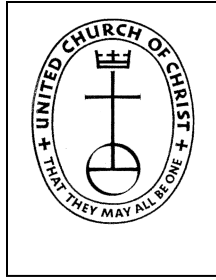


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AWARE
A Monthly newsletter
supporting the building of community
in the NPCUCC
multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual,
multi-national community of faith
January 2010

As I Look At It:

One area that must be confusing for people who are trying to sort out the direction their life will take in 2010 has to be the nature of Christianity. For calling oneself a Christian is not adequate to describe who one is and what is going on in one's life. This confusion is further borne out when we realize that on at least some major issues of our day (health care reform, global warming, etc.) you will find people of faith on opposite sides. To add to the confusion, both will be using their faith to support their point of view. Someone looking at this from the outside could conclude that either the Christian faith stands for nothing or it stands for everything or possibly that it has nothing to do with the way people lived in the day to day world. To bring clarity to this I believe the one question we need to ask each other and ourselves is "How Big Is Your God?" For the answer to that may well be foundational to our broader understandings of the nature of our faith and the place of the Christian faith in our everyday life.

Often when I hear people speak of their God the description they use is one of a judgmental, regimented and condemning deity. They describe an inflexible God who is incapable of understanding the human condition; a God who holds people accountable to rules making life difficult, if not impossible. It appears that this God feeds on our fears and energizes our biases thereby providing the building blocks used in constructing the walls that separate us from each other. This image of God is the very one beyond which Jesus called people to go. As you read the Gospel stories from the life of Jesus the Christ, you discover that some of the most difficult areas between Jesus and the Scribes and Pharisees were about the multitude of rules that the people were expected to follow. Jesus saw the mission of the faith to be empowering the people's lives, not shackling them to regulations they could not follow.

In fact, if you pay attention to what the Gospels do say you begin to discover just how vast Jesus' image of God really is. We find Jesus speaking of God as having endless love, and grace that abounds. These terms open a vision of God calling us to expand and enlarge our vision of life. They invite us to build bridges of understanding and compassion. The Gospel vision of God calls us to push hard to enlarge the boundaries of life. This larger understanding of God will not permit our fears to define our images of each other. It challenges us not to judge what we do not understand but to seek understanding. For our lack of understanding is not a sign of God's judgment but rather of our limited ability to comprehend what is beyond our realm of experience.

I believe the greatest challenge facing us this coming year is to not be captivated by "Too Small A Vision of God." May we hold the Gospel image of a God of massive love and endless grace. In the coming year may that God walk with us over new horizons, as God enables us to build bridges of hope that span valleys of despair and confusion so together we might explore the promised land of a new year.

*Grace and Peace
Wade*

Blessings and Hopes

As we stand on the cusp of a new year Peg and I want to wish you a Blessed New Year. While I am confident that the coming year will hold many challenges, may it also hold the blessing of knowing that you will not have to face them alone. May we each write on the empty slate of a new year the message of hope that God has placed within our soul. May you face the coming year with the enthusiasm of a child and the wisdom of a sage.

Time to Register for the Pre Lenten Retreat

It will be our pleasure to welcome Charlene J. Smith from the National Church to be our guest speaker for the Pre Lenten Retreat which will be held at Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ, in Fargo. A block of room has been set aside at the West Acres Super 8 Motel and you can contact it by calling 877-361-2508. The rooms will be held until January 4, 2010. The costs of the retreat and meals (with exception of the Sunday Night holiday gathering) are covered by the Conference, leaving participants to cover their cost of transportation and lodging. You can find a helpful flier on the NPCUCC web site www.npcucc.org under fliers and forms. Please register as soon as possible so we can be accurate in making preparations for the event.

Holiday Gathering

Each year the Fargo Cluster hosts a holiday gathering in January for NPC clergy. This year that gathering will be on the Sunday evening of the Retreat. All NPC clergy and spouses are invited to share in this special

time of celebration and fellowship. Please note on your Retreat registration form if you will be attending the Holiday Sunday Evening Gathering. (You are Invited to watch coming “E Messengers” for more information.)

Conference financial books to close

The Conference books for 2009 will close on January 10th of 2010. If for some reason you will find it difficult to make that date please do not hesitate to contact the Conference Office.

Your Support for the NPC Radio Ad is Welcomed

During the first weeks of Advent a very inviting Ad was placed in morning and afternoon Radio Programs. The AD was heard by many and the text of it can be found on the NPC web site. Each congregation is invited to take the radio AD and do one for a local radio station or to do a print Ad that could appear in a local news paper. If your church has not already done so, please make your contribution to this effort to the Conference Office as soon as possible. Your support of this effort will enable us to place other Ads through the year. Your comments and suggestions about this effort are invited.

Friends of the Conference Letters Have Been Sent

The Winter Friends of the Conference Letters have gone out and your reply is eagerly awaited. We sent more than 500 letters to NPC folk who have been active in the life of the Conference asking for a second mile gift to empower us to move with strength into the New Year. If you did not receive a letter and wish one please contact the Conference Office. So we might have an accurate understanding of our financial position for the coming year we are inviting all donations for the Friends of the Conference Offering to be in the Conference Office by December 31st.

Paul Nixon is coming to Jamestown

Thanks to the North Dakota Conference of Churches’ support Paul Nixon, author of “I Refuse to Serve A Dying Church” and “Finding Jesus on the Metro,” will be coming to Jamestown to host a workshop March 22 & 23. The cost of the workshop will be \$40 plus lodging, travel and some meals. A block of rooms have been reserved at the Quality Inn where the program will be held. There will also be a banquet Monday evening (the cost of which is covered by registration as will that of a concert by Chuck Suchy following the banquet). The registration form can be found on the Conference Web site. Checks accompanying the form can be made to the North Dakota Conference of Churches of the Conference Office.

Sue Kana Mackey Retires

Let us celebrate the long and meaningful ministry of the Rev. Sue Kana Mackey as the pastor of the United Church of Christ of Lakota. Pastor Sue is retiring from that larger parish work at the end of this year. Her plans for the future are still undetermined. Let us take this opportunity to gratefully wish Sue well as she moves into this new phase of her faith journey.

Congregations Seeking Pastors

United Church of Christ of Wahpeton
 Congregational United Church of Christ of Independence
 United Church of Christ of Lakota and the wider parish of which it is a part

The Calendar For January 2010

Date	Time	Event	Location
1/1	----	Happy New Year	----
1/1-1/3	----	CM on Vacation	----
1/10	11:00 am (ct)	CM leads Worship	Pierce
1/11	11:00 am (ct)	Central Stewardship Club	Jamestown
1/12	10:00 am (mt)	Missouri Valley Cluster	Dickinson
1/15	11:00 am (ct)	UTS Conference Call	----
1/17	9:30 am (ct)	Annual Meeting Sunday	Carrington
1/18	9:30 am (ct)	NDCC Board	Bismarck
1/19	11:00 am (ct)	Minot Cluster	Garrison
1/21	10:00 am (ct)	Fargo Cluster	----
1/22	11:00 am (ct)	Central Cluster	----
1/24	11:00 am (ct)	Annual Meeting	Hillsboro
1/24	5:00 pm (ct)	Registration for Winter Retreat	Fargo Plymouth
1/24	----	Holiday Gathering	Fargo
1/25-1/26	9 am Mon- noon Tues	Winter Retreat	Fargo Plymouth
1/27	12:00 Noon (ct)	Ft. Berthold Cluster	New Town
1/31	11:00 am (ct)	CM Presents	Unitarian Gathering