

# Light of the Northern Plains

Presbytery of the Northern Plains

February 2009

## PRAYER CONCERNS

Diana, sister of Jonathon Starks, who is serving the Calvary Presbyterian Church of Ryder, passed away on January 9<sup>th</sup> after a long fight with cancer. Please keep Diana and her whole family in your prayers.

We have heard the following from our partners in Kenya: "Famine is looming in all parts of Kenya. This is due to crop failure due to insufficient rains in November & December. The Government has declared it a Natural Disaster. We thank God that we can still survive, although in some parts of the country life has been lost."

Chris Bohn, an elder at Grandin Presbyterian Church, was diagnosed in December with acute myeloid leukemia. He is currently undergoing in-patient chemotherapy at MeritCare in Fargo. Once the leukemia is in remission, he will have a bone marrow consult at the U of MN. Please keep Chris and family in your prayers at this time.

Pam Anderson, member of the First Presbyterian Church of Hallock, is a patient at Altru Hospital (Grand Forks) in isolation. Please keep Pam in your prayers during this time of uncertainty.

## WINTER PRESBYTERY MEETING

By: Michael Lochow, Stated Clerk



Installation of Elder Pat O'Donnell as moderator and the Rev. Mary Holtey as vice-moderator.

The 96<sup>th</sup> Stated Meeting of the Presbytery of the Northern Plains was hosted by the Mendenhall Presbyterian Church in East Grand Forks, Minnesota, on Saturday, January 24. The meeting was attended by a total of 79 elder commissioners, ministers, CLPs, visitors and others. The closing worship included the celebration of the Lord's

Supper and the installation of Elder Pat O'Donnell as moderator and the Rev. Mary Holtey as vice-moderator. The offering was split between Presbyterian Clearwater Forest and a local food pantry.

Meeting highlights included a report on changes in the financial statements and a revised budget, a panel discussion on the proposed changes to the Book of Order, honoring a retiring treasurer and election of a replacement, election of several new officers including installation of our new moderator and vice-moderator, a report from the Interim EP search committee, recommendations from COM and several items of Good News.

The Budget and Finance Committee has been working to increase the accuracy and transparency of the Presbytery's financial statements. A comprehensive review has been completed, balances in some line items adjusted and new bank accounts opened. The volatility in the stock market has affected some account balances, which resulted in the approval of a revised budget for 2009.

A panel moderated by the Rev. David Thompson and led by the Revs. Paul Kuhn and Gretchen Graf, Elder Andrew Thostenson (West Fargo) and Stated Clerk Michael Lochow discussed the fourteen, proposed amendments to the Book of Order. The amendment getting the most attention was Amendment 08-B:

Ordained Officers. This amendment would replace the current language in G-6.0106b, which has been the subject of various proposed amendments over the past decade. Commissioners were urged to educate themselves on the amendments and come to the April meeting prepared to vote.

Bill Weispfenning's service to the Presbytery as its treasurer was celebrated with a gift of a book of prayers and a plaque. Bill Cawley, a CPA and member of the church at Forest River, was elected to a 3-year term as treasurer.

In other election action, Marilyn Olson (Fargo) and the Rev. Mindy Meier were reelected to the Nominating Committee and the Rev. Nancy Emerson was elected to complete the 2010 term of the Rev. Joan Swanson on COM.

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## LECTIONARY REFLECTIONS FOR FEB 8 & 15, 2009



-John G. Gibbs, *SCE for PNP*  
[2 Kings 4:18-21, 32-37 (or in RCL, Is. 40:21-31, Ps. 147:1-11); 1 Cor. 9:16-23; Mark 1:29-39; 2 Kings 5:1-15 (RCL adds Ps. 30); 1 Cor. 9:24-27; Mark 1:40-45]

Among the insights of texts for Feb. 8 and 15 these stand out for me in today's situation:

*Prophetic action* works within suffering creation against death, disease, and demonic power. *The apostolic tradition* "frees" the Church to do "all for the sake of the gospel," thereby bringing boundary-breaking "blessings" to "all people." "*A deserted place*" can be made, as Jesus made it, a home for *prayer*. Runners in the race of life focus, aim, exercise "*self-control in all things*," but the "imperishable prize" comes as unearned gift.

We need a Church that is prophetic in practical, effective action. Filled with vision of "the Creator of the ends of the earth," a prophetic Church empowers people to act against death, disease, demonic power, and any other threat to the Creation. We long for a creation restored and a Church renewed. Prophetic eco-justice aims for both. A prophetic Church does not construct her mission from balancing acts between her party-spirits. Her liberating mission comes from the God who acts against the groaning and bondage to decay that pervade creation and community alike (Rom. 8:22-23).

We need a Church in the apostolic tradition that brings boundary-breaking blessings for all people. Following Jesus' initiatives ("you have heard, but I say to you"), the apostolic tradition "jazzed up" scripture as it improvised creatively for its own time. The great themes of God's grace nourish variations beyond precedent. That symphony has not been completed. The mystery of God remains ahead of us no less than the cloud by day and the fire by night remained ahead of the great Exodus pilgrimage.

The Bible of a prophetic and apostolic Church is not a code-book of "dos and don'ts," nor a singular statute that is frozen in time by a misplaced "strict constructionism." Our Bible functions instead "for the sake of the gospel." Like a living constitution, it is a framework for further interpretation and discernment. [W. Stacy Johnson contrasts statute and constitution in The Mystery of God (WJK, 1997), p. 190.] The Bible

as written Word points beyond itself to the living Word in whom alone our faith is placed. It does that by displaying the trajectory of God's acts in cosmos and community. It is for us to discern where and how that trajectory impacts our own time. It is for us to discern how we can "let the same mind" be in us that was in Christ Jesus (Phil. 2:5).

A prophetic and apostolic Church leaves behind "a pattern of misusing the Bible to justify oppression," as Jack Rogers suggests in the title of Chapter 2 in his book Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality (WJK, 2006). We have seen that oppression in use of the word "dominion" to justify ecological irresponsibility while ignoring humanity's calling to "image" the Creator. Oppressive also is use of "proof texts" to justify slavery, patriarchalism, anti-intellectualism (including attacks on science, stem-cell research, and evolution), homophobia, and the addition of heterosexual orientation to prerequisites for ordination. In such oppressions, in such misuses of scripture, there is blessing for no one.

We need a Church whose *prayer*, like that of Jesus, is portable. Far beyond synagogue or church, genuine prayer (whether spoken or silent) is at home in wilderness and deserted places, at home on mountains and plains. Since "the earth is the Lord's, and all that is in it" (Ps. 24:1), we feel enough at home on it to pray there. Far from hoping to escape it, we delight in it, and make ourselves at home on it. We need a Church at home on earth - enough so to seek restoration of the Creation and repair of earth (*tikkun olam*), and enough so to be "keeper" (safeguard) of all our brothers and sisters. The Church's intercession embraces this earth and all that are on it.

We need a Church that *focuses beyond* some races now being run. Our Church has not yet arrived; her goalpost remains elusively far away. We are "on the Way" that leaves behind childish "grasping" and leads toward adult service. We do not control life. We receive it. The race we are called to run extends beyond the horizon of our sight. Its complexities confound our brightest minds and best spirits. Accordingly, we need a Church whose focus and aim "in all things" is on the Lord of history, the One who rules by serving, and who creates humanity to share this dominion of service and repair.

## “LIVING IN A MATERIAL WORLD”

Youth Retreat – April 17-19, 2009



The Presbytery of the Northern Plains Youth Retreat will be held on April 17-19, 2009 at Crystal Springs Camp (40 miles west of Jamestown).

During the weekend, the youth will explore what it means to be a Christian in our Material World.

Advertisers tell us that to be successful we have to wear the right clothes, drive the coolest cars, live in the biggest houses, and be the most athletic. Throughout the weekend we will use large group session, small cell groups, games, skits, and other activities to help us better understand what God has to say about all this “stuff.” This is a topic that we can all relate to.

**Who Can Come?** All 6<sup>th</sup> grade through 12<sup>th</sup> grade youth are invited to come. Friends are welcome!

**When Is It?** The retreat will begin with registration at 7:15 pm on Friday, April 17, 2009 and will conclude after worship on Sunday, April 19, 2009.

**How Much Is It?** The cost of the entire weekend is only \$75. This includes lodging, food, and program expenses. Checks can be made payable and sent to the United Presbyterian Church, 302 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue SE, Jamestown, ND 58401. Financial assistance is available.

**What Do I Need to Bring?** Sleeping bag, pillow (mattresses provided), clothing, toiletries, towel, Bible, notebook, and pen/pencil. Homework, if needed (free time will be provided).

For more information, go to the Presbytery’s website at [www.northernplainspresbytery.com](http://www.northernplainspresbytery.com) or contact Pastor Dave at United Presbyterian Church of Jamestown at 701-252-1748.

## STATISTICAL REPORTING

*By: Michael Lochow, Stated Clerk*



You are reminded that the deadline for reporting the 2008 statistics is February 24, 2009. As this date is neared, the rush for Internet access to the statistical entry page will cause it to slow to a snail’s pace, so enter your information as soon as you can to save yourself time.

Your statistics need to be approved by your session but **NOT** your congregation.

If you have any questions or problems, please call Michael Lochow, stated clerk, at 701-271-4775 or email at [sc.pbypn@gmail.com](mailto:sc.pbypn@gmail.com).

## RESOURCES

### **Before and After Easter: Activities and Ideas for Lent to Pentecost** (Book)

Crafts, service projects, reflection ideas, suggestions for family worship, and a Bible passage for each day of Lent, Easter, and up to the day of Pentecost.

### **Easter Story A - Z: Banner Patterns, Story Scripts and Worship Outlines to Create a Lent and Easter** (Book)

The stories of Lent and Easter are told through the creation of a banner depicted these events. Participants come together to create 26 sections of a banner, one for each letter of the alphabet, which portray the scripture story.

### **Journey to the Cross: Lenten Reflections for Individuals and Groups** (Book)

A seven-week adult study book designed to guide readers to a deeper experience of reflection, meditation, and prayer during the season of Lent.

### **The True Easter Story** (DVD)

Travel with Ray Vander Laan to the land of Israel and discover fascinating truths about the events surrounding the death and resurrection of Jesus. See 2,000-year-old tombs, much like the one that so temporarily held Jesus. Experience a dramatic plunge into the vibrant history and culture of Israel. The True Easter Story is not a superficial Holy Land travelogue. It’s a total cultural immersion directed by teacher and historian Ray Vander Laan. Using his knowledge of ancient customs, Vander Laan probes the true depth of the Easter story as it begins 2,000 years earlier.

### **Resurrection Eggs** (Kits)

A donkey, praying hands, three coins, and a strip of leather... what do all these have in common? You can use them to help children understand the meaning of Easter--the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ.

To borrow a resource, contact the **Resource Center for Churches** at

[info@resourcesforthejourney.org](mailto: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. For a complete listing of resources, go to: <http://resourcesforthejourney.org/>

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## WINTER PRESBYTERY MEETING

Highlights of the COM report included: clarification of CLP Cathy Bliss's (Wilton) authorities, the honorable retirement of the Rev. Don Woodford (Hallock), commissioning of CLP Barb Ault to Hallock, renewal of elders authorized to preside at communion, and approval of the call of the Rev. Paul Henschen to Ellendale.

The Presbytery's search for an Interim Executive Presbyter is moving forward. Interest has been shown by ten candidates. The deadline for submission of applications was January 31. The Committee will review those applications in February and hope to have a candidate by the end of April or early May.

During Good News we heard of:

- A prayer retreat at Red Willow Lake planned for August 28 - 30, 2009. The retreat will be led by the Rev. Joan Gray, Moderator of the 217<sup>th</sup> General Assembly. (See next article for more information.)
- There are \$28,000 in mission grants available and churches were encouraged to make requests (to Council) to help support current and new projects.
- Clearwater Forest had its strongest December in donations ever, which included a \$25,000 bequest from the church in Mankato on the last day of the year.

At this meeting commissioners voted to amend the Presbytery bylaws to provide for two presbytery meetings a year. The language to implement that change was available at the meeting. The vote on this language will be taken in at the next Presbytery meeting on April 24 -25, 2009 at United Presbyterian Church of Jamestown. We hope to see you there.

## BE STILL AND KNOW

### a time for rest, refreshment, and prayer

This is the theme for the Presbytery of the Northern Plains prayer retreat with former PC(USA) Moderator, Joan Gray. Joan invites us by saying:

"Be still and know that I am God" is not a command, but a promise.

God is more willing to speak than we are to listen.

God is more willing to give than we are to receive.

God is more willing to guide than we are to be guided.

The purpose of this retreat is to make time and space to receive what God wants to give us. Rather than gathering information, skills, or techniques, we will allow ourselves to be gathered into a deeper experience of Christ. Through prayer, meditation on scripture, worship, and fellowship, those of us who are always meeting the needs of others can let our needs be met.

### Come and relax into the abundance of God.

*Red Willow Bible Camp, Binford, ND*

*August 28-30, 2009*

Watch for more information in this newsletter and elsewhere.

## Presbytery's Calendar

Feb 4	COM (Sub-group) CC
March 12	Council Mt – location TBA
April 4	Spring PW Gathering at United Presbyterian Church of Jamestown
April 10	Good Friday – Office closed
April 17-19	Spring Youth Retreat at Crystal Springs Camp
April 24	COM Mt RASCALS Mt
April 24-25	Spring Presbytery Meeting at United Presbyterian Church of Jamestown
May 1-2	RASCALS Event
Aug 28-30	Prayer Retreat at Red Willow Bible Camp

CC = Conference Call

VCS = Video Conferencing Sites

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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.

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

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