

**NORTHERN PLAINS CONFERENCE  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

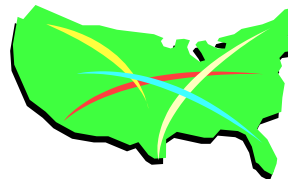
A monthly newsletter supporting the building of community in the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-national community of faith



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**AWARE 2011**



**AS I LOOK AT IT:**

As some of you may 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.

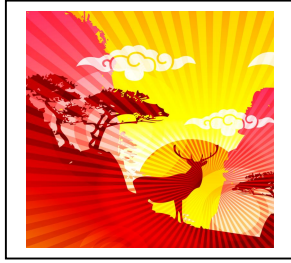
On May 17 – 18 in Medina the two delegations met again for the purpose of filling out the vision and designing a presentation for both annual meetings which will take place at exactly the same time.

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



### **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.



### **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.



### **Medallion Award**

Each year at the Annual Meeting we recognize Northern Plains Conference members who distinguish themselves in service by presenting them with a Medallion Award. The Medallion Award is to honor deserving lay persons and ministers who have served in the Conference in some capacity. The Award is intended to recognize members of the Conference who have served voluntarily for a sustained duration in one or more of these areas: Regional and/or National Synod instrumentalities Local Church, and Local Church and Community.

Medallion Award Nomination forms and background information can be found on the Northern Plains Conference Web Site, [www.npcucc.org](http://www.npcucc.org) and typing “medallion award” into the search box. If you have difficulty or need a nomination form sent to you, please contact the Conference Office.

All Medallion Award Nomination forms are to be sent to the Conference Office.



### **Sisters in Christ welcomes special guests to the Northern Plains Conference.**

Two special guests are on their way to the Northern Plains Conference to share in the

activities of the Women's Ministry of the Northern Plains Conference (Sisters in Christ, Women's Ministry Committee). Barbara Baylor, minister for health care justice will be the speaker for the Women's Luncheon at the Annual Meeting as well as a workshop leader. Charlene J. Smith, Minister for Evangelism and Vitality will be the presenter for the Women's Retreat to be held at the Abbey in Richardton, September 16 – 18. The theme for the Retreat is "Our Journey To The Well". All Northern Plains Conference and South Dakota Conference women are invited to make plans to share in these special times. We look forward to the message each will bring as we continue to share with our National Partners in that ministry to which we all are called, the discipleship of Jesus the Christ.



### **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.



## **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.



### *The 2011 New Earth Summer Camp Experience*

With the melting snow all around us, it is time to think summer camp. This year we have moved our camp program to Camp of the Cross in Garrison, ND. The sign up forms are now online at the Conference website [www.npcucc.org](http://www.npcucc.org) for you to download. If you would like hardcopies of the application sent to your church, let us know. To save some paper we did not put the health forms in the applications. You will need to go to the Camp of the Cross website <http://www.campofthecross.com/documents/healthformforweb.pdf> and print the health form file. For more info on summer camp contact Rev. Carleton Borden: [revcarletonborden@gmail.com](mailto:revcarletonborden@gmail.com) / 701-840-5104.

### **Summer Camp 2011 is coming!**

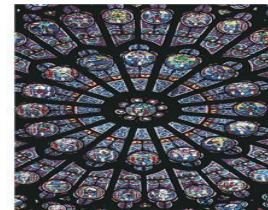
We are happy to report that Reverend Tammy Toepke-Floyd is returning as our young youth's Camp Dean, and we are happy to announce that Reverend Marilyn Levine is going to be our older youth's Camp Dean. Reverend Leola Allen and Ernie Conley will be returning also as our Arts and Crafts Team, along with

assistance from Kathy Holmes. Registrations are already starting to arrive, and it looks like it will be a summer experience to remember. Applications are available on our Northern Plains Conference website ([www.npcucc.org](http://www.npcucc.org)) and we hope to see you this coming July at Camp of the Cross in Garrison, North Dakota.



### **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.



### **Congregations Seeking A Pastor:**

The following churches are seeking new pastoral leadership:  
**New Horizon Parish** (near Lakota)  
**Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ in Fargo** (currently with a hold on profiles), and  
**United Church of Christ in Bismarck.**





## News from Lindy Holt, Disaster Ministries Coordinator

We need to be thankful that the severity of spring flooding wasn't as major as it could have been. That said, we still have many people around the state (places like Valley City), and especially in rural areas who have been impacted and many will continue to be impacted for weeks to come. We also know that the problems in the Devils Lake area are on-going and the rising water will continue well into the summer. Please keep them all in your prayers.

Earlier this spring Conference Council authorized an all-church appeal for funds to help with clean up and recovery needs. North Dakota Long Term Recovery, serving as an unmet needs committee for the whole state is just beginning to get things in place to do the case management to assess people's needs. We need money to help those people who are suffering. To date we have received very little support from the churches.

While our spring has been challenging, I personally will take snow and colder weather over the horrible tornadoes and flooding that have devastated other parts of our country. The United Church of Christ National Office is asking for our financial support to help others. In the past we have received the gifts of other churches to support our recovery and rebuilding, so this is an opportunity for us to give generously.

Please make your donations to the Northern Plains Conference (online - [npcucc.org](http://npcucc.org)) or to the United Church of Christ (UCC.org) and indicate how you would like your gifts used.

Thank you for your support and prayers!



## Notes from the Media Resource Center

Did you know that the MRC has print media, too? Summer will soon be here and you may be interested in finding a good book to read!

In the April issue of Parish Life & Leadership, Holly MillerShank wrote about Rev. Barbara Essex's books (published by The Pilgrim Press). We currently have six of them on our shelves: **Bad Boys of the Bible; Bad Boys of the New Testament; Bad Girls of the bible; Krazy Kinfolk; Misbehavin' Monarchs; and More Bad Girls of the Bible.** Holly wrote: "I would encourage pastors, churches, and conferences to turn to Barbara's books for insight and inspiration. I found them helpful as a local church pastor .....particularly on the concepts of Leadership Transition".

We also have three books from the CONGREGATIONAL VITALITY series: **Faith Formation in Vital Congregations; Leadership for Vital Congregations; and Worship for Vital Congregations.**

If you'd like to have a listing of our print media, just drop me an e-mail @ [mrc@sodakucc.org](mailto:mrc@sodakucc.org) and I'll send it to you.

Summer is also a great time to preview resources for Bible study groups, Adult forum, and youth groups. Check out our website: [www.plainsmedia.org](http://www.plainsmedia.org) to see the possibilities.

Look for the Media Resource display table at Annual Meeting.....and have a great summer!  
Carmen Gill, MRC Administrator





## Strengthen the Church Offering to be Received June 12

The Strengthen the Church Offering, one of the five for five offerings of the United Church of Christ will be received on June 12<sup>th</sup>. This offering helps to support the efforts to strengthen, and revitalize the church throughout the denomination. One of the unique realities of this offering is that the Conference keeps half of this offering for its own ministry. In the NPC, the Conference portion of the Strengthen the Church Offering is used to strengthen congregations across the Conference and to assist in the development of new congregations. Each congregation has been sent via email, a bulletin insert that can be printed off and shared on Sunday morning. Each Congregation has also a Strengthen the Church Power Point that can be shared during a coffee hour or, in those congregations that use screens, during a worship service. If you are interested in using the power point, but have difficulty down loading it, please contact the Conference Office and we can send you a CD of it. Let us come together in support of this vital offering.



## Prairie Hospitality Workshop holds final gathering.

In cooperation with Charlene J. Smith of the National Church, a number of congregations in the NPC have been sharing in an exciting church vitality project entitled "Sharing Prairie Hospitality". The first gathering was held in Jamestown face to face and the intervening 5

gatherings were on WebEx. The final gathering will be also be held on WebEx. Each gathering had assignments that congregations were to do in preparation for the next meeting. The results of various activities were sent to Charlene ahead of time. She used the responses from the congregations to shape her presentation. Charlene's presentation was a power point which could be shared in the presentation and then sent on to the congregations to use. We are grateful for the efforts of Charlene J. Smith and the congregations that have worked with us in this vital project. Hopefully this can become a model for future growth events in the wider church.



## The 28<sup>th</sup> General Synod of the United Church of Christ

"Imagine What's Possible" is the theme for the 28<sup>th</sup> General Synod of the United Church of Christ. This every other year gathering is a congregational meeting of the denomination. It is a time for the church to dream, lift up visions for its future, make statements about our world and the lives we live, and deal with the business of the "CHURCH". The Northern Plains Conference will be represented by three delegates; Karen Hartman, Katie Patrie and Stephen Holmes. There will be a workshop at the NPC Annual Meeting that will highlight some of the major issues that will be discussed at the General Synod. You can find out more about this exciting event by going to the UCC Web Site [www.ucc.org](http://www.ucc.org) and typing "General Synod" into the search area.





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.

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

### 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

