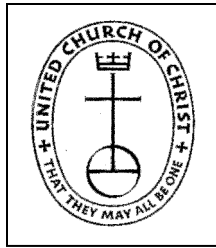


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AWARE
A Monthly newsletter
supporting the building of community
in the NPCUCC
multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual,
multi-national community of faith
November 2009

As I Look At It:

In Paul Nixon's book "I Refuse to Serve a Dying Church," are six choices that congregations can make. These choices are stepping-stones to move from a downward spiral into a positive projection. They focus on the attitude of the pastor and members as they encounter the world into which their ministry will be flowing. While I agree that each choice is important, the one I see as foundational is the very first one, "Choose Life over Death."

Let's face it, choosing life is a lot more work than accepting death. To choose life is to take a risk, it is to commit the resources of the congregation and its members to an unknown future. It is to accept the struggles that come with living in a rough and tumble world. It can cost more in energy, time and commitment to choose life. The reality is that to do anything else is to accept being the victim in an uncertain world rather than living out the heritage of a member of the family of God.

I do not believe that congregations have to die. There are alternatives. These alternatives could require making difficult choices. Now there are exceptions, the congregation that chose to close when it was down to two members, one of whom was in the hospital and the other in the nursing home, probably made the wise choice. I believe that is the exception and not the rule. The choice to accept death for a congregation is not made in the last months of a church's organizational life. Forerunners to that decision come many years earlier. When congregations decide to scale back their outreach, they make that decision. When the bottom line and not the faith becomes the guiding force, the congregation loses the energy and courage to be a community of faith in the everyday. When a congregation chooses to forego outreach to the community and to the Conference and National Church that it might maintain itself, they make that decision. The choice is made when congregations make survival its' vision. History has taught us that survival is not a vision that will sustain a congregation. To make survival the sole focus of a congregation is to accept death.

The reality is that God loves the church, and that through Jesus the Christ, God connects to the church. The church is plugged into the energy of the living Christ. Are we so connected to God's people that the energy of God gets from God through the church to God's people? Do people see and feel the message of God's love being lived in us? Anybody can talk a good message but it takes a faith community to live one. Will we allow the Spirit of the Living Christ to change us so that when our neighbors experience us they experience Christ?

I am inviting the Congregations of the Northern Plains Conference to take the risk of faithful living. To choose to be a channel of God's abundant and never ending grace into a world that is hungry to experience new life. Be the source of courage amid the fear that so clouds all our decisions. Stand for the "justice for all" that is the unifying theme of God's word. I do not believe that a congregation has ever had to close its doors because it was too faithful. I do not believe a congregation has ever had to close its doors because it has had too much outreach. I do know that churches die every day from an atrophy of the spirit that like a cancer eats away at the soul until there is nothing left to receive God's grace.

Choose life my friends in Christ, choose to be a channel of God's grace that can bring healing to the hurting, hope to the despondent, courage to the fearful and vision to the blind. Choose to be a beacon of hope instead of simply joining the chorus of complaints and woes. Choose life; take the risk of being faithful.

*Grace and Peace
Wade*

REGISTER FOR EVANGELISM IN THE PRAIRIE!

Charlene J. Smith will host a special event November 13 & 14 at Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ in Fargo aimed at empowering congregations large and small to find growth within the congregation and growth in numbers. Evangelism is much more than grabbing someone by the arm and asking them if they are saved. It is sharing a vital message in so that people want more. It is becoming the channel for God's grace into the midst of often-confused lives. This workshop will be a time for pastors and lay leaders to explore and share their hopes and their strengths. It will be an opportunity to share encouragement, support and ideas. We have reserved a block of rooms at the Fargo Super 8. Please reserve yours by Nov 6th. The Conference will cover the cost of the program and meals, leaving lodging and travel for the congregations. For registration information, please go to the NPCUCC website www.npcucc.org under forms or call the Conference Office.

There May Be Grant Money for Your Congregation's Project

Money may be available for worthy church projects. For the information needed please see "What Enquiring Funders Want to Know," on the NPCUCC Website (<http://www.npcucc.org/html/grants.php>). R. J. Stohler, NPCUCC Grant Request Writer, will be glad to explore with you possible funding.

Congregations seeking a pastor: United Church of Christ of Wahpeton

82 – 4 – 2010

At the last Annual Meeting in Minot, we passed a budget with an \$8,000 shortfall. We did this, confident that with the help of the members of the Northern Plains Conference we could face the coming year without that kind of weight hanging around our necks. During the Annual Meeting, we invited those present to start a movement by giving checks for \$100 to the Conference for the 2010 budget. Many of you were very generous and from that generosity came the idea for the 82 – 4 – 2010 drive. We are inviting NPC members clergy and lay to answer the call to discipleship by helping to get 82 contribution of \$100 dedicated to the 2010 budget. [The number 82 comes from Jesus' calling, first of 12 disciples and then of 70, sent forth into the surrounding communities to share the good news.] As individuals, groups, families or clusters of friends we invite you to accept the call to help the NPC get ahead of the short fall, so we can face 2010 head on and strong. Questions about this drive? Please call the Conference Office.

The Academy for Vital Christianity

The Northern Plains Conference in cooperation with United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities is offering meaningful educational opportunities for all our members. The first class of the Academy for Vital Christianity, "Interpreting the Old Testament with Integrity," taught by Richard Weis, Dean of the Seminary, had strong support and good feelings from the participants. All look forward to returning for the next meeting on Nov. 7 at the Congregational UCC of Valley City. The next class scheduled is entitled "Wrestling with Problems of Evil and Suffering" taught by Eleazar Fernandez. It will be October 24 and Nov. 21 at First Congregational UCC of Fargo. More information about these classes and registration forms are on the NPC website www.npcucc.org under forms or fliers. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact the Conference Office.

Faith Leadership Dialogue:

On November 15th between 3:30 and 6:30 pm (ct) at St. John's Lutheran Church at 424 1st Ave. S. in Jamestown there will be a dialogue between Judicatory leaders of the ELCA East and West, Methodist, Presbyterian and UCC churches around the topic of Creation Care and Climate Stewardship. This dialogue is for all people of faith, clergy and lay, and is an opportunity to share ideas, fears and hopes as we begin to take seriously the changing climate of our Mother Earth. This event is free and open to the public but we request registration. For more information please check out the flier that can be found on the NPCUCC web site at www.npcucc.org under fliers.

Friends of the Conference:

Later this month the "Friends of the Conference" letters will be mailed. This is an opportunity for many to help with special support for the ministry of the Northern Plains Conference as we launch into the challenges of the coming year. There are many visions guiding us along our path into the 21st century. We pray that with your support we will be able to follow them. If you do not receive such a letter and wish to be part of the group that lends special support to the life and work of the Conference, please contact the Conference Office.

A Thanksgiving Vision

As we anticipate Thanksgiving with all its good memories and joyous times, let us take a page from the text of our Hebrew brothers and sisters for whom thanksgiving was a faith statement. They not only gave thanks for what it was that God had done, but they celebrated what God was going to do in their community. It was a statement of confident faith declaring that the God who had been with them during the past year, will continue to be with them in the future. Therefore, in that spirit may you have a wonderful thanksgiving. May it be a time when you celebrate the God who has walked with you in the past, who will walk with you in the future.

The Calendar for November

Date	Time	Event	Location
11/1	-----	Council for Theological Ed.	Cleveland
11/2-11/5	6:00pm (ct)	West Central Regional	Schuyler/Nebraska
11/7	9:00am (ct)	Academy for Vital Christianity/Interpreting OT	Valley City
11/8	10:00am (ct)	CM shares in worship	Jamestown
11/10	10:00am (ct)	MV Cluster	New Salem
11/11	Noon (ct)	NDHRC Development	Fargo
11/12	-----	CM at UTS	New Brighton MN
11/13	5:30 pm (ct)	Evangelism Workshop	Fargo/Plymouth
11/14	-----	Evangelism Workshop	Fargo
11/15	10:30am (ct)	CM shares in worship	Wishek
11/15	3:30 pm (ct)	Leadership Dialogue on Climate Change	Jamestown/St. John's Lutheran
11/18	11:00am (ct)	Minot Cluster	New Town
11/19	10:00am (ct)	Fargo Cluster	Moorhead, 1 st Congregational
11/21	9:30 am (ct)	Acad for Vital Christianity/Problem of Evil & Good	Fargo/First Congregational UCC
11/21	11:00am (ct)	ALWL #4	Bismarck
11/23	11:00am (ct)	Central Cluster	-----
11/23	5:00pm (ct)	Charles Hall Board	Bismarck

11/26

Thanksgiving Day (USA)
