

# North Central Connection

North Central  
Conference



WINTER 2017



## WRESTLING IN PRAYER Supt Mike Hopper

Through the years, I have cheered on the teens of our church in their wrestling competitions. The dedication and energy these athletes put into their efforts have been impressive. When some of the wrestlers left the mats, they were exhausted--having put in their best effort.

In the Bible, the intensity of wrestling is tied into praying. Colossians 4:12 records that Epaphrus "is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured." Jesus wrestled

*You and I are called to  
wrestle in prayer.*

in prayer. While Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane just prior to His arrest and death on the cross, He fervently sought God in prayer. Luke described it in this way: "And being in anguish, (Jesus) prayed more earnestly, and His sweat was

like drops of blood falling to the ground." (Luke 22:44)

You and I are called to wrestle in prayer. For some, it may be a wrestle to start,

a wrestle to continue, a wrestle to trust, a wrestle to make it a priority, a wrestle to accept God's will (vs. mine), a wrestle to repent of one's sin, a wrestle to get through to God. Wesley Duewel, former President of the Oriental Missionary Society,

wrote: "The great and godly people of the church have always been those who know how to prevail in prayer. There is nothing higher or holier in Christian living and service."

Let me encourage you to wrestle in prayer ... for your superintendent, for your pastor, for your church, for your family, for your community, and for your nation. And know that your prayers make a difference. Will you join with me and others as we become more and more persons who wrestle in prayer?



Bringing Jesus to the North  
Central United States



### North Central Conference

2841 Mineral Point Avenue, Janesville, Wisconsin 53548  
Phone: 608-757-2970 ✪ Fax: 608/757-2988

## Men's Retreat 2017

A gathering of over 125 men attended Men's Retreat 2017 at Sky Lodge Christian Camp over the last weekend in January. This year's theme was "What if God Wrote Your Bucket List?" It was one of the challenges speaker and author Jay Payleitner presented to the men over the four sessions held during the weekend. Some of the other sessions included talks on being a better dad and a better husband.

Many of the men purchased a copy or two of his book, *52 Things Kids Need from a Dad*. The men had fun during free time with things like a HUGE bon fire Friday night, horseback riding, crate stacking (22 crates high!), and service projects Saturday afternoon. Many of the men topped a full Saturday with a late night homemade pizza from the Sky Lodge kitchen.

But the highlight of the weekend was the life transformation that took place after the sessions. The men all gathered with their different debriefing teams to process what God was saying to them. There were several stories of men contacting or reconnecting with their children or their fathers to seek reconciliation or just to affirm their love and commitment to each other. Men were confessing sin to each other and committing to live a life of holiness and accountability as they headed back home.



The Men's Retreat Programming Team, made up of Pastor Kevin DeVries and John Maxedon from Monee and Craig Nelson from Waukegan, are already planning for next year's retreat and have the date: January 26-28, 2018 and the Speaker: Mark Vermillion lined up. Please join them in praying that this weekend encourages and challenges our men to go All in for Jesus!

## Police Chaplaincy at Woodstock

Many years ago I did volunteer chaplaincy for the police department when I was at the Hillside FMC in Evanston. It was very rewarding, and we did see fruit from the labors there. A couple years ago, opportunity opened with the Woodstock police department. The first night I went out with a squad car, we ended up with a railroad/auto fatality. I felt compelled to go out that snowy night and the reason was revealed. A couple hours of intended service turned into over four hours as I walked the rails, spoke with officers and ministered on the delayed train to the engineers and passengers. The engineer at the controls of the passenger train was just learning on the job. I told him he would be in our prayers.

Since that time, I have been on ride alongs, been called to suicide sites, and found enjoyment in other opportunities. I have counseled with officers dealing with various issues. If a pastor has some time to offer, it may be good to talk with the chief of a local department and see if an open door is available. The pastor involved will learn about the dynamics of the community in a very real way, and this can help in reaching out to the needs that exist in a town or county.

Sometimes the chaplaincy can be done via the department, but I am endorsed through a chaplaincy agency known as Nationwide Chaplains at [www.NationwideChaplains.org](http://www.NationwideChaplains.org). Some chiefs will prefer to work through an endorsing agency. I'm sure this organization can help.

Dave Cooper, Woodstock, IL FMC

## Disciple Deeply at Marion

Peter J. Shaw (Marion, IA FMC)

Anniversaries are a time for remembrance, celebrating events or the founding of institutions. Who doesn't like wedding anniversaries, birthdays, Christmas, or Independence Day? My wife, Vicki, likes planning parties, and I'll never forget the Star Trek themed birthday party she threw for me seven years ago. I remember Vicki graduating from UNI and beginning her career as a teacher. So many wonderful memories and milestones over the years.

After our Annual Society meeting, I was thinking of another anniversary. It was about this time last year that Brenda Clothier at church was talking and praying about starting a women's small group. It took time, some encouragement, and a little push but Brenda and the women of the church started meeting each week. The women have grown spiritually and in numbers.

Our men's and women's small groups have been a blessing and changed our church. The atmosphere and the culture of the church has changed. There is an intentional effort to grow, serve, and engage our communities in new ways.

The latest group to form is a weekly Bible study using video conferencing. Byron Miller came to me with this idea, so I helped him find a solution. I call it ZOOM, since that is the video conferencing tool they are using. People from Marion and across the United States gather each Thursday night for Bible study, discussion, and fellowship online. So far it is working out great, and Byron is teaching people who thirst for the Gospel. Maybe this group will expand and multiply? Maybe it's just what is needed for certain people at this time?

Discipling is always a high priority, right behind loving God and loving people. Disciple deeply is a strategy of the Free Methodist Church:

*We will place the same priority on discipling and serving as we do on our services of worship. By valuing and measuring holiness, service and obedience, we will increase the fruitfulness of the good news in our communities.*

That is an awesome vision for discipling, and at any anniversary we look at what God has done over the last year. We also look forward to what God is going to do in Marion.

*The transforming action of love and discipleship always propels people into thrilling gatherings.*

## Christmas Giving

During the season leading up to Christmas, many of our churches participated in Operation Christmas Child – a cooperative ministry with Samaritan's Purse. Operation Christmas Child uses gift-filled shoeboxes to demonstrate God's love in a tangible way to children in need around the world. Individuals, families, churches, and groups fill empty shoeboxes with fun toys, school supplies, hygiene items, and notes of encouragement.



According to reports from pastors across the North Central Conference, a total of 1,374 shoe boxes were collected and sent out by the following churches: Chillicothe, MO; Fillmore, MN; Marion, IA; Motley, MN; Ottumwa, IA; Platteville, WI; Toddville, IA; and Waukegan, IL. The largest number (351) came from Chillicothe. What a great team effort! Since 1993, this Samaritan's Purse project has collected and delivered more than 135 million gift-filled shoeboxes to children in more than 150 countries and territories.



## Fillmore Church Construction

After two major building projects in the past 9 years, the Fillmore (MN) Church is swinging hammers once again. On January 18<sup>th</sup>, the church board, led by Interim Pastor Janet Hopper, approved a major remodeling of the fellowship hall. Construction began within three days and is expected to be completed in two months.

## Building Community in DeKalb

We have many things to report for DeKalb (IL). A great group turned out at our Common Grounds holiday event to raise money for human trafficking. We were able to raise \$125 for the Set Free Movement, but more importantly, we built community around the church taking action.

About a dozen people have visited our services held at First Nazarene Church in the past 2 months. In January our leadership team held a society meeting to rename the church Revive Free Methodist/ Nazarene. We have combined our boards, and all Free Methodist donations will be turned toward Common Grounds mission and local outreach.

Nathan Rodehaver and Jeff Foster are co-pastors, respectively.

The Area Youth Group Presents:

# 5TH QUARTER

a teen hangout

After the game until 11 pm  
@ the gradeschool gym  
6th - 12th grade

Open Gym Games Dodgeball tourney Prizes Food

Dec. 2nd | Jan. 13th | Feb. 11th

## Playing A Fifth Quarter in McConnell

Recently we at Grace Free Methodist Church in McConnell, IL had trouble getting kids to come to our community youth events. We decided to try a new event called "The 5th quarter" to get more kids coming. The 5th quarter is a youth hangout that happens after a home basketball game on a Friday night. We were able to rent out the elementary school for free, and kids come for open gym, dodge ball, food, and a lesson. So far we are averaging around 35 kids during these events, all hearing the story of the love and grace that Jesus has for them. We have heard some amazing feedback from parents, teachers, the principle, and the superintendent on this new event. We are excited to continue this event next year during the football games.

Paul Alf

**"Our most pressing obligation is to do all in our power to obtain a revival that will result in a reformed, revitalized, purified church."  
- AW Tozer**

This should be the attitude of every church in every city, village, or rural area in which we are placed. The location of our churches does not matter as much as our devotion to the God we serve. He has moved in the people of your church in the past, wants to do that now, and will unless we become a complacent church for the future. That kind of future is not a promising one.

I hope you have been praying for a fresh spirit in your church if the air has been stale in it for some time now. Maybe you are a church that has recently been experiencing the work of God in your church again. Maybe you have a vision from God what your church will look like in 5 or 10 years. Maybe you will need some financial help in the next year to make that happen.

The NCC provides a way for our churches in this situation to express their visions through the New Life Grant. Each Conference year we offer the opportunity at \$12,000 for your church, or for two churches to share. The application is on the NCC website under Revitalization and the deadline is March 1, 2017.

The Revitalization Committee, SPARC, is here for more than just the awarding of the grant. They exist to help you in evaluating your church even if you do not receive the grant. I would love to discuss with you whatever questions about the grant application process you may have or if your church could use an evaluation to give you some direction. You can contact me, Mark Phillips, at 608-625-4197 or [aljames@mwt.net](mailto:aljames@mwt.net).

### **Freedom Advocacy at Melrose**

I would like to wish you a very happy New Year! As 2016 came to a close we held our annual community Christmas service and luncheon at the Melrose Park (IL) church. Although it was a bitterly cold Sunday (10 – 20 below), hearts were warmed with the testimonies of those at Eden's Glory.

Through the ministry of Eden's Glory, those involved in human trafficking find freedom. Rev. Ginger

Coakley shared how God is at work freeing women not only from human trafficking but also from the bondage of sin through the power of Jesus!

Two small congregations joined us as we celebrated the gift of freedom. A generous love offering was taken in support of Eden's Glory. Everyone enjoyed a time of fellowship at the luncheon. An extra blessing was the fact that my uncle attended this Christmas service and luncheon.

Jim Pagani

### **Kindness Isn't Random at the Fishfactory**

The Fishfactory (Des Moines, IA) had a great Christmas season. With the help of a small grant we were able to engage in the first Random Acts of Christmas. We assembled 50 blessing bags and hit the streets to engage people, pray for them, and bless them with a bag that contained a ham, grocery gift card, candies and cookies, along with an uplifting message.

To add to this emphasis, we took people we have helped in the past with us to participate and feel what it's like to be on the giving end of life. It was a uplifting event that blessed not only the people we met, but our team as well.

Please pray as we are in transition of our leadership team. Two have stepped down and another moved. Our goal is to have our team better reflect the diverse population that we serve. We need good and faithful leaders to move us forward with our plans for 2017. Jeff Hanna



## Thanksgiving With A Twist

Each year Cedarcrest Church (Bloomington, MN) and our partner Good in the 'Hood work together to host our Holiday Help programs and ministry services. We offer resources for families of the metropolitan community, and we engage the recipients of our services with multiple volunteer opportunities. This past November, our staff and volunteers were working tirelessly to prepare for a Thanksgiving basket distribution serving 3900+ families from 12 locations. In addition, we were preparing to host another 1000+ hot meals, backpacks with survival supplies for 50 homeless and displaced youth, and our Adopt-A-Family Christmas sponsorships for over 900 families with children.

On Wednesday, November 16th our staff, volunteers, and I arrived at Cedarcrest Church around 8:00 am in order to begin a 3-day process of receiving several truckloads of supplies in preparation for the 3900 Thanksgiving baskets. We were in a jovial mood and ready to engage in hard work and ministry. As we entered the building, everything changed in a moment.

Tim, one of our regular volunteers, walked down the hall and noticed that several things were out of order. Then he walked past our offices and saw that the doors and frames had been completely destroyed. He called me over and said with sadness in his voice, "It looks like someone broke into the Church." We all were a bit shocked by this unexpected circumstance. We quickly walked the entire facility in order to assess the damage and to determine where the person or persons had entered. We found a broken window into the basement, some missing cash that had been dedicated to missions, and lots of facility damage.

Somewhat stunned and concerned with how to proceed with our outreach, particularly with limited cash reserves to fix the damages, we called the police and then gathered together for prayer.

Our prayer to the Lord was three-fold. First, we requested that He reach the person or persons who were so desperate that they felt it necessary to rob a church. With our ministry, all they had to do was ask and we would have helped them out; however, they apparently didn't know our ministry or were too embarrassed to request help. In addition, we asked the Lord to provide the necessary resources to repair all the damages. Our doors, frames, windows, etc. needed to be repaired, and we needed these things to be completed asap, particularly since our Thanksgiving basket outreach and hot meal was set for Saturday, only 3 days away. Finally, we asked for the wisdom to proceed with our outreaches in a manner that did not negatively impact those in need and to enable us to be fruitful in ministry.

Following our team prayer, we immediately began moving forward. We quickly placed a couple phone calls while I sent out an email to our Superintendent and church community informing them of the situation and requesting prayer. Within hours our conference leadership sprang into action with phone calls to encourage and pray with us and kind offers for both personal and conference support. In addition, NCC pastors, ministry leaders, and local Christians generously reached out with offers to help put things back together. The community of Christ, both locally and conference-wide, had sprung into action in a manner that was simply amazing. In fact, it was truly breathtaking to see God's love being made manifest through His people.

What the enemy had intended for evil God turned around for kingdom good. This event proved to be significant in at least 3 ways. First, it brought our community together in a manner like no other. Second, it enabled us to experience the other side. We often are in the power position of giving resources and support for others who are in need. This time, we were in need and we had the privilege of experiencing God's love in practical ways. Last, but not least, this break-in event served as a gentle reminder that God is greater than any problem we may have and that He "causes all things to work together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

We give praise to our great God and a heartfelt thank you to all of our generous brothers and sisters from the NCC. Our hearts have been truly warmed by your kindness and support as we work together to minister to a lost and dying world.

Shawn Morrison



Photos from Marion,  
IA FMC

