetown area with many shops and restaurants.

As a pastor I found the Cathedral College experience to be a highlight of my continuing education experiences. I appreciate that my congregation encourages my participation in such programs and includes funds for continuing education in the annual church budget as part of my compensation. The actual cost of Cathedral conferences is surprisingly reasonable and worth every penny. Please contact me if you would like to hear more. Also, learn and see more at www.nationalcathedral.org.

This is the first of several reports of Clergy Continuing Education and Self-Care options recommended by clergy of the Minnesota Conference. If you have a setting or program to suggest, the Professional Development of Authorized Ministers Team would like to hear from you. Please share news of opportunities close to home and farther away, long as well as brief — whatever you've done to nurture your ministry and wellbeing. Please contact Eliot Howard (612-927-4603), eliotoward@msn.com

GLAUCE Event in Chicago

Eleven children and youth ministry leaders from the MN Conference traveled to Chicago in October to attend the Great Lakes Association of Church Educators (GLAUCE) retreat. The time focused on spiritual renewal and understanding different spiritual types in our ministries and meeting those varied needs. Many thanks go to the Ashley funds and the Board of Directors for helping to make this enrichment experience possible.



Eleven church educators from the Minnesota Conference traveled to Chicago in October



The group traveled in the Mizpah, Hopkins bus

Watch for the Christmas Fund Offering

The Christmas Fund Offering, formerly known as the Veterans of the Cross is one of four special mission offerings of the United Church of Christ. The offering is an expression of joy and gratitude to and for those who serve the church and is administered by the United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance of the Pension Boards.

Gifts to the Christmas Fund help provide pension and health premium supplementation to low-income retirees, emergency assistance to the families of clergy and lay employees and Christmas gift checks to hundreds of annuitants. In the Minnesota Conference, 9 receive pension supplementation, 5 have assistance with paying their health plan premiums, and 17 receive Christmas checks from the Christmas Fund.

Facts taken from a 1953 publication indicate that, "In 1902, a little money was collected and special Christmas gifts were sent to ten older ministers." The same article reports that \$121,054 was received for the Christmas Fund in 1952. A little more than 50 years later, in 2007 the Christmas Fund received \$1,571,050 and nearly 1,500 families were assisted. The goal is to be able to provide at least \$1,700,000 in assistance from the 2008 appeal.

Your gifts are needed more than ever to help the growing number of retirees whose low income annuities make it difficult to meet rapidly increasing living costs. This is your opportunity to participate in God's promise of renewal by enabling this ministry of compassion and care.

Coming Soon!

**Conference High School Youth Event
February 13-15, 2009 @ United Theological Seminary**

"Myth-Busters": A weekend of examining world religions and opportunities for inter-faith dialogues

Early registration cost \$25/person before January 17

\$35/person until registration closes on February 6

Registration for this winter's CYE begins December 7, 2008

Fellowship of UCC Architects meet in Minnesota

In mid-October Minnesota played host to a gathering of the Fellowship of UCC Architects sponsored by the Church Building and Loan Fund. "Building Now for the 22nd Century" featured workshops, presenters, and speakers such as Rev. Dr. Leonard Sweet, Linda Mack, Rev. Dr. William Green and Rev. Dr. Thomas Dipko.



Rev. Dr. William Green speaks at Bigelow Chapel at United Theological Seminary

Opening Doors, Building Peace, Praising God

"Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to God in heaven." ~ Matthew 5: 16

Each Sunday we begin our worship at Peace UCC in Duluth with two of our third grade acolytes carrying in the light of Christ, symbolizing God's presence with us in the gathered community. At the conclusion of our worship that same light leads us back out into the world. The center of our life together is worship as we gather to listen to God's inspiring and challenging word, to sing, to praise God and to pray for and with one another.



The church's new exterior

Since May we have been worshipping in the basement of our church, but on November 23rd we will gather again in a completely remodeled sanctuary. This is the second phase of our building project. This phase created a fully accessible worship space with greatly improved sightlines and acoustics, multi-media capability and seating for 350 people. The worship space was turned ¼ turn, so that we can now look out upon our city and Lake Superior. The many large windows allow us to see who we are called to serve and the beauty of the natural world. A memorial prairie garden and of course Lake Superior are just outside our windows.

When we first began planning for the remodeling of our building, we envisioned completing the entire project in one step, but we soon realized it was too expensive and would need to be done in phases. Phase I included the creation of a new doors, entry way and gathering space, office areas and classrooms downstairs. We also were able to do some very necessary upgrades to the energy efficiency of our building — the installation of new windows and insulation, and new controls for our heating systems.



New windows and a shifted sanctuary

We never dreamed we would be able to achieve so much, so quickly. Phase I called for two or three capital campaigns to retire the debt on that part of the building project, but due to the gracious giving of two bequests and the faithful giving of so many of members and friends, we were pay off this portion and move on to Phase II almost 20 years before we thought ever could.

On Sunday, November 23rd we will dedicate our new space with prayers, a song written for this day by one of our members, great music by our choirs and praise bands, and preaching by Rev. Karen Smith Sellers, Conference Minister.

Fall CYE at Pilgrim Point

There were over 100 youth & adult leaders, representing 30 churches from the MN Conference, who gathered for the fall CYE at pilgrim point in October. Lizann Bassham was our keynoter who helped us dig in deep into the 8 Points of Progressive Christianity from The Center for Progressive Christianity.

Reflections came back with statements such as:

"It was awesome!"

"I have learned to accept people further"

"I'm going to keep in touch with my new friends and spread the word of God"

"I appreciated being just who I really am"

Many thanks go to the co-directors Mary Gilbertson (First Congregational Church, UCC, Moorhead) and Alyssa Miller (Bethlehem United Church of Christ, Maple Lake) along with the planning team for putting together a great weekend. Our time included a Halloween Party, scavenger hunts, chicken volleyball and meaningful worship. The food was also a huge hit prepared by the cooks from Mizpah UCC, Hopkins.



The MizpahUCC, Hopkins chefs fabulously cooked for the group all weekend



Youth and adults from across the conference met for a weekend of fellowship and fun at Pilgrim Point Camp in October

Middle School Road Tour

Featuring Bryan Sirchio and Sheltered Reality!

Come for food, games and worship — only \$5 per person

Upcoming dates:

- January 24, 2009 at Wayzata Community Church
- March 21, 2009 at the Federated Church in Fergus Falls
- And May 09, 2009 at Peace Church in Duluth.

Attend 3 Road Tour events and get a free Roadie T-Shirt!

More details will be available through COMMAntary and on the conference website as events get closer.

Visit www.uccmn.org or email Michele Borne at micheleb@uccmn.org for more details.

Many thanks to the Ashley Fund for making this event possible.

Minnesota... Nice!

Dear UCCMN Friends,

Well, it's been a whirlwind! Even if the moving truck had arrived on time, it's been a quick transition from life with my congregation in Chicago to life here, as a new ACM, in Minneapolis.

One of the nice things about moving is that people show their helpful sides. Friends invite you to stay over, family members pack boxes, people even give gifts! But one of the best parts is that people give advice. I've gotten advice about where to live, what restaurants to try, what kind of winter clothing to buy... and I've gotten a lot of advice about "Minnesota Nice."

"Minnesota Nice," it seems, is an inclination towards kindness, helpfulness, and a generally friendly attitude. This friendliness often arrives with a hotdish, or sweet rolls, and lots of hot coffee on the side. I've even heard stories about the codes of the road, where stranded drivers are rescued from snowdrifts by caring strangers. For a newcomer, Minnesota Nice means that I've been welcomed warmly, with genuinely Christian hospitality and care for my well-being. It's been wonderful!

But I've also been warned- several times- that there's another side to Minnesota Nice. I've heard that sometimes we may be so nice that we avoid sharing our "un-nice" opinions, and thereby disconnect where we're supposed to cooperate. This is completely understandable; the desire to maintain tranquility is normal, and it's easy for us to find ourselves putting our unmet needs and un-nice emotions on the back burner — and they can boil over just

when we've turned our back!

In my hometown in rural Northern California, there is a church with a stained glass window of Jesus. Little animals are gathered around him as he smiles over Main Street and the cars driving on their way to the high school. It's a nice window, but somehow I doubt that Jesus was always so perfectly amiable and even-tempered. Looking at the Gospels, we see Jesus have many, fully human moods. He makes jokes, he weeps, he is angry, he is disdainful, he is desperate, and he is moved by gestures of love and humility. Our Christ lived and walked among us, and he called us to be nice in the deepest way possible: to look upon our fellow brothers and sisters in the human family as our neighbors. Good neighbors share hotdish and driveways, and good neighbors know that solving problems together is not only a sign of respect, it brings us closer together.

As an ACM, I know that problem-solving is a big, fun part of my work. Whether it's helping a church find a new pastor, working to plant new churches, or stepping in when times are tough, it is my prayer that we, the Minnesota Conference of the United Church of Christ, will put our gift of Minnesota Niceness to work alongside our Christian vocation of neighborliness, using these strengths together to build to body of Christ and the unity of the Church in Minnesota. For I know that I am blessed that my new UCCMN family are not only 'nice,' they are also Christ-like neighbors!

In Christ,
The Rev. Elena Larssen

Coming to Minnesota: Kelly Burd, UCC National Minister for Youth, Young Adults and Outdoor Ministries

The Reverend Kelly Burd worked in parish and youth ministry for nine years before serving as the UCC National Youth Event Coordinator from 2007-2008. She currently lives in Cleveland, Ohio where she serves as Interim Minister for Youth and Young Adults in the national setting of the United Church of Christ.

Youth leader gathering & lunch Thursday, January 22, 11:00-2:00pm @ Plymouth Congregational Church in Minneapolis
20/30 Somethings Social from 8:00-10:00pm Thursday, January 22 at Rev. David Lindsey's home



Merry Christmas from the Conference Office

You are cordially invited to a Christmas Open House at the Conference Office!

Wednesday, December 17, 2008, 10:00am-2:00pm

Light refreshments and punch will be served. Come to meet all the new staff members and see the newly remodeled space. So we can plan for your presence, please RSVP to alisonb@uccmn.org or 612-871-0359 by December 12, 2008.



Standing: Marita Karlisch, Rick Wagner, Dee Dressler, Alison Bents, Sian Nelson, Ted Hovey; Seated: Elena Larssen, Wade Zick, and Karen Smith Sellers; Not Pictured: Michele Borne and Evelyn Henrikson

First Impressions on the job as Associate Conference Minister

To a person, I have found the members of the Conference staff to be capable, committed, friendly, and hard-working. It is a pleasure being around them, and there's a good energy in the office.

The learning curve has been steep, though. Over the years, I have served on enough Conference committees that I thought I knew most of what was required of Conference staff, or what they should be doing. But I'm afraid I didn't know the half of it! At this point, I'm acutely aware of how much I don't know, and I haven't had this feeling in many years. I don't like it!

But that leads to humility, which is a good thing. And to go forward requires trust — trust in God and trust in each other. I'm reminded of God's call to Abram to "go forth to the land I will show you," requiring that he and Sarai leave behind what was comfortable and familiar. Well, I've left behind much of what was comfortable and familiar, and while I've already been to some of the places to which this calling is now leading me, I haven't been to all of them, at least not yet. I've got a trip to International Falls scheduled in January, in part because their Pastor, Sue Hamly, said to me, "We'll know you really love us when you visit us in winter!"

That means there is also a sense of excitement and adventure about

the work. There are new places to see and new people to meet and new challenges to face. For example, some folks warned me about all the driving the job would require. Well, I enjoyed my first day of six hours of driving because the leaves were changing and cell phone coverage was spotty. There wasn't much I could do except drive and enjoy the scenery. The challenge, though, was not the drive. The challenge came the next day, because there was so much catching up to do.

Elena and I have been hired to further the mission of the Conference, and part of that means doing new things, or doing things in new ways. We hope that technology can help us shrink some of the distances involved in working with churches. It also seems to me that some clergy cluster groups clearly need new models or purposes for meeting. I hope that we will be able to step back far enough from the day-to-day details that we can observe carefully, think strategically, and act decisively and effectively in the interests of making the Minnesota Conference a transformational regional body, attentive to the needs of our churches and their leaders, and faithful to God and Christ.

Your co-worker in Christ,
Rick Wagner



Minnesota Conference Editor:
Karen Smith Sellers

Regular Contributors:
Karen Smith Sellers, Dale Dressler,
Wade Zick, Alison Bents,
Elena Larssen and Rick Wagner

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Submit Voyager materials, suggestions or inquiries to:

■ Telephone: 612-871-0359 ■ FAX: 612-870-4885 ■
■ Email: alisonb@uccmn.org ■

Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ

■ 122 W. Franklin Ave. Suite 323, Minneapolis, MN 55404 ■
■ Website: www.uccmn.org ■