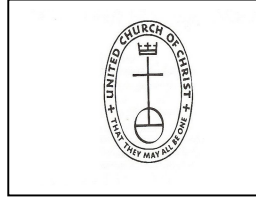


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AWARE

A monthly newsletter supporting the building of community in the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-national community of faith

December 2010

As I Look At It:

Recently I came upon a crèche scene in our neighbor's yard. We have Mary, Joseph, the Star, the Angel, Three Wise Men, Animals and of course the Baby Jesus. Each "Participant" was focused on the Baby Jesus lying in the manger. I was again reminded that Christmas is not about twinkling lights or bright ribbons or gifts or trees. Christmas is about God's declaration of love to the world. It is a message that is so personal, it lights up each person's soul and at the same time so vast in its scope it embraces a very diverse world.

I believe we have something to learn not only from the message of Christmas but from how that message was shared. The Birth of the Christ Child is in effect God sharing a holy dream with the whole world. Jesus' birth took place in a setting where no living being would be excluded. The humble shepherd and the wise men from the East were equally welcome. God did not close the door to anyone who would wish to witness the message of love. All could come before the manger. The invitational star pointed the way for all who would see it.

God gives us this message of hope, understanding and love to share by our words and our living. We too need to be mindful of how we share it. We need to ask if everyone is welcome, can the lame get in or are the steps too steep? Can the deaf receive the message or are the words too hidden? Can the confused comprehend what we are trying to share or is the message too complicated? Can the Gay and the Straight sit together or is the anxiety too high? Have we breached the barriers of concrete or steps or attitudes or do they close the way to a love that God has so freely given? Are our Spirits and minds open to share that love or do our fears and lack of understanding get in the way? God calls us to a life of faith so radically welcoming that none are denied access. This Christmas let us live the Divine Dream.

Namaste

Wade

Voices From the Prairie:

"SAILING"

Had an opportunity to sail a very large sailboat belonging to a friend earlier this summer. (I guess it is now officially fall). This boat is 9 feet longer than ours, three times the weight and equipped like a modern day naval vessel with all the electronics my sailboat never dreamed of.

I made a discovery though. It still sailed the same, size was relevant to cost, not necessarily to the knowledge and ability of the sailor at the helm. Interesting!

Think that maybe we judge our church and the ministry of our church relative to the size and cost? Businesses often do, why not the church? Sadly in our time spiritual leadership is judged in world standards of success, size, cost, and profit income.

I see very little of that perspective in the Gospels. In fact, that focus is often looked upon as quite contrary to Gospel teachings.

The large sailboat I was on didn't sail any faster nor did it lean to port or starboard any more or less than our seemingly smaller sailboat. It handled relative to the skill of the person at the helm. Perhaps that is what is important, the skill of the person at the helm.

Sailing means learning to be sensitive to the speed and gusts of the wind. The person at the helm "feels" their way across the lake in a stiff wind, in a sudden gust of unexpected wind, being able to "spill" wind by instantly adjusting the mainsail boom is so important to staying level and in control. I sail with one hand on the tiller and the other holding the line releasing the boom in a stiff, gusting wind.

How well are we able to adjust to the winds and storms of daily life? Perhaps keeping one hand on the tiller of the Gospel and the other holding the line (rope) of faith helps us to respond to those sudden unexpected gusts.

Sailing up Garrison Bay one evening with a friend, we sailed almost directly into a north wind but kept on course moving forward. My friend said, "How can this be possible? How can you sail into the wind: It defies my sense of logic." My only response is simply that so does faith. Faith also defies one's sense of logic. One hand on the tiller, one hand on the boom line, works every time. Steve Holmes First Congregational Church, UCC, Garrison.

Congregations Seeking A Pastor:

Mayville Congregational United Church of Christ, New Horizon Parish (near Lakota), Fargo, Plymouth Congregational UCC (Currently with a hold on profiles).

Conference Financial Books to Close 12/31/2010:

The Conference financial books for 2010 will be closing on December 31, 2010. The computer program that is being used makes it impossible to record any offerings received in 2011 for 2010. Offerings received January 1 of 2011 will be recorded for 2011. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to give the Conference Office a call.

From the Media Resource Center:

The Media Resource Center has videos and books which would interest people of many ages. Videos can be found on the website: www.plainsmedia.org, and if you are interested in book selections you can email a request for a print-out to: mrd@sodakucc.org and one will be sent to you by email or hard copy. There are currently 4 new DVD's for teens on the topic of bullying. They are: "Stop Bullying!-Standing Up for Yourself and Others", "A Cry for Help", "To Save A Life", "and When A Loved One Dies". The Media Center also has 13 "Veggie Tales" for the young, and for the adults, there is a new study guide entitled, "The Jesus Creed". You are invited to take advantage of this helpful resource.

AWARE Available In TWO Versions:

Starting with the December 2010 issue, the NPC AWARE will come forth in two versions. There will be one that as before will be held to two pages and may have a smaller print size to accommodate that limitation. This is especially helpful to Congregations that mail it out via the US mail. Then there will be a second version of the AWARE which will be an expanded version and sporting a larger font. This version will serve Congregations that send out the AWARE via email. Please let the Conference Office know how this works for you.

Items In The Expanded Version:

Youth Report by Carleton Borden, Disaster Coordinator
Notes by Lindy Holt.

Time To Make Plans To Receive the Christmas Fund:

The Christmas Fund is one of the most direct channels we have to support those who have supported us. The Christmas Fund helps pastors at the critical times in their lives. It empowers the church to be there when illness, age or circumstances places a financial burden on our pastors (active and retired). I invite you to generously support this special offering. The Christmas Fund, a five for five offering, will be received December 19, 2010.

Thank You Bert For All Your Dedicated Years!

Bert Holvik Resigns as UCC Insurance Representative:

After 21 years as the UCC Insurance Representative for the Northern Plains Conference, Bert Holvik has decided to resign. Bert started with the UCC Insurance program when it first came into the North Dakota Conference, and has been its Representative ever since. It is with gratitude that we recognize Bert's service to the Conference and its Congregations and thank him for the caring and skill with which he has shared in some of the trying times in our lives. We wish Bert and Barb all the best in the coming years as we hold with fondness Bert's decades of service as our UCC Insurance Representative.

Evan Mandigo In Line to become NPCUCC Insurance Representative:

There are a few more "I's" to dot and "T's" to cross before Evan Mandigo can become our NPC UCC Insurance Representative, but the process is underway. It is our expectation that soon Evan will be the UCC Insurance Representative for our Conference. If, in the meantime, you have Insurance questions, please call the Conference Office.

The Calendar for December

12/1-12/2	-----	Search and Call	Tampa
12/3	9:00 a.m.	Search and Call, Council of Conference Ministers	Tampa
12/4-12/6	-----	Search and Call	Tampa
12/7-12/8	12:00 Noon (ct)	Judicatory Gathering	Maryvale
12/10	6:00 p.m. (ct)	Multiple Paths	Valley City
12/11	8:00 a.m. (ct)	Multiple Paths	Valley City
12/12	-----	CM shares in worship	New Salem
12/15	10:00 a.m. (ct)	MV Cluster	Bismarck
12/16	10:00 a.m. (ct)	Fargo Cluster	-----
12/17	11:00 a.m. (ct)	Central Cluster	-----
12/22	12:00 Noon (ct)	Ft. Berthold Cluster	New Town
12/25	-----	CHRISTMAS	-----
12/29	11:00 a.m. (ct)	Minot Cluster	Garrison
12/31	-----	WATCH NIGHT	-----