



## AWARE FOR JUNE 2011

### As I Look At It:

Some of you have heard we are currently in a conversation with the South Dakota Conference (SDC) in which we are exploring ways that we might live together in the future. We are mindful that this conversation is not new. There had been several attempts in the past that explored the possibility of the Northern Plains Conference and the South Dakota Conference working more closely together. Each had, for any of a myriad of reasons, not been successful.

Several years ago NPC shared in a conversation with a number of Midwestern Conferences (Iowa, Nebraska, South Dakota, Kansas/Oklahoma, and Montana/N. Wyoming.) in an exploration of possibilities that may be before us to work together. While this discussion, which took place over many months and involved three gatherings of representatives of all Conferences, did not produce a solid outcome, I can safely say that they did lay the ground work for several meaningful conversations, which are currently taking place, including the one that involves NPC and SDC.

This incarnation of the conversation began with David Felton, Interim Conference Minister for SDC and myself agreeing to call together a delegation from each of our Conferences to have an open discussion about our future and the possibilities that lay before us for working together. This led to discussions in the respective Councils and Boards, that focused on whether each Conference would support future discussions about the possibility of the two Conferences exploring ways to work together in an ongoing fashion. Both the NPC Council and the SDC Board voted to continue the discussion. In addition SDC voted to suspend their search for a Conference Minister.

On May 17 – 18 in Medina the two delegations met again for the purpose of filling out the vision and designing a presentation for both annual meetings which will take place at exactly the same time.

This leaves us with a great deal yet to work out. Let me assure everyone that no decisions have been made at this time; we have only agreed to have conversation and to look at possibilities. We have begun to see a glimmer of a vision of what the future could hold. A vision that speaks of vitality, sustainability, and hope for both Conferences. But it is also a vision that speaks of change in the way that we do business. A vision that could mean we go to one office and one Conference Minister. A vision that could call each Conference to bring on board a series of "Deacons" who would serve as the presence of the Conference Minister in the local setting. A vision that may or may not mean the merger of two Conferences, for one possibility is that each Conference would remain independent with its own committee and financial structure.

One factor that helps give strength to this vision for this time is that SDC currently has an Interim Conference Minister, and in NPC the Conference Minister (Yours Truly) is coming to that mysterious time that follows one living 65 years.

As we prepare for the upcoming NPC Annual Meeting (June 3 – 5) I invite each of you to prayerfully and faithfully consider your thoughts and feelings about this

vision. Our goal is not to sell you an idea but to invite you to join your brothers and sisters in the NPC family on a pilgrimage of discernment. As you can tell from the Annual Meeting Agenda which is on the NPCUCC Web Site [www.npcucc.org](http://www.npcucc.org) we will be having this discussion on Saturday afternoon. If you have comments or questions please do not hesitate to call the Conference Office, I would look forward to the opportunity to discuss this vital opportunity with you. I am confident that together we can, with the ever present help of God's Spirit, find the path God would have us follow.

Namaste

Wade

### Voices from the Prairie:

Over the last fifty years, just about everything in our lives has been impacted by change. Technology and attendant changes in the way we communicate have altered how we relate to one and other as well as interact with the communities and individuals around the globe. Population shifts have decimated some parts of our country while causing dramatic growth in others. The increasing population of unchurched and ex-churched individuals, caused by a complex combination of things, not the least of which is the ongoing culture war, has reshaped the landscape of denominationalism in the United States.

What has not changed dramatically, until now, is the organization of denominations as they begin to address the new mission field that forms the context for their work. Some adjustments have been made over time. Many Conferences consolidated or eliminated Associations. Conference staff reductions were, and are, a regular occurrence. The National Setting engaged in a significant restructure in 2000. But all of these changes are as much an attempt to adjust the structure of the denomination to meet the old mission field. They have not represented the serious adaption required to position the United Church of Christ in a way that enables it to meet the tremendous opportunity for mission and ministry that are before it.

Conferences like Northern Plains and South Dakota are demonstrating a willingness to look at more serious adaptive change to free up resources for the mission of the church. The possibility of greater collaboration and even consolidation among Conferences will be a growing conversation across the church. An ecumenical partnership as demonstrated by the Montana-Northern Wyoming Conference and the Christian Church Disciples of Christ Region represents another experiment in how to gain strength and resources for mission. Other models will likely be tested. As the mission field increasingly centers in the local church, which now has the capacity for direct global mission involvement, the role and purpose of denominational structures will need to change to provide support and connection for this mission. The conversation on unified

governance at the National Setting represents the testing of another model of collaboration and consolidation.

Although many folks approach these conversations from the perspective of shrinking OCWM, I think it wise to reframe the conversation around increasing our capacity as a church to engage the mission opportunities of justice and evangelism that are increasing yearly. Our focus should not be on how to restructure in order to keep things going. Rather it needs to be on how best to reorganize for God's mission in today's context. We are currently perfectly organized for 1957. It is not 1957 anymore.

I commend Northern Plains and South Dakota Conference leaders and churches for the courage to engage this conversation. You are demonstrating leadership for the whole church.

Contributed by Stephen Sterner  
Executive for the Local Church Ministries, National Church.  
**NPC ANNUAL MEETING June 3 - 5**

The NPC Annual meeting is coming together June 3 - 5 at First Congregational UCC in Fargo. You can find the registration on the NPC Web Site by logging in at [www.npcucc.org](http://www.npcucc.org) and then typing Annual Meeting in the search area. You will also find an informative flier which has lodging and other helpful information under "Church News". If you have difficulty getting to either the flier or the registration form, please do not hesitate to contact the Conference Office.

The theme for the 2011 Annual Meeting is "Our Legacy; Faith and Resilience". Built upon the text of Micah 6:8 this theme calls us to live our faith with fullness and strength. This message is carried on through the guest speakers, Geoffrey Black, the General Minister and President of the UCC, Steve Sterner, the Executive for Local Church Ministries, and Barbara Baylor, the Minister for Health Care Justice each of whom will call us to a deeper understanding of the call and the opportunities for faithful living.

This all is in addition to the special discussion we will have surrounding the possibility of a joining of our ministries with the South Dakota Conference. NPC congregations are encouraged to make plans to attend this important and informative annual gathering and share in the celebration of faith and life.

**AWARE Available in TWO Versions:**

Starting with the December 2010 issue, the Northern Plains Conference AWARE will come in two versions. Please let the Conference Office know how this works for you. 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.

**Summer Camp Registration:**

On the [npcucc.org](http://npcucc.org) website under the Church News tab there is the registration form for the Summer Camp Experience, July 24-July 28, 2011. The location of the Camp Experience is at Camp of the Cross for ages 8-18.

**Two NPC Lay members are honored at General Synod**

It is with great pleasure that we lift up Beth Begg as the NPC nominee for Honored Lay Woman. This recognition is given to lay women of the UCC who have shown dedication and leadership in various settings of the church, locally, Conference wide and nationally. Over the many years that Beth has been active in the life of the NPC, she has demonstrated her dedication to the faith we share and the ministry that we are called to share. Beth will be recognized at the Honored Lay woman's Luncheon at General Synod.

We are honored to announce that Juanita Helphrey has been selected to be one of the recipients for the 2011 Social Prophet Awards. This recognition is presented by the Justice and Witness Committee to UCC members who have distinguished themselves through their work for justice and a fuller appreciation of the place of all the members of God's family. Through her work within and beyond the church Juanita has demonstrated a passion for such justice

**ARTICLES IN LONG VERSION:**

Medallion Award, Sisters in Christ welcomes special guests to the NPC, The 2011 New Earth Summer Camp Experience, Summer Camp 2011 is coming, Congregations Seeking A Pastor, News from Lindy Holt, Disaster Ministries Coordinator, Notes from the Media Resource Center, Strengthen the Church Offering to be Received June 12, Prairie Hospitality Workshop holds final gathering, The 28<sup>th</sup> General Synod of the UCC,

**The Mission Gift for 2011 is the NPC Youth Ministry**

NPC Congregations are invited to join together in support of the Conference's Youth Ministry. Each congregation of the NPC is invited to give \$1 per member or \$100 whichever is greater. This offering will be received with the regular offering on June 5<sup>th</sup> during the worship service or can be received whenever it is convenient for the congregation to send a check. We are excited about the developing youth ministry of the Conference and look forward to the many ways we might strengthen that ministry with the help of the NPC Congregations.

**The Calendar for June**

Date	Time	Event	Location
6/2	5:30 pm (ct)	Conference Council dinner	Fargo
6/2	7:00 pm	Conference Committees	Fargo
6/3	9:00 am (ct)	Conference Council	Fargo
6/3	3:30 pm (ct)	Annual Meeting Registration	Fargo
6/4	-----	Annual Meeting	Fargo
6/5	-----	Annual Meeting	Fargo
6/12	10:00 am (ct)	25 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary	Winnipeg
6/19	10:00 am (ct)	25 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary	Winnipeg
6/24	5:30 pm (ct)	Multiple Paths	Valley City
6/25	9:00 am (ct)	Multiple Paths	Valley City