MFSA FALL STATEWIDE GATHERING
Saturday, October 15
9:45 a.m.

Prairie City UM Church
706 W. McMurray St.
Prairie City, IA 50228

Program:
Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge Tour
Lunch at Church*
Business Meeting
Election of Officers
(*RSVP to Eloise by Oct. 11 at mfsaiowa.org)

Preserving the Prairie

Reconstructing Iowa’s Tallgrass Prairie for Wildlife and People
By Nancy Corona

Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge (NSNWR) is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS). There are more than 560 National Wildlife Refuges found throughout the United States. “The Mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”

NSNWR is located approximately 20 miles east of Des Moines and was established in 1990 with the purpose to construct a piece of the tallgrass prairie ecosystem. This ecosystem is now globally endangered but once covered approximately 85 percent of Iowa. Less than one percent of this ecosystem exists today. The Refuge purchased 5,600 acres but is allocated to acquire up to 11,200 acres. The Refuge staff manages the prairie, oak savanna and sedge meadows through application of prescribed fire, eradicating non-native invasive plants, harvesting, cleaning and planting of native prairie plant seeds, and monitoring wildlife.

The Refuge is also a place for people to learn about prairie and their natural heritage by participating in wildlife-orientated recreation. Visitors can recreate by walking four hiking trails, riding the entry road bike trail, and by driving the wildlife drive to view the tallgrass prairie and its associated wildlife including bison and elk herds. Visitors can learn more about the Refuge by visiting the Prairie Learning Center to watch a video entitled “Return to Wildness,” view exhibits, volunteer, or participate in many of the ranger guided programs and special events.

Reconstructing and protecting native tallgrass prairie ecosystem is vital to maintaining the health of our natural environment for both people and wildlife. This will ensure future generations get to chance to see, feel, and connect to this amazing and necessary ecosystem and to their natural heritage.

Nancy Corona is director of the MSNWR and will lead the October 15 tour.

Contacts: MFSA Iowa Coordinator
Eloise Cranke ecranke@mchsi.com

Membership/Donations
Mike Biklen wmbiklen@hotmail.com
The Complaint
By The Rev. Anna Blaedel

On August 30, I received a phone call from Bishop Trimble, calling from Indiana, to notify me that he was dismissing the charges against me. The call, and dismissal, came as a surprise. The complaint had been filed during Annual Conference, immediately following a speech I made on the floor testifying to the persistent pain and weary woundedness of being raised in and called to ministry in a denomination that continues to call my being and my loving a chargeable offense, that continues to identify my being and my loving as incompatible with Christian teaching. The formal complaint was straightforward and factually accurate (except for the spelling of my name): “We, the undersigned, file a complaint against Anna Bladel [sic] for publically professing herself as a self-avowed practicing homosexual on the floor of the Iowa Annual Conference on Saturday, June 4, 2016.” You can read my initial response to the dismissal of charges on the Reconciling Ministry Network’s blog.

Honestly, I’m not sure how to respond when people ask me how I’m feeling about the dismissal. Selfishly, I am relieved. The complaint process was exhausting and consuming. It drained my time and energy. It required multiple full-day meetings on short notice, out of town. It undermined my ministry. It kept me persistently and insistently aware of my own precarious positioning within this denomination, and of the immediate harmful impact of the abusive systemic power dynamics within the UMC. Dismissal brought some breathing space. And, selfishly, I am grateful. For now, I am retaining my clergy credentials and my appointed position in campus ministry at the University of Iowa Wesley Center. Any remnants of a stifling closet in my life have been blown open. The expectations of don’t-ask-don’t-tell have disintegrated. I am an irrevocably out, partnered queer clergy person serving as an ordained, appointed elder within the UMC. That’s pretty cool. And, I still have a paycheck, and health care, and employment that I find meaningful, rich, and rewarding. That’s pretty cool, too. And, I have experienced an incredible outpouring of support—thank you all, more than I can ever express—for your prayers and letters and cards and generous expressions of love and care.

You have held me. Thank you, also, for all the ways you have been participating in movements of Justice and Spirit and Truth. Some of you have been in this fight for longer than I have been alive. Trails I have been traveling have been blazed by y’all. I have been well mentored, particularly by MFSA folk in Iowa, in the spiritual, prophetic, Gospel call to seek justice, practice kindness, and walk humbly with God and with each other. This journey can be lonely, but thanks to Divine Presence and human solidarity, we are never truly alone. I am feeling moved and inspired by all y’all who are paying attention in new ways, speaking up in new ways, refusing to acquiesce in new ways. Thank you.

In the midst of my relief and gratitude, I am also grieving. Two days before the charges against me were dismissed, Rev. Cynthia Meyer preached her last sermon before going on indefinite, involuntary leave of absence. She is gifted, called, courageous. There is no justice in my continuing to serve as clergy in good standing, while she is forced out. And, there is no justice for all the closeted clergy who are living and dying in shame, silence, fear, and secrecy, within this conference and throughout the UM connection. And, there is no justice in the countless queer and trans youth who are being explicitly told by the UMC that they are incompatible, unworthy, unfaithful, sinful, unlovable. Forty percent of homeless youth are LGBTQ. The UMC bears some direct responsibility for this homelessness and harm. Through the UMC’s discriminatory policies andcondemnatory practices toward LGBTQ people, our church is not only losing the next generation, we are losing our soul, our moral conscience, our spiritual integrity.

The Rev. Anna Blaedel speaks at Annual Conference
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The Complaint,
By The Rev. Anna Blaedel

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Superficial calls for unity, which depend upon the silence, shaming, condemning, and punishing of LGBTQ people do not reflect true unity, nor do they reflect faithfulness. James Baldwin wrote, “We can disagree and still love each other unless your disagreement is rooted in my oppression and denial of my humanity and right to exist.” We cannot faithfully “agree to disagree” about oppression. When we silently acquiesce to injustice, we are living lives incompatible with Christian teaching. Our baptismal covenant calls and commands us to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves. This means naming and confronting the evil, injustice, and oppression manifest in the UMC’s policies and practices toward LGBTQ people.

A surprising point of unity and common ground with those who brought the complaint against me was found in mutually acknowledging that we are living within a broken system, and that the current situation within the UMC is untenable. We met one another with honesty, and respect. While I celebrate the complaint’s dismissal, I lament the ways this dismissal preempted further honest engagement of this brokenness. Our conversation was substantive, and Spirit-filled. But it did not change our deeply incompatible understandings of scriptural authority, human sexuality, ecclesial covenant, and theological integrity. We are a divided church. Refusing to acknowledge these deep divisions does not move us closer to repairing or restoring our covenant, nor our relationships. So, the question remains: how shall we live? Non-compliance with unjust rules is the only way I know how to proceed. Being the ecclesia in spite of the denomination, incarnating the radical, revolutionary love of God, and following the radical, revolutionary teachings of Jesus leads us, I am convicted, toward open spiritual disobedience, transparent non-compliance, and joyful biblical obedience. I pray our collective non-compliance with injustice can be ever more flagrant, and faithful. I am grateful to be in covenant community with all y’all practicing this spiritual resistance.

Review: The John L. Lewis Mining and Labor Museum in Lucas, Iowa
By The Rev. Bill Steward

I declare that no IA MFSAer should live and die without making a pilgrimage to this social justice shrine. Make the 50-mile drive after some desultory church meeting in DSM when you find yourself in desperate need of revival.

You'll find a museum filled with treasures: old-time coal mining tools, “heyday” pictures of old Lucas (pop. 2000---262 now), yellowing cartoons and covers of TIME and LIFE magazines from the ’40s and the dramatic life-size bronze statue of “the great old lion of labor,” a gift from the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA).

John L. Lewis's life was a life of commitment and struggle. He:
*was born to Welsh immigrants in the Cleveland Coal Mining Camp, 1 mile east of Lucas;
*began to work in the “Big Hill” mine in Lucas in his teens;
*joined a UMWA local in 1900;
*became 40-year president of the UMWA and a founder of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO); and died July 12, 1969 and was buried in Springfield, IL (in the same cemetery as Abraham Lincoln).

Lewis was lifelong agitator and stem-winding orator for working people. Introducing himself in 1933 at his first appearance before a congressional committee: “The name is Lewis---John L.”
*Of Senator Robert A. Taft: “The articulate zombie of predatory and oppressive wealth in America.”
*Posted beside his museum statue: “If we must grind up human flesh and bones in an industrial machine---in the industrial machine we call modern America---then, before God, I assert that those who consume coal owe protection to those men first and we owe security to their families after, if they die. I say it! I voice it! I proclaim it! And I care not who in Heaven or Hell oppose it.”

The museum is staffed entirely by volunteers and is open April 15 – October 15, 9 am- 3 pm, except Sundays and holidays. Admission: $2.

www.coalmininglabormuseum.com
Every year the members of the World Council of Churches and affiliated Christian justice organizations, come together to advocate for justice by meeting one on one with the senators and Congressional representatives of the United States. This year we met with them on April 18, 2016. I was privileged to be among those advocating on behalf of the United Methodist Church and our brothers and sisters in Christ. I had the honor to meet face to face with Senator Charles Grassley and with Representative David Young. I also met with the staff of Senator Joni Ernst and Representative Steve King. Before I met with these honorable senators and representatives, I was joined by over 700 Christians of various denominations in three days of prayer, worship, and education so that we could converse knowledgeably and effectively about justice issues which are now before the Senate and House. We were welcomed by Rev. Dr. Olav Tveit, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, reminding us that this was a FAMILY REUNION, that we were part of an ongoing PILGRIMAGE OF JUSTICE AND PEACE; and a WITNESS OF FAITH.

At Saturday’s worship, Marian Wright Edelman, of the Children’s Defense Fund, reminded us that 15 million children live in poverty, and 6.8 million of those American children live in extreme poverty. They are part of the School to Prison Pipeline where we allow our public schools and pre-schools to fail children in poverty and so they grow up and end up in prison—where most read only at the 5th grade level. She urged us to “become better pests of justice.” She said don’t wait for leaders to do it, “be strategic fleas to move the big dogs.”

DIGGING INTO THE ISSUES
Our goals were simple, bi-partisan, global, and protective of human rights.
1. To SUPPORT THE VOTING RIGHTS ADVANCEMENT ACT OF 2015
2. DEFEAT THE TRANS-PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP TRADE AGREEMENT
VOTING RIGHTS FOR ALL
Historical background: One of the hard fought victories of the Civil Rights movement was the Voting Rights Act of 1965 which guaranteed the RIGHT TO VOTE for all Americans. This law was passed in 1965 with provisions that it needed to be renewed. It was renewed in 1970, 1975, 1982, and most recently in 2006—all by large bipartisan majorities.
Current Situation: In 2013, the Supreme Court struck down a key provision of the Voting Rights Act in Shelby County v. Holder. It struck down the formula used to decide which states had to get pre-approval of voting laws. Congress was to pass a new formula before any states would need to get pre-approval. Congress has had three years to pass a renewal of the Voting Rights Act but has failed to do so.
2016 is the first presidential election in 50 years without the full protection of the Voting Rights Act.
A bi-partisan bill, the Voting Rights Advancement Act, would modernize the pre-clearance formula needed to restore the Voting Rights Act. THE BILL IS CURRENTLY SITTING IN THE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE WAITING FOR THE CHAIR, SENATOR CHARLES GRASSLEY, TO BEGIN HEARINGS ON THE BILL AND SEND IT TO THE FULL SENATE FOR A VOTE.
When I talked to Senator Grassley, HE DID NOT PROMISE TO ADVANCE THE BILL. He said he didn’t think discrimination was as much of a problem anymore. But 21 states have passed laws that make it more difficult to vote.
Our Senator is holding up the Voting Rights reauthorization bill which protects the rights to vote. Please contact Senator Grassley and urge him to move this important protection of our rights forward. Tell him why you feel it is important to guarantee the right to vote of all citizens.
When I contacted Rep. Young, he indicated support of the Voting Rights Advancement Act. Thank him for his support and contact other representatives to let them know your concerns.
DEFEAT OF TRANS-PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP TRADE AGREEMENT
Background: This trade agreement is between the U.S and 11 Pacific Rim nations, which establishes trade rules between these countries.
Current situation: It is still being written, but the current draft is being pushed by the President, and involves many elements which our Christian brothers and sisters feel are unjust and harmful to the people and lands involved. A summary of their concerns are:
· It puts Corporate Rights over Human rights.
· It would offshore more U.S. jobs, undermine labor standards, and drive down wages.
· Would undermine environmental protection.
· Would limit patients from accessing medicines and make medicine more expensive.
· Would harm the livelihoods of small farmers in U.S. and globally.
In talking to our Senators and Representatives, they were non-committal because the final version hasn’t been written yet. Please share your concerns with your congressional representatives. Just remember “be strategic fleas to move the big dogs”—Marian Wright Edelman.
YOU can make the difference.