



Global Mission Conference Affirms Value of Minnesota Connection with the Philippines

*By Rev. David Lindsey, Pastor
Lynnhurst Congregational UCC, Minneapolis*

In November of 2008, conference ministers from across the United Church of Christ gathered at a Global Mission Conference at the Church House in Cleveland to discuss ways to strengthen our partnerships with churches around the world. Our conference minister Rev. Dr. Karen Smith Sellers was in attendance, along with several of her colleagues from across the nation, to hear about various ways in which conferences are connected (and connecting) to partner churches across the globe. A handful of lay and clergy leaders from the conferences were also in attendance, including Rev. David Lindsey of Lynnhurst UCC in Minneapolis.

The event was jam-packed with presentations by a wide array of folks, including conference ministers, lay leaders, and our UCC/DOC (Disciples of Christ) area ministers for various regions of the world.

Several of our conferences are deeply engaged with global partners in creative and transformative ways. Also, a wide variety of our local churches across the nation have established relationships with sister congregations in all corners of the earth. From Zimbabwe to Honduras, from India to Germany, we as the United Church of Christ are deeply engaged in building mutually supportive relationships with partner churches so that all God's children may truly be one (John 17:21).

Here in Minnesota, we have been connected with the United Church of Christ in the

Philippines (UCCP) for many years. In recognition of our ongoing relationships with our partner churches in the UCCP, you are invited to join with congregations throughout our conference in celebrating this relationship in your local church on Sunday, April 26th! Congregations throughout the United Church of Christ often recognize their connections to churches in Asia and the Pacific Islands on Pacific Islander and Asian-American Ministries (PAAM) Sunday. This year, PAAM Sunday is happening on April 26th, two weeks after Easter Sunday. Liturgical materials created by our conference's Philippine Task Force will be sent to your congregations in an effort to support you in worship for this special celebration. Please save the date of April 26th for this joyous celebration of our relationship with the UCCP!

Conference Connection with the UCC Philippines Strengthened by Rev. Marma Urbano

United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities and the Minnesota Conference UCC partnership with the United Church of Christ in the Philippines are glad to welcome the Rev. Marma Urbano for the current academic year.

Marma is on campus as the Campbell Scholar, studying in the Diploma in Advanced Theological Studies program. She is originally from Surigao City, in northeastern Mindanao, and earned her Master of Divinity degree from Union Theological Seminary in Cavite, just south of Manila, in 1978. Marma is married to Marlon and together they have three daughters, the youngest of whom is a college student. Funding for the Campbell Scholarship comes from the Benevolence Committee of Plymouth Congregational Church and is named in memory of Thomas C. Campbell, academic vice-president of United from 1974–1979.

In addition to working as a high school teacher, Marma's ministry was with several congregations

before working in the Northern Luzon Jurisdiction (the equivalent of an association in the UCC). Beginning in 1998, she held a variety of positions in the UCCP National Office, including Christian Education and Nurture, Executive Programs Director, Development and as the Executive Secretary to the Office of the General Secretary. In July of 2006, she became the Associate Director and then the Executive Director of the Institute of Religion and Culture.

In that capacity, Marma became known as a passionate advocate for human rights, speaking out against the hundreds of extrajudicial killings in the Philippines, whose victims have included lawyers, journalists, clergy and union organizers who have spoken out against the Arroyo administration. Marma received what is known as an "order of battle," an anonymous threat against her own life in response to her advocacy work. Fearing not only for safety but also for her family, she came to the United States and has begun the process of

applying for political asylum. After a series of hearings this fall, a hearing before an immigration judge has been scheduled for next March.

In the meantime, she will continue her Diploma program at United, using her course work to develop "a proposed model of church and of mission, for the consideration of the UCCP that seriously takes into account and reflects the reality of massive overseas migration of Filipinos in general and of UCCP members in particular." Following a consultation with Filipino church workers serving in the US, Marma has been assigned by the UCCP to work with and through UCCP ministries here in the US once her studies at United are completed in May. Of course, all this depends on a favorable decision regarding her immigration status.

Marma has preached and led discussions at Cherokee Park United Church in St. Paul, Peace UCC in Duluth and First Congregational UCC in Grand Marais. If other



Rev. Marma Urbano,
UTS Campbell Scholar

congregations or partners of the Minnesota Conference would like to welcome Rev. Urbano as a preacher or teacher during the coming months, please contact her through United's Director of Admissions (Glen Herrington-Hall, 651-255-6107).

“Together, We Will Be Renewed”

A Time to Renew Relationships, Opportunities, and Spiritual Commitment

Our Minnesota Conference Annual Meeting, June 5–7, 2009, aptly supports the recent commitment of the Conference to engage in renewing and revitalizing our churches. In keeping with the Conference’s work with Paul Nickerson, Annual Meeting speakers this year offer similar experiences with churches in their own arenas. Paul Nixon is one of those speakers.

In his 2007 book *Refuse to Lead a Dying Church*, Nixon offers these choices for today’s churches which seek revitalization and renewal:

- Choosing life over death
- Choosing fun over drudgery
- Choosing bold over mild
- Choosing frontier over fortress
- Choosing now rather than later

Paul is the pastor of Epicenter Church, a new United Methodist community of faith focused on serving the people who live in the urban expanse of greater Washington DC. Formerly the Director of Congregational Development for the Alabama-West Florida Conference of The United Methodist Church, Paul is now working on his fourth book, focusing on urban ministry.

Our time with Paul at Annual Meeting dovetails nicely not only with the work that Paul Nickerson is doing with our Conference churches already but also with the experiences and work of Rev. Dr. Susan K. Smith, our other keynote speaker (highlighted in the last VOYAGER), and with the efforts of David Schoen, Congregational Vitality and Discipleship Ministry Team Leader, who will also be with us at Annual Meeting, from Local Church Ministries of the United Church of Christ, Cleveland, OH,.

What is unique about our time with Nixon this year is his offer to spend a focused special session with any churches actively engaged in using his book in either the 4-session or 6-session format. On Thursday, June 4, 2009, Paul Nixon will be available to those churches that have opted to use his program in their congregations, at a session held in one of our UCC churches in the Twin Cities Metro area. That way, even if your church is not able to send representatives to Annual Meeting this year, you will be able to engage in practical application of this speaker’s work, and enjoy real-time discussion with him about your outcomes, progress, and questions.



Rev. Susan K. Smith



Rev. Paul Nixon

(Watch for a special invitation enclosed with the official letter of call to the Annual Meeting, for more details.)

The location of the 2009 Annual Meeting is once again the College of Saint Benedict, St. Joseph, MN, where most of our activities, including cafeteria-style meals, will take place at the year-old Gorecki Conference Center.

In light of this year’s financial realities, we are doing our best to hold costs to last year’s levels. The Conference does not profit from the Annual Meeting; we aim only to cover our expenses. However, at our request, St.Ben’s this year offers parents with children attending the children’s program, a real “break” on housing. Watch for more information with registration.

Worship on Friday night and Sunday morning will include Holy Communion, but briefer worship times are sprinkled throughout the weekend schedule, offering a thematic journey in scripture and music. The jazz duo CODA will be featured in worship and during the Saturday night “after hours” session in Gorecki Center. Other musicians will augment gathering music and selected worship moments. Malcolm Anderson will direct the popular impromptu choir.

Once again the meeting begins on Friday afternoon, with important information for all attendees, whether new delegates or veteran attendees, offered by our Conference Minister, Rev. Dr. Karen Smith Sellers, beginning at 1:00pm, Friday, June 5th.

This year, business items will also be more spread out throughout the schedule, with some voting happening earlier than in past years.

We hope you’ll plan to join us for the entire time at the 2009 Annual Meeting of the Minnesota Conference UCC so that “*Together, We Will Be Renewed.*”

CALL FOR EXHIBITS & WORKSHOPS FOR THE 2009 ANNUAL MEETING

June 5–7, 2009

College of St. Benedict, St. Joseph, MN

Theme: “Together, We Will Be Renewed!”

We are seeking exhibits related to ministry, congregations, missions, church’s response to current issues, or Christian education. Exhibits will be seen by over 300 attendees from across the state.

SHARE YOUR KNOWLEDGE! SHARE YOUR SUCCESSES!

We hereby invite you to request space to present an informational/educational workshop on Saturday, June 6th 2009 as part of the Annual Meeting of the Conference, (June 5th–7th), at the College of St. Benedict.

***Deadline for filing applications
is May 8th.***

For information and registration forms contact

Rev. Kent A. Meyer at revkmeyer@gmail.com
or 507-495-3356 for Exhibits

Alison Bents at alisonb@uccmn.org
at the Conference office, 612-871-0359 for either

Is Your Church an Anniversary Church?

Is your local church celebrating an important anniversary in 2009? Each year at the Annual Meeting of the Minnesota Conference UCC, we honor those congregations celebrating quarter-century anniversaries (25th, 50th, 75th, 100th, 125th, and 150th). To prepare, we look at the United Church of Christ Yearbook, but often we find that the date provided there is not the one the church recognizes.

If your local church is celebrating an important anniversary this year, we urge you to contact Alison Bents (alisonb@uccmn.org) at the Conference office so that we can recognize and celebrate your joy at the Annual Meeting. Additionally, our Conference Ministry staff is honored to participate in these celebrations with you. Please let us know at the earliest possible time of the date you have selected for celebration so that one of us can be among you personally!

Call to the 27th General Synod

Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

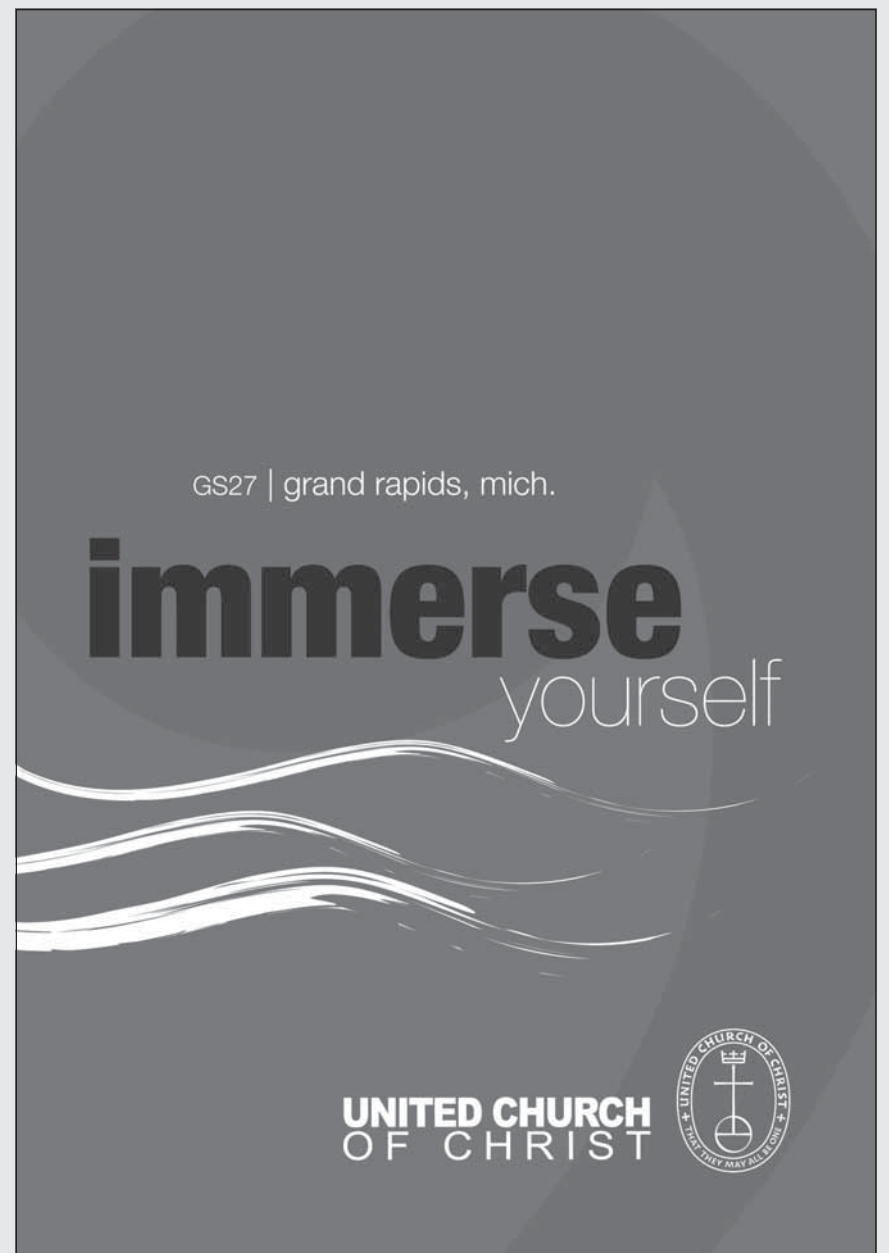
The 27th General Synod of the United Church of Christ will convene Friday afternoon, June 26, 2009 in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and will adjourn at the close of business on Tuesday evening, June 30. With the Grand River flowing beside the DeVos Convention Center, the theme for this year's Synod will be "Immerse Yourself!" We will be reminded of the waters of baptism that signify the grace of God and welcomed each of us into the community of Christ's people. We will consider the important significance of water for life on this planet, and our responsibility to care for and share the water that covers our earth in a time of accelerating climate change and environmental crisis. We will reflect on how our Church will immerse itself in the mission of God for justice and peace.

Our Fiftieth Anniversary Synod in Hartford was built around Synod in the City, a day of speakers, workshops, forums, and hands on mission. We know we can't duplicate the remarkable experience of Hartford. However, we have heard from many of you that we can't just return to the old ways of doing things. There will be a day set aside for inspiring speakers, for learning, sharing, worship, and celebration, along with the normal business of the General Synod. Invitations are going out to a prominent group of leaders in mission, theology, Biblical studies, public life, science and technology, the arts and culture; look for announcements of speakers on the website—www.ucc.org—as we hear back from invitees. We expect another large delegation of youth from across the Church. This year the program combines the traditional Synod experience with elements of a mission trip involving service in the community of Grand Rapids. Also, of course, there will be uplifting worship with an opportunity to join the churches of the Michigan Conference.

Guest registration opened in December and there are instructions for registering on the website.

Please join us in Grand Rapids for the 27th General Synod, and "immerse yourself!"

Sincerely,
John H. Thomas
General Minister and President



Mary Kulberg is Honored Laywoman

By action of the Board of Directors at its January meeting, Mary Kulberg of The Congregational Church UCC, Detroit Lakes is the Honored Laywoman of the Minnesota Conference UCC. Her contributions will be celebrated in a plenary session and at a special luncheon at General Synod XXVII to be held June 26-30, 2009 in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The Synod theme is "Immerse Yourself."

Mary was selected for her immersion in numerous vital and transforming ministries of justice and mercy. Eight years ago Mary introduced her congregation to the idea of giving to Heifer International as an alternative Christmas gift. In the intervening years she has organized the committees, ordered the materials, worked with the church school teachers to involve the children, and provided the Heifer Day Sunday sermon. She and her husband

have visited Heifer sites in the US and Thailand and cumulatively to date the local church has given about \$25,000 to Heifer International. Volunteering directly with Heifer International, she presents programs to other churches and organizations.

Mary is also a leader in the women's organization of the congregation, where she was instrumental in a restructuring that resulted in more women participating in diverse activities and programs. She has planned and led women's retreats and been active in World Day of Prayer. Additionally, she serves on the board for stewardship and has been a delegate to the Annual Meeting of the Minnesota Conference.

For more than two decades, Mary and her husband, Walter, have also immersed themselves in the lives of people who are near death. As

hospice volunteers, they offer respite care to families and minister directly to those who have no family nearby.

Mary is a poet and gardener and is known as the "Butterfly Lady." In her garden she nurtures and follows the growth of the monarch butterfly from egg to adult and shares the mystery of this experience with school children and adults.

A generous gift from the UCC Women of Minnesota will make possible Mary's full participation in General Synod. The Honored Laywoman celebration makes visible the many and varied contributions that have been made by UCC lay women and honors specific women by telling their stories so that they may inspire others. The honoring is not a contest, but is rather a way to acknowledge the leadership and spiritual vitality of lay women in our denomination.



Mary Kulberg preaching at the Congregational Church of Detroit Lakes on Heifer Day Sunday

Abounding in Hope

By Karen
Smith Sellers
Conference
Minister



2009 marks my *fourth* year as your conference minister and the year in which Richard and I anticipate celebrating our *fortieth* wedding anniversary. Romans 15:13—“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope”—was the text selected for our Pentecost wedding. It was also my choice when asked as an applicant for this position: “As you now understand the challenges/hopes of the Minnesota Conference, cite and make comment on a biblical text that you believe speaks to our present realities.”

I wrote, “I believe that the deepest hope of the people of the Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ is to be faith-filled and faithful people. In our consumer, secular and individualist culture, many goods and gods cry out for our attention and demand our time and dollars. In the absence of deep spiritual moorings, we are easily distracted.” Now as then, I believe that our *primary* challenge is neither financial nor numerical nor demographic, but spiritual.

Accordingly, I rejoice in the opportunity made possible by a gift from the Enduring Fund of Chapel Hills United Church of Christ (Edina) and by financial assets from the closed Congregational Church of Granada to support the partnership with Local Church Ministries of the UCC and Nickerson Coaching to help us “go deeper in faith,” cognizant that this precedes and informs our efforts to “reach out in new ways.” Thriving congregations and new church starts are rooted in vital faith.

The year ahead will be challenging for the Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ. The peace, joy and hope for which Paul prayed are likely to be deeply mingled with anxiety, fear, and perhaps despair. The decline in the stock market has reduced the value of the Ashley Endowment, individual investment portfolios and pension accounts—all of which sustain our ministries. And we do not yet know how the rise in home foreclosures and increased joblessness will impact giving to Our Church’s Wider Mission or participation in Conference events and programs.

But we fool ourselves if we believe that Paul’s context was less certain or more difficult than ours. Paul’s prayer is ageless. It informs the confession of the Heidelberg Catechism that our only comfort in life and death is in knowing that we belong to God, that we are God’s own.

This amazing grace offers—even today—joy, peace and confidence in God’s abundance that frees us not just to hope, but to **abound** in hope and to be “heartily willing and ready henceforth to live unto God.”

Living unto God *is* our calling. This requires translating our mission “to increase the love of God and neighbor” into specific choices about strategic priorities and resource allocation. It means naming the actual neighbor(s) whom we will serve. In the aforementioned application essay I inquired: “Will the neighbor(s) toward whom we wish to increase love be the one(s) we hope to reach through the stillspeaking movement and/or those we hope to serve through new church development? Will the neighbor(s) be the one(s) longing for us to create and support new strategies for pastoral leadership in

small rural congregations and/or the one(s) who cry out for attention to anti-racism and diversity initiatives? Will the neighbor(s) be the one(s) living on St. Paul’s east side or in the Southeast Mindanao jurisdiction of the Philippines?”

I am grateful that last fall, as the national conversation focused on the disparities between Wall Street and Main Street, our UCC General Minister and President, John Thomas, joined the leaders of the National Council of Churches in sending a letter to the presidential candidates reminding them, “It is not enough simply to address the misdeeds of those who bear significant responsibility for this crisis, or to respond to the problems and anxieties of the middle class, as important as they may be. Our Christian faith calls us to give particular attention to our most vulnerable neighbors, to children, and to people living in extreme poverty.”

Speaking through a major prophet, the stillspeaking God said it this way: “If you offer food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noon day. The Lord will guide you continually and satisfy your needs in parched places. You shall raise up the foundation of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.” (Isaiah 58: 10–12)

May 2009 find us growing in faith and inspired and active in our vocation. And may the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit we may abound in hope!

Rev. Dr. Karen Smith Sellers
Conference Minister

*“Living unto God
is our calling.”*

Save the Date!

The annual fall Women’s Retreat will take place September 18–20, 2009. Mark your calendars now and make plans to attend!

Got COMMAntary?

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 wider 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.



Miracle on 31st Street

By Rev. Don Portwood, Pastor
Lyndale United Church
of Christ

Lyndale United Church of Christ (lyndaleucc.org) at 31st Street and Aldrich voted on December 7 to sell our building to New Wine Church of St. Paul (newwinechurch.org)! If only it were that easy. A done deal.

New Wine Church wants a bigger building. They want to buy and restore our building. Partnered with Salem Lutheran Church (discoversalem.com) and presently sharing our building with them, we want to sell and downsize (our building is 25,000 sq. ft), moving the fall of 2010 into a renovated green friendly building, Salem Lutheran Church's sanctuary at 28th Street and Garfield Avenue.

It is a big deal for a congregation to voluntarily agree to sell their building, what with the edifice complexes some congregations are often known to have. But the Lyndale Church building has been too big for the 120 member congregation for years, and 5 years ago we began to work on plans to move to a more sustainable building. Salem Lutheran Church joined in the quest and in November of 2006 Salem Church shut up their 45,000 sq. ft. building at 28th & Lyndale and moved in with us. We are partnered, not merged. Salem has a traditional service in the sanctuary at 8:30 a.m. Lyndale has our service in the sanctuary at 10:30 a.m. and Salem has a jazz service in the dance studio at 10:30 a.m. Just to make things exciting, the Greater Deliverance Church moved into the garden level of the building in July of 2008 and they begin worship on Sundays at 12:15 p.m.

As all of us are too fully aware, these decisions are happening in a tough economy. And that's an understatement. New Wine Church has 60 days following the signing of the purchase agreement on December 18th to inspect the



Lyndale UCC's church building currently houses the Lyndale congregation and that of Salem Lutheran Church

building. Even after they decide to move forward, they need to work with a bank that will make the loan. And we know how that's going.

But faith is often simply putting one foot in front of the other and trusting God for the results. That's what these three churches are doing. Who better?

So there may be a miracle on 31st Street in this economy in the near future. We won't know for sure until the end of March, 2009. Presently Lyndale and Salem Churches are looking in the immediate neighborhood for a place where two congregations can share one space, continue to worship separately, but minister together in other ways.

Meanwhile, Brighton Development continues to apply for gap funding to make the project at 28th & Lyndale a reality. Some money will be coming from the Metropolitan Council for the affordable housing part of the project. We hope for other money from the City of Minneapolis. When all the funding is in place (this coming summer), the project at 28th & Lyndale will begin and hopefully be completed by the fall of 2010. Another miracle? This time on 28th Street.

Both Lyndale and Salem Churches ask for the prayers/thoughts/energy/manifestations of the neighborhood, that together we might continue to serve in the neighborhood.

Montevideo UCC Shares in Visionary Program

By Rev. Dick Fylling, Pastor
First Congregational UCC, Montevideo
& Granite Falls United Church of Christ

This past November, the First Congregational United Church of Christ at Montevideo, Minnesota shared in what has become a visionary program in western Minnesota as 35 students and faculty from the Twin Cities ventured to Montevideo to explore the environmental and social advances in this part of Minnesota.

The two-day event, held November 19–20, brought together college students and faculty from Hamline, Macalester, St. Thomas, St. Catherine's and the University of Minnesota with some of the leading innovators and writers from this region of the state.

Most of the students were at Montevideo to visit with staff members of CURE (Clean Up the River Environment), the Moonstone Farm, Land Stewardship Project and other progressive organizations in the area. Those students would seek to integrate their findings with their class on "Environmental Sustainability".

The second group would spend Wednesday visiting the CURE staff and visiting the downtown area of Montevideo before joining others that evening at the Java River Coffee House for a "Reading Riot", a time to share their poetry and other writings in a gathering of students, faculty and local musicians. This group of students had come to the community to explore possibilities of using their literary skills for their class on "Writing for Social Change".

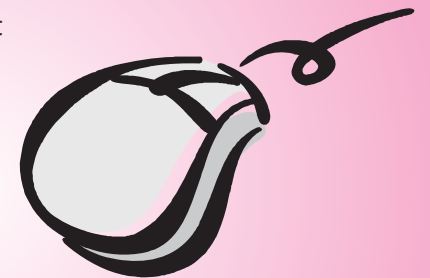
When Patrick Moore, the Executive Director of CURE and the author of this five-year visitation and dialogue program with HECUA (Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs) learned that the teacher of this second group was a writing instructor, he contacted some of the outstanding writers in western Minnesota—Joe Paddock, Florence Dacey, Athena Kildegaard, Jim Van der Pol, Duane Ninneman and Joe Amato—and asked them to make presentations and share in a panel discussion with students on the subject "Writing for Social Change" on the morning of November 20.

Moore contacted Teresa Patton, a member of First Congregational UCC at Montevideo, about the possibility of using the church for sleeping accommodations Wednesday evening and for the panel presentation and discussion Thursday morning. Moore considered the church a good choice due to its proximity to downtown Montevideo and its space for sleeping and a good-sized fellowship hall for the morning program.

Patton told Moore to get in touch with Dwayne Knutsen and Mark Rekow regarding using the church facilities. That would be easy as both Knutsen and Rekow were on the CURE Board of Directors. A few emails later, the First Congregational United Church of Christ was part of a visionary venture that is bringing new ways of integrating studies and programs relating community and culture to their indivisible and inevitable encounters with environment and the stewardship of God's creation.

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.



The Minnesota Conference website has gotten a facelift! Say hello to the new web presence of the Minnesota Conference, United Church of Christ. We are very excited to have a new look and a cleaner way of communicating with you. Come by www.uccmn.org to see what all the fuss is about!



Members of Union Congregational UCC, St. Louis Park pause to take a photo at the Thanksgiving Day Free Store



Goods piled high waiting for dispersal at the Free Store

Thanksgiving Day Free Store 2008

By Jo Senander and the Free Store Family

What began in 1994 by a group of 7 or 8 volunteers as a Christmas Day Free Toy Store, serving 40–50 children has become a much larger mission. Still held at St. Stephen's Catholic School in Minneapolis, the Thanksgiving Day Free Store has moved beyond toys to providing those in need with basic necessities.

This year, our 14th Free Store greeted over 500 guests. Our intention is to provide each guest with the following: a warm jacket, sweatshirt, hat, mittens or gloves, scarf, underwear, two pair of socks, toiletries, backpacks filled with school supplies for children and other miscellaneous items. Although our resources were greater than ever, so too was the need. Because of this, we were unable to realize our goal of providing all of the items to each guest.

The Thanksgiving Day Free Store culminates on one day each year, but the work continues year round. Most of our now 100+ volunteers are members of Union Congregational UCC in St. Louis

Park. Many days are spent organizing, de-tagging, sizing, and packaging the thousands of items to be given. Purchasing takes place year round with much attention paid to how and when items are bought with regard to sales, senior discounts, store discounts, and other ways of maximizing donations. One hundred percent of all donations go directly to those in need.

Although the majority of our volunteers are UCC members, the Free Store has become quite the ecumenical endeavor involving several other denominations around the metro area. This fall, we were honored to be included in the Mennonite Festival and Relief Sale Live Auction, which raised over two thousand dollars for our outreach. Chapel Hill's UCC of Edina gave a generous grant as well. Union Church and individual member donations made up the bulk of our budget.

The many volunteers who work at the Free Store year after year feel it is an important part of their Thanksgiving Day and that without it, the day would be incomplete. An example includes a family toting along their then 2-year old with a

broken leg in order to serve. We have a wonderful time with each other and with our guests who are genuinely appreciative of our warmth and caring.

An amusing event occurred two years ago. A volunteer brought a large box of clothing and set it in the hallway. Pretty soon, a guest came running into the free store saying that a woman across the street was selling clothes from a box. We were able to talk her into giving the box back. Needless to say, she wasn't very pleased with this outcome. Such instances are rare, but clearly illustrate the need and desperation that exists for many of God's children.

To better serve, we have recently achieved status of 501 (c)3 non-profit. We hope, through this change, to access new sources of donations and free products. We lovingly welcome new volunteers, specific item donations (mentioned above), and funding. Funds donated earlier allow better access to end of season sales which maximize the impact of the gift. If you are interested in learning more or becoming involved, please call Jo Senander at 952-926-8390.

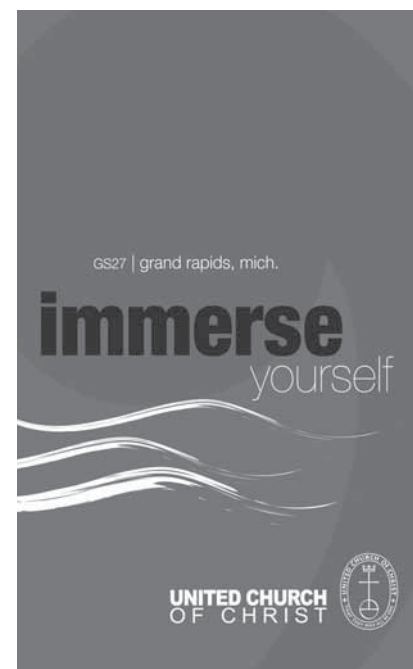
One Great Hour of Sharing is coming soon!

One Great Hour of Sharing is the relief, refugee and development fund of the United Church of Christ. It is one of the Special Mission Offerings received by the United Church of Christ and is a part of Our Churches Wider Mission (OCWM). One Great Hour of Sharing is a Lenten Offering. The 2009 suggested Dedication Day is March 22, 2009. One Great Hour of Sharing carries God's message of love and hope to people in more than eighty countries. The UCC works with international partners to provide sources of clean water and food, education and health care, small business micro-credit, emergency relief, and advocacy and resettlement for refugees and displaced persons. OGHS also supports domestic and international ministries for disaster preparedness and response. 2009 offering resources are available on the United Church of Christ's website at <http://www.ucc.org/oghs/resources/>.



Service & Synod 2009

At the end of June, the Minnesota Conference will be taking high school aged youth to Grand Rapids, Michigan for General Synod. The youth portion of Synod, this year, runs from June 24–30 and combines General Synod events along with service projects, evening programs, social opportunities and after hours activities. It's a wonderful chance for UCC youth to learn about and participate in the business of the wider church and to grow in faith, service and friendship with their peers. There has been great intentionality put into making this a cost effective trip for youth—fulfilling both the fun/meet new folks quotient as well as the service/mission aspect of a summer youth trip. We are excited to have such amazing representation of the Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ in Grand Rapids!





"Roadies" play alongside members of the drumming group Sheltered Reality



Bryan Sirchio entertains in Rochester

Middle School Road Tour Featuring Bryan Sirchio and Sheltered Reality!

We've had two fantastic events in Rochester and Wayzata. There are still two dates in the four-stop tour—make sure you're there!

March 21, 2009 at the Federated Church
in Fergus Falls 9:30–3:00pm

May 09, 2009 at Peace United Church of Christ
in Duluth 9:30–3:00pm

Stay tuned to COMMAntary for more details!

It's time to start thinking about summer at Pilgrim Point!

Greetings from the shores of beautiful Lake Ida and Pilgrim Point Camp. Yes, even though the beach is not very good for swimming at the moment, it is indeed a beautiful sight. Stomping my feet to keep them warm and knowing that there is sand below the snow helps me dream of the summer that is not too far off—really! The summer schedule has been set and placed on the web site so you can begin planning for your visit to Pilgrim Point Camp either as a camper, a volunteer counselor, a volunteer program director, first aid person, chaplain, or with your church group. If you want to swim, I would recommend you come after the snow is off the beach. You can find the schedule by visiting www.pilgrimpoint.org. The link to the schedule is easy to find.

You'll also find, listed below the summer camp schedule,

the weekends and facilities that are still available for you church to come spend some quality time while you play, worship, sing camp songs around a campfire, swim and just relax together. You can ask the folks from Wayzata Community UCC, New Brighton UCC, First Congregational Fairmont, Pilgrim Congregational Benson, First Congregational Mankato, Parkway UCC, Minneapolis, Robbinsdale UCC, how great a time they have every year when they come out to camp for a weekend together. There's something about the wind blowing off the lake that relaxes you, invigorates you, and makes you want to be together as a community of faith. Come and bring your church family to find out what's in the air.

See you this summer at Pilgrim Point Camp!

Dee Dressler



Appreciative Inquiry Based Leadership Training

By Rev. Rick Wagner, Associate Conference Minister

Since its introduction in the mid-1980s, *Appreciative Inquiry* has become a powerful influence in the fields of personal and organizational development. For many people this positive, future-oriented, strength-based approach resonates with other complementary approaches in the fields of psychology and spirituality.

AI-based workshops, coaching, and consulting are offered to clergy and churches by the Rev. Dr. Rob Voyle, and are described on the website, clergyleadership.com. I (Rick Wagner) first learned of his Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry when it was recommended by some of our intentional interim ministers in the Minnesota Conference.

That introductory workshop was so helpful and informative that I eagerly registered for his recent offering, "Appreciative Leadership for Managing Change," which was held at Mt. Olivet Retreat Center in Farmington. The registration fee for this 5-day workshop included the on-line completion of three inventories—the MBTI Type II, the FIRO-B (Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation—Behavior), and the LPI (Leadership Practices Inventory) which provides feedback from a number of people chosen in advance by the registrant.

The workshop featured a mix of lecture, discussion, small group work, case studies, inventory interpretation, and coaching suggestions. It began

with the theory and dynamics of leadership as distinct from other kinds of ministry. For example, most of us in ordained ministry have received much more training in how to be chaplains than in how to be leaders, though this does not imply that chaplains can't be leaders. Courses in pastoral care and counseling and CPE are valuable but not geared toward organizational change or transformation. Especially in the 21st century, many of our local churches need to be transformed or they will die.

As Rob Voyle writes in some of his hand-out materials, "The appreciative approach to problem solving does not focus on the causes of problems but on the causes of success. Focusing on the nature or causes of problems often leads to cycles of blame and defensiveness in which people react protectively rather than compassionately engaging in creative change. An appreciative approach does not ignore or avoid problems, but it does suggest that what we need to do to solve problems is to move from the problem mindset, which created or nurtured the problem, to a solution mindset. This mindset transformation occurs when we become experts on the root



Rev. Rob Voyle,
Clergy Coach

causes of success rather than the root causes of failure. This means looking at the situation from the perspective of the solution, or the future without the problem, rather than focusing on the causes of the problem."

For example, if someone is afraid, we can ask either *Why are they afraid?* or *What do they need to feel safe?*

The first question leads to ideas of causes and blame but not necessarily to solutions. The second question leads to potential solutions, most of which are independent of the original causes of the fear. In this second approach, time and energy are not wasted in the blind alley of blame. People can approach solutions without being demoralized by judgments on their current predicament.

One part of AI-based training Rob calls "**A to B**." State **A** is one's current condition. State **B** is one's preferred future state. To maximize the probability of achieving **B**, **B** must be positively stated; that is, it cannot be less of **A** or less of some other undesirable condition. For the change to be welcomed and engaged in with enthusiasm, **B** must be something you value more than what you value at **A**. In order to get from **A** to **B**, one must also know what resources are needed. Resources can be external (money, materials, time, people, etc.) or internal (skills, imagination, motivation, energy.) Many pastors and churches are adept at analyzing **A**, but inept at articulating a vision of **B**.

Our performance on any major task involves six broad domains: purpose, identity, values, expectations, skills and environment. They all flow outward from the Source (God), and making changes in one domain will naturally lead to changes in those that are farther out from the Source. For example, if we change our sense of purpose, we will most likely change our sense of identity, which in turn will modify our values, and so on. Many church arguments occur in the domain of environment, such as deciding on the shape of worship. Such a conflict can only be resolved by discovering commonality in the domains closer to the Source. AI-based training continually invites people to move closer to the Source.

Rob Voyle will be offering a 3-day "Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry" in conjunction with next summer's General Synod in Grand Rapids, MI. Other AI offerings are described at www.clergyleadership.com.

This is the second 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), eliothoward@msn.com



Save the Date!

Youth Ministry Leaders Retreat and Training

August 21–23, 2009—Pilgrim Point Camp

Stay tuned to the Voyager and COMMAntary for more information!

Children and Family Leaders March Mixer

Thursday, March 5 from 10:00–2:30
at Union Congregational UCC, St. Louis Park

Our time together will be spent in a couple different ways. Part of our gathering will be discussing with Ann Hanson, National UCC Minister for Children, Families and Sexuality, the importance of integrating sexuality with spirituality into our ministries with children and families. We will also spend part of our time hearing from local experts in recruiting/training/keeping/firing volunteers. Lunch will be provided. Please RSVP to Michele Borne, micheleb@uccmn.org by Tuesday, February 24. We look forward to seeing you there!



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