

The Monthly Update

August 2007

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

This edition of the Monthly Update is a continuation of annual conference summaries from the Methodist Church both in our country and around the world. We are compiling the results at this time, but it appears that we will continue to lose members.

Areas of interest are each annual conference's budget, of course, and others such as declining membership, declining worship attendance, professions of faith, new church development, racial/ethnic concerns, pastoral authority, "Making Disciples of Christ," pension and medical plans, backpacks and school supplies to at-risk children and youth, sexuality issues, AIDS, poverty, Iraq, and "immigrant rights" – which translates into "illegal immigrant advocacy" regardless of the rhetoric used.

There is a growing interest in conference-initiated missions to places such as Angola, Cuba, Mozambique, and concerns over the situation in Zimbabwe. Part of this outreach is seen in the "Nothing but Nets" campaigns conducted in the various conferences. While this is a worth-while activity, it should be noted that pressure in years past to eliminate the use of DDT has cause the mosquito population in various parts of the world to mushroom. Secondly, we have been informed by various contacts that mosquito nets from some of these "Nothing but Nets" campaigns are being seen on the Black Market in some of these countries.

A "get out of Iraq" resolution was introduced into and debated in my own North Carolina Conference. Fortunately, there were some people knowledgeable on this issue and active duty military who offered the perspective that for us to undermine the effort there goes against what we are about as Christians in that we are trying to free a people who had been suffering injustice and offering to them the possibility of having the same freedoms that we enjoy. Thankfully, this petition went down to resounding defeat.

Please continue to pray for our United Methodist Church as it progresses toward the General Conference next year in Ft. Worth, and for those of us in Concerned Methodists as we "contend for the faith" as the Lord has called us to do. Remember, prayer is key to the well-being of our spiritual lives, our denomination and our country.

And, again, I thank you for standing with us during this time of financial need in our ministry. It is so much needed and appreciated.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris,
Executive Director

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August 2007 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

*I contend that for a nation to try to tax itself into prosperity is like a man standing in a bucket
and trying to lift himself up by the handle.*

- Winston Churchill

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Annual Conferences Reports

Alaska Missionary Conference met May 25-27 at St. John UMC in Anchorage. First Samoan UMC and the Alaskan Emmaus Community prepared the food for the conference. The conference theme was "God's Beloved Community: Nothing but Nets"; all churches were encouraged to take this message of mission back to their congregations. Because of a petition from the youth, 2007 funding for the council on youth ministries was restored. As members redefine how Native Ministries happen in the life of the conference, Bishop Edward W. Paup ordained Della Waghiyi as the first Native Alaskan elder in the UMC. This action was taken in accordance with ¶ 588 in the Discipline. This will shape how it is that the conference recognizes and celebrates the ministry of Native Alaskans within the UMC and how it strives to reach out to more persons with the grace and love of Christ.

Elected to General Conference was Georgina Dapceovich, a lay member of Sitka UMC, as the First Alaskan Native delegate. The clergy delegate is David Beckett. The conference said goodbye to pastors who are moving on to many different ministries and life experiences: Dan Lush, Dick Smith, Jon Walters, Susan Knight, Curt Karns, Dale Kelley, John and Bonnie Campbell, and Steve Lambert. These individuals represent more than one quarter of the active pastors at the close of the conference year. The conference shared the successes and struggled with the difficulties of being in ministry with one another, remembering all over again that the work of Christ is a collaborative process and we are in it together for the glory of God. Membership is 4,070, up 70. - Jim Doepken, as reported in UMNewscope, July 6, 2007.

Austria Annual Conference met May 17-20 in Linz. The topic sounded like "Unity of Faith-Diversity of Church"; but instead of the German word for "unity" (Einheit), there was another German word in the title that resembled it strongly (Einfalt) and means in English "simplicity." An English version of the topic would have been "One-folded Faith-Many-folded Church" (Einfalt des Glaubens-Vielfalt der Kirche). During the conference the rich meaning beyond the play of words was discovered. To speak of simplicity instead of unity makes it clear that the focus should be on that plain faith for which the fathers of the church used the Latin word simplicitas. John Wesley wanted to share this concern with the "plain truth for plain people." The enriching diversity of the conference was visible and audible and could be experienced in the multicultural worship services as well as in the various evening meetings. One of the main topics of the conference discussions was finances. Since fall 2006, when a new pastor started his service, the conference has had more pastoral workers than it can afford. In his report the superintendent submitted an analysis of the financial contributions of the church members. The average giving is astoundingly low, lower than all conference members would have estimated. Some core members have a strong financial commitment; however a majority of the members do not or only hardly support the church financially. Measures to positively develop a culture of giving have been adopted. Another report dealt with interesting progresses in the ecumenical cooperation, especially with regard to a common understanding of baptism between the three Protestant churches (Lutheran, Reformed, Methodist) and the Alliance of Baptist congregations. Wilfried Nausner (clergy) and Roland Siegrist (lay) were elected as delegates to General Conference. The next meeting of the annual conference will take place May 15-18, 2008, in Salzburg.

- Urs Schweizer, as reported in UMNewscope, July 6, 2007.

California-Nevada, held in Sacramento, Calif., June 19-24, met under the theme "Celebrating Our Diversity and Unity in Christ." A new program to develop transformational clergy leaders was unveiled, with goals of increasing discipleship, addressing the needs of pastors, identifying issues to turn churches around, and setting goals for health and leadership. A motion to amend the budget, to increase the amount for retired clergy health-care premiums from \$100,000 to \$300,000, failed. The \$12.3 million budget was ultimately passed. Half of the conference offering was designated to a ministry of solidarity for the more than 835 victims of extra-judicial killings in the Philippines. The offering was shared equally with the conference's growing partnership with the West Angola Conference. Bishop Gaspar Joao Domingos (West Angola Area) led worship services in his native tongue. Marva Mitchell, pastor of Bethany UMC in New Orleans, spoke of the

continued difficulties caused by Hurricane Katrina and thanked the conference for sending more than 50 volunteer repair teams. Cory Parish, executive secretary of the Conference Claimants' Endowment Board, presented a check for \$1.4 million to the conference for pensions and benefits. Lay delegates elected to General Conference are Randall Miller, Susan Hunn, Rosa Washington-Olson, Chuck Myer, and Katherine Kim. Clergy delegates are Odette Lockwood-Stewart (delegation head), Renae Extrum-Fernandez, Ted Virts, Dale Weatherspoon, and Felicisimo Cao. Bishop Shamana announced her intention to retire Sept. 1, 2008. Statistician Scott Allred said that growth, baptisms, and Sunday attendance have continued to drop in most churches. Membership is 84,504, down 1,421.

— Chuck Myer, as reported in UMNewscope, July 13, 2007.

California-Pacific Annual Conference met June 20–24 at the University of Redlands in California under the theme “To Be the Cup Overflowing With Peace.” During opening worship, Bishop Mary Ann Swenson challenged members to “serve their zip code with their Wesleyan code.” Throughout the session, the Methodist Federation for Social Action’s [MFSA] 100th birthday was celebrated. [Editorial note: The MFSA is a far-left organization that has been closely associated with many controversial causes. – Allen Morris]

In legislative action, conference members adopted four strategic initiatives. They are 1) to establish a Center for Leadership Excellence in partnership with the Claremont School of Theology; 2) to renew and re-shape youth and young adult ministries through a director of development for young people; 3) to provide funding and oversight to congregations and ministries to expand existing or establish new positions for fostering the development of younger clergy; and 4) to have a district coaches and community developers initiative that would provide funding for district-based congregational coaches and community developers to provide congregation- and community-specific guidance and resources in both revitalization and the formation of new ministries. Members adopted a budget of \$12,807,938 for 2008, an increase of 2.9%. Lay delegates elected to General Conference are Ken Ellis, Larry Hygh Jr., JoAnn Yoon Fukumoto, Dan Gara, and Mele Maka. Clergy delegates are Molly Vetter (delegation head), Bau Dang, Grant Hagiya, Mary Elizabeth Moore, and Patricia Farris. Membership is 87,300, down 1,365. Worship attendance stands at 50,816, down 1,855 from the previous year. Church school attendance stands at 22,103, down 1,313 from the previous year.

— Larry R. Hygh Jr., as reported in UMNewscope, July 13, 2007.

Central Pennsylvania met June 6-9 at Messiah College, with Bishop Jane Allen Middleton presiding. Middleton focused on the need for transformational leaders. After noting that many pastors are trained to provide pastoral care and engage in ministry within the church, Middleton urged clergy and laity to “cast a vision for where God is calling us” and said, “We count on leaders who are willing to risk everything.” In legislative session, the conference moved: 1) to tithe 20% of the interest earnings from the deposit accounts of the conference board of pensions to the pensions of the central conferences; 2) to support the denomination's Global AIDS Fund; 3) to call for a speedy resolution of the war in Iraq, full support and services for veterans, and the rebuilding of Iraqi infrastructures; 4) to encourage local churches to study Israeli/Palestinian issues; 5) to designate Mental Health and TV Awareness weeks; and 6) to include Bermuda within the boundaries of the Northeastern Jurisdiction. Also approved were petitions to General Conference allowing members elected to staff-parish relations committees to succeed themselves one time and recommending a number of actions to increase the denomination's emphasis on peacemaking. The conference tabled a plan that would have reorganized the nine districts of the conference into seven. It approved a board of pensions plan requiring its retired clergy to contribute to the cost of their medical coverage based on their years of service. An \$11.2 million plan for funding ministry, which included an additional \$100,000 for church vitalization and startup, was approved for 2008. Lay delegates elected to General Conference are A. Vance Hart II (head of delegation), Zedna M. Haverstock, Shirley J. Sowers, Joshua Tobias, Ethan Shearer, Benjamin Harvey, and Gary D. Sowers. Clergy delegates are Mark J. Webb (head of delegation), Anthony C. Alexander, Deborah J. Heisley-Cato, Lewis A. Parks, Pamela H. Ford, Timothy R. Baer, and Kathleen Kind. Membership is 143,851, down 2.

- Gerald F. Wolgemuth, as reported in UMNewscope, July 6, 2007.

East Ohio Annual Conference met June 18–21 in Lakeside. Bishop John Hopkins presided over the session with the theme “This Is Our Story.” His annual address focused on evangelism, mission, and advocacy. Hopkins announced a mission initiative called the 3C’s, which stands for Churches, Clinics, and Classrooms, with new mission work in West Africa, Zimbabwe, and Russia. In other conference business, the conference committed itself to educate congregations and individuals to empower them to step into a mission of political responsibility and to help strengthen the political system of Ohio by advocating for the poor. The conference and churches will offer opportunities to study the issue of global climate change, increased recycling efforts, and energy conservation. Local churches are to join the growing faith-based response as “Zero Violence Tolerance Churches,” providing resources for victims and families affected by domestic violence. It is

also urged that there be collaboration among churches and community service agencies as well as interested parties in the conference as all seek to increase education and direct support as part of the solution to domestic violence. The conference encouraged Camp Aldersgate, Camp Asbury, Camp Wanake, and the Lakeside Association to study the feasibility of using fair-trade products through the UM Committee on Relief Coffee Project and the Interfaith Foodservice Program at their sites. Members also supported General Conference petitions: 1) granting deacons sacramental privileges; 2) asking the U.S. government and Supreme Court to amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to give a visa to an alien who was fathered by a U.S. citizen after 1950 in Korea, Vietnam, Laos, Kampuchea, or Thailand; and 3) granting voting privileges to associate members and full-time pastors. Clergy elected to General Conference are Gary George, Valerie Stultz, Wanda Wilson, James Winkler, Neriah Edwards, Julius Trimble, Marvin Brown, Kenneth Chalker, and Paul White. Laity elected are Jessica Vargo (delegation chair), Jerry Rinehart, Matthew Laferty, Maggie Jackson, Holly Grant, Anita Jackson, Allen Laferty, Paul Capelle, and Iris Andrews. Membership is 177,037, down 3,062. —
Kay Panovec, as reported in UMNewscope, July 13, 2007.

Florida met June 6-9 in Lakeland under the theme "From Generation to Generation." Jeff Stiggins, director of the conference's Congregational Transformation office, reported overall worship attendance has dropped by 9.3% during the past five years. Stiggins said professions of faith have dropped 27% since a peak in 1997 of more than 10,000. He also reported that 48% of churches had increased worship attendance last year; and 340 churches had at least one profession of faith, with more than 200 churches having one every month. New Church Development reported 86 new churches since 1995. Members celebrated the tenth anniversary of the Cuba-Florida Covenant. Members approved a 2008 budget of slightly more than \$17.3 million, 6.1% less than the 2007 budget. They passed resolutions encouraging conference churches to advocate for and be in ministry with immigrants and supporting the National Plan for Hispanic/Latino Ministries. Lay delegates elected to General Conference: William Walker III (delegation leader), Allison Mitchell, John Denmark, Mary Alice Massey, Rodney Akers, Jeannie Jacques, Joyce Waldon Bright, Walter Dry, Teresita Matos, Disney Weaver, Judith Pierre-Okerson, Mickey Wilson, William Graves. Clergy delegates are Jorge Acevedo, Jim Harnish, Sue Hauptert-Johnson, David Dodge, Debbie McLeod, Anne Burkholder, David McEntire, Dan Johnson, Bob Bushong, Geraldine McClellan, Candace Lewis, Clarke Campbell-Evans, and Phil Roughton. Membership is 317,716, down 4,133.
- Tita Parham, as reported in UMNewscope, July 6, 2007.

Holston met June 10-13 in Lake Junaluska, N.C. The theme was "Boldly, Passionately, Joyfully Making Disciples of Christ," based on a vision statement adopted by the 2006 conference. Bishop James E. Swanson Sr. presided over members from east Tennessee, southwest Virginia, and north Georgia. Bishop Paulo Lockmann, resident bishop for the Rio Conference, preached at a service that included an offering of \$106,621 for two Brazilian ministries: Evangemed and the School of Missions. The annual hands-on mission project more than doubled goals for supplies donated to schools in Liberia and Ishe Anesu in Zimbabwe with more than 6,300 supply kits. The conference approved a resolution requesting the Outreach/ Advocacy Ministry Team to study the social costs versus the social benefits of the Tennessee State Lottery. The conference approved, by narrow vote, a resolution "calling for The United Methodist Church to withdraw from the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice." The conference approved a 2008 budget of \$15.7 million, a 1.96% increase. Lay delegates elected to General Conference are Bob Lockaby, Casey Graves, Del Holley, Anne Travis, Jean Henderson, Joyce Moore, and Paul Brown. Clergy delegates are H. Eddie Fox, Al Bowles, Carol Wilson, W. Randall Frye, Dennie Humphreys, Kim Goddard, and Jerry Russell. Membership is 166,815, down 525.
- Annette Spence, as reported in UMNewscope, July 6, 2007.

Kentucky Annual Conference met June 10–14 in Louisville. Bishop James R. King Jr. presided. The focus was "Never Alone" with an emphasis on small groups and worship. Bishop B. Michael Watson (South Georgia Area) preached at the service of commissioning and ordination. King ordained five elders and one deacon and commissioned five probationary members. Thirteen pastors retired. During the clergy session, selected clergy were invited to share what it meant for them to be "Never Alone." Bishop Zothan Mawia of the Methodist Church of Myanmar (Burma) was a special guest. King presented 49 clergy with a 5-Star Pastor gold lapel pin for their outstanding ministry during the past year. Members voted on further study to be presented at the 2008 conference regarding a proposal to reduce the number of districts from 12 to ten. Sister Kathleen Flood of Nashville led Bible study. Vance Ross was guest preacher during the mission and ministry celebration, where an offering of \$57,341.93 was collected for the Methodist Mountain Mission, UM Global AIDS Fund, and for East Africa. The elected clergy delegates for General Conference are Debbie Wallace-Padgett, Maxie Dunham, Tom Grieb, Tom Eblen, Michael Powers, Kenneth Cummings Jr., and Tom Smith. The elected laity delegates are

Christine Harman, Melvin Bowdan Jr., John Minton Jr., Carol Ackley, Linda Underwood King, Ed Shytle, and Jayne Squires. Membership is 152,432, up 303. — Kevin D. Evers, as reported in UMNewscope, July 13, 2007.

Iowa Annual Conference met June 7-10 in Ames, led by Bishop Gregory V. Palmer. The theme, "Stewards of Money," was the 2007 expression of the multi-year theme of "Growing as Generous People." Petitions sent on to General Conference called for inclusion of the words "gender, gender identity, marital status, sexual orientation, and ability" in Article 4 of the UM constitution; adding the words, "We encourage civil authorities to enact laws that will ensure full civil and economic rights for persons in civil unions and marriages without regard to the gender of partners" to ¶ 161G; and replacing the words, "The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching" with "Although we are not of one mind concerning human sexuality, we affirm that God's grace is available to all, and we will seek to live together in a Christian community." In addition, a resolution calling for "the United States to remove all troops as soon as logistically practical and to relinquish all military bases on Iraqi soil" was approved. Beginning July 1, there will be eight districts. Elected delegates to the 2008 General Conference as clergy are Barrie Tritle, Diane Eberhart, Brian Milford, Christina Sung, Karen Dungan, Wesley S. K. Daniel, Edward Kail, and Dennis Coon. Laity elected are Philip Carver, Inez Dawes, Sue Ney, Norma Morrison, Lana Ross, Jessica Ireland, Twila Glenn, and Beverly Nolte. Thirty-two clergy retired. The membership of the Iowa Conference is 190,556, down 2916. A budget of \$29,590,852, a decrease of \$83,251, was approved.

- Arthur McClanahan, as reported in UMNewscope, July 6, 2007.

Mississippi Annual Conference met June 10–13 at Christ UMC in Jackson with Bishop Hope Morgan Ward presiding. Based on Isaiah 61, the theme was "Arise! Shine! Rejoice!" Bishop Ivan M. Abrahams of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa was guest preacher, and F. Belton Joyner Jr. taught from his books, *Being Methodist in the Bible Belt* and *Life in the Fish Bowl*. Bishop Duncan M. Gray III and several clergy of the Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi participated in a special service of shared communion. Building on the "Chabadza Covenant" the conference entered last year with the Zimbabwe Area, conference youth who just returned from Zimbabwe led the worship service focused on mission. The Chabadza offering of \$110,222 will support youth and children's ministries in Mississippi and Zimbabwe. Members approved a budget of \$20,664,572, the first increase since Hurricane Katrina. Members also voted: 1) to join in commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the bombing of Temple Beth Israel in Jackson and similar acts of violence against churches in the civil rights era; 2) to continue to examine the impact of legalized gambling on the Mississippi; and 3) to work toward eliminating the use of plastics and establish a food ministry grant program.

Members submitted to General Conference several resolutions calling for bishops to face re-election after eight years; allowing local pastors the right to vote in elections for jurisdictional and General Conference delegates; the deletion of support for the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice from the Book of Resolutions; and changes in the wording of the Discipline regarding the church's stance on abortion, the definition of the local church, and the function of the local church. In addition, members approved petitioning General Conference to allow local pastors to continue serving sacraments. Steve McDonald, Joe May, Bill McAlilly, Timothy Thompson, Sheila Cumbest, Ginger Holland, Mike Childs, and Bryan Collier were elected as clergy delegates to General Conference. Lay delegates are Turner Arant, David Beckley, David Stotts, Bill Smallwood, Sara Hillman, Mary Ford, Jack Ramsey, and Steve McAlilly. Membership is 186,208, down 1,555. [Note: Their petition for bishops to face re-election after eight years is extremely significant; this would institute a measure of accountability among the bishops – some of whom are now egregious in their disregard of *The Book of Discipline* in some of their decisions. – Allen Morris]

— Gwen Green, as reported in UMNewscope, July 13, 2007.

New York Annual Conference met in Hempstead June 6–9. Bishop Jeremiah J. Park presided. Bishop Warner H. Brown of the Rocky Mountain Area preached on the theme "Go Deeper." Two resolutions forwarded to the General Conference called for equal rights for persons regardless of sexual orientation and called for the test of qualification for transfer of church membership from another denomination be determined by appropriate letter of transfer and not subject to evaluation by the pastor of the receiving congregation. A resolution calling for non-discrimination against laity because of sexual orientation and identity was approved for submission to General Conference. A further resolution was approved for submission calling for acceptance of the declaration of faith of any person seeking membership and accepting the time at which that person chooses to make such a declaration and seek church membership. A final petition was approved calling for the church to recognize committed unions. Also approved were two proposals asking that mandatory retirement ages for bishops and ordained clergy be eliminated from denominational legislation. Lay delegates elected to General Conference are Frederick K. Brewington, Ernest L. Swiggett, Chan K. P. Gillham, Carolyn Hardin Engelhardt, Jorge

Lockward, and Natassia Velez. Clergy delegates to General Conference are Allen Pinckney Jr., Constance Pak, Timothy Riss, Noel Chin, Judith Stevens, and Evelyn McDonald. Membership is 122,756, down 1,164.

— Donald E. Collier, as reported in UMNewscope, July 13, 2007.

North Carolina met in Greenville June 13-16 using the theme "Working in the Light of God." Bishop Al Gwinn talked about two initiatives with the Duke Endowment, Duke Divinity School, and Western North Carolina Conference directed for rural areas. The Thriving Rural Communities Initiative over the next six years will place each year three seminary students, after graduation, in rural areas. By working in the churches 5-8 years, their seminary training will be paid in full. In the second initiative, the Duke Endowment announced a seven-year, \$12 million plan to assess and improve health of North Carolina UM clergy. The Healthy Congregations Task Force introduced an overview document, Bible study, Healthy Church Assessment, and Ministry Action Plan to help churches determine their current health and strengthen areas that should be stronger. The conference passed resolutions opposing human-induced climate change, establishing a Hunger Awareness Day, favoring UMC withdrawal from the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, and agreeing to new wording to the Discipline concerning abortion. A motion to pray for peace and healing of all affected by the Iraq war and to minister to the emotional and spiritual needs of soldiers, veterans, and their families was passed. Members designated a \$12,755.20 check from The United Methodist Publishing House for the Central Conference Pension Initiative and offerings of \$12,439.93 for support of clergy and district superintendents in Liberia. In order of election, the following clergy were elected to General Conference: Paul Leeland (delegation chair), Beth Hood, Belton Joyner, Carol Goehring, Robert Bergland, Patricia Archer, Gray Southern, Albert Shuler, Carl Frazier, and Leonard Fairley. Lait elected are Emily Innes, Cashar Evans, Gary Locklear, Bill Norton, Ben Adams, Laura Little, Anna Gail Workman, Mack Parker, Beth Norris, and Steve Taylor. Membership is 236,634, up 91.

- Bill Norton, as reported in UMNewscope, July 6, 2007.

Northern Illinois Annual Conference convened June 9–12 in St. Charles. Bishop Hee-Soo Jung presided with the theme of "Sharing God's Gifts: The Heart of Global Missions." Bishop Jung told the conference, "God treasures the gift of each person." He also reminded people how in the season of Pentecost "people went from timid and afraid to bold, turned from inward looking to outward looking for others, and the Holy Spirit overcame confusion, and unity came out of diversity." The mission theme was celebrated with the presence of Bishop Gaspar Joao Domingos (West Angola Area); Bishop Albert Frederick "Fritz" Mutti (retired) speaking about the UM Global Aids Fund; and retired bishops Judith Craig and Sheldon Duecker, along with Grace Imathiu, leading three days of Bible study. Harvest 2020 was launched, which seeks to revitalize existing congregations, build closer cooperation for growing ministry within district clusters, and plant 100 new faith communities by the year 2020. The conference passed a budget of \$7,563,190. Legislative highlights included the issue of inclusiveness, including "affirming all families," an acceptance of the definition that "inclusiveness means openness, acceptance, and support that enables all persons to participate in the life of the Church, the community, and the world and denies every semblance of discrimination," and that the definition of status in Article IV of the UM constitution includes heterosexual, homosexual, bi-sexual, and transgender status of single persons and persons who avow they are in committed, loving relationships. The conference encouraged farm worker "justice" via contact with Burger King, Subway, and other large tomato purchasers to follow Taco Bell and McDonald's lead of working directly to improve tomato pickers' wages and working conditions.

"Pursuing Peace & Justice in the Holy Land" encouraged UM agencies to use financial leverage to push for accountability among corporations conducting business in regions of the world with civil and political unrest, particularly the Holy Land. Members authorized development of a conference task force on e-safety and ethics to develop training materials and opportunities for children, youth, parents, clergy, and church leaders on topics of safe and moral use of electronic media and communications. Lay delegates elected to General Conference are Roger Curless, Harriett McCabe, Irma Clark, Jack Ryder, and Ana Kelsey-Powell. Clergy delegates are James Preston, Deborah Fisher, Tracy Smith-Malone, Margaret Ann Crain, and Ouk-Yean Kim Jueng. Membership is 105,360, down 2,242. [Editorial note: With the far-left speakers, is it any wonder that the conference is in decline? In addition, note the petitions on veiled efforts to legitimize homosexual practice.]

— Susan Dal Porto, as reported in UMNewscope, July 13, 2007.

Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference met June 7–10 at Preston. "Christ Centered—Spirit Led" was the theme of the 165th session. Bishop Robert E. Hayes Jr. led the conference with inspiring preaching and leadership. The conference celebrated the formation of a fifth new fellowship at Glenpool. Mike Chaffin, superintendent of Tulsa District, presented Margaret Battiest, superintendent of the Northern District, with the keys to an abandoned church that will be leased to the conference for the new fellowship. Approximately \$1,700 was collected in offerings that will help support the new

fellowships. The conference held a special service on Saturday night focusing on children's choirs that sang only tribal songs. The conference passed a resolution calling for balance and respect in Oklahoma Centennial celebration events, asking for fair depictions of both history and present conditions within the state. The resolution also asked for the retirement of Indian mascots and a moratorium on reenactments of Oklahoma land run events in public schools. The conference also contributed their check from The United Methodist Publishing House to the Nothing but Nets campaign. The clergy delegate to General Conference - David Wilson; lay delegate - Josephine Deere. Membership is 6,220, down 17 members.
— David Wilson, as reported in UMNewscope, July 13, 2007.

Pacific Northwest Annual Conference met June 12–16 in Tacoma, Wash., in a spirit that reflected its theme, “God’s Beloved Community: One in Ministry to All the World.” In this spirit, the community shared Holy Communion daily in order to “center our life and work at the Table of Jesus Christ,” as Bishop Edward Paup said. In his episcopal address, Paup reminded the body of its biblical call to be “missional communities” within a wide variety of ministry contexts. The conference held a Nothing but Nets benefit basketball tournament. A “Youthful Yellow” Team took on the “Bishop’s Bunch” in a “team effort” to wipe out malaria in Africa. Donations (totaling \$4,628.68 that evening) from a large crowd of cheering fans went to the Nothing but Nets to purchase essential, anti-mosquito bed nets. Some of the approved legislative actions include: 1) returning of the number of districts in the conference from five to six; 2) presenting petitions to General Conference that include calls for the establishment of a U.S. Department of Peace and Nonviolence and for lay persons to accept primary responsibility for the growth and vitality of the UMC; 3) making available “After the Fact: Reducing the Risk of Suicide Among Sexual Minority Youth” to clergy and congregations; 4) recognizing the “diversity of our opinions and pledging to be in respectful dialogue with those with whom we disagree”; 5) urging legislators to plan for the immediate and orderly withdrawal of troops from Iraq and to form an international coalition for rebuilding the region; 6) urging legislators to oppose the appointment of James W. Holsinger as U.S. Surgeon General; and 7) sending letters to the president of the Council of Bishops and the members of the Judicial Council expressing sadness and anger at Judicial Council Decision 1032. The body elected and blessed delegates to General Conference. Laity elected are Amory Peck (delegation head), Gail Grossman, and Ryan Russell. Clergy elected are Jin Ming Ma, David Valera, and Elaine Stanovsky. Membership is 56,377, down 1,117.

— Tanya Barnett, as reported in UMNewscope, July 13, 2007.

Poland Annual Conference took place June 14-17 in Klarysew/Warsaw. The conference theme, "Immersed in Truth-Truly Free," followed a current theme within the Polish society. In the past months there has been a full discussion on church members and representatives who had collaborated with the Polish state during the Communist time and had served as informers. Contemporary historians search[ed] in the archives and publish[ed] their findings. The annual conference decided to establish a Truth and Mercy Commission. This commission has the aim to be open for church members who want to speak about their past or make a confession in a pastoral conversation. According to internal regulations of the Poland Annual Conference, a general superintendent had to be elected for a term of six years. Edward Puslecki, who already filled this position in the past years, was re-elected. He appointed Zbigniew Kaminski as his deputy and Josef Bartos as new conference secretary. The new Discipline of the central conference is almost completely translated into Polish and will be presented to and discussed with the local churches later this year. Puslecki (clergy) and Zbigniew Benedyktowicz (laity) were elected as delegates to General Conference. The next meeting of the annual conference will take place June 13-15, 2008, in Kielce. - Urs Schweizer, as reported in UMNewscope, July 6, 2007.

South Germany Annual Conference came together June 20–24 in Ijhringen und Büblingen, Germany with Bishop Rosemarie Wenner presiding. The conference theme was “I Depend on It!—Nothing Can Separate Us From the Love of God.” This theme fit well with one of the most talked-about aspects of the conference: the salary of pastors and efforts to ensure that the pension fund is secure for the next generations. The conference decided to raise the pastors’ salary 2% next year. At the same time various measures are being contemplated to shore up the pension fund. The conference was in agreement on the importance of informing the churches of the situation. Several ideas for fundraising were proposed and will be followed up on in the coming months. The pilot project of starting a special church for young people, which was given a green light at the last conference, will start in 2008. The church will be located in Karlsruhe. Bishop Wenner took up the conference theme again at the ordination service in Büblingen. She preached on Matthew 6:25-34 (Jesus’ command not to worry about the future), and used this amazing and difficult command to demonstrate God’s promise to continue caring for his creation. In a time of uncertainty about the future of our numerically declining and financially challenged church, it was a comfort to hear once again that whoever puts God’s kingdom first can face the future with confidence and

hope. The annual conference elected as delegates to General Conference Harald R ckert (clergy) and Christine Flick (laity). Membership is 17,798, down 307 or 1.7%.

- Jonathan Whitlock, as reported in UMNewscope, July 13, 2007.

Switzerland/France/North Africa Annual Conference took place June 7-10 in Zofingen, Switzerland. The theme was an invitation to meet other people. This had quite important implications on the program as these encounters were not only to take place among the conference members but also outside of the church walls. There were only two working days for the regular conference business. One of the most important issues during these sessions was the approval of a UMC-profile that was developed in conference-wide meetings and discussions during the past 15 months and that should help the local churches to better respond to God's calling and to share the gospel with the people in their neighborhood.

On the weekend a huge festival was organized by the UMC in Zofingen (the host congregation) and by Methodists from many local churches all over Switzerland. There were concerts, pleasure grounds, restaurants, a marketplace, lectures, cultural exhibitions, meditations, a theater, and worship services. The aim was to invite the people of the region regardless of their relationship with any church to a special, colorful festival where they could eat, drink, and have fun, but where they were also invited by a variety of program items to think about important issues such as health, money, power, sexuality, life, and death. The organizing team hoped that in all these activities, many people would be blessed and challenged and that many people would hear the voice of God and dare to respond by taking steps towards a future with Christ. The next annual conference meeting will take place June 26-29, 2008, in Basel/St. Chrischona.

- Urs Schweizer, as reported in UMNewscope, July 6, 2007.

Western New York Annual Conference met June 8–10 in Buffalo. Bishop Violet L. Fisher opened the session urging Christians to let go of personal agendas and to trust in God. She issued six challenges: to build strong leaders, to strengthen small churches, to improve urban ministries, to facilitate global presence, to root out ineffective clergy, and to encourage young to answer the call for ordained ministry. Fisher will retire next year. Bishop Nkulu Ntanda Ntambo (North Katanga Area) was guest preacher. Members voted to establish a scholarship to support a student at the Africa University in Zimbabwe from the North Katanga Conference, with which Western New York has a partnership. The conference also supported the UM Global AIDS Fund. Members forwarded ten resolutions to General Conference—six dealing with human sexuality and the others relating to global warming, Bermuda, peacemaking as a mission priority, and the National Plan for Hispanic/Latino Ministry. Superintendents were asked to initiate and carry out a comprehensive assessment of the ministry potential of urban congregations. The resolution called for the study to be carried out in the forthcoming year, with a report and any recommendations brought to the 2008 district and annual conference sessions. The purpose would be to enhance and expand UM ministry and mission in urban centers through the development and implementation of a coordinated urban strategy for the next quadrennium and the creative and effective use of all available resources (human, spiritual, financial, and physical). The conference also adopted a 2008 Shared Ministries budget totaling \$3,210,494. Elected as lay delegates to General Conference are Eleanor Collingsworth (delegation head) and Jan Rothfuss. The clergy elected Larry Baird and Sinnathamby Thevanesan. Membership is 56,127, down 969.

— Marilyn J. Kasperek, as reported in UMNewscope, July 13, 2007.

West Ohio Annual Conference met June 10-14 in Lakeside, with Bishop Bruce Ough presiding. UM pastor Adam Hamilton served as keynote speaker. Conference members adopted resolutions about: 1) ending the U.S. military presence in Iraq and preemptive military strikes while promoting the effort of military chaplains, especially UMs; 2) supporting an amendment to the Ohio constitution to establish a new funding mechanism for public education; and 3) encouraging all churches to observe the National Day of Prayer, especially in ecumenical settings. The conference endorsed petitions to the 2008 General Conference for support of 1) continued sacramental privilege for local pastors; 2) full clergy voting rights for local pastors and associate members; 3) allowing deacons in full connection to be ordained to Word, Service, and Sacrament, and extend the sacramental ministry to deacons retroactive to the first class in 1997; and 4) require the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns to publish annually a complete list of all ecumenical shared ministries. Lay delegates to General Conference are George Howard, Mary Kercherval Short, Anna Barrett, Katherine Connolly, Chris Steiner, Benis Lutz, Mildred Oglesby, Robert Walker Sr., Scott Dawson, Phillip Connolly, and Anthony Carmichael. Clergy delegates are Gregory Stover, Gloria Brooks, Roger Grace, Norman Coleman III, Joon-Sik Park, Darryl Fairchild, Thomas Tumblin, Margaret Mallory, Alice Wolfe, Rachel Miller, and Dee Stickley-Miner. Membership is 224,342, down 6,159.

- Ann Rhyan, as reported in UMNewscope, July 6, 2007.

Wisconsin met June 10-13 in Madison with the theme "Wholeness to Holiness: Reaching for Higher Ground" and with Bishop Linda Lee presiding. New items: 1) asked each congregation or circuit in the conference to recognize and celebrate Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy in sermon, song fest, forums, and community gatherings; 2) established a task force to study the financial needs of current students of ministry for the purpose of discerning the impact of the educational debt load; 3) affirmed the continuation of the National Plan for Hispanic Ministry; 4) restructured the conference council on youth ministries; 5) advocated for the establishment of a Department of Peace and Nonviolence; and 6) called for a 2008 report-back study to determine if the current number of superintendents is adequate. The conference filled a semi trailer for the Midwest Mission Distribution Center, including 4,214 baby or youth blankets, quilts, and shawls; total value of all the items, kits, and tools collected reached almost \$63,000. A check from The United Methodist Publishing House was forwarded to the Central Conferences Pension Initiative Fund. The 2008 conference budget was set at \$7.1 million. Delegates elected to General Conference as clergy are Jorge Mayorga Solis (delegation chair), Susanne Burwell, Samuel J. Royappa, Stephen J. Polster, and Mary Council-Austin. Laity elected are Lisa King, Billie LaBumbard, Becky Foster, Justin Lowe, and Rick Kindschi. The conference voted to forward to General Conference 16 of 34 petitions submitted. One congregation was discontinued. A review of active clergy ages shows that there is a potential for 55 clergy retirements (15%) in 2008. Membership is 90,255, down 3,481.

- Jane Follmer Zekoff, as reported in UMNewscope, July 6, 2007.

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"If you don't read the newspaper, you are uninformed; if you do read the newspaper' you are misinformed."

- Mark Twain