

the ESSENGER

American Baptist Churches of Nebraska



Dec 2009 -
Jan 2010

ABC/NE Date Data

Annual Meeting Planning
Dec. 3
Omaha Office

Advent Services
Moses Merrill
Nov. 29, Dec. 6, 13, 20
4:00 pm

Christmas Eve Service
Friendship Chapel
Moses Merrill
5:00 pm

National ABC Pastors Conf.
Orlando, FL
Jan. 4-7

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*May your
celebration of
Christ's birth
spread hope,
peace, joy
and love to all
around you.*

*ABC of Nebraska &
Moses Merrill Camp & Conference Center*



IT'S A NEW DAY . . . A NEW CHALLENGE . . .

STEP UP !

Moses Merrill Camp & Conference Center has been blessed with growth and an abundance of new ministry opportunities. The staff and volunteers are "stepping up" to meet the demands.

What's Happening? — More and more adults are finding Moses Merrill a place of spiritual renewal and growth. We are still strongly committed to ministry with children and youth but the new opportunities are in ministry with adults. God is opening doors!

How Do We Meet the Challenge? — This ministry is an outreach of each ABC church in Nebraska. Together we do what we could not do alone. Each person who encounters God at Moses Merrill owes a debt of gratitude to every ABC/NE church.

Can We Do It? — The staff and volunteers are doing amazing work to respond to all the opportunities. Each person and each church that believes in the ministry is invited to "step up" with us. Step up in prayer — Pray every Monday for Moses Merrill. Step up in volunteerism — If you are able, volunteer to help with summer camps, with special year-round events, with repair and maintenance projects. Step up in financial contributions — You'll be getting a letter soon that will spell out the urgent need for support. The need is serious and urgent but it is not a crisis. God is leading. We are invited to follow. [see Exec. Min. column, p.2]

See this month's MISSION FOCUS on page four.
Sponsored by the ABC/NE Mission Department,

From the Executive Minister Susan Gillies

RADICAL HOSPITALITY AT WORK!

Whether or not you have ever been to Moses Merrill Camp & Conference Center (MMCCC) . . . you have a part in this vital ministry. Originally, the ABC churches of Nebraska began this ministry to train our children and youth in faithful discipleship. Many young people made first time commitments to follow Jesus, re-commitments, and decisions to enter full time Christian vocations.

Through the years, the ministry has remained true to this purpose. But we have felt led to expand this ministry. Now **MMCCC is reaching far beyond our original dreams.** We engage in year-round programming to serve our pastors and churches with a variety of continuing education experiences. Discipleship development is a primary commitment. But **what is perhaps more surprising is that more and more we are having the opportunity to touch the lives of people who are outside the church.**

Your church has a ministry in your neighborhood. It also has a ministry across Nebraska and especially through MMCCC. And through ABC, you have a part in ministry around the world. Some folks can't visit MMCCC regularly. For some it is a matter of distance; for others a matter of cost.; for still others it's a matter of physical limitations. But everyone can pray for this ministry that is transforming lives. And most of us can support this ministry with our time, talent and treasure.

I challenge you to make a commitment or re-commitment to this vital ministry.

During 2009, the ABC/NE Church Vitality Department has been encouraging us to practice "radical hospitality." It is one of the indicators of a vital church according to author Robert Schnase in his book, *The Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations.*

I saw that radical hospitality at work November 14 at Holidays With the Merrills, an open house, Thanksgiving & Christmas festival at MMCCC. My personal dream was that we would get at least 100 people there. We'd not done anything like this before. I knew the Spirit was at work and that something special was happening when we had 35 volunteers at camp overnight the night before working to prepare for the big day. But I thought maybe just having the volunteers together was the blessing. I even said to the volunteers that even if no one came we would have a great day being together.

"My vision was too limited."

My vision was too limited. By the end of the day, about 300 people had been on the grounds. In everything we did, we tried to practice radical hospitality inspired by Jesus. We greeted each guest as though he or she were Christ.

There are many stories still emerging from that day. We have an extraordinary ministry opportunity. Please join us in prayer – especially on Mondays for Moses Merrill. You'll hear more about the prayer emphasis from the ABC/NE Mission Department in the months to come.

And please, consider prayerfully a year-end financial gift. This ministry relies on strong donor support, as well as on United Mission and America For Christ.

Thank you for all you do.

May the blessings of Christmas and the bright beginnings of a new year fill your heart with joy!



From the Associate Executive Minister Dave Lundholm

JOY OF THE SEASON

Luke 2:10-11 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. ¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

Phil 4:8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.



since we are good at it we keep looking for problems to solve.

It is a basic psychological principle that we tend to find what we are looking for and so our lives are filled with problems and with things that aren't right.

The Bible offers us a corrective for this problem-focus that steals our joy. It says, instead of doing the usual thing (looking for what's wrong) we ought to look for the good stuff. Spend the day looking for the true, the noble, the right, the pure, the lovely, and the admirable—not the problems. That is the Christian way.

In her book The Joy of Appreciative Living, Jacqueline Kelm shares the following two daily exercises to help enhance joy. Do them in the morning. (They take no more than 5 minutes altogether)

1. Write down three things for which you are grateful. Spend 30 seconds thinking about each of the three things.
2. Write down one incredibly small thing you could do to increase your joy today.

If you want your Christmas season to be filled with joy, focus on what is right. Focus on what's true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable or praiseworthy and think on those things.



**Truly good news
Of great joy!**

The Christmas season is designed to be a time of great joy, celebrating the greatest gift ever given. It celebrates God as a generous father, giving his most precious gift his son Jesus, so that we can be reconciled to God. Truly good news of great joy! But in American culture there is a trait that we all have that conspires to steal that joy away from us. We have been trained, through all of our lives, to look for what is wrong and fix it. We have been trained to ignore all the things that are good and right and focus on what is wrong. I think the reason for this trait is that Americans are problem solvers and



Karen leader, Htoo May, spoke to the Fremont women in October. On the left left is Eileen Cash, President of the ABW Ministries group at FBC, Fremont. On the right is Bev Holman.

It's Working!

from The ABC/NE Dept. of Church Vitality

It's working! This year's focus on **radical hospitality** is working. We are beginning to hear people in the churches about being radically hospitable. [The idea comes from Robert Schnase's book Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations.]

Here are two more questions from the book to focus your thoughts.

1. What is one activity your group or class could do, which if done with excellence and consistency, would have the greatest impact on fostering a culture of Radical Hospitality in your congregation?
2. How did you become a part of the congregation to which you belong?

Describe the services, activities, and people who opened the doors for you. What obstacles made it difficult to feel like you belonged.

Dave Lundholm, Assoc. Ex. Min. wrote, "I saw Radical Hospitality in practice at the "Holiday with the Merrills." One staff person saw a need for blankets for the people on the wagon rides, within minutes they were provided. One volunteer saw the need for meals for the vendors (so they didn't have to leave their tables unattended), took orders and brought food to them. I wonder what the Department of Church Vitality will offer us next year."

All churches are invited to discuss ways they can implement these practices and report back to the Dept. of Church Vitality.



The Poinsettia is called the Christmas Star and Christmas flower. A Mexican legend tells that a child, with no means for a grander gift, gathered humble weeds from the side of the road to place on the church altar on Christmas Eve. As the congregation witnessed the Christmas miracle, the weeds turned to brilliant red and green flowers.

Nola's Take Five . . .

Ideas from Nola Oberhelman
ABC/NE Christian Education Consultant

Take five Judson book titles to give this season to your church library or resource shelf:

1. *Baptism Ahead, a Road Map for Young Disciples*
2. *Being Baptist: Lessons for New Members*
3. *Crazy Faith*
4. *Mothering Heights*
5. *Addicted to Hurry, Spiritual Strategies for Slowing Down*

This is on audio so if you haven't reading time, you can listen while you drive.

To order: www.judsonpress.org

Vital Church Leaders Conference Draws Pastors from Six States

Pastors and lay leaders from NE, SD, IA, WI, IL, and KS attended the Vital Church Leaders Conference at Moses Merrill in early November. Dr. Tom Johnson was the keynote speaker. Other speakers included Rev. Robin Stoops, FBC Norfolk; Dr. Marshall Peters, Mid-American Baptist Churches; and Robin Sandbothe, Central Seminary. Evaluations scored the event as excellent. Plans are underway for next year.



Church Consultant Dr. Tom Johnson



Pastors at Vital Church Leaders Event at Moses Merrill.

MISSION FOCUS: Thailand School Mission Project

The ABC/NE Department of Mission has endorsed the "Thailand School Mission Project" as an "over & above" mission giving and mission action opportunity for Baptists in Nebraska.

Tom and Angie Gillming of First Baptist, Kearney, were part of a mission work trip to Thailand in 2008. They returned convinced that Baptists in Nebraska could make a difference in Thailand. They contacted ABC Missionary Mike Mann. Mike encouraged the Gilmings to consider inviting Nebraska Baptists to build a school in Thailand.

Angie writes, "Just as Moses and Eliza Merrill brought education to Nebraska, we believe that it would be wonderful for Nebraska to now make it possible for little children in the Hill Tribe areas of Thailand to go to school. They are refugees with very few rights and no protection from the Thai government. They are taken advantage of and exploited. Children are sold into slavery; drug abuse and crime are a part of their lives. We believe that Jesus has another plan for these precious children. Tom and I feel led to go and build this school and we would like to take some of you with us. Will you help us?"

ABC/NE churches and people can get involved. As churches consider their budgets, and seek ways to be more faithful in mission involvements, here are the project goals:

\$46,000 to build the building
\$46,000 per year for 3 years for salaries, maintenance, supplies etc.
\$184,000 total

Mike Mann has an arrangement with the government of Thailand. As the building goes up, it is maintained for 3 years. Then ABC/NE churches can decide to continue paying the salaries and upkeep or it can be turned over to the government. During the time that Baptists take care of the building, the teachers will evangelize the area with the Gospel of Jesus, ministering to the needs of the children and their families.

If you would like more information on this exciting opportunity, or would like Tom and Angie to speak at your church, please call 308-468-6154. Contributions can be sent to: First Baptist Church, 1616 W 39th St, Kearney NE 68845, Attn. Angie Gillming.

"Without education, we are left to wander in the reckless present, with no help for the future. It was April 1, 1835 when arrangements were finalized for the first public school supported by the government in the Indian Territory, Nebraska. Moses Merrill would be the teacher receiving five hundred dollars a year. His wife, Eliza would be of immeasurable support. This was the first teaching contract issued in Nebraska. This Baptist mission was to the Otoe Indians. White businessmen had brought "fire water" and diseases to this tribe. The result was great destruction and turmoil. The Merrills brought an attempt for betterment of a people being threatened by great change."

-Rev. Stan Murdoch

JUDSON PRESS WINS AWARDS, AGAIN!

On October 20, 2009, USABookNews.com announced the winners of its National "Best Books" 2009 Awards. Among the winners and finalists in over 140 categories, three Judson Press titles were included:

- Profiles in Black: Phat Facts for Teens by Marvin A. McMickle won in the African American Studies category;
- Addicted to Hurry: Spiritual Strategies for Slowing Down by Kirk Byron Jones won in the Audio Book: Spiritual category; and
- Crazy Faith: Ordinary People, Extraordinary Lives by Susan K. Williams Smith was a finalist in the Religion: Christian Inspiration category.

Founded in 1824, Judson Press—a publishing ministry of National Ministries, American Baptist Churches USA—produces Christ-centered leadership resources for the transformation of persons, congregations, communities and cultures. In 2009, Judson Press celebrates its 185th year of Christian publishing.

To order Judson Press titles, call 800-458-3766 or visit www.judsonpress.com.

"Unchurched" --- "Dechurched"???

What do these terms mean?

The terms "unchurched" and "dechurched" are used today to help understand people outside the church. The term "unchurched" usually refers to people who have never been a part of a church. The term "dechurched" means those who have been a part of a church but who, for a variety of reasons, have dropped out or drawn away.

Churches and individual Christians are called to reach out to both groups, but it helps to understand the difference.



The Christmas wreath is unending, representing life eternal. The ever-green represents growth and new life in Christ. If made with holly, it represents the crown of thorns. The berries, the blood of Christ.


Book of Timothy





Moses Merrill News

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Christmas Vesper Services

You are invited to attend any or all the Vesper Services at Friendship Chapel on Nov. 29, Dec. 6, Dec. 13 and Dec. 20. Each service begins at 4 pm and is followed by cookies and cider.

The Annual Christmas Eve Service will be at 5 pm.



Following an insurance settlement for hail damage, several buildings at Moses Merrill each got a new roof. Crews took advantage of good weather in November to work on the project. This is the pool house.

THANK YOU . . . To all the wonderful folks who helped make "Holidays With the Merrills" such a great event. From the pie bakers to the front gate greeters to the decorators to the venue hosts to the gifted musicians and everyone in between . . . We have the best volunteers in the world! —MMCCC staff

Calvary Lodge:
Rooms are available for spiritual retreats, couple or family get-aways, study groups, etc.
Winter is a great time to walk in the forest or just curl up in your room and read. Treat yourself & support this ministry. Contact Moses Merrill Camp & Conference Center for details.



An energetic volunteer crew from First Kachin Baptist Church put in long hours on a recent Saturday. Another crew from Benson Baptist worked a long day and evening repairing the deck on Weaver

Join in the
MMMMMMs . . .
Pray for Moses
Merrill on Mon-
days [and everyday
in March and May.]

New Names for Two Buildings
The ABC/NE Department of Camp & Conferences agreed to name two buildings that have never had names before. The home nearest the Visitor Center received the name "**Outlook.**" The home near the front gate is named, "**Valley View.**"

From Camp Cat . . .
The leaves are down and I feel winter approaching. With all the leaves on the ground it's a little harder to catch mice—the little critters have too much cover. But MaryBeth feeds me and I'm grateful. I haven't quite forgiven Clarence & Trudy for moving to town but I still see them all the time.
The volunteers Ron & Beryl are pretty nice folks. I pretend I don't understand Ron so I don't have to put up with his teasing.
It takes a lot of volunteers and a lot of \$ donors to make this place

work. I hope you know how people are affected by this place. It's always great to see kids running and playing. But I also see couples walking hand in hand — it's a little mushy but I think it's good for them. I try to be very quiet when I see people praying. Not long ago I saw a man who had lost his job. He sat on the Ebenezer Rock for over an hour. I knew he was praying.
This place is really important. I don't mean to be nosey but could you contribute money to keep this ministry going? Either way, come see me.
—Camp Cat



In honor of
Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
January 18, 2010

Some quotations from Dr. King:

Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.

A nation or civilization that continues to produce soft-minded men purchases its own spiritual death on the installment plan.

All labor that uplifts humanity has dignity and importance and should be undertaken with painstaking excellence.

All progress is precarious, and the solution of one problem brings us face to face with another problem.

Almost always, the creative dedicated minority has made the world better.

An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity.

Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase.

Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable... Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals.

I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear.

Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'

Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into friend.

The first question which the priest and the Levite asked was: "If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?" But... the good Samaritan reversed the question: "If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?"

To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.

We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love. There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us. When we discover this, we are less prone to hate our enemies.

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Vacant position to be filled at Feb. 2010 Board meeting
Region Vice-President Rev. Dr. Onnie Drain

LOCAL CHURCH NEWS . . . Featuring four ABC/NE churches

Arthur Baptist Church

Arthur Baptist Church is the only church in Arthur County. As such, it has a unique role in the community and a rich ministry.

Ranch life is very different from many other occupations. Ranchers work very hard daily. Pastor Ben Keene writes, "there is an amazing goodness among them. It is a privilege to know and become friends with nearly everyone in the county and surrounding area."

Some of the opportunities to minister include: Hospitality committees giving meals to all families who are going through grief, a new Sunday School Class designed for young adults that welcomes small children, a new Hispanic Bible Study, opportunities to fellowship through the continuing cycles of ranch work, i.e. sharing labor for cattle work and branding, broad community participation in school events, etc. The church hosts a Bacca-laureate BBQ giving an invitation to all graduates and their families. At that time they give a Life Application Bible to all the graduates.

The church maintains a deep appreciation for the Gospel of Jesus Christ and desire to witness to the Lord when possible. The church members do a great job of supporting the mission opportunities of ABC. They also have a harvest supper in November that emphasizes giving to Samaritan's Purse - Operation Christmas Child shoe boxes.

The church has children's ministries including Pre School, After School children's program and VBS. They also have Youth meeting with meal and Bible Study twice a month.

The pastor writes, "We do basic work here, just serving God with the Gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit. We work with the natural inclination of sandhills people to be friendly and very community minded."

First Baptist Church, Grand Island

First Baptist has a clear vision that guides everything it does.

The Vision Statement is: *"We believe we are called by God through prayer and study to: — Develop as disciples; —Love and support one another into spiritual maturity; —Welcome people. We are committed to community reconciliation through Hispanic Ministry. We are committed to pray and study together. We are committed to treat each other, including visitors and new members, as family. We are committed to sharing our massive facility with those who can make it serve."*

Pastor Charlie Gregory has led the congregation into a self-study which began with an interview process. Over 40 members were interviewed individually by a region team. The results of the interviews will be presented to the church in December and January as a guide to planning.

In addition to worship in English each Sunday, there is a second service in Spanish.

FBC has long provided hospitality to various ABC/NE Boards and committees for meetings. It is the meeting place for the Departments of Professional Ministry, Mission, Finance, the Executive Committee and the Board.

The church has an active AB Women's Ministries group with two circles. There is also an active AB Men's group.

Wednesday fellowship supper and Wednesday night Bible study are central to the life of the church.

First Baptist Church, Omaha

First Baptist is a vital inner-city congregation. They work with an ecumenical group providing food and clothing for neighbors, including a hot "come on in and sit down" meal every Saturday. Pastor Kip Mickelson says, "The group of churches call themselves "Neighbors United" and includes about 14 churches. FBC is looking for other churches to become involved. Maybe it could be your church?"

Ben Martinez has started planning men's activities. They've gone camping, fishing, bowling, and have had a cookout, along with monthly breakfasts the first Saturday of every month. These events have helped increase attendance and expanded the range of ages participating.

Women's Ministries has become active in planning events and projects. They headed up Operation Shoe Box this year. They have also had fun events such as a pizza and movie night, their own retreat, have sponsored book clubs, and other events. They also have on-going women's Bible studies.

The church continues to reach out to the community by offering a weekly NA group. The pastor reports that additional groups will be started soon, "We continue to offer our support to the YWCA - one of our neighbors - whenever they need space for small support groups."

Along with the four ABC mission offerings each year the church also supports, with money & volunteer time, Child Evangelism Fellowship, Good News Jail Ministry, and Crisis Pregnancy Center.

The newest congregation in ABC/NE is the American Baptist Karen Congregation that meets at FBC. Every fifth Sunday they have a combined service with FBC in English and Karen followed by a fellowship meal.



First Baptist Church, Mason City

First Baptist sees its role as an important part of community life in Mason City. It is the only Protestant church in town. FBC seeks to serve the community with a variety of activities, and on occasion works with the Catholic church on such things as World Day of Prayer.

Pastor John Lewis reports that one of the best known programs of the church is the after school Bible club. In addition to Bible teaching and memory work, the children enjoy games and crafts. The congregation is committed to this outreach program which has attracted about 15 children, most of whom are unchurched.

The church has a Wednesday morning women's Bible study and regular Wednesday evening Bible study.

There is a men's group that meets regularly for breakfast and prayer.

The church has been known for a spring tea for the community elderly each May, a Community Ladies Night Out Salad supper each spring and a Men's Night out supper.

Especially at this time of the year the church is known for its strong tradition of sharing food with the needy.

The church has a rich heritage, beginning in 1881 as the Oak Springs Baptist Church just north of Mason City. The congregation moved into Mason City in 1888. The current church building was dedicated in 1970.

The congregation remains committed to its ministry, seeking to impact the local community and also reach the world through missions.

ABC/NE PRAYER EMPHASIS IN ACTION

At the beginning of 2009, ABC/NE churches were assigned another ABC/NE church pray for. The Baptist/Congregational Federated Church (BCF) in York and First Baptist of Chapman (FBC) took the invitation seriously. In addition to prayer, Pastors Beth Gregory, FBC, and Barb Johnson, BCF, met for brainstorming and a plan was carried out. On Sunday, October 4, almost equal numbers of members of the two congregations gathered at another sister church, the Presbyterian United Church of Christ in Aurora, for a common potluck lunch and time of fellowship.

The two congregations have similar demographics and strong, long-standing and proud church histories. But the folk who gathered also discovered other similarities.

According to Pastor Johnson, "We *liked* each other; we found common interests; and 'degrees of separation' connections while participating in get-acquainted activities and table conversations. A member of each church told a bit about his/her own fellowship. We prayed, laughed, talked, ate *very well*, and prayed again."

"And as far as 'how it went', the twenty-seven persons who gathered that Sunday afternoon would probably report that we now have faces and names to think of and pray for when the names of BCF, York and FBC, Chapman appear in weekly bulletins and in other communications from that day forward. They would agree that the event was a wonderful opportunity to strengthen relationships, support the needs of our partner church and fulfill our region purpose. And we have some good memories of yet another sister community of faith, PUCC, Aurora. Praise be to God!"

ABC of Nebraska Staff

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