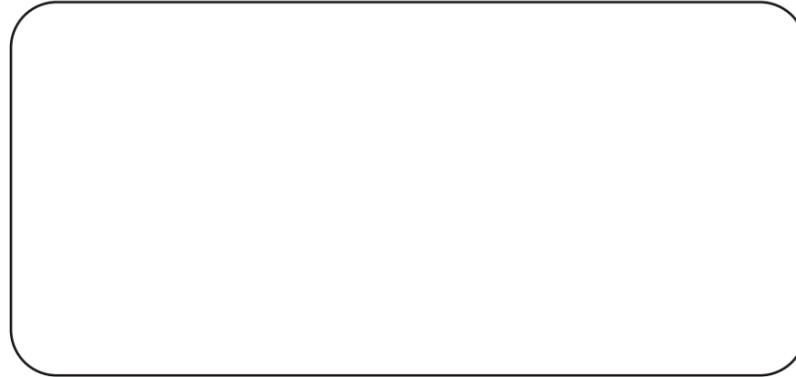


RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



Hilton lives out call through bi-vocational ministry

By Doreen Gosmire, director of communication, Dakotas UMC

Pastor Geoff Hilton, who serves the congregation of the United Methodist Church in Velva, North Dakota, and is the controller for Dakota Midland Grain, describes his bi-vocational role as a gift from God. “I just want to reach others to help them to get to know Christ. I am thankful that God has given me the blessings to be able to do what I can do,” he says. “I am very introverted. I would much rather sit in the pews. How I can get up in front and preach baffles even me.”

For many pastors, being a pastor is their only job. The demands of church ministry—sermon preparation, teaching, outreach, hospital visitation, counseling, administration, etc.—fill up their days and leave scarce room for anything else. Other pastors, however, find that they must take an outside job to supplement their livelihood and make ends meet. These are the bi-vocational pastors.

Hilton grew up in Bowman, North Dakota, attending a Lutheran church. His mother made sure he attended church and Sunday School. When Hilton went off to college, he stopped going to church. Attending college in Minot, he was invited by a girl to attend Vincent United Methodist Church.

He found himself getting involved at Vincent UMC as a Sunday School teacher, lay leader, and a lot of service projects. “Rev. Michelle Brennen and Rev. Kathy Hammond were two people that encouraged me and got me involved in lay leadership at Vincent,” says Hilton. “I became a certified lay leader and filled in for Pastor Kathy once in a while.”

The district superintendent invited Hilton to fill the pulpit at Bantry UMC. After less than

one year, a new district superintendent asked if he would take on preaching at the United Methodist Church in Velva, North Dakota, in addition to Bantry.

“My wife Jennifer said, ‘You can try it for a year. But, if it gets to be too much, you will have to quit.’ Well, I am in my fourteenth year,” says Hilton.

They are several members of the congregation who are also customers at the elevator. “It is an awesome experience to be able to see them outside of the church and be able to have those kinds of connections with them,” Hilton says. “A lot of fulltime pastors just would not have that opportunity. I am thankful for that.”

The opportunity to be in the bi-vocational role has strengthened Hilton’s faith. “I have been strengthened by the faith in this congregation and the people I have met,” he says. “I have learned so much about the Bible and God in the fourteen years that I have been here. I learned much more than I have been able to teach. I thank God for the opportunity to learn, to learn about his love, to learn about Jesus, and encourage others.”



Pastor Geoff Hilton is a licensed local pastor who serves the United Methodist Church in Velva, North Dakota. Photo by Dave Stucke, Dakotas UMC.

Looking back on what we’ve accomplished together

The Dakotas Conference’s seven-year plan is about starting new faith communities by planting new churches and partnering with existing churches to multiply their ministry, revitalizing existing churches through transformational processes and developing leaders by internships, mentoring and coaching.

Since 2015...

The Dakotas Conference has started

18

new faith communities.

70

churches are implementing new ideas and initiatives to reach new people for Jesus through these transformational processes: the Missional Consultation Church Initiative, MCCI—a process that targets large sized congregations; Journey Renewal Partnership—designed to assist mid and smaller sized congregations; Youth Ministry Cohort—churches create a ministry plan and grow congregational support of children’s and youth ministry.

107

individuals have stepped into vocational ministry across the conference.

42

young adults have explored their call to vocational ministry through the Elisha Project, an internship program that allows college students to try on ministry at host churches and learn from clergy mentors.

Since 2015 your generous gifts of \$3,523,481.86 have been distributed for:

\$1,374,944.75

New worshipping communities

\$119,000

Raising up leaders

\$96,000

Revitalizing congregations

Friends,

Ministries are Thriving across the Dakotas and are stronger now than before the Thrive campaign just four years ago. Opportunities are plentiful, more individuals have been called. Called into ministry... called to make disciples... called to spread the good news!

And, this could not have happened without you. Thank you for your contribution to start new faith communities, transform congregations and call people to ministry.

Through Jesus Christ, disciples are being made as we continue to see the Holy Spirit giving us Strength for Today, Hope for Tomorrow.

Sheri Meister
President/CEO

Dakotas United Methodist Foundation



Addiction recovery ministries build communities of hope

By Karla Hodve, communication specialist, Minnesota UMC

At a time when almost 21 million Americans struggle with addiction, four communities across the Dakotas-Minnesota Area have created new opportunities for people with addiction to find recovery, community, and hope.

Two new faith communities—Celebrate Recovery at Celebrate Grace in Bismarck, North Dakota, and The Road at Canyon Lake UMC in Rapid City, South Dakota—are passionate about reaching new people and helping them find healing and wholeness through Christ.

Addiction, recovery, and faith

From alcoholism to drugs, shopping to gambling, addiction takes many forms and affects people's lives and relationships in many ways. Given the vital role that community plays in the recovery process, churches have a key opportunity to meet the needs of those on that path.

"Our truth has been distorted, our view of society and God and relationship has been so twisted that we don't have a focal point to focus on," Rev. Chris Chase said of addiction. He leads church plant Celebrate Grace and its Celebrate Recovery Ministry, and he himself is in recovery from drugs and alcohol.

Recovery-based churches take people by the hand and show them that "not only can they overcome the hardship they are going through, but they can get on the other side of that and experience a whole new love and grace that God has been trying to show them all along," said Chase.

The foundational structure of Celebrate Grace is its 16 small groups that meet at various times



Chris Chase leads a small group at Celebrate Grace, a recovery ministry in Bismarck, North Dakota. Photo by Dave Stucke, Dakotas Conference.

each week. All of them come together at a Celebrate Recovery worship service and dinner, which attracts 40 to 70 people each Friday night. The church has seen nearly 70 professions of faith, nine adult baptisms, and entire families finding recovery and healing.

Rev. Brett Roes, who leads The Road, a new off-site ministry of Canyon Lake UMC in Rapid City, South Dakota, said "being a part of a faith community is incredibly life-giving to anyone—but I think it is especially so for those in recovery. Speaking from personal experience, recovery just isn't something that most people can do well on their own."

Worship and small groups are a key part of each of the recovery ministries.

The Road gathers weekly in a local café for small group time and has larger gatherings each month. It will eventually form a congregation with a weekly recovery-themed worship service.

Roes notes that there is still a stigma and sense of shame around addiction—even within most churches.

"We need recovery-specific faith communities because sometimes that's the only way that people will be honest about their struggles," he said. "It's a really powerful thing to walk into a group and know that every person there, in some way, understands and resonates with what you're going through."

Roes noted that although there are instances of spiritual life and death in all aspects of ministry, addiction can lead to actual physical death, "which means there's a great responsibility on all of us within The Road to show up and care for and love one another as best we possibly can because we're literal lifelines for each other."

'Ready for a real encounter with Jesus'

Recovery ministries generally reach the unchurched or those who left the church at some point in their lives. Rev. Ben Ingebretson, Dakotas-Minnesota Area director of new church development, said what makes people seeking a



Creating a welcoming culture is a huge part of recovery ministry. Photo courtesy of unsplash.com

recovery-based church unique is that they tend to have a readiness for personal transformation.

"This is not routine cultural or nominal Christian spirituality," said Ingebretson, who has worked alongside all four new recovery ministries by providing training in best practices, start-up resources, and leadership support and coaching. "Recovery participants tend to be ready for a real encounter with Jesus that changes everything."

Building community and supporting each other is a critical part of each ministry, as is sharing personal stories of struggle, transformation, and hope.

Seeing God at work

Prayers are being answered and lives and families are being transformed within each of these recovery ministries. At Celebrate Recovery, every person who comes to a worship service is prayed for. Chase said, "We have people come back and say, 'Thank you so much for praying for us. Our prayers are being answered. Healing is happening.'" For Chase, having people in recovery bring their entire families to a recovery service, and witnessing the family heal together from the damage of addiction, is the most rewarding part of his job.

Roes has seen similar growth in those involved with The Road. "We're seeing people put together longer times of recovery than they have before," he said. "We're seeing people ask questions about God and profess a faith in God in ways that they haven't before. Time and time again, God has brought goodness from The Road—even in the moments when I wasn't sure it would be there. But God continually shows up, partnering with this community to bring life and freedom. I still work as hard as ever, but now I do it with a much deeper and abiding trust that God is with us, working alongside us."

Discerning call to ministry at Exploration 2019

By Doreen Gosmire, director of communication, Dakotas UMC

"Taking young people to Exploration re-ignited the fire and passion for what I do," says Deb Kjerstad, director of leadership development for the Dakotas Conference. "It gave me such confidence in the future of The United Methodist Church. Seeing young people that are so committed to their calling, filled my soul. It reaffirmed my faith in the next generation of leaders. They are excited to birth a new thing. They are not paralyzed by fear."

Hannah Bowes, Andrea Hult, and Zach Gors, undergraduates at Dakota Wesleyan University, and Bryce Blank, a seminary student at Perkins Theological Seminary, participated in Exploration 2019 with Deb Kjerstad, director of leadership development for the Dakotas Conference, and Jerry Simmons, a member of the Dakotas Conference Council of Youth Ministry.

Listening to God's call

"I wanted to go to the Exploration in Orlando to better understand the calling that God has for my life. I was interested in the different workshops and wanted to explore the different avenues that I could possibly take after undergrad," says Hannah Bowes, a junior at Dakota Wesleyan University.

The three-day event featured four keynote speakers, several workshops, small group interaction time, and awesome worship.

"I enjoyed the workshop on women in leadership. They had awesome stories to share," says Andrea Hult, a freshman at Dakota Wesleyan University who attended Exploration 2019. "I appreciated their perspectives of what it was like to be ordained as a female."

Zach Gors, a senior at Dakota Wesleyan University and 2019 Exploration participant, appreciated the connection to others throughout the experience. "Exploration informed my faith and my call to ministry by providing clarity, showing that I am called to bigger things that I hadn't even realized," he says. "I came to understand that it is in my passions that I am invited to find something to pour everything into. Through speakers, workshops, and worship, it was revealed that I haven't gotten to this point alone. It is the people I am surrounded by, that we are called together to live this life with one another. It

is promising to know that I am called by God, given a purpose with a destiny, to do His work."

Bowes shared that even though she is called, she still needs to listen for where God is calling her. "A very powerful message that I am going to take away from Orlando is that to discern your calling; you first have to be able to listen. You have to get rid of the distractions and outside voices and hone into the things God is speaking or nudging you to do. Then you respond to the calling He has placed for your life. It looks very different for each person, but that is the beauty of the God we serve," she says.

The Dakotas Conference funded the travel, registration, and other related expenses for the journey to Exploration 2019. Kjerstad sees the expenditure as an investment in the future. "It helps our young people see that they are not in this alone in this journey. There are people all across the United States experiencing the same things that they are; trying to understand their call, trying to figure out what that means for them, and trying to live into that fully, authentically. For them to see 250-300 other young people in the same place and sit side-by-side with each other is powerful."

Future leaders hopeful about the future

Participants for the Dakotas Conference are thankful for their experience and continue to discern where God is calling them. "A critical message that kept surfacing was that the work of Christ is, can be, and should be an act of everyday life," says Gors.

Bowes continues to explore pathways where God is calling her. "Everyone is called to some ministry. With that being said, being called to ministry does not necessarily mean you are called to be a pastor. I honestly am still unsure what my future holds," she says.

Hult could not agree more. "I first felt my call to ministry at camp. This past summer, at the annual conference in Bismarck, I felt my call again at the Celebration of Life in Ministry Service. At Exploration, it was helpful, but

also confusing, that there are a lot of different pathways to living out your call."

The future leaders for the Dakotas Conference and The United Methodist Church are hopeful about the future. Rev. Rachel Billups, who serves as the senior pastor at Ginghamburg Church, told those in attendance that, at closing worship, "This generation gets it. Unity is not uniformity. You are called to lead the younger generation and remind an older one how to love like Jesus!"



The theme for the 2019 Exploration gathering, held in Orlando was Called Together. Photo courtesy of GBHEM.



Dakotas Conference participants Zach Gors, far left, Bryce Blank, Jerry Simmons, Deb Kjerstad, Hannah Bowes, and Andrea Hult gather for a moment of prayer at Exploration 2019. Photo by GBHEM.