

*Nora Unitarian Universalist Church
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Non-Profit Org.
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<http://www.nora-uu-church.org/nora/>

Address Service Requested

Sunday Services MARCH 2004

Social Hour: 10:00 A.M. Worship Service: 10:30 A.M.

March 7 – “The Future of Nora: Mission and Ministry”

Reverend Mark Yackel-Juleen will help us continue on our journey into the future of Nora.

Servers: Algot & Bonita Blomquist, Roger & Norma Breu

Musician: Ardelle Becken

9:00 Adult Discussion Group

11:30 POTLUCK LUNCH

March 14 – “Libraries in the Wilderness”

Reverend Wesley V. Hromatko

Servers: Jerry & Susan Allen

Musician: Ardelle Becken

9:00 Board of Trustees Meeting

March 21 – “Selma Re-visited”

Reverend Fred Doty

Servers: Wendy Tuttle, Christopher Olson

Musician: Ryann Rathman

9:00 Adult Discussion Group

March 28 – “The Future of Nora: Seeking A Vision”

Reverend Mark Yackel-Juleen

Servers: Michelle Bethke, Julie Grathwohl

Musician: Ryann Rathman

9:00 Adult Discussion Group

THE CORNER

On January 11th, Nora Church gathered for worship and reflected on its history under the theme – “The Past: Stepping Stones to the Future.” Our reflections were guided by Rev. Mark Yackel-Juleen who is assisting us in a process of reflection and visioning regarding the future of our congregation.

Rev. Yackel-Juleen had read our historical documents and had visited with certain leaders. He shared his observations about Nora’s past. Here are those observations in summary:

*Nora’s history is one born in conflict and adversity, yet born of tolerance and openness to new ideas.

*Nora’s history has strong ties to a Norwegian heritage and a strong commitment to place – the “Hill” and the Hanska community.

*Nora’s history is one of facing change and challenge. Rev. Yackel-Juleen named several examples of this throughout the life of the congregation.

*Nora’s history is one of on-going tolerance, openness to new ideas, and the valuing of learning. This was especially apparent in the commitment to study and discussion in the congregation. This was exemplified by a several decade discussion regarding symbolism in the worship space (primarily the altar painting of Jesus with the child) resulting in the “blue curtain compromise” and the educational standards of the ministers that have served and led Nora through the years. This was underscored with a quotation from the 100th Anniversary Book:

“Since its beginning this church has proclaimed a liberal liberating faith. Its contributions of freedom, character, and reason in religion were not accidents of history. They were wrought out of dedication, consecration, vision, and generosity of men and women who gave of themselves and their substance that the faith they held might be heard . . . We set our sights on our second century.”

Rev. Yackel-Juleen engaged the congregation in small group conversation at a number of points. He asked, “Why is Nora important to you? Why are you a member here?” These three themes emerged:

*People and fellowship – family and friendship. *Diversity of backgrounds – exchange of ideas and world views. *Freedom of choice in spiritual practice – spirituality without judgment.

Later we addressed the question, “What events of the past seem most important to you for the current life of the congregation?” Here is what was highlighted:

*The building of the fellowship hall (1965) – coffee hour and hospitality. *The unifying efforts of paying off debt and the unifying efforts of carrying out Norwegian celebrations. *Dealing with the death of Rev. Olofson. *Educational opportunities. *The high quality of ministers.

Finally we discussed the questions, “What characteristics, strengths, and/or direction do you draw from the past that might guide the Future of Nora? and Are there any stumbling blocks/challenges from the past that might get in the way as you move forward?” As relates to the first question, folks shared:

*Liberal thinking in a traditional setting. *The freedom of spiritual practice. *Gender equity. *Global connections.

The congregation’s Norwegian identity was highlighted as a strength and a potential stumbling block. The latter if it becomes a barrier to new members who may not have an affinity to Norwegian heritage. Other challenges raised were:

*The need to be aware of the different dynamics between long-time members and new members. *The aging membership of the congregation.

Everyone is encouraged to continue to reflect on these questions individually and in conversation with other members of Nora and to gather for the next steps in the months ahead.

SEARCH COMMITTEE

On the weekend of Jan. 29 – Feb. 1, the Search Committee hosted a pre-candidate visit. It was a very full weekend beginning with the minister's arrival at the airport at 5:30 PM on Friday, followed by dinner at the Makepeaces. On Saturday morning we conducted the formal interview for several hours at the Holiday Inn in New Ulm, followed by lunch and a driving tour of New Ulm and Hanska. Several hours were spent at the church. We met for supper that evening before Anne and Kristine drove the minister to the Cities so that he could be rested for two Sunday services. The rest of us left New Ulm at 6:30 AM to be at a 9:00 AM church service.

The weather that weekend was a challenge as we were in an Artic freeze and a bit of a snowstorm all day Sunday. Despite the exhausting schedule and chilly weather, the weekend had a warm feel to it. As a committee, we had studied well, rehearsed our interview skills with a "stand-in" minister, and had carefully planned the content of the weekend. I believe we did a quality job both in presenting our church and in learning about the style and skills of the pre-candidate. No conclusion has been drawn to that interview. We have another interested candidate and will continue to explore options until we confidently feel we are presenting the congregation with our best candidate. We wish we could share more details with you but the candidating and interview process is considered as confidential information until the time that a candidate is invited for a second visit. This is necessary to respect the candidate's status with all churches that he/she may be interviewing with as well as to maintain the stability of the search committee. After months of heavy duty preparation, it seems trying for things to move so slowly now. This isn't the time, however, to feel rushed. We need to be patient and deliberate in making a wise choice for the right leadership and spiritual qualities in a minister that feels like a "fit" for our community. We'll keep you up to date with news as best we can. Jeanie Hinsman

BOARD NOTES

The departure of Rev. Oelberg has meant increased responsibilities for the Board of Trustees. The board has begun the process of sprucing up the parsonage for a new minister. Preliminary plans for new kitchen cabinets and updated bathrooms are available for viewing in the Fellowship Hall. The Buildings and Grounds committee and other volunteers will be working with the board to finalize the plans.

Katie Beckius has agreed to serve on the Interim Task Force which is acting as liaison between the Search and Program committees and the board. It is made up of representatives from the Search and Program committees, the board and the congregation. Other members are Darrell Hinsman, Wally Wellmann, Kristine Paulson, Doug Anderson, Mark Wiger, and Algot Blomquist.

Ben Marti has moved to St. Peter and will no longer be playing the piano on Sundays. Until a more permanent replacement is found, Ardelle Becken is helping out and Ryann Rathman has agreed to play an extra Sunday. We are grateful for their willingness to help out.

Recently the church paid off its pledge to the city of Hanska toward installation of a handicapped access ramp for the Community Center. Nora Church was instrumental in moving this project forward. The board also has purchased a new computer and copier for the office.

The board will be working on the budget for FY 2004-05 at the end of March. That also means the Pledge Drive will be coming soon. We'll keep you informed.

President Carol Chambard is seeking volunteers to visit members who are not able to attend church regularly or who live at a distance.

Saturday, March 6th, will be a work day at the Nora parsonage. Anyone wishing to help should bring tools to remove bricks, carpet, and cupboards. We'll meet at 9:00 AM.

The Prairie Star District annual meeting will be in Kansas City, Missouri, April 23-25. Information is on the bulletin board in the foyer.

HOSPITALITY

We all realize that it can be intimidating to enter a new congregation for the first time especially if you are not aware of the protocol and traditions in that church. A Greeter can take the edge off an uncomfortable situation and make a new person feel at ease and informed about Sunday routines.

At the last All-Committee night it was decided to set up a schedule of Sunday greeters. The responsibilities include – lighting the altar candles, passing out service programs, taking collection, and most importantly standing at the entry to welcome congregation members and visitors. Encourage congregation members to wear their nametags. Provide a nametag for a visitor if it is desired. Show the visitor to our information table. Walk them into coffee hour and introduce them to a few “regulars” who will include them in morning coffee or if they prefer to go directly into church, provide them with the service program and let them know what the sermon topic is and who is presenting and invite them to sign the visitors book. As a greeter, when introducing yourself you should wear a friendly attitude. Ask the visitor if it is their first visit, if they are from the area, if they have been in other UU churches, are all easy ways to start a conversation. The plan is to have four main Greeters, either single or couples, each of whom would take a regular Sunday, i.e., one would be the first Sunday, second Sunday, etc., with two or three back-ups to call if a regularly scheduled Greeter could not keep their particular Sunday commitment. If you would like to be a Greeter for one Sunday a month or if you can be available for a back-up, please let Jeanie Hinsman know.

PLEDGE DRIVE

At the All-Committee meeting on February 18th, it was decided to hold area meetings again to explain the financial needs of the church and to ask for your support. This approach proved useful last year in reaching out to members and getting input from them about issues vital to Nora Church. The Finance and Membership committees will be working together to set up these meetings in late March and early April. If you would like to host such a meeting, please contact Jeanie Hinsman at 359-7494 or Janet Rosenbloom at 354-8595.

NEW FACES

Kathleen Baril and Matt Harbur are recent arrivals in Minnesota, having attended school in Iowa for a number of years. Kathleen is from Toledo, Ohio, and Matt is from Woodstock, NY. They met at Grinnell College in Iowa and were married at Grinnell in 1996. Subsequently, Kathleen received a masters degree in library science from the University of Iowa, and Matt received an advanced degree in alternative weed management from Iowa State.

Currently, Kathleen is working at the Gustavus Adolphus College Library in St. Peter and Matt is working at the Research and Outreach Center in Lamberton. To equalize commuting time, they reside in New Ulm with their two dogs.

Kathleen’s interests include reading, running, and baking. Matt describes himself as “jazz obsessed” and also enjoys cooking and traveling.

WORK DAY

Saturday, March 6, will be a work day at the Nora Parsonage. Anyone wishing to help, should bring tools to remove bricks, carpet, or cupboards. We’ll meet at 9:00 AM.

CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

The Congregational meeting held on Sunday, February 29, approved the expenditures for remodeling the parsonage.

DIRECTORY UPDATE

We have been getting a few notices of changes in addresses, email address updates, and family name corrections. Thanks much for your help. Please continue to keep us up-to-date with any changes in any mailing addresses and such. The email address for Nora is norachuu@lakes.com and this is checked daily. You may also contact any of the board members who are: Carol Chambard (507-354-2242), Warren Paulson (507-439-6316), Janet Rosenbloom (507-354-8595), and Sally Hanson (507-388-8776).

Visit the Nora Unitarian Universalist Church Website:

www.nora-uu-church.org/nora/

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Our plans for March include learning about the sixth principle on March 7. HELP for March 7 – WE NEED MAGAZINES OR CATALOGS WITH MULTICULTURAL PICTURES, PEOPLE IN THEM FOR THE KIDS TO CUT OUT. We will work on our banner on March 14. We will hear the Palm Sunday Bible Story, and talk about Palm Sunday and Easter on March 21. Our famous UU person for this month is George de Benneville, and we will learn about him on March 28. Some of the activities vary between March and April depending on work for the banner and road signs.

The older kids will be discussing the sixth principle on March 7. We will work with the younger kids on the banner on March 14. On March 21 will start looking at the Easter story and complete that look on March 28. We will also spend part of March 21 and 28 working on the design for the road signs for the church.

We will continue to collect nonperishable foods for the Food Shelf this month. A box is under the table in the church lobby for the donations. We encourage the children to bring an item each Sunday if possible. Thank you, Courtney, for making the fun sign on the box.

We would like to start the Secret Friend Program again. If you are interested in sharing with a young friend or for the kids, an older friend, please give Sheldon a note with your name on it either March 7 or March 14. The kids need to sign up too at this time. On the 25th, you will give a note describing what to do. On April 25, Clean-up Sunday, we will share our identity with our young friend.

A bulletin board, especially for the children, has been placed at the back of the dining room for the children to share their accomplishments and contributions. If your child's name or picture appears in your local paper or school paper, cut it out to put on the bulletin board to share. After all, we are all unique and have our own special talents, and it's important to recognize them.

LOOKING AHEAD: We are still thinking about doing another activity away from the church in March, and are still looking for ideas and suggestions. Please talk with Anne or Sheldon if you have any ideas for fun activities for the children. We will be talking with families about the possibility of an Easter breakfast for the congregation this year.

A NORWEGIAN MUSICAL EXTRAVAGANZA WEEKEND

The Hanska Business Association presents Bjoro Haland, Norway's Country Gentleman Singer and the Scandinavian King of Country Music in concert on Friday, March 5th, at the Hanska Community School Gym. The Wendinger Brothers Band of New Ulm will have a Pre-Show at 7:00 PM followed by Bjoro at 7:30 PM. Bjoro sings in both English and Norwegian. Tickets are available at the door for \$12.50 each. Lunch will be served following the performance. For more information, contact Alicia at 507-439-6321.

Sons of Norway Elvesvingen Lodge 1-582 of Mankato and Lin Hans Rud Lodge 1-479 of Hanska will present the advanced Music School Students from Valle, Norway, on Saturday, March 6th, 7:00 PM at the Bethlehem Lutheran Church, 720 South 2nd St., Mankato, MN. It will be an evening of Norwegian singing, Hardanger fiddle, folk dancers in bunads, Norwegian sing-a-longs and a whole lot more. Tickets are available at the door for \$10.00 each. Contact Linda at 507-388-7130 for advance tickets or more information.

UUSC HOLIDAY CARD

The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee is holding a UUSC Holiday Card Design Contest for 2004. Creative UUs of all ages who are passionate about social justice to submit a design for a new UUSC holiday card for the 2004 holiday season. Suggestions for greetings to print on the inside of the card are also solicited. The name and congregation of the winning card designers will be printed on the back of their cards, which will be purchased and shared by UUs nationwide during the holiday season.

Submissions must be received by UUSC on or before April 15, 2004. Submission guidelines are posted on the bulletin board in the foyer. All proceeds from the sale of the cards go towards supporting the UUSC social justice and human rights programs.

UUA PARTNER CHURCH

Nora has been involved in the UUA Partner Church Program for about eight years. Our retiring minister served as the impetus and the enthusiastic advocate for the program. During these years she made four trips to Transylvania to visit the Romanian congregation in the very small village of Little Benced. The Village is home to about 12 families, has no commercial establishments, and is located two kilometers from its sister village, Big Benced, where they boast a store, a community center, a larger church, and forty families; both are accessed by a dead end cart path of a road. Telephone service has only just arrived in Little Benced. They have recently laid a small pipeline the distance to their sister city, but it ends there awaiting piping to the natural gas supply. There is, however, some recently introduced industry in the Village, two manufacturing enterprises. One of them produces furniture, the second produces satellite dishes. Both are using very little in the way of modern tools and so their output is considered to be hand-made. The factories employ as many as 50 people, so some of the work force comes from a surrounding countryside. As a comparative measure, the families of the village own a total of five cars and two tractors (capable of pulling tow bottom plows), and the nearest public transportation is six kilometers—just under four miles—away. The Little Benced church—the Church itself is small too, seating only about 60 persons—is served by the Reverend Gergely Kiss, who also handles the sister city church as well as one other congregation, along with being the person that administers such medical care and aid as he is able to the area's inhabitants, in addition to tending a farm as a means to provide for his family.

As a congregation, we have sent contributions supplemented by fundraisers such as craft sales and auctions featuring items the minister brought back from the Bencedites and a "Romanian Dinner" as well as additional personal contributions from congregation members. We have developed something of a sense of empathy for the conditions of existence in our affiliates' rural community. The cows still wear cowbells and the church uses its bell to communicate significant rites of passage and the time of day, a pastoral life-style with little of the trappings of the modern world. But the simpler life holds little attraction and even less opportunity for young people, and so they move on, to brighter lights and a world of more possibilities than Little Benced affords. Our help has recently made it possible to lay the gas pipeline, replace a broken church

bell, add a second that had not been in place since its predecessor had been confiscated for the production of war material during World War I, and help fund a program that assists with travel expenses to more professional medical service for those who need more than the minister can provide. Getting our contributions to the folks over there has been problematic. There seem to be many ways to lose it as it travels from here to there. To be safe, we send it by courier. That takes about six months—usually—our last dispatch awaited confirmation of its arrival for a year!

Several persons in the congregation have expressed an interest in visiting the Little Benced congregation, but timing seems to be everything, and it just hasn't been right – maybe after we settle a new minister . . .
Doug Anderson

PARTNER CHURCH COUNCIL

The UU Partner Church Council is asking for donations to further its work with various partner churches. The UUPCC faces a substantial deficit in its attempt to continue its programs at the high levels that account for so many good things such as hot lunches for students in Transylvania to a creative new travel service for North Americans. Nora Church is a member of the council and has enjoyed our connection with the Unitarian Church in Benced, Romania. Mail your tax-deductible contribution to UUPC, PO Box 88, Bedford, MA 01730-0088 or contact Janet Rosenbloom for a form. More information is posted on the bulletin board in the church foyer.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

It's not too early to be thinking about attending General Assembly to be held June 24-28, 2004 in Long Beach, CA. Nora Church is entitled to two voting representatives, and the church budget contains funds to help defray delegate expenses. Contact a board member for information.