February 2022 eNews

Clearing Ahead

Rev. Dr. Marc Ian Stewart

*With your ears you will hear a word from behind you: “This is the way; stay on it, whether you go to the right or the left.”* Isaiah 30:21

As if the past 24 months have not fogged up enough in our lives, welcome to post-omicron days. Uncertainty is not just about CoVid and whether it has become safe enough to get comfortable with no-masks. It seems nothing is clear, from Olympic athlete doping procedures, to what is happening between Russia and the Ukraine, to whether the two political parties are devolving or consolidating, to whether faith is holding us together or is irrelevant. And maybe the lack of clarity in the world is just the blurred perception of an exhausted humanity.

I know that when I can’t see clearly it is usually because of varieties of physical, emotional, social, and spiritual exhaustion. I overexert, and I can almost see star lights and not where they should be. I get flooded with feelings, and those filters that balance perspectives can clog. An encounter with another person becomes unavoidable in the worst way, and it can devolve into complete non-caring. And nothing is as dispiriting to faith as apathy.
I am hearing a lot of exhaustion within my social and ministerial circles. It is no wonder so much is not clear to us. We don’t even know what church will look like half a generation from now. Our exhausted efforts seem to be coming up short, as a group of local church leaders recently told me.

Yet, people are looking for clarity.

Seeking clarity is the young Olympian plugged into earbuds in the minutes leading up the defining performance of their specialty. I suppose it doesn’t matter if it is music or a mindfulness meditation being heard, but that it is accessible. What in our worship life can be accessible like that?

Seeking clarity is the bartender I recently met who goes to a Wednesday morning Bible study at a new church in town because no one tells them what they have to believe about the text. And they like that the Sunday morning sermon affirms what they read, though they have to work at making sense of their recent immigrant pastor’s accent. What openness and affirmation is available to millennials in our study groups?

Seeking clarity is the cohort of rural church folk from around the UCC who meet by zoom each month to share how they keep faith where they are. How open are you to what others are doing?

Seeking clarity are our church members in discernment with the conference about how they may be called to leadership with and on behalf of church. Sara Branom (Great Falls First UCC) graduates from Chicago Theological School in May and senses a clear call to hospital chaplaincy. Michael Craddock (Butte UCC) is a distance student at Sioux Falls Seminary and is exploring a call to military chaplaincy in the National Guard Chaplain Candidate Program. Where are you called to live out your faith?

Seeking clarity are all of us as that nudge of the Spirit directs to what is right with God.

Seeking clarity is Jesus in prayer: *I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them. John 17:26*

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**Conference News**

Send church news items to [ucc@mnwcucc.org](mailto:ucc@mnwcucc.org) before the 10th of each month.

**First UCC Billings refugee support**

Rev. Lisa Harmon writes about sharing a meal with the new Afghan family in Billings: To see the littlest ones eat naan dipped in lamb stew from Ambrin’s hand is something I will never forget. God was swirling among us in this sacred time. This was nourishment. It was
Colstrip Community Church

Valentine’s Day Meal

The Colstrip United Community Church Women’s Circle gave a Valentine’s Day meal for church members. The menu included: chicken cordon-bleu, outback green beans, twice-baked potatoes, spinach salad, and dessert.

Great Falls First Congregational UCC

supports shelter for littles

Toby's House is a local crisis nursery, named after October “Toby” Perez, who was only two years old when she died from abuse in 2011. Toby’s House provides urgent and emergency care for children ages 0-6, at no cost to families. There are no income requirements for services, services that are accessible to the public. Toby’s House believes all children deserve safe, loving, and immediate shelter during a family’s crisis. It is a 501(c)3 Non-Profit Organization and relies on the community’s generosity through donations and grants to help care for innocent kids at risk. A table is set up in the church narthex with a house and hearts, listing items needed at the nursery.

Red Lodge Community UCC

New Women’s Gathering

NEW! We are starting a new monthly women’s ministry at our church. The first event will be on a Saturday with
brunch at 11:00 a.m. at the church. The focus of this group is self-care and celebration as an outreach ministry to the women of Red Lodge.

Miles City United Christian Church

Valentine Love gift box

A box of chocolates and wine from Rev. Bob Thaden's Tongue River Winery made for an excellent church Valentine's Day gift box. Proceeds went to OGHS Week of Compassion.

Summer 2022 Outdoor Ministries

. . . click on pics for more information

What is Outdoor Ministry?

Why is Outdoor Ministry Important?

What do we need to realize to make Outdoor Ministry happen?

What is needed from Churches and members around the Conference?
As COM moves forward to “Reconnect, Reclaim, Refresh, Renew,” we urge everyone to support the events which happen in 2022 and to join in the vision, planning, and implementation of what Outdoor Ministry will become as the Conference moves forward.

Information has been sent to the Churches. Invitations have been sent to past leaders, chaplains, counselors, and campers. After two years of not being able to host a full Outdoor Ministry Program, COM is planning a wonderful set of adventures to get everyone back into the outdoors. Our being able to run our camps is dependent on the support we get from churches and folks around the conference. Will you help? We need to confirm leadership this week so we can determine registration, program needs and viability of the adventures. Will you pledge your support?

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<th>Adventure</th>
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<th>Leader</th>
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Volunteers enlisted (Teams will be determined by leader group)

Meg Hatch (3-5 or 6-8)
Katie Stubbe (3-5 or 6-8)
Terry Stubbe (3-5 or 6-8)
Allysa Champin (3-5 or 6-8)
Charles Wei (9-12)

Adult Adventure June 27 - July 2 Christ:Ken We are looking to offer one or more adventures rotating through the week with a leader for each adventure and one chaplain for the group.

Adult Adventure August 21-28 Christ:Ken We are looking to offer one or more adventures rotating through the week with a leader for each adventure and one chaplain for the group.

Bob and Nancy Stegemiller Memorial Family Retreat Sept 2-5 Minnagish We are looking to offer a family weekend of activities. COM (Trudi Downer, Meg Hatch, Katie Pedergast, Axel Blankett) will lead the Retreat.

*1 chaplain for all three groups to share (#) is the needed number of volunteers in each category.

As COM moves forward to “Reconnect, Reclaim, Refresh, Renew,” we urge everyone to support the events which happen in 2022 and to join in the vision, planning, and implementation of what Outdoor Ministry will become as the Conference moves forward.

Click for More Information

**Invitations to Special Events**

**Rural Ministries Initiative**

Rural church leaders, including some from our MT-NW churches will speak to the joys and challenges of serving a rural community. They will talk about how rural church and community engage with each in the backdrop of current times (pastoral presence for covid, economic uncertainty,
social justice issues, families/youth outreach, elder care…whatever you feel most passionate about). [register here]

Zoom with Rev. Andrew Warner on March 20

**Planned Giving Seminar**

University Congregational Church is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

**Topic:** Planned Giving with Rev. Andrew Warner

**Time:** Mar 20, 2022 11:00 AM Mountain Time (US and Canada)

Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber in person on April 6

**Nationally Renowned Minister**

New York Times best-selling author, Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber, will present on her book, "Shameless: A Sexual Reformation," which reminds us that sexual flourishing can and should be for all genders, all bodies, and all humans. This lecture on April 6 at 6 p.m. is sponsored by United Campus Ministry at MSU-Billings, MSU-B Women and Gender Studies, and the Rocky Mountain College’s Wheatley Lectures. Methodist Bishop Karen Oliveto will be hosting a conversation with Rev. Bolz-Weber following the presentation and a Q & A will follow along with a book signing. Tickets to the event are free. [RSVP here]

Church Leaders Breakfast on April 6

**Rocky Mountain College Invite**

Come and be a part of your faith story. The Church Relations Committee of the Rocky Mountain College invite you and church leaders to visit our UCC related Rocky Mountain College for breakfast on April 6, 2022, 8 - 9:30 am. This will be an occasion to hear some of the ongoing story of Rocky Mountain College’s mission to provide first class education, to meet staff and faculty, and most importantly to hear from students who continue the fine tradition of making Rocky Mountain College a place worthy of honor and pride.
Mayflower UCC Zoom Book Club

"Silver, Sword and Stone" ... Marie Arana

Review: “Against the background of a thousand years of vivid history, acclaimed writer Marie Arana tells the timely and timeless stories of three contemporary Latin Americans whose lives represent three driving forces that have shaped the character of the region: exploitation (silver), violence (sword), and religion (stone).” details in the Mayflower Weekly

Pilgrim UCC Zoom Book Club

ATLAS OF THE HEART, Mapping Meaningful Connection and the Language of Human Experience by Brene Brown

Review: “In her latest book, five-time #1 New York Times bestselling author Dr Brené Brown, writes, "If we want to find the way back to ourselves and each other, we need language and the grounded confidence to both tell our stories, and to be stewards of the stories that we hear." Find details in the Pilgrim UCC Bozeman News and Updates

Conference Minister suggestion
Who Do We Choose to Be?
Margaret Wheatley

Author: "I know it is possible for leaders to use their power and influence, their insight and compassion, to lead people back to an understanding of who we are as human beings, to create the conditions for our basic human qualities of generosity, contribution, community and love to be evoked no matter what. I know it is possible to experience grace and joy in the midst of tragedy and loss. I know it is possible to create islands of sanity in the midst of wildly disruptive seas. I know it is possible because I have worked with leaders over many years in places that knew chaos and breakdown long before this moment. And I have studied enough history to know that such leaders always arise when they are most needed. Now it's our turn."

Pastoral Ministry

Columbus Community UCC

Rev. Kate Stulce installed as pastor and teacher

On January 23, 2022, Rev. Kate Stulce was installed in a beautiful worship service. Rev. Meg Hatch (Absarokee UCC) preached.
Broadus Powder River UCC, searching with ELCA to share a pastor
Baker UCC has a new church profile especially developed for rural churches
Sidney Peoples UCC and Savage UCC have also engaged a pastoral search company to supplement their search with the UCC.
Big Timber UCC is completing its church profile and will soon be searching
University UCC Missoula seeks a middle school youth minister
Pilgrim UCC Bozeman seeks an office manager

Conference Green Team

Acts of Greening

At our February 15 Green Team meeting, we got to talking about the big issues of climate change, the arctic glaciers melting, and the concern to not allow the temperature of the planet to increase over 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels. We will continue to educate ourselves about these issues.

One of us had attended a rally to oppose the construction of a methane plant in Laurel, with pipes to run under the Yellowstone River. This is to be the first of eight methane plants constructed by Northwest Energy. We would hope that renewable energy, such as solar and wind energy, could be the where Northwest Energy looks to supply its customers.

We discussed the book by Broks Berndt, Cathedral on Fire, published by the UCC that urges us to look at Genesis again, as for the first time, and consider the Big Gardener, our Holy One. Can we approach the needs of the garden with as much urgency as those all over the world approached the rebuilding of the Notre Dame Cathedral after it burned?

Here are the things we decided we could do. We invite you to join us:

1. We can share climate issues with our congregations.
2. We can communicate with our congressional representatives.
3. We can read Cathedral on Fire and other books and articles to educate ourselves.
4. We can change our default search engine on our phone and computer to Ecosia. Ecosia, a free browser, generates income through search ads, and then uses over 80% of their monthly profits to plant trees. . . over 144 million trees so far. . . . in 9,000 planting sites all over the world. They plant native species benefiting the local population. Approximately 45 searches plant a tree. Also, Ecosia does not sell data to advertisers and has no third-party trackers.

Our next Green Team meeting will be on March 15 at 2 p.m. on zoom. Won’t you join us? Contact Jennifer at the Conference Office to get the link.
March 27, 2022 suggested offering

OGHS is where we catch up with where God Is

By the time we hear about a need somewhere in the world, we, in the United Church of Christ, are already present through our support of One Great Hour of Sharing, our global ministries partners with Church World Service, to coordinate and provide worldwide support. Our UCC Disaster Ministries was present even in our MT-NWy Conference by providing $3000 to assist Red Lodge Community UCC responding to community needs following the Robertson Draw fire in June 2021.
Send calendar items to Conference office by the 10th of each month

February 21-23 Clergy Retreat at Cane Ridge West, Lincoln MT
March 1 Committee for Outdoor Ministries. 7 pm
March 2 Ash Wednesday
March 10 eNews article and pic submission deadline
March 13, 2022. Last Service at Amistad Chapel zoom
March 14-17, Council of Conference Ministers in Cleveland
March 15 Green Team 2 pm
March 27 Marc Stewart preaches at Glendive UCC
April 6 Church Leaders Breakfast, Rocky Mountain College 8 - 9:30 am
April 6 Nadia Bolz-Weber presentation st MSU-B Billings 7 pm
April 10. Marc Stewart preaches at Baker UCC

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