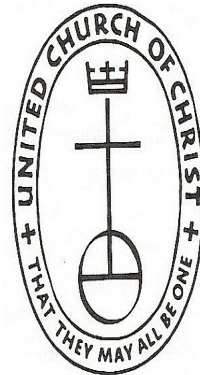


**NORTHERN PLAINS CONFERENCE
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

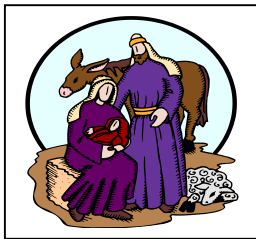
**A monthly newsletter supporting
the building of community in
the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic,
multi-lingual, multi-national
community of faith.**



**204 East Reno Avenue
Bismarck, North Dakota
58504-6471**

**Office Phone: 701-255-1104
Fax Number: 701-255-0103**

**Website:
<http://npcucc.org>**



**DECEMBER
2011
AWARE**



As I Look At It:

In Western Culture the month of December is dominated by Christmas. In fact this year the Christmas presence started long before December actually began. We barely got through Halloween when there were Christmas jingles on the radio, twinkly lights in the stores and advertisements about the latest and best gift options for children, men and women. The question that continues to come back to me is the one that asks, "What is it that we are really celebrating this Christmas?" With all of our decorating, letter writing, jingle singing and gift giving, what are we really celebrating? Or putting this another way, what is the purpose of it all? Please do not get me wrong, I do not have a problem with lights that sparkle, gifts that are wrapped and decorations that get your attention. But I do wonder if our goal is the celebration of General Electric or Jesus the Christ?

Undergirding all that we do at Christmas is a breath taking story involving angels, shepherds, wise men, a young couple on a journey and of course a

magnificent star. What are we about this Christmas?

Is Christmas a walk down memory lane, a visit to a museum? Is it a time when we remember that nice thing that God did in the mist of by gone years? May I suggest that Christmas is indeed a time for us to remember what it is that God has done. Christmas is a time for us to get personally and communally woven into that magnificent story. It is a time for us to hear the angels and see the star, a time to have that breathtaking moment when we see for the first time the Christ Child and his mother. Christmas is a time for us to know in the depths of our heart that God has done something wonderful and we are a part of it. Therefore, Christmas is a time for Christ to be born anew into our lives, our communities, our churches and, our families. The value of all the stuff we do for Christmas is measured in whether or not it enables us to better welcome Christ into our world. The decorating, the gift giving, the jingle singing, the bright lights are not an end in themselves, but only a means to

an end. Are we able to better welcome the Christ to be born anew into our world and our lives because of what it is we are doing, if the answer is yes then by all means we should continue and do more, if the answer is no then we need to rethink what it is we do to celebrate the birthing of Christ into our world.

Our prayer is that Christmas, for you, be a most wonderful time. May it be a time when dreams are fulfilled, and memories come to life. May your legacy of Christmas 2011 be the awareness that as you walk the paths of each day you do so with the awareness that God walks with you. May you not only have read the story of the birth of Christ from the Gospel of Luke, but may you have a story of your own to share of how the Christ came to life for you and how that promise and hope are part of your daily routine. May you go forth from Christmas 2011 energized for servant hood. May there be a light burning in your soul.

Christmas is about the transformation of our world and the lives of today's people. It is about finding peace and good will not only in the stories of the past but in the realities of everyday.
Namaste
Wade



Soon the Faith and Nurture Committee will be convening for the purpose of calling a **NORTHERN PLAINS CONFERENCE Youth Director**. While we have to date received some names of interested persons, we invite others who might be interested to **send in their resume and letter of interest** to the Conference Office. The youth director is a vital part of the ongoing ministry of the Northern Plains Conference. The Northern Plains Conference

Youth Director works with UCC partners from across the region and the National UCC. They work with other Northern Plains Conference Youth Leaders as we plan the Fall **Youth Rally**. Any who might have questions about the Conference Youth director are invited to **call the Conference Office**.



Voices From the Prairie

Even after 40 years of ministry in the United Church of Christ, the last 28 years on the east coast of Florida, retirement in 2006 seemed premature. Not long into this new phase of life an invitation came to consider an interim position with the Sanibel Island, FL congregation. Since I had training with the Interim Ministry Network, and this was a fine church, it seemed a very natural thing to do. Subsequently, that 17 month interim turned out to be one of the highlights of my ministry. Though we live in an east coast beach community that we love, the experience on Sanibel off the west coast was another different adventure. My wife, Dorie, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. Plus the church experience with that strong mission minded and supportive congregation was very intense and engaging. We enjoyed a very happy relationship with the people and they readily accepted a Harley motorcycle riding couple. I concluded that interims are essential to churches and provide lively, challenging experiences of ministry for willing clergy.

This past summer, I received an inquiry from the interim pastoral search team from the United Church of Christ here in Bismarck, North Dakota. At first I thought it unusual that the team would even consider someone from so far

away as Florida. But as we communicated and eventually met by virtue of a computer Skype interview, we obviously had much in common with regard to views on the church, its mission and preparing to embrace the future in rapidly changing times. It probably didn't hurt that Dorie was a native North Dakotan and I a native South Dakotan. Though we do love Florida, plus our daughters and grandchildren all reside there, part of our spirit is entrenched in Dakota land. Several of Dorie's family lives in and around Bismarck. In addition, when I mentioned bringing the Harley, the church team heartily encouraged and endorsed it. The church issued a call to this interim and we happily agreed.

We arrived in Bismarck in mid-July. The search team had appropriately informed us about the flood and unusual spring rain issues in the community and region. On our journey from Florida, whenever we approached the Missouri River basins of various states, the destructive results of flooding were sadly obvious – devastated agricultural land, washed out roads, homes and businesses lost, many forever. Upon arriving here it only took a short time and a few driving excursions to discover the horrific impact that resulted from the raging Missouri. To this day, we continue to hear the stories among church members and other new acquaintances that reveal the courage, tenacity, resilience and faith of stalwart Dakotans standing bravely against serious odds.

In the midst of this unique flood challenge, there are other signs of exponential change impacting this region and state, all demanding adjustments and adaptations that are largely new to the people. North Dakota has been looked upon from the outside as a mostly agricultural land with a very small population and only modest development, nothing to encourage the young to stay. That's

all changing. The new science and extraction of oil, gas and coal, coupled with correlative development in business, construction, infrastructure, roads and an infinite list of other concerns are daily and overwhelming news subjects. The Bakken patch is just part of our common conversation in nearly every venue of life here now. There are expressions of satisfaction and gratification for what all this development brings and yet others lament the loss of what has been known for generations as the beloved wild, largely untamed western experience of life. When we tell friends and family what's happening "up here" they respond by saying "Wow, we hear none or very little of that news down here."

The other day, I stopped at the Roughrider Harley Shop in Mandan to check on the progress of repairs to my 2006 Harley Ultra Classic. Way back on September 6, I was struck from behind by a guy in a pickup who said, "Geez, my foot slipped off the brake and hit the accelerator." While talking with the service manager and 3 bikers checking on their Harleys the conversation drifted to the subject of changes caused by action in the Bakken patch. Their conviction was that the land and life here in North Dakota will never be the same again. It was a conclusion of both lament for losses, but also promises for a better future.

To my way of thinking, based on our brief time among you as an interim UCC pastor, that promise captures part of our challenge in ministry here in North Dakota – to share the lament of losses, but also to proclaim that God is leading us toward the light of an ever better, though challenging, and future. Sounds like the story of Advent.

Peace and joy,

Dale G. Kent, Interim Pastor United Church of Christ of Bismarck/Mandan

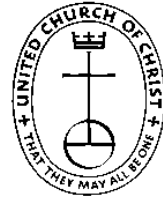


The **NORTHERN PLAINS CONFERENCE Office has moved.** The new location is in the basement of our home which is located at 204 East Reno Avenue in Bismarck. Thanks to helping hands and “Hometown Movers” the job is virtually completed. The phone numbers remain the same, the cell numbers remain the same and the email addresses remain the same. The only thing that has changed is the mailing address. Any who would like to come and pay the new digs a visit are invited to drop in some afternoon. Much of the Conference material is stored at the parsonage of **the First Congregational UCC of Hebron.** Thanks to Marcy Dawson and the First Congregational Church for their generosity.



Don't forget the new mailing address for the **Northern Plains Conference United Church of Christ is 204 East Reno Avenue, Bismarck, North Dakota, 58504-6471.** The Conference **phone is still 701 255 1104** and the **fax is 701 255 0103.** The Conference Minister can be reached on the **cell phone by calling 701 471 3278.** The Administrator can be reached on the cell phone by calling 701 -226 -1196. The Conference **email addresses are: secretary at secretary@npcucc.org and Conference Minister at Schemmel@npcucc.org and the Conference Web Site is**

www.npcucc.org. If you have questions please do not hesitate to get in touch with us.



Media Resource News

Many thanks to all the churches who have sent in their fees for 2012! Because of your participation, we are able to bring you new resources periodically.

We have several new resources for you now! Coinciding with the fall stewardship focus, but good information anytime, is a documentary about people of faith building a sustainable future: **Renewal** (documentary DVD) features eight stories from America's Religious – Environmental Movement. 10 to 18 minutes each in length. 2007 Fine Cut Productions

Joining our popular **Uppity Women of The Bible: Ruth** is the second **Uppity Women of The Bible: The Song of Songs**: a six session Bible Study led by Rev. Dr. Lisa Wolfe on “Song of Solomon”, 2008 Biblenerd Productions. This study of The Song of Solomon is every bit as captivating and engaging for Women's Bible Study groups as the study on the Book of Ruth.

Want to learn more about the religions of the world? Well, we have the resource for you: five separate DVD studies from the Great World Religions, The Teaching Company. Each set includes 12 lectures, 30 minutes each with a guidebook. Choose from **Christianity, Judaism, Islam,**

Hinduism, or Buddhism. They would be great material for an Adult Forum!

Calling all drivers: do you spend a lot of time in the car? We have resources for you, too! **The Apostle Paul** is a CD 12 lecture (30 min. ea.) series, also from The Teaching Company. It comes with a guidebook, in case you might want to use portions for a class and / or sermon.

Augustine: Philosopher and Saint is also a CD 12 lecture (30 min. ea.) series from The Teaching Company. It's been described as "pure intellectual stimulation that can be popped into the [audio or video] player anytime." Also comes with a guidebook. Please visit our website to see a listing of all our resources.

Carmen Gill, Administrator
6509 S. Cliff Ave. Sioux Falls, SD 57108

www.plainsmedia.org
mrc@sodakucc.org



CUE Seminaries Update Highlight: Eden Seminary: Eden Theological Seminary is the "E" in CUE Seminaries, and as one of the seven seminaries of the United Church of Christ, our mission is to serve the Church by preparing women and men to be effective ministers and leaders. Students from 14 US states, 11 countries, and 18 different denominations immerse themselves in an intensive learning environment on our St. Louis campus. A rigorous academic program combined with significant opportunity for practical ministry experience helps Eden to be faithful to our educational mission. The support of individuals and churches allow our work in the community to draw congregations,

pastors, faculty and students together and promote the traditions of the progressive Christian movement. For more information about Eden and the ways we partner in the life of churches, please visit us at www.eden.edu.

CUE Seminaries Survey: In order to better communicate with congregations in the region, CUE Seminaries (Chicago, United, and Eden) is collecting information about how and why congregations support theological education. Please take a few minutes to participate in a congregational survey for CUE Seminaries. Here is a direct link to the online survey:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/7GDKO>
[HQ](https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/7GDKO). You can also connect to the survey directly on the CUE website:

www.cueseminaries.org. If you have questions, please contact Kiely Todd Roska, CUE Director, 651-255-6121 or kiely@cueseminaries.org.

Kiely Todd Roska
Director, CUE Seminaries
P.O. Box 120357
St. Paul, MN 55112
kiely@cueseminaries.org
www.cueseminaries.org

Celebrate Theological Education!
Higher Education Sunday: October 30, 2011
Seminary Sunday: February 26, 2012



Coming together on Line is the developing opportunity for Northern Plains Conference pastors and lay leaders to get together for

inspiration, information and individual attention. Via the **WebEx connection** those interested in a particular offering can be connected to an instructor and each other for a time of sharing and growth **without ever having to leave the safety and warmth of your home or office**. The first such offering will be a **Conversation with Kate Huey on December 12 at 6:00 pm (ct)**. Please check the **Northern Plains Conference UCC Web Site** under **Conversation with Kate Huey**, for more information. Those who are interested can send in the registration form or email your interest to the Conference Office. **All who let us know they are interested will be sent a link for the WebEx connection**. If you have questions please do not hesitate to contact the Conference Office.



**2012 National Youth Event
IMAGINE**

**Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana
July 7th to 16th, 2012**

As we make plans for the **National Youth Event** which will be **held July 10 – 14 at Purdue University in Lafayette, Indiana**, is a very special time for all who attend. We are in the process of making some decisions about transportation and the like as we look to participating in that exciting time. So that we can make the wisest choice we need your help. Would you please **check with the youth** in your congregation and community and see **how many would be interested in coming** so that we can begin to line up transportation. More information on the National Youth Event will be forth

coming in future E Messengers and AWARES.



On **December 18th, 2011** the **Christmas Fund, Veterans of the Cross** offering will be received. The special all church offering provides an opportunity for all of us to reach out in support of those that have given so freely of themselves. Money from the Christmas Fund Offering goes to help **retired pastors who receive a low pension payment because of low salaries** during the years they served a congregation. While the **Christmas fund offering also provides support for active pastors who find themselves in a difficult place and need some additional support**. I would invite you to be **generous in your support of this vital offering**.



The **South Dakota Conference and the Northern Plains Conference** continues to be in conversation. With the help of Jerry Paul of the Deaconess Foundation in St. Louis, the conversation has progressed with clarity and energy. We have explored the financial significance of merger and now we are moving beyond the finances to the broader question of the value of coming together. It is hoped that the task force

working on this vital issue can come to a solid recommendation at their December 5 & 6 meeting in Watertown, South Dakota. Any who have suggestions or comments are invited to please contact the Conference Office.



Representatives from 4 **Northern Plains Conference Congregations** attended a special Church **Growth Workshop** in Detroit. Each of the participants came back to the Northern Plains Conference excited about what they heard, each with vital information that they can use in their congregations and many started as soon as the first week back to draw

upon their experience. This group will be getting together for a **Coming Together On Line** event along with Charlene J. Smith of the National Church. There will also be a **workshop** in the near future for these leaders and others to **share their church growth and development ideas.**



Northern Plains Conference UCC Congregations seeking a pastor are:

- First Congregational UCC, Jamestown,
- Zion UCC, Medina,
- Plymouth UCC, Fargo
- Bismarck UCC, Bismarck

The Calendar for December

Date	Time	Event	Location
12/1	-----	CM and Peg on Vacation	-----
12/3	9:00 am (ct)	Fair Housing Conference Call	_____
12/5	4:00pm (ct)	SDC/NPC Meeting	Watertown, SD
12/6	9:00 am (ct)	SDC/NPC Meeting	Watertown, SD
12/8	10:00 am (ct)	MV Cluster	Bismarck
12/9	5:30 pm (ct)	Multiple Paths	Valley City
12/10	9:00 am (ct)	Multiple Paths	Valley City

12/11	10:00 am (ct)	Closure Service	Streeter
12/12	6:00 pm (ct)	Stewardship gathering with Kate Huey on WebEx	Computer
12/14	12:00 Noon (ct)	Ft. Berthold Cluster	New Town
12/15	10:00 am (ct)	Fargo Cluster	Fargo/Plymouth
12/16	1:00 pm (ct)	Midwest Seminary Conference Call	-----
12/18	-----	CM shares in worship	-----
12/19	11:00 am (ct)	Central Cluster	-----
12/22	11:00 am (ct)	Minot Cluster	-----
12/24	-----	Christmas Eve Day	-----
12/25	-----	Christmas Day	-----
12/31	-----	New Year Eve	-----