

Light of the Northern Plains

Presbytery of the Northern Plains

May 2009

PRAYER CONCERNS

Please hold our Chogoria partners in your prayers as they deal with drought and famine.

Please keep everyone in your prayers who are still dealing with the flooding or recovery in our Presbytery.

SPRING PRESBYTERY MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

By: Michael Lochow, Stated Clerk

The Presbytery of the Northern Plains has an Interim Executive! Cheryl Biller, Chair of the Interim Executive Presbyter Search Committee, reported that the Rev. Dr. Stephen Minnema has been called to be Interim Executive for the Presbytery. Rev. Minnema is currently pastoring a church in Madison, Wisconsin, and will begin his duties in Northern Plains on June 1st.

The amendments sent by the 218th General Assembly to the presbyteries for their consideration were presented for discussion and vote. The amendment drawing the most interest was Amendment 8-B which, if approved, would delete the current language in G-6.0106b and replace it with new. Twenty commissioners debated the pros and cons of the amendment. When the final vote was taken, the Presbytery voted to disapprove Amendment 8-B. As fortune would have it, the Presbytery's disapproval was one of two votes on Saturday which sealed the defeat of Amendment 8-B church wide.

The Minot church presented its resolution on per capita. The resolution asked that presbyteries be allowed to withhold per capita not paid by their churches as a matter of conscience, provided that the presbytery had counseled with the congregation as to alternatives. Following vigorous debate the resolution was defeated.

In ministry happenings, the Rev. Dr. Stephen Kisslinger has joined the Presbytery, transferring from the Presbytery of Pittsburgh; Bottineau has called Deborah Burger to begin work on July 19, 2009, and she will be examined for ordination at a special meeting of the Presbytery in the near future; the Rev. Paul Henschen, the new pastor at Ellendale, attended his first Presbytery meeting here and was welcomed; and Blair Moorhead of the Community Presbyterian Church of West Fargo, was accepted as an Inquirer. She will be attending Union Seminary this fall.

There was an emphasis throughout the meeting on the current situation in Kenya. The offering taken during the worship service will be donated to Kenyan Famine Relief. The amount received was reported to be \$985.00. Kenyan Handicrafts were available for purchase and churches were encouraged to explore the possibility of selling the handicrafts in their local communities.

The Presbytery will meet next at First Presbyterian Church, Bismarck, North Dakota, on Friday and Saturday, October 2-3, 2009.

Amendments vote count

Amendment	Yes	No	Abstain
08-A	20	36	1
08-B	21	33	1
08-C	41	14	1
08-D	40	12	3
08-E	30	23	3
08-F	34	16	4
08-G	39	13	3
08-H	49	4	1
08-I	37	11	8
08-J	52	2	1
08-K	49	6	1
08-L	45	10	1
08-M	49	5	1
08-N	48	6	2

THE REV. DR. STEVE MINNEMA, INTERIM EXECUTIVE PRESBYTERY

By: Cheryl Biller, Chair of Interim EP Search Committee

"It's a minor moment in the ministry of Jesus but it speaks volumes about who he was and how he lived. And – I think – it gives us a new and clear vision of who we might be and of how we might live if we truly try to follow him. It has to do with living closer to God in nature and prayer and thereby finding the freedom we need to do what we are called to do.

Mark reports this incident without much in the way of comment. Jesus heals many people. The next morning he gets up early and goes to a wild place to pray. His disciples are besieged by more people who want Jesus help so they hunt for him and when they find him they say, "Everyone is searching for you!" Clearly, they think that Jesus should honor and respond to the needs and expectations of the clamoring multitude. But he simply says, "I'm moving on

to share the message elsewhere since that is what I came to do."

Continued on next page. . .



The point of this minor moment is very clear and well worth our pondering. Jesus found the freedom to say “no” to the expectations with which people sought to trap him and to stay on the course to which he felt called because he was able in nature and in prayer to live close to the Creator God.

Many of us have not found such freedom. We have allowed ourselves to become enmeshed in institutions, or social networks, or workplaces or families, where conforming to the expectations of others is our primary concern. We seldom lift our heads above this enmeshment to ask what God is calling us to do. And, if we do, we do not know how to sustain such a commitment because we do not know how to live close to God in nature and in prayer. And please know that when I say this, I am speaking as much about myself as anyone else.”

These thoughts open a recent sermon preached by the Rev. Dr. Steve Minnema, who has been called to work begin with the Presbytery of the Northern Plains beginning June 1 as Interim Executive Presbyter.

Steve grew up in the suburbs of Grand Rapids, Michigan. His grandparents lived on a farm where he spent much time as a child; and so he has appreciation for our presbytery’s rural and urban mix of populations. He remained in Michigan for his undergraduate work, studying at the Univ. of Michigan. From there he earned his Masters in Divinity from Harvard and later a Doctor of Ministry from Garret Evangelical Theological Seminary on the campus of Northwestern in Illinois. In the midst of all that formal education, Steve spent time in Haiti and Cuba on peacemaking tours, studied the theological writings of Douglas John Hall through the Pastors Theologian Program at Princeton and with Walter Bruggeman at Boston College, and trained in church conflict mediation through the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center.

Much of his employed career has been spent in our synod – Steve’s first call was to a yoked parish in Houston and Rushford, MN. He served as a redevelopment pastor near Madison, WI, and spent much of the 1990’s in Mankato, MN. For about 6 years, he served a church in the Chicago suburbs that grew from 250 to 400 during his leadership. Most recently, he has served a congregation in Madison, WI, in which he initiated a co-pastor model. He brings experiences gained serving congregations that seem to be as diverse as those within our presbytery. Out of all this experience, he has discerned that his gifts will be best used in a place where the people have as their highest priority following Christ. He has also stated that he wishes to have good conversation around questions like: how is our identity distinct from the identity we acquire from culture; how do we discern Christ’s call to ministry in this world with its many crises; what gifts have we been given for this service and how are we equipped to use them faithfully; and last, do we realize how much we need reciprocal relationships with others if we are to discover our identity, discern our call, and develop our gifts?

Steve told the search committee that he’s had a fascination with scripture from childhood – he read the entire Bible through twice before he was 10! He still considers the Bible the foundation for a teaching and preaching ministry. The committee found in him a person who could skillfully articulate his own positions on theological issues and why he held those positions, but who is respectful, and in fact eager, to engage people of diverse opinions in conversation. His references consistently told us he was intelligent and honest, hardworking and faithful. We found in him the person we were seeking: one who had clear understanding of his own theological beliefs and one who could successfully create space where diverse and opposing ideas were welcome, encouraged, and respected. In all this, we hope he will help us build bridges of understanding and common ground in an overarching desire to be engaged in mission.

Steve expressed his love of reading, and his sermons underscore this with references to all types of literature. As soon as we extended a call to him, he began reading Kathleen Norris’s books! He is a weaver and brings his loom with him so perhaps we can look forward to seeing what the plains of our presbytery inspire from his hands and his threads. He tells us he enjoys most all food but spice is good – Thai and Mexican are two of his favorites. He is not without pet peeves, and one of them includes church leaders who look at diminishing budgets and choose to increase evangelism efforts. *Scent of a Woman*, *Dead Poets Society*, and the *Dream Team* are movies he appreciates. By way of rounding out his interests, he regularly plays basketball and tennis.

On June 1st, Stephen Minnema will begin a short tenure with this presbytery charged with helping us: to understand what it could look like to live into our vision statement *to be a vibrant, informed Presbyterian community which nourishes ministry and joins in Christ’s mission*; to better understand and strengthen our committee on ministry; and to consider how to staff our presbytery so we can be the presence for God we hope to be on the northern plains. “I am deeply humbled and honored to be offered the opportunity to be your interim executive presbyter. I am looking forward to meeting people and beginning important conversations through which – I hope and pray – the Spirit of God will show us the way toward a bright future of mutual love and service.” Rev. Dr. Steve Minnema.

CHOGORIA PARTNERSHIP INVOLVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

From the Chogoria Partnership Ministry Team

Famine Relief – In response to the efforts of our partners to meet the needs of those suffering famine from the effects of the continuing drought in Kenya, we encourage you to raise money for **Famine Relief**. The need is immediate and so this campaign will last until the end of May. Please give the members of your congregation the opportunity to donate to the **Chogoria Famine Relief Fund**. Donations will be received through May 31 and sent to Chogoria the first week of June. Please make checks out to Presbytery of the Northern Plains and note “Kenyan Famine Relief” on them. Donations may be sent to: Presbytery of the Northern Plains, 5555 So. Washington Suite A, Grand Forks, ND 58201.

Bible Study – We have received a Bible study written by Rev. Susan from the Chogoria Presbytery. This is in response to our commitment to study the Bible together. The study is “Work for God – A Study of Nehemiah.” Several churches in Chogoria and Northern Plains have already begun this study. We encourage your congregation to do the same. The study can be downloaded from the PNP website. Come, study with us! If you wish to share insights gained from the study with our Chogoria partners, send them to Sharon Secor at sjssecor1@aol.com and she will pass them on.

Sister Congregations – We are trying to ascertain how many of us in the PNP are aware of our sister congregation relationship, how many are in contact with their sister congregation and how many are interested in pursuing this relationship. Forms with examples of what some of the active sister congregation relationships look like and what some of the hopes for future relationships are were available at the most recent Presbytery meeting. This form can also be viewed on the Presbytery website.

Over the next several months, the ministry team hopes to call all of the congregations to find out their interest in being involved in a sister congregation relationship.

Prayer – Please keep our Chogoria partners in your prayers as they continue to reach out to those who are suffering during this time of famine and to make ends meet in their own homes as food prices continue to rise astronomically.

JULY YOUTH TRIP TO WASHINGTON DC



All 9-12 grade youth are invited to join us for a trip to Washington DC for the DCLA Conference sponsored by Youth Specialities (<http://dcla2009.com/>). The DC/LA Conference is a national youth event that is held every three years in LA and Washington DC. Sponsored by Youth Specialities, it is designed to equip high school youth with tools to deepen their faith and communicate that faith to others. The five day conference will include large group sessions, with about 15,000 youth in attendance, and break out small group sessions. Several big named Christian bands and solo artists will be performing.

The cost will be approximately \$400 and will include transportation, lodging, and program expenses. A charter bus will be leaving Jamestown on July 7 and will return on the 15th. Scholarship funds are available through the Youth Connection Council. Space is limited, so please contact Elizabeth Sherfy at the United Presbyterian Church of Jamestown at 701-252-1748 or esherfy@daktel.com as soon as possible.

RESOURCES

Seven Spiritual Gifts of Waiting: Patience, Loss of Control, Living in the Present, Compassion, Gratitude (Book)
[Whitcomb, Holly W.](#)

In America, waiting presents an enormous challenge. We are impatient, 'fix-it' kinds of people — and not all situations can be fixed. This book presents seven spiritual gifts that waiting can teach us: Patience, Loss of Control, Live in the Present, Compassion, Gratitude, Humility, and Trust in God. An excellent resource during times of waiting within the church year including Advent and Lent, the book includes spiritual exercises and reflection questions for personal or group use as well as a retreat design.

When the world breaks your heart : Spiritual ways to live with tragedy (Book)

[Clapper, Gregory Scott.](#)

By examining six ways of coping with tragedy--mystery, tears, humility, gentleness, hope, and the presence of God--the author helps us see God's presence in the midst of our broken-heartedness.

The Word Made Fresh: Communication, Church, and Faith Today (Book)

[Gould, Meredith](#)

The Word Made Fresh: Communicating Church and Faith Today is more than a how-to guide. It will help readers appreciate the significance, value, and role of church communications as a ministry. Readers will be invited to understand the role they play in transmitting the Gospel and counselled about using spiritual practices to face the challenges of using secular means to communicate sacred messages.

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. For a complete listing of resources, go to: <http://resourcesforthejourney.org/>



PRESBYTERIANS ACTING TO RESTORE CREATION

By: John G. Gibbs, SCE for PNP

“Green and Lean” is a 5-page article in the April 2009 issue of Presbyterians Today, which reports,

“More churches are seeking ways to conserve the Earth’s resources.”

Among them is our own church at Grand Forks which built a new structure with windows that resist heat transfer, extra insulation, and a heat pump that warms the church in winter, and cools it in summer. The article quotes Gretchen Graf: “Building this way is a witness to environmental integrity, to stewardship of the environment.”

Here are some other accomplishments by Presbyterian churches: print the bulletin on recycled paper, email newsletters rather than snail-mail them (but don’t tell my USPS worker-friend in Bemidji!), use CFL light-bulbs or the more efficient LED (light-emitting diode) lights, install dual-flush toilets, have cisterns collect rainwater for use on the landscape, replace old boilers and A/C units (funded in part by a loan from the Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program), install solar panels to produce most of the electric power used, carpool to attend worship and meetings, plant a garden and thereby reduce lawn-mowing costs and pollution while simultaneously giving excess produce to the local food bank.

This article is well worth recovering, for our fellow Presbyterians have many other ideas to help Presbyterians restore creation. Among the websites listed are these:

- www.pcusa.org/environment (Environmental Justice Ministries)
- www.pcusa.org/palms (The Eco-Pals Project)
- www.prcweb.org (Presbyterians for Restoring Creation)
- www.pcusa.org/pilp (Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program)
- www.nrpe.org (National Religious Partnership for the Environment)
- www.energystar.org (Energy Star)

PRC’s 2009 conference, “Embracing God’s Call to be Green,” will meet July 7-11, 2009 at the Montreat (N.C.) Conference Center. Information and application forms are at www.montreat.org. This location is near Asheville, the Blue Ridge Parkway, and Mount Mitchell, which at 6,684’ is the tallest mountain east of the Mississippi.

PRESBYTERY MISSION TRIP (JUNE 22 – 27)

All 9th graders through adults are invited for our Presbytery Mission Trip to Clearwater Forest and inner city Minneapolis this summer. We will be doing some work at Clearwater Forest (ie, trail clearing and painting) for about four days and then will spend several days in Minneapolis working with two inner-city mission groups.

The cost for the trip will be \$50 per person and will include transportations, room and board. To register for this trip please contact Elizabeth Sherfy at the United Presbyterian Church of Jamestown at 701-252-1748 or esherfy@daktel.com.

SUMMER OFFICE HOURS

The Presbytery office will normally be open Monday thru Thursday 9:00 am to 4:30 pm from Memorial Day weekend until Labor Day weekend. Due to flexible schedules and reduced staffing during the summer, please call before stopping by to make sure someone will be at the office.

Presbytery’s Calendar

May 1-2	Reformed Spiritually at Fireside Inn & Suites in Devils Lake
May 7	ABS Mtg
May 11	Flood Response Team Mtg
May 25	Memorial Day – Office closed
June 4	Council Mtg Special Presbytery Mtg
June 22-27	Youth Mission Trip
July 6	Office Closed
July 7-15	Mission Trip to Washington DC – Youth & Adult
Aug 27	Council Mtg
Aug 28-30	Prayer Retreat at Red Willow Bible Camp
Sept 7	Labor Day – Office Closed
Oct 2-3	Fall Presbytery Meeting at First Presbyterian Church of Bismarck
Oct 17	ECCT Event with Doug Pagitt at First Presbyterian Church of Grand Forks

CC = Conference Call
VCS = Video Conferencing Sites

PNP vision statement:

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

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.

Other contributors: David Thompson, Sharon Secor, Cheryl Biller, Micheal Lochow and John Gibbs

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