

The newsletter of the Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches

EXPRESSIONS



GMCC president Gary Reiersen to retire, search for successor underway

The Rev. Gary Reiersen announced recently he will be retiring as president and CEO of the Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches on July 2, 2012.

“Having gotten through the worst of the recession in a strong position financially and programmatically, it is a good time now for a new leader to guide GMCC into the future and, hopefully, to the next level of impact,” Reiersen, 62, said in announcing his retirement plans.

Reiersen came to GMCC in 1989. Under his leadership, the community service organization has grown from 13 to 30 programs, impacting 350,000 people statewide. With an \$8 million budget, 700 member congregations and 25,000 volunteers, GMCC is the largest council of churches in North America.

“A succession plan developed under previous board leadership included asking Gary to give a year’s notice,” Susan Sands, GMCC Board Chair said following the announcement. “We are grateful for this and expect it will give us ample time to do a thorough search for a new leader.”

Reiersen explained that while it seemed like an opportune time for the organization, he was also looking forward to spending more time with his family. “My wife and I want to have time together in my retirement to travel and enjoy doing more things together,” he said. Reiersen added that he will not be retiring altogether. He will continue to teach part time, remain active on several boards on which he serves and hopes to have more time for writing and consulting.

Having nearly tripled the number of programs serving needy families, 22 years of balanced budgets and clean financial audits and an improved alliance with the Division of Indian Work, among other achievements, Sands expects GMCC to attract the highest quality candidates. A search committee has been established and is already meeting. “The impact Gary has made over the past 22 years is immeasurable and he will be greatly missed,” she said. “This organization has strength, resiliency and a strategic plan that will carry it successfully into the future.”

“Leadership matters, but an undue amount of credit for success is focused on the leader,” Gary added. “There’s a lot of work to be done in the next year in advancing the work of GMCC and I look forward to working with our strong leadership team and dedicated staff to build on our accomplishments.”

Kinship of Minneapolis to join GMCC



Kinship
Greater Minneapolis

Kinship of Minneapolis, a community-based program that provides youth ages 5-15 with caring adult mentors, joined the Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches (GMCC) family of programs on Sept. 1, 2011.

“I can’t imagine a better fit than this,” Gary Reiersen, president of GMCC, said. “The

mission fit, the values fit, the rootedness in the faith community yet not limited to the faith community, and our impact areas are in synergy.”

With the continuing economic uncertainties and funding challenges facing nonprofits both locally and nationally, Reiersen explained the GMCC-Kinship collaboration will strengthen both organizations. “This will allow more resources to be dedicated to programming, not overhead,” he said. “We are both very successful with a long history of service to the community. This strategic alliance will enhance that service.”

The forerunner of the mentoring program, Kinsman, was founded in 1954 by a group of Lutheran seminary students. In 1988, Kinship of Greater Minneapolis was established as a separate, nonprofit organization servicing much of Minneapolis and the neighboring suburbs. Today, the organization serves Hennepin and Anoka counties and has mentored 2,000 youth since its inception.

“Sustainability is important to us and after several months of studying programs under the umbrella of GMCC, we made the decision to move forward with confidence that this joining of forces will strengthen us,” Margie Edberg, interim director of Kinship, explained.

Considering mentoring?

Currently, Kinship has matched 300 children in Greater Minneapolis, yet 150 still wait anxiously for a mentor.

You can make a difference in a child’s life as a mentor. Whether you have an hour a week or more, your time will make a significant impact on a child in your community.

For more information or to start the application process contact Kinship at 612-588-4655.



West African cultures take center stage

Joyous feelings of celebration filled the rooms and halls at the Center for Families during the fourth annual West African Cultural and Family Day.

Colorful processions of dancing, singing and native dress were just one of the highlights of the afternoon. The July 23rd event also featured a wonderful variety of food, culturally significant artwork, family activities, storytelling and informational booths of some of the center’s partner organizations.



A different, but worthy project for Metro Paint-A-Thon

When the 20 teenagers and 5 adults arrived at the Como Park area house in St. Paul, they didn't know quite where to start.

The group, from the Episcopal Diocese of Ohio, had been recruited by GMCC's Metro Paint-A-Thon to tackle an unusual project: To clean out a garage and overgrown lawn that had been cited by the city for code violations.

The teenagers and adults were in the Twin Cities in late June for EpiscoYouth, an Episcopal Church youth gathering of 800 youth from around the world at Bethel College. Following the event, the group chose to stay for a three-day mission event.

This is how they ended up at Loretta's house on a summer Monday morning. The elderly homeowner was distressed about the condition of her yard and garage and had no idea how it had gotten to this point. But working with Wendy Johnson of the Episcopal Church of Minnesota, Diedre Pope, director of Metro Paint-A-Thon and city inspectors, the team got right to work.

Throughout the next three days, the youth, adults and Loretta worked to remove debris and clutter from the yard and garage. In the process, bags and bags of yard debris were removed. In addition, one 30-yard dumpster was tightly packed and hauled away and a 20-yard dumpster was almost filled.

"At first, when Loretta kept coming into the garage, it was really uncomfortable," Julia said. "We were throwing out things that had meaning to her."

But eventually, the group's gentle persuasion, as well as a nudge from the city inspector, helped Loretta realize that most of the possessions were beyond saving and needed to go.

"I now have a much better idea of how this could happen after listening to her explain why she was keeping some things," Ellen, an adult leader, said.

The group's diligent work on the yard and garage did not go unnoticed. "Neighbors told us they hadn't seen this yard in this shape in 15 years," Gary said. "I would have never guessed there was such an amazing yard underneath," Matthew added.

When the group left her house on Wednesday afternoon, Loretta was amazed at the transformation. "I was just paralyzed, I had no idea where to even start," she said. "It is a miracle that these wonderful people came together to help me sort this out."

For more information on the Metro Paint-A-Thon or to donate to the program, go to paintathon.gmcc.org.



The Feed My People Food Drive at Chanhassen Dinner Theatres is just one of many community efforts that raised the money that is now being distributed statewide to help the food shelves.

Food shelves statewide get boost from Minnesota FoodShare

The generosity and goodwill demonstrated by civic groups, companies, congregations, schools and individuals throughout the state during Minnesota FoodShare's 29th annual March Campaign continues to reach those who need it most.

In early August, 277 individual food shelves throughout the state each received a portion of the \$800,000 that was distributed from contributions made during the March Campaign. Checks to individual food shelves ranged from \$250 to more than \$34,000.

"It is a constant struggle for many food shelves to meet the needs of the hungry, especially during the summer months," Sara Nelson-Pallmeyer, director of Minnesota FoodShare said. "With gas prices going up, groceries going up and many people still looking for work or underemployed, it continues to be a challenging time for many families and individuals."

Minnesota FoodShare also supports food shelves statewide in a variety of ways throughout the year. On Sept. 11-13 in St. Cloud, the program is presenting *Building on Accomplishments, Learning Together*, a conference on a variety of topics for food shelf staff, volunteers and board members.

For more information about Minnesota FoodShare, the 2011 Food Shelf Conference or to contribute to the program, visit mnfoodshare.gmcc.org.

Helping with tornado relief

GMCC is serving as fiscal agent for the Northside Community Response Team, a coalition of more than 20 nonprofit agencies in North Minneapolis. The coalition, which was issued a \$240,750 grant from the Minneapolis Foundation, is working to provide long-term recovery services in the wake of the May 22 tornado. In its role as fiscal agent, GMCC will administer the grant monies.

DIW film extends winning streak

The teen group of the Youth Leadership Development Program continues to earn honors for the short film "Tasha's Story", recently placing first in the YouTube View Challenge. The film had previously placed first in two categories at the recent Indigenous People's Task Force Native C.H.A.T. film festival.

Mark your calendars

DIW powwow to focus on cultural healing

A traditional powwow spotlighting American Indian cultural and spiritual healing practices will be held Saturday, Sept. 10 at the Midtown YWCA. Registration begins at 11 a.m. with Grand Entry at 1 p.m. Award-winning musical artist Keith Secola will be featured, along with songs, drumming and dancing. For more information, contact Nigel Perrote at 612-722-8722 x375 or nperrote@diw-mn.org

Recruiting mentors

Volunteer mentors are the backbone of the Community Justice Project. The next mentor training will be held on Saturday, Sept. 10 from 8:45 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Hennepin County Adult Correctional Facility in Plymouth. Anyone interested in becoming a mentor or signing up for the September training can contact Jennifer Edel at 612-721-8687 x318 or jedel@gmcc.org.

Coming together for the common good

Minnesotans Standing Together, an interfaith gathering on the tenth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, will take place Sunday, Sept. 11 from 2-4 p.m. on the steps of the State Capitol. The ceremony will feature a coalition of religious, civic, and military groups from across Minnesota and hopes to inspire greater cooperation across differences for the common good.

Resource fair for those expecting

The Division of Indian Work's Women of Traditional Birthing program is holding a Pregnancy Gathering on Thursday, Sept. 15 from noon until 3 p.m. in the Dakotah Lodge. The event, open to expectant mothers and fathers, will include a resource fair, food and other activities. For more information, contact Fawn Edberg at 612-722-8722 x312 or fedberg@diw-mn.org.

A day of engagement and understanding

This year's Pan African Summit will be held on Saturday, Oct. 8 from 9:30 a.m. until 3:30 p.m. at the Center for Families. The annual summit, which brings Africans and African-Americans together for a day of conversation, networking and problem-solving, is free. For more information, contact Edmund Ocansey, Director of Programs at 612-276-1571 x205 or eocansey@gmcc.org.



Looking for an uplifting weekend? Check out UISR

As the leaves begin to change, Urban Immersion Service Retreats (UISR) is shifting into school-year mode and accepting reservations for weekend retreats through May 2012. Each session begins on Friday evening and ends Sunday morning and combines an overview of poverty and its causes with hands-on help for those in need. For more information or to register visit urbanimmersion.gmcc.org or contact Gennae Falconer at 612-722-8687 x564 or gfalconer@gmcc.org.

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The newsletter of the Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches
EXPRESSIONS

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UNITING PEOPLE OF FAITH—SERVING PEOPLE IN NEED

OUR FAMILY OF PROGRAMS

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DIVISION OF INDIAN WORK
HANDYWORKS
METRO PAINT-A-THON
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PROJECT PERSEVERE
URBAN IMMERSION SERVICE RETREATS**

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Making the most of your contributions

Bringing people of various denominations, spiritual practices and beliefs together to serve seniors, American Indians, West Africans, single mothers, students and the hungry is not an easy task. However, it is one our employees and volunteers embrace with motivation and dedication. And it would not be possible for GMCC's 30 programs to continue to reach those less fortunate without your moral and financial support. Thank you for your contributions. **To donate visit gmcc.org.**



By moving to more electronic forms of communication, the staff at GMCC is doing its part to make the most of your contributions while reducing our carbon footprint. Please consider receiving your GMCC publications by e-mail. If you would prefer this method of delivery, please contact info@gmcc.org.

One of our goals for 2011 is to build our "fan base" on Facebook. It's also a great place to receive regular updates on GMCC events and programming.

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