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# CONGREGATIONAL UCC OF WAHPETON



## Pondering our Past, Framing our Future

'Pondering our Past, Framing our Future' was the theme in 2006 for our church. We celebrated our 125th anniversary as a Congregational church. It was a good year in which we celebrated with a banquet, a float in area parades, and pie and ice cream social that raised money for the people in Tanzania, Africa. There was much to celebrate and much to give thanks for in our church's ministry in the community of Wahpeton and beyond.

Like many communities and congregations in North Dakota, we have anxiety about our church's life. But we hope like many, we are facing this head on and trying to frame our future. Two years ago, our congregation voted on three 5-year goals for us to work on. They are: to increase our membership, to increase participation of our current membership, and to strengthen our youth ministry. This year at our annual meeting, we voted in the objectives and the means to carry out those goals. We have members left and right signing up to help with the individual tasks to attain our goals; with many of them already underway.

It's getting harder and harder to pin the 8 deadly words on our church, "We have never done it that way before." The women always had a spring salad luncheon and a fall bazaar, they are now making and selling homemade pies, apple in the fall, cherry in February, and rhubarb custard in the spring and we are getting quite the reputation. So much so, we came up with the slogan, "Like our pies, try our Sundays." We have

changed our worship and Sunday school times around the last two years and may do so again in the fall to see what works best. We changed our by-laws and cut down the number of people on each board. We have introduced contemporary Christian music into our worship services and have changed our worship bulletin format to include the scripture readings. We are even sponsoring a car in the local demolition derby at the county fair this year. Every third Sunday over the last couple of years, we have had a potluck after church. We forgot to put it in the newsletter and announcements, and only two families showed up with something to share. It has not become a rut in which we are stuck.

Good news abounds in our church. Along with a praise choir, we have restarted our bell choir. The last two years we have ended with more money in the bank than when we started, and we have also increased the number of members in our church. We have started an ongoing book study club and a pizza and movie night. Our youth groups during the summers have been going all over the region from Fort Snead on Garrison Darn, to Lake Itasca in Minnesota, to Laura Ingalls home in DeSmet, South Dakota.

Our ties to our denomination continue to grow stronger. We are a 5 for 5 church, contributing to all five denominational special offerings and also a tithing church, 10 percent of our budget goes toward OCWM. We contribute regularly to Charles Hall in our conference and sponsored a month for the Katrina truck. We have one Authorized Lay Worship Leader in our church who preaches for us and to us, as well as in other congregations. One of our youth is on the state youth council. We also participate in ecumenical missions such as the Blanket Fund, health kits, and school kits through Church World Services and Souper Bowl Sunday with our youth. We give monthly to the local food pantry and help welcome the college students to NDSCS with a Pizza Party every fall sponsored by the local ministerial association.

In February, one of our women helped to bring the Kids Against Hunger outreach into our community. Through her efforts and the efforts of others, we packaged enough food to send to Africa to feed over 100,000 people. Over 290 people from the whole community came to pitch in: churches, schools, businesses and clubs came together united in purpose and in love. Our local church sent over 30 people and \$585 plus individual donations to this mission. We also received a mission grant from our Northern Plains Conference, as we needed over \$20,000 to pay for the meals and send this sustenance over there.

Though all this is happening, there is much in this church that hasn't changed. It is basically the same members who come to worship and pitch in. We have two families with four generations worshipping here on Sunday morning. It is the same people who are in leadership positions and being good stewards of our budget, our building, and our ministry. We still have our Potato Pancake and Sausage Feed fundraiser every October this last year we had a record crowd and profit. Above all, we still are a

faithful community who worships God and looks to Jesus Christ, the sole head of our church and perfecter of our faith. We are still a family church, brought and bound together by the Holy Spirit, celebrating each other's joys and pulling together in times of sickness and sorrow.

We are an old church, over 125 years old, many of our members are nearing or in retirement. We are also a young church, setting the course for the next 125 years, confirming 5 youth this spring, and seeking to be renewed in our faith and witness.

The United Church of Christ (Congregational) in Wahpeton is living out the celebration to "LET IT SHINE."

