



Issue 2
April 2009

Hope on the Prairie

GREETINGS FROM BEHIND THE SCENES

You are reading our newsletter, and it has increased curiosity about the North Dakota Conference of Churches among readers. Your NDCC Board is happy about that. We hope we can engender a lot more curiosity and interest in the NDCC throughout North Dakota.

In a recent conversation with clergy a suggestion was made which piggy-backed an approach the Board has talked about a number of times. The suggestion was to develop a data base of local/area ministerial memberships which can be used to email relevant NDCC information to clergy and congregations.

Because changes in resident clergy happen periodically it has been difficult to develop a plan by which such a data base can a) be collected and established; and b) maintained with current names and changes.

A variant of such a broad data base was for NDCC to have on record the name of one clergy in each ministerial group who would receive, and be asked to disseminate, information from the NDCC. This would pertain particularly to notices of programs, workshops, etc. which the NDCC be providing for you and your congregations.

Such program/workshop announcements would pertain to not only those sponsored by the NDCC but also those from other groups, such as Charis, or a denominational offering open to the public, or from one of our colleges or universities, etc., which we are often asked to disseminate.

Hence, if your local/area ministerial group would like to designate one person who would receive such information, and be willing to share it with the rest of the group, please send the name and email address of that person to Elicia, our Exec Secretary and Editor of this Newsletter. The website address, and email address, is posted in this Newsletter.

Please keep in touch with your comments, suggestions and news items of ecumenical happenings in your communities.

Reuben Schnaidt, Pres.

NDCC

Why Aren't People Coming to Church?

Part 1 of Exploring Missional Theology

By Kevin Goodrich O.P.A.

This is a question I have been asked dozens of times and have spent literally hundreds of hours researching, learning about, and discussing in seminars, graduate courses, books, as well as with regular lay folk after Sunday worship all around our country.

This is a complex question and assumes that people use to attend church more often in the past – an assumption that generally speaking is true, but we must remember there have always been people who have not worshipped regularly in a Christian Church for the entire history of the United States.

The experts who study these trends, both Christian, and secular point to a fundamental shift that our western society is going through right now. It is often referred to as the shift from the age of modernity to the age of post-modernity. In this post-modern era our culture is becoming increasingly diverse and society with its vast communication abilities is becoming more complex to navigate. Churches use to perform several important social functions in our communities, but for the most part these important roles have been taken over by other institutions. For example, at one point you had to attend church to be connected socially, to receive education, and health care, but this is no longer the case.

Not attending church use to carry a stigma in many parts of the United States, but this is no longer the case, and your social opportunities and standing in a community are not adversely affected if you don't attend worship. In fact, some research (as well as the Bible) indicates that being an active Christian may have more adverse affects on your social opportunities than not attending!

For the last fifty years (especially after the 1960s) American Christians have tended to lament, make excuses, and hope that people would come back to the Church. The research indicates that increasingly people do not come back to church later in life – even after having children – and it is no longer unusual to find 2nd or 3rd generation families who have never attend a church (with the occasional wedding or funeral being the exception). This means they have virtually no Christian memory and their understanding of Christianity is gleaned entirely from popular culture.

This shift from the Church being an important part of civic life to being one of hundreds of sub-communities in any given city or town has left American Christianity reeling.

What do we do? How do we re-invent ourselves in the light of the fundamental shift in culture that will never go back to the way it use to be?

The first steps to answering these questions is to explore what the real purposes of the Christian faith and thus the Church really are – many people are looking for spirituality, but find that churches have forgotten how to be vibrant places of spiritual commitment, joy, and difference making.

In the next issue of the NDCC newsletter I'll explore further the purposes of the Church in our post-modern age. One thing is for certain - our new situation has many implications for ecumenical work among the churches in the coming decades.



"The North Dakota Conference of Churches gathers Christian faith traditions to further express our unity in Jesus Christ through prayer, dialogue and shared ministry."





In Wisdom and Stature

[7 Key Points]

A Call by the North Dakota Conference of Churches for Reflection on Extracurricular Activities for Youth and Children

Introduction

Sacred Scripture tells us that Jesus grew in "wisdom and stature." (Lk 2:52) All parents seek the same for their children and extracurricular activities provide excellent opportunities for growth and development. However, when done for the wrong reasons or done without the proper balance between the activities, school, family, and religious obligations, the consequences can be detrimental to the children, the family, and the community.

1. We must remember that the goal of any extracurricular activity is to foster the full development of our children. It is not to create a winning team or future professional athletes.
2. Although the maxim, "practice makes perfect" may be true, we must remember that achieving perfection is not the purpose of youth extracurricular activities.
3. It might behoove us to question whether traveling long distances and whether playing teams from other places is really necessary to accomplish the true purpose of the activity
4. Parents and coaches must also focus on their child's individual growth, rather than the child's acquisition of particular skills or accomplishments.
5. Parents, schools and organizers should consider whether family, religious, and school obligations have their proper place, whether a proper balance exists in the lives of children, and about what messages we are sending as to what is important and what is not.
6. Extracurricular activities should reach out and include the greatest number of interested children.
7. By working together to make the best of extracurricular activities we can help ensure that those activities positively contribute to the growth of our children – and ourselves – in wisdom and stature.



Our Members:

American Baptist Churches of the Dakotas • Church of Brethren, Mon-Dak Area • Church of God (Anderson) • Episcopal Diocese of ND • Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Eastern ND Synod, Western ND Synod • Moravian Church in America, Northern Province • Presbyterian Church, USA, Presbytery of the Northern Plains • Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) • Roman Catholic Church, Bismarck Diocese, Fargo Diocese • United Church of Christ, Northern Plains Conference • United Methodist Church, Dakotas Conference.

UPCOMING BOARD MEETING:

MAY 18, 2009
JAMESTOWN, ND
9:30 AM

SEPTEMBER 21, 2009
9:30 AM

JANUARY 18, 2010
9:30 AM

UPCOMING NDCC EVENTS

ND101

October 1-2, 2009

Maryvalle Monastery

Valley City, ND



FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO SUBMIT AN ARTICLE CONTACT

ELICIA JACOBSON
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
PO BOX 123
MANDAN ND 58554
701-226-8037
Exe_sec.ndcc@yahoo.com

www.ndconferenceofchurches.com



Pastors Pray Together for Unity

By Stephen Wisthoff

Each Wednesday morning, pastors in Bismarck can be seen gathering around a large conference room table sharing their prayer concerns, passions and upholding each other in prayer.

It began over a decade ago as the Evangelical ministerial group known as the BMEMF (Bismarck-Mandan Evangelical Ministerial Fellowship) began to pray together daily for change and revival in the city and surrounding area. Pastors met daily for one full year and eventually adopted a once-a-week format where they would meet at a local pizza shop. A handful of pastors from Bismarck and Mandan met intermittently and by the late 90s, the group faded out. In preparation for an area-wide crusade in 1999, the pastors began to meet again at First Baptist Church of Bismarck where they continue to meet today. It began with a handful and within a couple years grew to a dozen and later to over twenty.

The purpose of the gathering is to seek God's direction and find unity and common mission among the churches of the area. Each Wednesday morning, local pastors can step away from their congregational-focused ministry and unite together to discern how God might want churches to work in unity and commonality. Over time, an atmosphere of trust emerged, allowing pastors to cooperate rather than compete with each other. The atmosphere is relaxed and religious humor and gentle ribbing seems to lead to healthy laughter among those present. A prayer schedule was established and distributed so that every few weeks, every major denomination, local church, and para-church group has been elevated in prayer during the one-hour meeting. When a pastor has an urgent need, he or she often feels free to call upon the other leaders to pray for personal and profession needs.

Conducting business is discouraged at these meetings in order to keep the focus on prayer. Furthermore, the promotion of congregational events is discouraged in order to maintain unity. The prayer group has become the backbone of the BMEMF by building more intimate relationships among the clergy. All pastors are invited to attend the gathering each Wednesday at 8:30 a.m. at First Baptist Church at 306 E. Divide Ave. The meeting concludes promptly at 9:30.

