

# Light of the Northern Plains

Presbytery of the Northern Plains

December 2011

## PRAYER CONCERNS/JOYS

Please hold Bob Edward, Teaching Elder at First Presbyterian Church of Minot, in your prayers. Bob recently had heart surgery.

Please join in prayer for the leadership of the Presbytery and the church in every time and place as we move forward in God's service.

Please pray for our congregations in transition and congregations that are in need of healing.

Please lift up in prayer those displaced from their homes by natural disasters in the United States and all over the world, those in need of basic supplies, and those who are working to offer assistance. Pray that conditions improve so that delivery of much needed relief supplies can reach their distribution points.

Please hold our Chogoria partners in your prayers.



## DECEMBER PRESBYTERY MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

By: Elder Michael Lochow, Presbytery Stated Clerk

The 104<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Presbytery of the Northern Plains was held by video conference on Saturday, December 3, 2011, and was opened with worship. The offering went to the Bdecan church.

Participants were at video sites located at First Presbyterian churches in Minot and Grand Forks, North Dakota; Community Presbyterian Church in West Fargo, North Dakota and at United Presbyterian Church in Jamestown, North Dakota. Registration forms have yet to be collated but it is estimated about sixty were in attendance.

Cheryl Biller reported on the Presbytery Wide Retreat which was held on December 18 -19 in Jamestown, North Dakota (more on page 2). The retreat was well attended with presentations made about the demographics of the Presbytery (church membership, attendance, etc.) and the activities and programs of the churches and the Presbytery. The Planning Team will take the information from the retreat and present a proposal to the Council at their January meeting and from that a proposal to the Presbytery meeting in March 2012 for a decision by the commissioners about how the Presbytery will look and function in the future.

The stated clerk reported that the Rev. Amanda Werth, member-at-large of the Presbytery of the Northern Plains, had renounced jurisdiction of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), effective July 1, 2011.

The stated clerk announced that the First Presbyterian Church in Minnewaukan, North Dakota, has voted to close. The moderator was authorized to appoint members of the commission to work with the Minnewaukan church during the closing process.

The commissioners approved the recommendation regarding changes in the Presbyterian Investment & Loan Program, Inc. loan to the First Presbyterian Church - Moorhead. The interest rate was lowered from 6.5% to 4% with no change in monthly payments which will pay off the loan four years early.

Rev. Adam Copeland was elected to complete an unexpired one-year term on the Committee on Ministry. The commissioners to the 2012 General Assembly are Rev. Keri Shelton, Elder Dixon Moorhead and Youth Advisory Delegate Mikayla Shelton. There are still opportunities for two ruling elders to serve on the Committee on Ministry and the Session Records Committee is in need of another member. If anyone feels called to help with any of these positions, please call the Presbytery office.

After a clear explanation of the budget process by Casey Chapman, the 2012 budget was approved. Council presented four names who were elected to serve on the Committee on Nominations: Dixon Moorhead, Curt Biller, Jake Kincaid and Mildred Rothgarn. Barb Ault has agreed to serve as Committee on Nominations chair for 2012.

The next meeting of the Presbytery will be on Friday and Saturday, March 9-10, 2012, at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Devils Lake, North Dakota.

## HOLIDAY OFFICE HOURS

The Presbytery office will be closing on December 22, 2011 at 2:30 pm and will reopen on January 3, 2012 at 7:00 am. If you need assistance, please contact Michael Lochow, Stated Clerk by email at [sc.pbypn@gmail.com](mailto:sc.pbypn@gmail.com) or call 701-271-4775.



## IMAGES OF A WEDDING

By: Elder Lorelee Rude, Moderator of the Presbytery of the Northern Plains

*I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.*



– Isaiah 61:10-11

I've always been fascinated by the wedding imagery found so many places in the Bible. Since I recently became a bride myself for the first time at the ripe old age of 52, those images have taken on even richer meaning for me.

Is there any occasion more joyful than a wedding? Is there any event more meticulously prepared for and fussed over? Is there anyone happier than a bride and groom, who, knowing themselves to be loved and cherished above all others, enter into a solemn covenant to build a life together?

Actually...yes! These verses from Isaiah, taken from one of the Advent lectionary texts, remind me that I should be more excited about my salvation than I was about trying on my wedding gown...that I should be more attentive to preparing for the coming of Christ than I was about ordering my bridal bouquet and planning the wedding dinner. The Lord of the universe loves me far more than even my husband does, and I have entered into a solemn covenant to build my life with and around God. That is indeed cause for great rejoicing!

Over the past year it was my privilege to serve as the moderator of your presbytery. As I move on to a new season of life, my prayer will continue to be that you will never cease to be overjoyed about God's love for you and the salvation that Jesus Christ entered our world to offer you. May the peace of God permeate every moment of your holidays!



## YEAR END COUNCIL LETTER

By: Elder Cheryl Biller, Council Moderator

Merry Christmas to you this holiday season! It is my wish for each of you that in the magic of this special time of year you might experience Christ's presence in new and renewing ways.

It has been a privilege and joy to serve you as chair of your council for the past year.

Your staff - Michael, Laurie, and Bill - serve you ably and with generous hearts; and your council representatives have stepped up to serve in so many ways. I am grateful for their gifts and energy, and their willingness to share those with us.

The council and staff spent the past year continuing to do all the things they normally do for you – planning meetings, making sure our mission dollars are allocated and spent appropriately, facilitating the election of leadership in the Presbytery, connecting us to our Synod and to the Office of General Assembly, helping to keep you informed of decisions made across our denomination that impact us, and working on policies and practices to help us continue to interact with each other with love and respect. It is a challenging time in God's whole church, in our denomination in particular and also here in our midst. Regardless of disagreements I might have with others in leadership across the Northern Plains, I am touched and impressed with the energy, love, and intelligence with which our leadership seek to work for you. We are a good bunch!

In addition to all the usual work staff and council carry out, we have also continued to wrestle with the work products you generated for us over the past 2 years as we've been open about being in transition. We planned for, and recently accomplished, a Presbytery-wide retreat to consider what our demographics tell us about who we are and the realities of our financial potential. At this retreat, 60 or so of us discussed the implications and realities of these facts:

- nearly half our congregations worship with 25 or fewer people in church each week;
- only 6% of our congregations worship with more than 100 people;
- and none of our congregations regularly have more than 225 in worship each week.

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We also discussed what the impacts to our work are together when:

- one third of our congregations never send a ruling elder to presbytery meetings;
- one third send a ruling elder only once per year;
- and about 20% participate regularly with ruling elders.

We discussed the ramifications of trying to be faithful Presbyterians when half of our congregations have pastoral leadership who are trained in other denominations. We talked a bit about what it means that our Presbytery asks each congregation to share in our per capita obligation (this is the way our denomination shares the administrative and personnel costs of being God's church together). It was clear that many of us are not aware that when one congregation chooses not to pay their share of this obligation, the Presbytery must find other monies to cover that. We also spent time sharing stories of our mission and ministries, and how we can continue to support each other, and connect to each other, in these endeavors.

Your council observed great and positive energy in the work of those who gathered in Jamestown for this two-day retreat. We identified these areas for which there seems to be strong collective energy:

- Mission
- Training
- Learning
- Celebrating
- Starting new churches

Retreat participants identified these as characteristics of vital, alive churches (new or existing):

- worship styles are varied and diverse
- truth is preached and taught
- programming is relevant and engaging, not just "what we've always done"
- filled with laughter and lots of prayer
- joyful
- there is a sense of God's presence
- multi-generational
- open to change.

Please notice the absence on this list of the requirement for either a pastor or a building in order for a congregation to be vital and alive.

Council wisely noted potential road bumps as we move forward together:

- Our numbers are on a downhill slide
- We have not found a way to connect the next generation
- We haven't found a good and consistent way to have fun while we work
- We need to keep finding ways to communicate with each other

You also told us that you believe we are strong, and getting stronger, in working through pastoral vacancy and doing mission.

Now, even as I pass the council chair torch to the next person, your leadership is engaged in the next steps in our transition process. The Planning team is drafting a structure and staffing proposal for council to consider at its January meeting. Council will take that proposal, and turn it into a final proposal that will come back to you for your ratification in March.

Thank you for offering me this opportunity to learn and grow with you as we journey together toward the realization of God's kingdom. May God's peace come to you this season, and linger with you into the new year.

## RESOURCES

### **Saving Jesus** (DVD)

Ever feel like Jesus has been kidnapped by the Christian Right? Saving Jesus is a revolutionary dvd-based small group exploration of Jesus Christ for the third millennium. The 12-week program includes a printable participant reader and a facilitator guide offering discussion questions. The basic format for each weekly 1 – 1 ½ hour session includes conversation around the readings, a 20-minute video segment and guided discussion. The themes are: 1) Introduction: Jesus through the Ages; 2) Who was Jesus? Featuring Matthew Fox; 3) What Can We Know About Jesus (and How)? 4) The World into Which Jesus Was Born Featuring John Dominic Crossan; 5) Jesus' Birth: Incarnation; 6) Teachings of Jesus: Wisdom Tradition Featuring Bernard Brandon Scott; 7) Jesus' Program: The Kingdom of God Featuring John Dominic Crossan; 8) Jesus' Ministry of Compassion; 9) Killing Jesus, Part One: Who Killed Jesus? Featuring Amy-Jill Levine & Helen Prejean; 10) Killing Jesus, Part Two: The Atonement Featuring Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker; 11) The Resurrection of Christ Featuring James Forbes; 12) Why Jesus Is Worth Saving Featuring Marcus Borg.

To borrow this or a different resource, contact the **Resource Center for Churches** at (888) 293-9901 (toll free) or [info@resourcesforthejourney.org](mailto:info@resourcesforthejourney.org).

The staff will gladly reserve resources for you. The center has books, DVDs, reference works, choir anthems, and even a labyrinth available for loan. For a complete listing of resources, go to:

<http://resourcesforthejourney.org/>

## COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY UPDATE

By: Elder Dale Shook, Chair of the Committee on Ministry

Committee On Ministry (COM) membership is changing as we welcome new members Don Casmeay and Adam Copeland, while thanking and saying good-bye to Darrel Cory, Dixon Moorhead, Elaine Hendrickson, and David Nix. Gary Watts and Keri Shelton have consented to continue on second terms. The willingness of all to serve presbytery through COM is truly appreciated.

If there is anyone, particularly elders from the western region, who would be interested in serving as a COM member, please let the Nominating Committee know. Since the presbytery is geographically challenging, it is difficult to be short of members in the western region.

We continue to work with an array of congregations in transition or requesting help for other issues. A couple pastor searches appear to be coming to an end, for which we share the joys; several continue or are just beginning.

COM will have a January retreat which will include the presence of Diana Barber from Synod to discuss a variety of issues, including the new form of government, and we will cover issues related to triennials and transitioning.

Please be aware on your calendar of the excellent educational and fellowship opportunity March 18-19 when Rev. Landon Whitsett, Vice Moderator of General Assembly, will be leading discussions and lectures. Attendance is open and encouraged, further information will follow.

The COM portion of the website has been updated with a few minor changes in personnel, and may undergo further updates after our retreat in January.

My personal thanks again to those COM members who are departing. We have been beneficiaries of your service. And, as a committee, we are always grateful to all congregations and pastors for their input and perspectives to which we listen closely.



### 2012 PER CAPITA

2012 Per Capita was approved at the September Presbytery Meeting. The per capita apportionment is based on the funds necessary for the Presbytery/Synod/General Assembly to do their essential ecclesiastical work.

The Presbytery office has a free brochure which will help individuals understand the fundamentals of Per Capita and Unified mission. If you would like to receive a copy, please contact the office at 701-772-0783 or email [pnpooffice@gmail.com](mailto:pnpooffice@gmail.com)

2012 Per Capita Apportionment breakdown:

General Assembly	\$ 6.50
Synod of Lakes & Prairies	\$ 5.00
Northern Plains Presbytery	\$ 31.00
Total 2011 Per Capita	\$ 42.50

The 2012 apportionment is based on a church's membership as of December 31, 2010 as reported in the 2010 General Assembly Minutes (Part II, Statistics).

## Presbytery's Calendar

Dec 2	Committee on Ministry CC
Dec 3	Winter Presbytery Meeting at all Video Conference Sites
Dec 7	Council CC
Dec 10	Human Rights Day
Dec 13	Committee on Ministry CC
Dec 23-26	Christmas Break, Office Closed
Jan 2	Office Closed
Jan 6	Agenda, Bylaws and Structure (ABS) Meeting
Jan 10	Committee on Ministry mtg
Jan 20	Council Meeting by video
Feb 9	Agenda, Bylaws and Structure (ABS) Meeting
Mar 9 & 10	Spring Presbytery Meeting @ Westminster Presbyterian Church of Devils Lake
Mar 18 & 19	Leadership Retreat in Devils Lake
Mar 29	Agenda, Bylaws and Structure (ABS) Meeting
Apr 20	Council mtg
May 11	Agenda, Bylaws and Structure (ABS) Meeting

CC = Conference Call  
GTM= GoToMeeting  
VCS = Video Conferencing Sites

PNP vision statement:

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

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

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