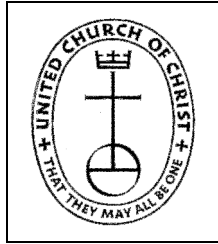


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AWARE
A Monthly newsletter
supporting the building of community
in the NPCUCC
multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual,
multi-national community of faith
December 2009

As I Look At It

Dr. C. Jeff Woods wrote a book entitled "Leverage Points of Church Health and Church Growth." In it he shares statistics about congregations, those that are growing and those that are not. Some of these statistics break the myths we have held onto for many years and some support them. Let me share a few and if you wish, I can send you a power point presentation that outlines the book.

Currently 52% of all congregations in the country are in small towns and rural areas, with the remainder split almost evenly between city and suburban areas. In all denominations most congregations are small; 25% having less than 50 active members, 50% having less than 100 active members and 65% having less than 150 active members. Woods research showed that the number 1 concern for smaller congregations was keeping the doors open.

The research however also showed that our fixation with location is over rated. The study showed that as many congregations located in declining counties grew as those located in growing counties.

While smaller congregations often have fewer resources they often achieved the same results as larger more wealthy congregations. It was not a matter of richness but commitment.

The leadership style most appreciated was the one that could get people to do things on their own, as opposed to doing it for them. The qualities most admired were inspiration, respect and trust.

Looking at "Why People come to a Church for the first Time," the dominant reason was because someone invited them. Half of the answers given lifted up the reason as having been asked by someone to come with them to church. But when asked why people leave a church they listed the following (in order of frequency beginning with most), Not yet found the right religion, do not believe that way now, moved, married someone unaffiliated, death, divorce.

Among the activities that do not work when it comes to growing churches was: Calling a younger pastor, shortening the worship service, Evangelistic campaigns are like placebos. They make congregations feel better about themselves but do not lead to growth. Churches with evangelism committees are growing more slowly than those without such committees.

Woods called on all to be careful whom you emulate. After all if it does not fit, it will not invite anyone to be a part of it. The message is that we are to be honest about whom we are and what it is we are trying to say in our worship, fellowship and service life.

Research found that contemporary worship tended to be a factor in increasing congregations. Uplifting worship correlated with church growth. The research also found, however, that there was a wide variety when it came to uplifting worship styles. The research also found that of Congregations with the same worship style for the past 5 years 11% decreased and 21% increased and congregations that changed their worship style in the past five years had an 8% decrease and a 51% increase.

When it comes to vision the statistics held a clear message. They found that 71% of congregations with a clearly articulated purpose grew while only 22% of congregations without a clearly articulated purpose were able to.

When we come to the end of Wood's book we find listed the five key variables for healthy and growing congregations. They are; 1- the invitation which will get the people there, 2- Worship and 3- Focus which will bring them back, 4- A sense of belonging and 5- empowerment will build community and send the members forward.

The challenge facing all congregations is to be a channel for the grace of God that the light of hope might shine forth and call the stranger to come in.

*Grace and Peace
Wade*

Prayers of the Season

As we come to the close of 2009 my prayer is that of gratitude. I thank God for the opportunity that the year has provided to share the grace that brings healing and promise. I thank God for those with whom I have had the privilege of sharing in ministry. I have experienced many times in the past year the fact that God lives with you and in you. The Temple of God is truly in the people of God. I thank God for the gifts that you have brought to the church of Jesus Christ this past year.

As I think of Christmas my prayer is that of hope. For Christmas was God's assurance that as we look to an uncertain future we will never have to be without the assurance that God's creative presence is there, continuing to create life out of chaos. The Christmas story is a story of hope and promise in the midst of daily confusion and threat. The story of the birth of Christ is the assurance that God shares all times with us, the good and the bad, the exciting and the threatening. Christmas is an invitation to come and see what God is doing and go forth with a song of praise in our hearts.

Then as I look to 2010 I pray that God's holy vision could become my path. May God help me set aside the fear and the confusion that can get in the way and follow with the clarity of the Wise Men the path of our redeemer into the future.

Finally I pray that this holiday season each of you find the joy that set Mary's heart ablaze and the hope that guided the shepherds. May the light of the love of God be the hope in your heart.

Horizon Parish calls a new pastor

We welcome Rose W. Trenbeath to the Northern Plains Conference as she begins her duties as the pastor of Horizon Parish. Rose will soon be ordained by the ELCA Western ND Synod when she will be installed as the called pastor of Horizon Parish. We pray God's grace and love will continue to embrace the ministry of this exciting rural parish and their new pastor Rose W. Trenbeath.

First Congregational UCC of Jamestown receives Grant

Thanks to the efforts of the NPC Disaster Coordinator, Lindy Holt, a grant of \$2,000 has been awarded to the First Congregational UCC of Jamestown, to offset the costs of repairs to their heating system which caused the Carbon Monoxide poisoning some weeks ago. We wish to express our appreciation to the Disaster Ministries of the National Church and to Lindy Holt for her work as Disaster Coordinator.

New Arrivals as the Media Resource Center

The following resources have come to the Media Resource Center and are there to be used by the NPCUCC Congregations. First we have "Uppity Women of the Bible", a six session piece that helps us come to a deeper understanding of the role and plight of women in biblical times. Then we have "Women of the New Testament: A Middle Eastern View". The program consists of 6 half hour DVD lectures by Kenneth Bailey on Women in the Old Testament, Women Leaders in the New Testament, Mary the Mother of Jesus, Women Prophets, I Cor. 14, I Tim 2, Titus and I Cor. 6

Yankton College Announces Scholarship possibilities

YC is pleased to announce \$1,000 scholarship listing for 2010 – 2011 academic year. These scholarships are awarded on a one-time basis to qualified high school seniors graduating in the spring of 2010 and may be used toward tuition at any accredited college or university. In addition if anyone wishing to attend graduate school can apply for Brink and Sherman Scholarships for graduate study. These are also one-time \$1,000 scholarships.

Applicants must either have a) a family relationship to Yankton college alumni, former faculty or staff, or b) a family friend, teacher, pastor or other person with a connection to Yankton College may recommend an applicant. Any who are interested are invited to please contact the Conference Office for application forms.

Time to Prepare to receive the Christmas Offering

The Christmas offering is to be received on Sunday, December 20. This special offering enables the church to respond to pastors, retired and active, at the critical times in their lives with the necessary help to get them through a tough experience. I invite you to please respond generously to this offering that we might continue to equip our congregations and their pastors to face the challenges of everyday life.

Evangelism Workshop Dates Moved

Our Evangelism Workshop has been moved to January 24 – 26 at Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ in Fargo. The workshop with Charlene J. Smith as leader will be part of our Winter Retreat that is still in the planning stages. For more information please check out the NPCUCC Web Site www.npcucc.org under fliers.

Registrations Are Being Received For Regional Youth Event

All NPCUCC youth ages 13 – 18 are invited to the Regional Youth Event in Billings, Montana. While this event is a long way off early registrations have a reduction in cost. Registrations received by Feb. 15th will save \$50 off of the \$450 RYE registration cost and those registering by March 15 will save \$25 dollars. Please check out the registration for the Regional Youth Event, the Church Family Gathering and the NPCUCC Summer Camp. You are also invited to take advantage of some of the fund raising opportunities, (T Shirt sales, Limited Stock Option, Have a no serve dinner).

NPCUCC HOSTS RADIO ADS

The Northern Plains Conference is hosting a series of Radio Ads that will air on the morning and afternoon show beginning the first Monday of Advent. There will be two 30-second ads on the morning and afternoon show and an additional 104, 10 – 15 second ads on KFGO. The ads can be heard on KFJR (550) out of Bismarck, KCGB (910) out of Minot and KFGO (790) out of Fargo. These ads will be an invitation to people to come home to a United Church of Christ church this Holy season. Congregations are invited to host newspaper or local radio ads to enhance and focus this message and then to be ready to welcome people home for the holidays. Texts of these ads can be found on the NPCUCC web site www.npcucc.org under forms. Please let the Conference know if we can be of help if developing the various ad copy.

The Calendar for December

Date	Time	Event	Location
12/6	11:00 am (ct)	CM shares in Worship	Lakota
12/8	10:00 am (ct)	MV Cluster	Bismarck
12/9	10:00 am (ct)	Annual Meeting Planning	Valley City
12/9	12:00 Noon	Development Committee	Fargo
12/15	9:30 am (ct)	NDCC Executive Comm.	Video
12/16	11:00 am (ct)	Minot Cluster	Minot
12/16	4:30 pm (ct)	NDHRC Board	Fargo
12/17	10:00 am (ct)	Fargo Cluster	UCM building, Fargo-----
12/21	11:00 am (ct)	Central Cluster	-----
12/23	12:00 Noon (ct)	Ft. Berthold Cluster	New Town
12/25	-----	Christmas	-----
12/27	10:00 am (ct)	CM shares in worship	Argusville
12/28 – 12/31	-----	CM on Vacation	-----
12/31	-----	New Year's Eve	-----