

Light of the Northern Plains

Presbytery of the Northern Plains

December 2008

PRAYER CONCERNS

Evy Holt, wife of the late Edward Holt of Casselton, is having some health concerns. Please keep Evy and the whole Holt family in your prayers during this time of uncertainty.

Please pray for the many families that were displaced by the wildfires in Southern California, the courageous firefighters and rescue workers, the caregivers and Presbyterian congregations providing ministry to disaster survivors, and all involved in the disaster response in California.

Please pray for families who find themselves in hard economic times with the loss of a job, home, or retirement funds.

WINTER PRESBYTERY MEETING

The January Presbytery meeting has been changed to be a one day meeting. The meeting will be held on Saturday, January 24, 2009 at Mendenhall Presbyterian Church of East Grand Forks.

Meeting material will be posted on the Presbytery website at www.northernplainspresbytery.com by noon on January 7, 2009. For congregations which don't have internet access, packets can be mailed out to them. We are asking for those congregations to contact the office if they are unable to find someone within the congregation to print off the meeting material.



BORN UNDER US

By: The Rev. David Thompson, Moderator of the Presbytery

“If you could rewrite the script for the birth of Christ, how would you introduce Jesus to the world”?

I have asked a number of people this question, ranging from children to adults, and most of the responses include the following ideas:

I would introduce Jesus with a national parade, escorted by dignitaries and marching bands, with ticker tape being thrown upon him.

I would introduce him coming down from heaven on a white cloud, escorted by angels and the sounds of trumpets.

I would introduce Jesus during the half-time of the Super Bowl that boasts the largest television audience in the world.

Others have suggested the use of spotlights, aircraft, and limousines.

What is most surprising about the story of the incarnation is that hardly anyone noticed. Outside of a few animals and some unsuspecting shepherds, the biggest event in the history of the world went basically by without a trace. There were no newspaper reporters in Bethlehem, no parades in Jerusalem, no marching bands or trumpet sounds.

What is most amazing about the story of Jesus' birth is that God designed it this way. It was not some accident that Mary and Joseph were relegated to a stable, that hardly anyone took notice, that he was born in a place off the beaten and path. This was God's design.

The stable that we read about in the Bible was most likely a cave, a natural opening in the Bethlehem hillside. These common caves provided a place for animals to receive protection from the elements of nature. Renowned Christian scholar G.K. Chesterton points out that Jesus, being born in a cave was not some accident or a divine oversight. God intended for this to take place to send a message to the world that God was “born under us.” He was born from beneath, not above; in weakness, not in strength, in vulnerability, not in power in order that the world may know of God's intentions and purposes.

For a story that doesn't seem to make much sense, it begins to make perfect sense. This is most often how God works through Jesus Christ, not over but under. Throughout the Gospels we read of Jesus empowering the weak, binding up the broken hearted, and giving honor to all people regardless of race or economic privilege.

During this season of Advent I invite you to see Jesus for who he truly was and is: as Savior to give a gift that is unattainable without him; as Lord who shows us the true meaning of power; as Encourager who empowers us by the gift of the Holy Spirit.

I wish you the very best during this Christmas season and wish God's blessings upon you and your families.

WHAT DOES A NEW VISION STATEMENT MEAN?

By: Cheryl Biller, Member of the Vision Task Force

How is life any different for us for having accepted a new vision statement? Why should anyone take note? There will be no quizzes or tests, no fines levied, no ceilings will fall in if you don't ever look at this statement. But on the other hand, if you do, and if you consider your work in committees, on sessions, when you meet to study or share together as Northern Plains Presbyterians in light of this statement, I hope you might find a common purpose and a shared sense of how to engage each other. We are a diverse bunch – we differ in theology, geography, political persuasion, economic concerns, and likely any other area that matters. But more importantly, though tougher to get to, **we share** a desire to continue a Presbyterian presence in this place, and to study and learn about what God is calling us to do and be in these times.

Speaking now as a member of the team who spent a year in study and conversation, it is my hope that you all will be willing to take time and effort to include notice of this vision statement, read it at your gatherings, consider your work within this framework, and then see how it is helpful – or not. Tell us at Presbytery meetings and in reports to council, how it feels. For the next year, use it, work with it, spend time with it, and then we can decide together if it helps us.

Specifically, this is what I hope you will do with this statement:

1. Include it at the top of your meeting agenda and read it.
2. Talk about how you think it can be helpful, and do this at a minimum of 3 meetings.
3. Voice your concerns, disagreements, or displeasure with the statement – and then sit with it anyway. We do want to hear all of those things, but only after you've given it some time.
4. Record your concerns so you can share those with us at some point in the future. If you want to unload these opinions and thoughts right away, send them to me (cheryl@plantproinc.com) or Laurie Elhard (pnpooffice@gmail.com) at the Presbytery office, and we'll keep a paper on all the opinions you share.
5. When you have ideas for work you want to do – missional, evangelical, or otherwise – consider it in the context of being vibrant, of learning together, of being Presbyterian.
6. Ask yourselves in your meetings what it might look like if our Presbytery was a vibrant place. Write it down and send it to Laurie. Or draw a picture and send to Laurie.
7. Is your team or committee operating from a fully informed position? If you don't currently think you are, then let council know. Do this each time you find yourselves lacking. We may not be able to respond immediately, but we'll know you see a void and we can work on that.
8. Discuss what it takes to be community, and specifically Presbyterian community. Record your thoughts to share with us later, or send them to Laurie. Do this at more than one meeting.
9. Share your thoughts in committee meetings, in sessions, in anyplace where more than one Presbyterian is present on what it means to join in Christ's mission, and record those thoughts.
10. Discuss what it means to nourish ministry. And record your ideas – or your questions.

Presbytery's Vision and Mission Statement:

At the October 2008 Presbytery meeting, new vision statement was approved:

“A vibrant, informed, Presbyterian community which nourishes ministry and joins in Christ's mission.”

The mission of the Presbytery of the Northern Plains as we seek to be a faithful witness to the good news of Jesus Christ, is three-fold:

To CARE for the congregations and members of Presbytery by providing guidance, encouragement and resources for their ministries;

To CONNECT congregations and members of Presbytery with one another and with the church beyond our denominational geographical bounds;

To CHALLENGE the congregations and members of Presbytery with a vision of faithfulness so that, with God's help, our witness on the plains can grow.

NEW FELLOWSHIP AND MINISTER MEMBER OF PRESBYTERY



At the October 2008 Presbytery meeting, the Hope Korean Presbyterian Fellowship was recognized as a part of the Presbytery. The Fellowship is being served by Pastor Gyun Ho

Tak. The Rev. Tak was received as a minister member of the Presbytery.

The Rev. Tak was born in September 1970 in Korea and was raised in a religious family. His father and uncle were also Presbyterian pastors, his father worked for 40 plus years starting new churches in Korea. His father taught him about honesty and trust from an early age, which are two of his life long themes. Tak started to work as a minister in 1991 in Korea.

In February 2006 Rev. Tak came to the US for retreat and study. In Aug 2006 he began his pursue of a Ph. D at the Midwest University and Reformed Theological Seminary. During his time at the University he was called to work as an associate pastor at the Midwest Community Church in St. Louis, Mo., until August 2007 just before he came to Grand Forks. He now is serving Korean Presbyterian Fellowship.

Rev. Tak lives in the Grand Forks area with his wife, Eun Sook Lee. They have three daughters: Esther in 6th grade, Carol in 3rd grade, and Shron, 19 months. In his free time he enjoys meeting people, reading books, and writing them too.

SEMINARY ON THE PRAIRIE



EVENT FOCUSES ON RURAL CHURCHES

A "Seminary on the Prairie" event is slated Jan. 12-16 at Red Willow Bible Camp, Binford, N.D., that will focus

on the "Development and Redevelopment of Rural Congregations and Ministries." This will be the seventh annual "Seminary on the Prairie" event to introduce seminarians to rural ministry during the prairie winter. The event is co-sponsored by Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn., and Tri-County Ministry, a group of eight ELCA Lutheran churches and one Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) congregation in eastern North Dakota. Church leaders, lay ministers and pastors are invited as well to learn more about rural life, rural church development and re-development. More information about this event can be found at www.tricountyministry.org/news_articles.

RESOURCES

Radical Welcome: Embracing God, the Other, and the Spirit of Transformation (Book)

By: Spellers, Stephanie

Radical Welcome: Embracing God, the Other, and the Spirit of Transformation is a practical theological guide for congregations that want to move beyond mere inclusivity toward becoming a place where welcoming 'the other' is taken seriously and engaging God's mission becomes more than just a catch-phrase.

Grace at the table : Ending hunger in God's world

By: Beckmann, David M.

Widespread hunger is no longer necessary. Wars and tyrants will always cause some to go without, but we already have the ideas, experience, financing and technology to put nearly all hunger behind us--if we have the will to do it. Twenty-five years after the launching of Bread for the World, the nation's pre-eminent citizens' lobby on hunger, its president (David Beckmann) along with its founder (Arthur Simon), tell us what they've learned in question-and-answer format and with stories that give the statistics human faces. Every time we give thanks, every time we say grace at a meal, we are reminded that our daily bread is a gift from God--and is a gift to share. Here is a book that shows us God's heart and how we can help to end hunger in God's world.

Unchristian: What a new generation really thinks about Christianity--and why it matters (Book)

By: Kinnaman, David

It's a difficult fact to face: the perception that most nonbelievers have of Christianity is overwhelmingly negative. Through groundbreaking research conducted on 16- to 29-year-old non-Christians, released solely through this book, Christians will see how their friends, colleagues, and neighbors really perceive them.

Unchristian uncovers why these perceptions exist and what can be done to reverse them. David Kinnaman, a Generation X thought leader himself, does a masterful job of providing readers hope and motivation to live the kind of life that reflects a winsome and compassionate Christianity, one that reflects the nature of Jesus Christ and the principles of the historic Christian faith. This one-of-a-kind book gives readers practical examples of what this fresh expression of the Christian faith can look like in a sophisticated, pluralistic society, and captures the thoughts of respected Christian leaders on what Christianity can be known for in thirty years.

To borrow a resource, contact the **Resource Center for Churches** at info@resourcesforthejourney.org or telephone (888) 293-9901 (toll free). The staff will gladly reserve one of these or another resource for you. The center has books, DVDs, reference works, choir anthems, and even a labyrinth available for loan.

PRC COVENANT NETWORK CONFERENCE

By: *By: John G. Gibbs, SCE for PNP*

The interconnections between creation and covenant are at the heart of our life and work as Presbyterians restoring creation. Creation and covenant meet with particular urgency in the Church. The following “Litany for the Church” was included in our worship at the Covenant Network 2008 Conference that met in Westminster Presbyterian Church at Minneapolis, MN on Nov. 6-8:

“Litany for the Church”

(written by Kenneth John Wilkinson)

One: We confess and acknowledge one God alone, to whom alone we must cleave, whom alone we must serve, whom alone we must worship, and in whom alone we put our trust. [Scots Confession, 1560]

All: Let us seek, in all that we say and do and are, to cleave to God and to trust God’s promises.

One: Our only comfort in life and in death is that we belong – body and soul – not to ourselves, but to our faithful savior Jesus Christ. [Heidelberg Catechism, 1562]

All: Let us seek to live in the sure promise that in life and in death we belong to God.

One: The church is the assembly of the faithful, a communion of all saints, citizens of the one commonwealth, the one city, in the fellowship of all good things. [Second Helvetic Confession, 1561]

All: Let us seek to live together as citizens and to build a city of reconciliation and joy. [Westminster Confession, 1647]

One: The church’s commission, upon which its freedom is founded, consists in delivering the message of the free grace of God to all people in Christ’s stead, and therefore in the ministry of his own Word and work. [Barmen Declaration, 1934]

All: Let us seek to be bold witness to Christ’s grace, proclaiming to cities and nations the living Word among us.

One: Life is a gift to be received with gratitude and a task to be pursued with courage. [Confession of 1967]

All: In a broken and fearful world, the Spirit gives us courage to pray without ceasing. [A Brief Statement of Faith, 1991]

One: With an urgency born of this hope, the church applies itself to present tasks and strives for a better world. [Confession of 1967]

All: May we, the church of Jesus Christ, be joyful in our worship, be generous in our giving, be abundant in our caring, be courageous in our proclaiming, for the sake of the world God loves so much and for the sake of the church entrusted to our care. Amen.

The opening worship of that conference included superb music led by Westminster’s gifted musicians, joined also by the choir from House of Hope Presbyterian Church in St. Paul, all supported by the famed organ at Westminster. One of the beloved musical interpretations of the creation was composed by Franz Joseph Haydn in his oratorio titled “The Creation.” The combined choirs and organ gave us a spirited performance of one section of that oratorio, namely “The Heavens Are Telling the Glory of God,” the words of which follow here:

*“The heavens are telling the glory of God;
The wonder of his work displays the firmament.
Revealed are His ways by day unto day,
By night that is gone into following night.
In ev’ry land is known the Word,
Ev’ry ear will hearken, never tongue be dumb.”*

Presbytery’s Calendar

Dec 5	Council CC
Dec 9	COM CC
Dec 24-25	Office Closed – Holiday
Jan 15	Council Mt at Chiefton, Carrington, ND
Jan 23	RASCAL Meeting
Jan 24	Winter Presbytery Meeting at Mendenhall Presbyterian Church of East Grand Forks
March 12	Council Mt – location TBA
April 4	Spring PW Gathering at United Presbyterian Church of Jamestown
April 17-19	Spring Youth Retreat at Crystal Springs Camp
April 24-25	Spring Presbytery Meeting

CC = Conference Call

VCS = Video Conferencing Sites

At the October 2008 Presbytery meeting, new vision statement was approved:

“A vibrant, informed, Presbyterian community which nourishes ministry and joins in Christ’s mission.”

More information about how the Presbytery will grow into this statement to come.

How would you like to receive the Light of the Northern Plains electronically? You can by signing up for the paperless edition. It costs nothing. To sign up, simply email pnpoffice@gmail.com and request to be put on the electronic newsletter list.

Light of the Northern Plains is published under the Council of the Presbytery of the Northern Plains.

Laurie Elhard, Communications Coordinator

Other contributors: John Gibbs, David Thompson, Cheryl Biller,

A copy deadline for the Light is the twenty-fifth of the month. Items may be sent to:

Laurie Elhard
Presbytery of the Northern Plains
5555 South Washington Suite A
Grand Forks, ND 58201
701-772-0783
pnpoffice@gmail.com