



Keeping in Touch

An e-newsletter for ministry partners in the Synod of Lakes and Prairies

FEBRUARY 13, 2009

You can find the synod online at www.lakesandprairies.org or on My Space at www.myspace.com/synodoflakesandprairies.

News around the synod

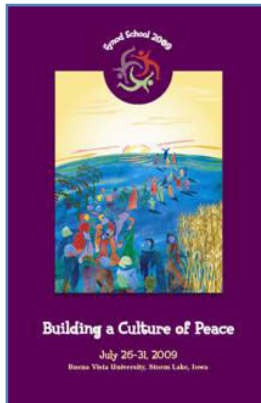
- [1. Synod School ads posted on Web site](#)
- [2. Synod's SDOP committee awards \\$53,000](#)
- [3. World-Herald story features Underwood Hills](#)
- [4. Gray highlights officer training in Minn Valleys](#)
- [5. Flood recovery continues in Iowa](#)
- [6. Hillcrest notes awards, philanthropy mag mention](#)
- [7. School for pastors slated in July](#)
- [8. Calvin Crest seeks camp directors, counselors](#)

Seminary news

- [9. Dubuque Seminary sets annual mission conference](#)
- [10. Project Burning Bush provides taste of seminary](#)

Pensions, foundation news

- [11. BOP head reflects on economic crisis](#)
- [12. New reports, resource available on BOP site](#)



1. SYNOD SCHOOL ADS POSTED ON WEB SITE: Believe it or not, summer will come to the northern plains states and that means that Synod School, the long-running educational ministry of the Synod of Lakes and Prairies, will be just around the corner. The Synod School catalog will be mailed soon; an advance look at the catalog cover, and additional information, can be found on the synod's Web site at www.lakesandprairies.org/school.html.

Also, several high resolution ads for print publications, such as newsletters and bulletins, are at the same location. ([Return to top](#))



2. SYNOD'S SDOP COMMITTEE AWARDS \$53,000: The Committee on the Self Development of People of the Synod of Lakes and Prairies awarded \$53,000 this winter to five organizations that are combating racism and poverty. The committee assists the broader church in carrying out its global commitment to help the economically poor, oppressed and disadvantaged people who own, control and benefit directly from projects that promote long-term change in their lives and communities. Grant funds from the synod committee were distributed in January. The committee issued \$15,000 grants each to two Minneapolis organizations, Anti-Racism Study - Dialogue Circles (www.cherokeeparkunited.org/asdic.php), 1826-C South 5th St., and Lydia Women's Empowerment Project (www.kwanzaachurch.org/Ministries/LydiaProject.htm), 3700 Bryant Ave. North. A Richfield, Minn., organization, Table of Bread Catering, 7101 Nicollet Ave. South, received a \$10,000 grant. A Moorhead, Minn., organization, Mujeres Unidas - or Women United (www.mujeresunidaswomenunited.org/) - 200 5th St. South, received a grant of \$8,000 and Jefferson Haven Tenant Organization (<http://www.pcusa.org/sdop/stories/hibbing.htm>), 3112 6th Ave. East, Hibbing, Minn., received \$5,000. Also, SDOP Sunday is March 1. Details can be found at www.pcusa.org/sdop. ([Return to top](#))

3. WORLD-HERALD STORY FEATURES UNDERWOOD HILLS: Underwood Hills Presbyterian Church in Omaha, Neb., began hosting a "dog-friendly" service in December. It recently caught the attention of the Omaha World-Herald newspaper and a story appeared Feb. 13. The story began, "The sanctuary looked like what might happen if the biblical tale of Noah's Ark met the hit movie 'Hotel for Dogs.' Two by two, people and dogs filed into Underwood Hills Presbyterian Church. A Yorkshire terrier. A goldendoodle. A border collie. And their proud owners. An usher handed out rugs for the dogs. Worshippers drifted to pews amid the jingle of tags and collars. The Rev. Becky Balestri stepped to the front. The dogs were a little restless, but Balestri was calm. They would settle down soon." The complete story can be found at

[13.](#) Foundation group announces voluntary retirement program

Eco-palms, environment news

[14.](#) Eco-palms available

for Palm Sunday

[15.](#) 'Web of Creation' fosters sustainable world

PC(USA) news

[16.](#) SDOP is now on YouTube

[17.](#) Parsons supports 'Big Tent' event

[18.](#) 'Big Tent' online registration is now open

[19.](#) Moderator names committee for civil union, marriage

[20.](#) Membership set for Heidelberg, Israel-Palestine committees

[21.](#) Stewardship event slated in Kansas City

[22.](#) 'Pastors Sabbath' event set in Florida

[23.](#) 'Gifts of Women' to be feted March 8

[24.](#) PCUSA's Web site being overhauled

And a few more

[25.](#) Birthdays, birthdays, more birthdays

[26.](#) Pew releases research package on evolution debate

[27.](#) New report questions Baylor religion study

www.omaha.com/index.php?u_page=1219&u_sid=10562753. ([Return to top](#))

4. GRAY HIGHLIGHTS OFFICER TRAINING IN MINNESOTA VALLEYS: The Rev. Joan Gray, former moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), will participate in the annual elder-deacon training event Feb. 28 in the Minnesota Valleys Presbytery. The event is designed for all elders, deacons and everyone interested in leadership in the church. The training runs from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at First Presbyterian Church in Willmar, Minn., and the only charge is \$6 for lunch. More information about the training event can be found at www.minnesotavalleys.org/valleybridge.php. ([Return to top](#))

5. FLOOD RECOVERY STILL CONTINUES IN IOWA: It may be the middle of winter, but recovery efforts still continue in Iowa. In the Presbytery of East Iowa, the Web site states, "We, in Eastern Iowa, have been so incredibly blessed by the hands and feet of Jesus. Thousands of people have answered God's call to assist the survivors of the flood and have put in countless of hours of service. This tragedy has opened opportunities for faith in action. ... Presbyterians are known for their hospitality and generosity. Mission and outreach are part of our DNA. On this Web page you will find links on everything from recipes for cooking for large volunteer groups to ways you can help with the next phase of flood recovery." The latest concerning flood recovery in the presbytery can be found www.pbyeastia.org/tp40/page.asp?ID=155667. ([Return to top](#))



6. HILLCREST NOTES AWARDS, PHILANTHROPY MAG MENTION: Staff and friends of Hillcrest Family Services, Dubuque, Iowa,

received a note from Gary Gansemer, Hillcrest's president, that cited a staff award, institutional award and the mention of the institution in The Chronicle of Philanthropy. John Bellini, director of residential education at Hillcrest, will receive the "Program Supervisor of the Year" award from the Coalition on Residential Education at the organization's national convention in Jacksonville, Fla., in March. Hillcrest has also been notified by Opportunity Knocks that it is a national winner in its budget category - \$5 million plus - for a "Best Nonprofit to Work For" award. A Chronicle of Philanthropy article in its Jan. 15 issue noted how Hillcrest is striving to survive in a slow economy. In part the article cited Hillcrest's financial position, its move away from government contracts that pay less than cost, and its long-term effort to increase its endowment. More information about Hillcrest can be found at www.hillcrest-fs.org. ([Return to top](#))



7. SCHOOL FOR PASTORS SLATED IN JULY: The 53rd annual Omaha Presbyterian School for Pastors will run July 8-15 at Hastings (Neb.) College. The annual school, sponsored by the Omaha Presbyterian Seminary Foundation, was first held in 1957 on the campus of Omaha University which later became the University of Nebraska at Omaha. The seminary closed in 1943, but it has continued as the Omaha Presbyterian Seminary Foundation. The foundation's

stated mission is "to seek, develop and support excellence in Christian leadership through the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) ." Additional information about the School for Pastors can be found at http://www.omaha-sem-found.org/pdf/PastorsSchool_Broch.pdf. ([Return to top](#))

8. CALVIN CREST SEEKS CAMP DIRECTORS, COUNSELORS: Calvin Crest Camp in Fremont, Neb., is gearing up for the summer and seeking people to fill paid staff positions, volunteer camp directors and counselors. Volunteer camp positions can be found at www.calvincrest.org/Volunteer_Positions.php, and paid summer positions can be found at www.calvincrest.org/Paid_Summer_Staff.php. ([Return to top](#))



9. DUBUQUE SEMINARY SETS ANNUAL MISSION CONFERENCE: The University of Dubuque Theological Seminary plans to conduct its second annual mission conference, March 10-11, addressing mission from both the Methodist and Presbyterian perspectives. The Rev. Hunter Farrell, director of world mission for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and the Rev. Phil Thrailkill, past chair of the board of directors of the United Methodist Church Mission Society, will be conference speakers. The conference includes two days of worship, workshops and discussions. More information can be found at <http://udts.dbq.edu>. ([Return to top](#))

10. PROJECT BURNING BUSH PROVIDES TASTE OF SEMINARY: Project Burning Bush is an educational program for high school youth who are considering ministry as a vocation. In short, it is a place to imagine and explore how their gifts and talents can be used for God's purposes, alongside others who are experiencing the same type of call. Now in its ninth year, Project Burning Bush is a yearlong program with three phases. In the first phase of the program, students are challenged to consider their call to ministry by studying for two weeks with faculty and peers at Union Theological Seminary & Presbyterian School of Christian Education in Richmond, Va. Students live together on campus and use their gifts in areas such as worship, drama, video, recreation, mission and music as they take classes in theology, Christian education, spiritual practices, and contemporary ethics, among others. It is a taste of what seminary is like. Dates this year are June 29 to July 11. Priority consideration is given to applications received by March 1. More information about the program can be found at www.projectburningbush.org. ([Return to top](#))

11. BOP HEAD REFLECTS ON ECONOMIC CRISIS: Robert W. Maggs Jr., president and chief executive of the Board of Pensions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), recently wrote about the financial crisis and economic stimulus. He began, " Given the political reactions to the proposed stimulus package and market uncertainty about 'TARP II,' the immediate future for the economy is not a rosy one. We might start to feel some benefits from the stimulus in 2010, but the root problems are both too widespread and too complex to handle in legislation that has a 'little something for everyone.' Admittedly, some legislation is better than none, but it is far from clear how much immediate benefit there will be." The remainder of Maggs' thoughts can be found at www.pcusa.org/pcnews/2009/09108. ([Return to top](#))

12. NEW REPORTS, RESOURCE AVAILABLE ON PENSIONS WEB SITE: Two new reports are now available from the Board of Pensions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and can be found at www.pensions.org. The reports are the 2008 Investment Review (<http://web.pensions.org/Publications/pensions/Home/Forms%20%26%20Publications/Booklets%20%26%20Brochures/2008%20Investment%20Review.pdf>), a review of the Board of Pensions Balanced Investment Portfolio and the 2008 Report of Management (<http://web.pensions.org/Publications/pensions/Home/Forms%20%26%20Publications/Booklets%20%26%20Brochures/2008%20Report%20of%20Management.pdf>), an assessment of the Board of Pensions' response to the opportunities and challenges of 2008. In addition to the reports, the Board of Pensions' Tax Resource Center provides key tax tools with an emphasis on tips and advice for ministers, church treasurers and business administrators. It can be found online at <http://www.pensions.org/portal/server.pt?open=514&objID=17678&mode=2>[Return to top](#))

13. FOUNDATION GROUP ANNOUNCES VOLUNTARY RETIREMENT PROGRAM: The Presbyterian Foundation and its subsidiary, New Covenant Trust Co., have announced a voluntary early retirement incentive program in an effort to reduce payroll expenses and manage budgets during this challenging economy. To qualify to participate in the voluntary plan employees must be age 55 and older with at least three years of service. Those employees accepting the package would retire effective March 23, 2009. The early retirement incentive program is part of the foundation's on-going review of its operations and organizational structure. The complete story can be found at www.pcusa.org/pcnews/2009/09109. ([Return to top](#))

14. ECO-PALMS AVAILABLE FOR PALM SUNDAY: There is still time to order eco-palms through the Eco-Palms Project, a program sponsored by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in cooperation with Lutheran World Relief, Catholic Relief Services and the University of Minnesota. The program provides congregations with the option of purchasing palms that are being grown and harvested in a sustainable growth environment. The program also provides a fair wage to the harvesters. All the palms come from communities in Mexico and Guatemala. More information about eco-palms can be found at www.pcusa.org/palms/why.htm. ([Return to top](#))

15. 'WEB OF CREATION' FOSTERS SUSTAINABLE WORLD: The "Web of Creation," a Web site

created, it states, "to foster the movement for personal social transformation to a just and sustainable world from religious perspectives," contains and provides connections to a variety of environmental justice sources. The site fulfills at least three objectives, building connections with resources and strategies for environmental justice, informing and teaching about environmental justice, and supporting efforts for living in ways that promote environmental justice. The site can be found at www.webofcreation.org. ([Return to top](#))

16. SDOP IS NOW ON YOUTUBE.COM: The Presbyterian Committee on the Self Development of People of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) now operates its own YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/user/selfdevelopment. This information was passed on to Keeping in Touch by the Rev. Bob Houser, executive presbyter in the Central Nebraska Presbytery. ([Return to top](#))



17. PARSONS SUPPORTS 'BIG TENT' EVENT: In his monthly column, the Rev. Gradye Parson, stated clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), wrote, "I will admit it up front: This column is an unabashed promotion for the Big Tent event(www.pcusa.org/bigtent), June 11-13, in Atlanta. The Big Tent will bring together several of our Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) summer conferences in one place at the same time so that participants might experience the breadth and width of the ministries of the PC(USA). One of the hopes of moving to biennial General Assemblies was to create opportunities for Presbyterians to come together nationally in non-legislative meetings in non-GA years. As someone once told me, the church needs conversations that aren't required to produce a product at the end. The Big Tent fits that description to a tee. The rest of Parsons' column can be found at www.pcusa.org/pcnews/2009/09077. ([Return to top](#))

18. 'BIG TENT' ONLINE REGISTRATION NOW OPEN: Online registration is now open for the "Big Tent" event of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) that will be held June 11-13 in Atlanta. "Big Tent" is 10-partner conference with shared worship and some shared meals. Some participants will spend most of their time with the track of one of the 10 conference partners, but the "Big Tent" is designed so that participants can experience aspects of several programs over three days. More information about the event and registration materials are online at www.pcusa.org/bigtent. ([Return to top](#))

19. MODERATOR NAMES COMMITTEE FOR CIVIL UNION, MARRIAGE: The Rev. Bruce Reyes-Chow, Moderator of the 218th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), has selected members for the General Assembly Special Committee to Study Issues of Civil Union and Christian Marriage. Last summer's General Assembly directed the Moderator to "appoint a special committee, representing the broad diversity and theological balance of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), to study the following ... including any policy recommendations growing out of the study. The complete story can be found at www.pcusa.org/pcnews/2009/09075. Biographical information on the members of the committee can be found at www.pcusa.org/pcnews/2009/09098. ([Return to top](#))

20. MEMBERSHIP NAMED FOR HEIDELBERG, ISRAEL-PALESTINE COMMITTEES: The Rev. Bruce Reyes-Chow, moderator of the 218th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), named members to another two special committees formed out of actions of the General Assembly last summer in San Jose, Calif. The topics of the latest two committees are the translation of the Heidelberg Catechism and the situation in Israel and Palestine. The complete story can be found at www.pcusa.org/pcnews/2009/09084. ([Return to top](#))

21. STEWARDSHIP EVENT SLATED IN KANSAS CITY: A national Presbyterian stewardship conference, "Stewardship Kaleidoscope," is slated March 9-11 in Kansas City, Mo. According to conference materials, the event is designed for "anyone interested in helping members become more joyful stewards." Speakers slated for the event include Laura Mendenhall, Debra Mumford, Marc Carmichael and Shannon Webster. The conference brochure can be found at www.heartlandpby.org/kaleidoscope/. ([Return to top](#))

22. NATIONAL PASTORS SABBATH EVENT SET IN FLORIDA: Presbyterian pastors from all over the country will gather in Florida for a time of rest and renewal April 17-20 for National Pastors Sabbath. The weekend will provide time to rest, relax and renew through purposeful worship, biblical-theological reflection and fellowship. Walter Brueggeman will lead the Bible study and reflection on the book of Exodus. Details for the event can be found at www.pcusa.org/pastorsabbath. ([Return to top](#))



23. 'GIFTS OF WOMEN' TO BE FETED MARCH 8: "Celebrate the Gifts of Women Sunday," planned March 8, honors women who contribute their gifts to the church and community and lifts up issues of women's rights. The day is also International Women's Day. This year's celebration also coincides with the 500th birthday of John Calvin. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is offering multiple resources, including pieces for worship services. More details can be found at www.pcusa.org/womensministries/resources. ([Return to top](#))

24. PCUSA'S WEB SITE IS BEING OVERHAULED: The overhaul of the pcusa.org Web site is nearing the halfway point with significant work completed on organizing content for the new site and developing wireframe schematics for various page types (the "information architecture"). An initial round of usability testing will begin next week to make sure the site organization makes sense to users. Once that's completed, the actual graphic design work for the new site will start. For a full review of the site's progress, check out Moderator Bruce Reyes-Chow's recent blog post: www.mod.reyes-chow.com/2008/12/pcusa-website-update-from-rob-bullock.html. ([Return to top](#))

25. BIRTHDAYS, BIRTHDAYS, MORE BIRTHDAYS: This summer will mark the 500th anniversary of John Calvin, and a brief examination of Calvin's theology can be found at www.calvin09.org/EN/calvin-theo/. Additional information about Calvin is located on the Web site of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) at www.pcusa.org/theologyandworship/calvin.htm. While 2009 is a 500-year event for Calvin, a rather curious bit of information arose in the office last week regarding a few other birthdays. One 10-day period 200 years ago, Feb. 3 through Feb. 12, 1809, saw the birth of three quite highly acclaimed individuals: Charles Darwin, Abraham Lincoln and Felix Mendelssohn. As noted, just curious. ([Return to top](#))



26. PEW RELEASES RESEARCH PACKAGE ON EVOLUTION DEBATE: The Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life released a new research package this month that explores the religious debate over evolution, marking the anniversary of both the birth of Charles Darwin and the publication of his well known book, "On the Origin of Species." Two hundred years after Darwin was born and nearly 150 years after Darwin first published his work, Americans are still fighting over evolution. More information about the Pew research package can be found at <http://pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=114>. ([Return to top](#))

27. NEW REPORT QUESTIONS BAYLOR RELIGION STUDY: A report released recently by the Council for Secular Humanism (CSH), calls into question many of the findings contained in the widely cited Baylor University Religion Survey of 2008. Baylor, a Baptist university, made headlines when its survey claimed that America is as religious as it has always been, adding that belief in religion is a universal characteristic displayed by all peoples around the world. Baylor researchers recently published their findings in the book, "What Americans Really Believe." The CSH report contradicts these claims, suggesting that Baylor and lead researcher Rodney Stark may have improperly evaluated the data and consequently misinformed the public and the media. The full report can be downloaded as a PDF file at www.secularhumanism.org/greg-paul-baylor.pdf. ([Return to top](#))