

The Monthly Update

Volume 18, Number 3

July 2008

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

This edition of the Monthly Update contains the first of this year's summaries of the annual conference meetings from the United Methodist Church around the world.

In addition we are continuing to "digest" the results of the General Conference that was held in Ft. Worth. When we have analyzed the approximately 1500 petitions that were either passed or defeated, we shall issue a report that will be posted on the website. In addition, we plan to mail each of you a written copy.

As has been stated earlier, we are cautious about what happened there. The past edition of *The Christian Methodist Newsletter* tried to be as positive as possible because in fact there was much that happened that was good. However, there was also the other side that gives us cause for alarm. It is this that we shall continue to aggressively monitor.

Regarding Iraq, while a great deal of attention is given to this area, we need to keep in mind that what we learn from the mainstream media may not necessarily be the truth. Often journalists do not have an adequate background in military affairs and the impact on international relations. Secondly, the media for which they work may have their own bias and the news reported from the field will be filtered through the lens of that perspective. The result is that what we learn here in the United States will not sufficiently inform us as to the true nature of events.

I remember living, working, and going to the University in Houston. I knew someone who worked for the *Houston Chronicle*. On more than one occasion, he would say with a bit of feeling, "What you read is what that editor wants you to read!" At the time, I passed it off as the comments of "an old man" and hardly worth considering. Then starting with the Vietnam War and subsequent military actions, I learned the truth of what he was saying.

I do firmly believe that we are at what is possibly the most crucial time in our nation's history. What happens in Iraq and Afghanistan will determine the future of our country and the rest of the world.

Please pray for military personnel overseas. And while you are at it, please pray for revival in our country - that tens of millions of Americans will come to know Jesus as Lord and Savior. When they do, there will be an increased awareness of God's expectations of us as individuals and of our country.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris,
Executive Director

July 2008 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

Wouldn't it be fine if all those who point a finger would extend a hand instead?

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Annual Conference Reports

Editorial note: For the most part, the reports are presented as is with minimal comments. Occasionally, there will be an editorial note inserted to provide insight into a certain action or as added comment. It is interesting to note that some of the conferences with the most imaginative themes are ones that suffer the most decline. Again, in all of this activity, where is the clear message that people are spiritually lost and need a resurrected Christ to take away their sins and change their lives? Could it be possible that we have misguided priorities? Could it be that the main reason for our decline is that we have lost sight of this vital need? It would seem so.

Alabama-West Florida was held June 1-4 in Montgomery, Ala. at Frazer Memorial UMC, with the theme "Amazing Love-Great Grace." The theme combined Acts 4:33 with Charles Wesley's great hymn, "And Can It Be." Prior to this year's conference, Bishop Larry M. Goodpaster challenged the churches of the conference to raise \$60,000 for the Ganta Hospital in Liberia (Advance # 982168). With donations still coming in, the people of the AWF Conference have overwhelmingly responded by raising almost \$70,000.

In business matters, the conference: 1) established a \$17 million budget for mission and ministry for the next year, up 3.78% from 2008; 2) adopted a resolution dealing with tax fairness issues in Alabama; 3) voted to send the UM Publishing House pension contribution of \$9,703.60 to the Central Conference Pension Initiative; and 4) heard a Blue Lake Campaign update that \$2 million of the \$3 million goal has already been raised to enhance and improve the conference's camp and assembly grounds.

Two deacons and 11 elders were ordained as members in full connection on June 2 at First UMC of Montgomery, Ala. Ten clergy entering into a probationary relationship with the conference were commissioned on June 4 (one probationary deacon, eight probationary elders, and one probationary elder in a missional setting). Among those commissioned was Tsuchue Vang from Laos, where Bishop Goodpaster also serves as Bishop.

[No statistics were available on membership and attendance.]

– Meredith Earnest, as reported in UMNewscope, June 20, 2008.

Alaska United Methodist Conference held its annual conference in Anchorage May 30-June 1. There are 28 UM churches spread out over The Last Frontier, with ministries to several outlying areas.

[Editor's note: this is the first time it has been listed as a UM conference; before, it was the "Alaska Missionary Conference" of the UMC. This report is written in the first person.]

The following is a "Top Ten List" of what occurred in the 2008 annual conference session.

- 1) We started by singing "And Are We Yet Alive." That's how we UMs know we've begun!
- 2) We increased membership on our program and administrative committees to reflect an increase in clergy to our conference (from clergy couples) and a desire for more lay participation.
- 3) We changed our name from "The Alaska Missionary Conference" to "The Alaska United Methodist Conference" (AUMC). While we remain a missionary conference in the UMC, the change reflects that we are learning how to do mission in the 21st century. We have learned from our Native sisters and brothers that the word missionary can be offensive because of the sometimes disturbing history of Christian missionary activity in Alaska.
- 4) We conducted a "Hoopla" for Nothing But Nets-netting over \$600.
- 5) We celebrated "Good Gnus Money." This is a program for grants up to \$2000 to use as seed money for new ministry projects. We want to encourage our local churches and members to dream of potential new ministries in their settings. And, yes, the program material has several "gnus" on it.
- 6) We said goodbye to Bishop Ed Paup, who will become General Secretary of the General Board of Global Ministries, and to our Conference Superintendent, the Rev. Rachel Lieder Simeon, who will become the Associate General Secretary for Administration of UMCOR.
- 7) There was "holy conferencing." One of the very unique things about the AUMC is that we are small enough to spend a lot of time together-at meals, in worship, in small groups and merely being with each other. If God is moving in a particular way, we have the freedom to move right along with God. And our conference leadership has been attentive to that in our gatherings.
- 8) We shared a report from General Conference, lifting up the high points, the holy points, and the points of disagreement. It was shared that the AUMC has a challenge making its distinctive voice heard in the larger church. While our state is large in size, our church is small in numbers. There were changes that will make it more difficult to express our missional needs, particularly on General Boards and Agencies. Nevertheless, we believe we have something to say to the larger

church.

9) We adopted a Missional Priority for 2008-09: "Native Ministry in Alaska." We hope to identify Native Communities (some of which are very isolated) and their needs for expanding mission. We pray that we will be able to raise up lay leaders and ministerial leaders in these communities.

10) The AUMC was a 2007 recipient of a mission offering taken by the Virginia Annual Conference. That offering will fund "Giving Voice," an ecumenical gathering of Native elders representing several regions and tribes. While this started as a gathering to give a place at a table for elders to share concerns and religious experiences, it has grown into discussions on addressing and exploring solutions for common problems. By being part of this process, the AUMC is learning how best to address the needs of native communities, some of which we've never worked with before.

Membership is 3928, down 142 from the previous year. Worship attendance is 2415, down 153. Church school attendance is 964, down 28.

– Jim Doepken, as reported in *UMNewscope*, June 13, 2008.

Baltimore-Washington, May 21-24, was attended by clergy, lay members and visitors from 682 churches, totaling more than 1,500 people under the theme "Poured Out: Serve Like Christ." Bishop John R. Schol, in his state of the church report, encouraged UMs to be extreme disciples. With a goal announced three years ago of having 600 Acts 2 congregations by 2012, Bishop Schol announced that the conference is nearly half way to its goal, with 272 churches.

Striving to better allocate conference resources to help all churches become Acts 2 congregations, the conference overwhelmingly passed a proposal to move from nine districts to eight. Seventy-six percent of conference churches received at least one member by profession of faith last year. The UMC average is 58%. A motion was passed without discussion for the Commission on the Status and Role of Women to determine what progress has been made since the 2003 study that researched women in ministry in the Baltimore-Washington Conference, as well as determining what needs to be done going forward. Members of annual conference raised \$74,379 in a special offering for the HOPE Fund, a conference initiative to raise a million dollars that will benefit ministries in Zimbabwe, the Global AIDS Fund and rebuilding churches along the Gulf Coast that were destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. The Rev. Clark Carr, pastor of Grace UMC in Hagerstown and a chaplain with the Maryland National Guard, presented Bishop Schol with gifts from the front lines of the Iraq war, including an American flag. The Bishop led the conference attendees in a prayer for peace. Annual Conference members voted to continue to create and facilitate regional dialogue teams that will explore together issues related to the full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people within the life of the UMC.

[Note: This "continual discussion of "LGBT issues" is one of the tactics used in attempting to normalize homosexual practice in the UMC.]

Conference members also voted to encourage local churches to pray for and support the operation of pregnancy centers in their area that help pregnant women in the bearing and caring for their children. Conference members adopted the 2009 budget. An adjourned session of annual conference will be held later this year to discuss apportionment and stewardship issues.

[No statistics were available on membership and attendance.]

– Shaun Lane, as reported in *UMNewscope*, June 13, 2008.

Central Texas met June 1-4 in Fort Worth. With the theme of "Reaching Out to Others," Bishop Ben R. Chamness presided over his eighth and final business session before retiring from the active episcopacy in August. It is under his leadership that the conference celebrates its 34th consecutive year of membership growth, full payout of General Church apportionments, four new Hispanic church starts this year and the joyful afterglow of having hosted UMs from around the world for the 2008 General Conference in Fort Worth. With a narrative budget that shared personal stories of how ministries of the Central Texas Conference are transforming lives around the world, members approved a \$10.6 million budget that reflects a 3.78% increase.

In other actions, members: (1) heard an update on the ongoing need for work teams to repair homes damaged by Hurricane Rita in Louisiana; (2) heard plans for the publication of the conference history for the 100th anniversary in 2010; (3) discontinued two churches; (4) designated the Annual Conference offering for the Justice For Our Neighbors ministry operated jointly by the Central and North Texas conferences; (5) approved resolutions calling for a just minimum wage, inclusive local church membership and support of restorative justice education and the forming of partnerships with existing ministry programs, encouraging federal budget priorities aimed at health/education/energy/job training/repayment of the national debt, urging national leaders to cooperate with the United Nations to resolve differences without resorting to violence and calling local churches to reduce their electric consumption by 10% by 2010. The conference failed to affirm the Council of Bishops' resolution asking for an end to the war in Iraq.

Membership is 162,511, up 776 from the previous year.

– Carolyn E. Stevens, as reported in *UMNewscope*, June 20, 2008.

Florida gathered more than 1,600 laity and clergy May 29-May 31 at the Lakeland Center in Lakeland, Fla., under the theme "Living the United Methodist Way." Members heard from the Rev. Dr. Randy Maddox, professor of theology and Wesleyan studies at Duke Divinity School and Northern Illinois Conference Bishop Hee-Soo Jung, guest speaker and preacher, respectively. The two spoke about the theological vision and spiritual meaning of The Methodist Way of salvation and discipleship. Reminding members of Methodism's start with John and Charles Wesley on a college campus, the Florida Conference Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministry said it's time for the conference to make ministry with young people a priority, not just one of its ministries. That includes reaching more than a quarter of a million college students in South Florida. To do that, the board is planning to develop a regional campus ministry in the area. The conference currently has a campus ministry at the University of Miami, in addition to six others in a state with 1 million students on 60 college campuses.

New Church Development reported it will use 75% of the slightly more than \$1 million in funding approved for new churches and missions to launch non-Anglo congregations-Hispanic, Haitian, Korean and Chinese. Seventeen new churches and missions have begun since 2005. Members also approved funding for a conference-level director of African-American Congregational Development to provide resources and assistance to Florida Conference African-American churches. More than 9 percent of the conference's 722 churches are African American.

Florida Conference Treasurer Mickey Wilson said churches gave nearly \$15.3 million in apportionments in 2007, down from nearly \$16.8 million in 2006. The amount collected for property and casualty premiums in 2007 was \$18.3 million, up from \$15 million. The total cost of insurance premiums decreased 22 percent, saving the conference more than \$4 million in 2008. Despite the reduction in apportionment giving, Wilson said a drop in operating expenses and little storm activity in 2007 helped strengthen the conference's financial condition. Members approved a 2009 budget of nearly \$18.5 million - an increase of slightly more than 6 percent.

The conference episcopacy committee affirmed Florida Conference Bishop Timothy W. Whitaker's return to the conference as its bishop.

Membership is 310,711, down 7,005 from the previous year.

- Tita Parham, as reported in UMNewscope, June 13, 2008.

Greater New Jersey met May 29-31 with the theme "One in Spirit, All in Ministry, In the Spirit of Fellowship." In his Episcopal Address, Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar celebrated that ... the total number of Christian formation groups in the conference increased by 26% and that there was a 156% increase in volunteer mission teams. The Rev. Charles Bender, delivering the District Superintendent's Report, cited numerous exciting and innovative ministries from around the conference, challenged each pastor and local church to find ways to incorporate the "new" membership vow of witness into their ministry and urged the annual conference to take at least one young lay person and one young clergy to General Conference in 2012.

In response to a resolution at the 2007 Annual Conference, the Study on Effectively Fulfilling Our Missional Responsibilities was established. The report recommended that the conference start one new church plant per year, provide opportunities for youth and young adults to participate in mission trips globally and locally, including the spiritual pilgrimage to Taizé, invest in the education of youth and young adults for both college and seminary, provide lay speaking programs for youth, and institute a Pilot Program for Growth for churches not receiving new members by profession of faith.

Hearing the calls for action, the conference celebrated raising \$118,250 for the Nothing But Nets program. The conference further celebrated its partnership with the North Katanga Annual Conference in the Congo, by receiving a \$10,000 legacy gift to build a church in North Katanga in addition to the \$5,628 in special offering collected for North Katanga. In hopes of creating a national trend, the conference celebrated the successful effort to ban the death penalty in New Jersey and authorized efforts to seek similar bans in Pennsylvania, New York and Texas.

The conference approved an \$11.9 million budget, an increase of 2.67%, and included the major step of removing membership numbers from the conference apportionment formula.

Membership is 96,927, down 2,016 from the previous year.

- Jack Shaw, as reported in UMNewscope, June 20, 2008.

Kansas West met May 28-30 in Salina, Kan., under the leadership of Bishop Scott J. Jones. The theme was "Gather Us In." More than 1,000 prayer shawls were collected and distributed during communion at opening worship, wrapping conference members and guests in the prayers of shawl-makers from across the annual conference. The conference celebrated pledges of more than \$5.2 million toward its \$4.2 million capital campaign to support infrastructure for camping and campus ministry and church development for new and existing congregations.

Rev. Adam Hamilton, senior pastor at the UM Church of the Resurrection, was the featured plenary speaker. He brought messages on leadership, preaching and worship, and the future of the UMC. The conference adopted a new vision statement: "As we make disciples of Jesus Christ, the Kansas West Conference calls God's people to invite through radical

hospitality, excite for intentional faith-sharing and unite in risk-taking mission for the transformation of the world." Copies of *Three Simple Rules* by Bishop Rueben Job were also distributed.

The proposed \$5.9 million budget for 2009 was adopted. The conference received a check for \$8,841.97 from the UM Publishing House and voted to contribute the entire amount to the Central Conference Pension Fund.

Membership is 83,724, down 1,242 (1.5%) from 2006. Worship attendance stands at 34,293 down 1,419 (3.97%) from 2006. Sunday school attendance stands at 13,954, down 41 (.29%) from 2006.

– Lisa Elliott Diehl, as reported in *UMNewscope*, June 13, 2008.

Louisiana gathered more than 1,000 UMs from around the state at Centenary College in Shreveport June 1-4. "Sanctify You, Through and Through" was the theme for this year's event. The focus on Sanctifying Grace continued a quadrennial theme of Grace from the Wesleyan Tradition, with previous themes being Prevenient Grace (2005), Justifying Grace (2006) and Means of Grace (2007). Members of the conference celebrated Bishop William W. Hutchinson's decision to remain as an active bishop for one more quadrennium.

The body voted unanimously to send a recommendation to the South Central Jurisdiction's Episcopacy Committee to return Bishop Hutchinson to Louisiana for four more years....

The conference also celebrated three new church starts.

The Louisiana Disaster Recovery Ministry reported that, to date, more than 53,000 volunteers from around the world have served in rebuilding storm-stricken areas of the state. Those volunteers have worked more than 2.4 million hours, at a value of \$45.4 million in in-kind donations. Out of 50 churches deeply affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, six of the churches have closed. An additional six churches have merged with other area churches. Churches continue to work with a "hurting" people who are rebuilding their communities, working several jobs, seeking affordable housing and spiritual support.

Celebrations included the creation of Luke's House, a free clinic serving the New Orleans area, and the strengthening of already established Hispanic ministries with the addition of two GBGM missionaries. Affected churches still seek relationships with partner churches from throughout the connection to provide prayer, physical assistance and financial help. The offering taken at a Monday night concert raised \$4,919 and will support the construction of the Louisiana Friendship Plaza at Mt. Sequoyah, Ark. The Plaza is the conference's way of visibly showing our appreciation to the conferences in our South Central Jurisdiction for their assistance in our recovery from Hurricanes Rita and Katrina. Total membership for the Louisiana Conference is 123,233, down 2,404 from last year. Worship attendance is 43,862, down 1,092 from last year. Sunday school attendance is 18,621, down 866 from last year.

– Betty Backstrom, as reported in *UMNewscope*, June 20, 2008.

Memphis met June 1-3 under the theme "Radical Hospitality and Change." Conference members came to the Carl Perkins Civic Center in Jackson, Tenn. prepared to discuss radical change in both vision and the structure of the Annual Conference. The tenor of the two and a half day conference was hopeful and enthusiastic despite the bad news of decline in membership and worship attendance.

Change for Children, the conference offering, was dedicated to programs that offer hope to at-risk children and youth. Many local churches sent their children to the opening worship service to deliver jars of coins and checks that had been collected during special Loose Change Sundays. The mountain of coins is still being counted, but it is estimated that over \$20,000 was collected.

Two major reports with the potential to change the future of the UMC in West Tennessee and Western Kentucky were received: 1) The Bishop's Study Committee Report, approved with several amendments to the five recommendations, outlines a plan to share costs with the Tennessee Conference, develop a comprehensive plan to train and equip clergy and laity in Methodist essentials, urges conference agencies and institutions to establish endowment programs, institute fund-raising efforts and develop a new apportionment formula that is easier to understand and interpret. 2) The Transition Team report offered a radical revision of the Connectional Ministries Team structure and a new vision for ministry. Integral to the restructuring is a reliance on part time Lay Resource Leaders in every district, an emphasis on local church revitalization and the development of new faith communities.

A budget of \$9,483,363, which was a decrease of \$46,864 from last year, was approved.

Two resolutions were passed: one established a Creation Care Team that will communicate with local churches and agencies on ways to care for the Earth, and the other directs the Memphis Conference delegation to the Southeastern Jurisdiction to request a resident bishop for the conference.

Bishop Dick Wills, the Rev. Roger Hopson and the Rev. J. Ted Leach preached; Dr. Brady Whitehead led two Bible studies. Nine pastors retired, two elders and two deacons were ordained, and eight probationary members were commissioned.

Membership is 85,594, down 2,045 from 87,639.

– Cathy Farmer, as reported in *UMNewscope*, June 20, 2008.

Minnesota met May 27-30 in St. Cloud, Minn. "Change is strange!" Bishop Sally Dyck proclaimed to nearly 1,000 lay and clergy members gathered at the opening banquet of the 154th conference session. Members took to heart her challenge to embrace the way God works through change as they prepared to rearrange from six to five districts (beginning July 1), to minister more intentionally with those in poverty, and to pursue creative ways of reaching new people with the Good News.

Four years ago, conference members voted to raise funds to help UMs in St. Petersburg, Russia, build a facility for worship and outreach. Learning how cultural suspicion and government oppression restrain UM ministry in Russia, session members recommitted themselves to "unlock the church in Russia" by pledging to raise funds to complete Minnesota's promise by the end of June. They contributed more than \$16,000 at session alone.

During their report, the lay leader and dean of the cabinet highlighted a sampling of churches that are reaching new people, such as recent immigrants, people who have been disaffected by typical worship services, youth seeking a welcoming space for fellowship and support, and residents moving to growing communities.

Following Jesus' example of ministry with the poor, conference members established a voluntary "Witness to End Poverty" society in which participants pledge their time and resources to befriend and advocate for those in poverty, urged Minnesota UMs to promote social policies to "end poverty in Minnesota by 2020," and resolved to tell the U.S. president and the Minnesota governor not to enact "economic stimulus packages" that hurt those in poverty.

Members adopted a 2009 budget of \$6,518,550, which is \$18,500, or .3 percent, higher than the 2008 budget. Adding \$500,000 for uncollectible apportionments, the total to be apportioned is \$7,018,550. Over \$60,000 was raised for the conference Love Offering for missions.

Membership is 77,583, down 2,040 from the previous year.

– Victoria Rebeck, as reported in *UMNewscope*, June 13, 2008.

North Carolina was held June 11-14 in Greenville, N.C., with the theme "A Witnessing in the Light of God." One of the first actions taken by the conference was to approve a modification of the conference structure changing the five circles of ministry to four teams (Outreach Ministry, Leadership, Christian Formation and Stewardship). The Conference Connectional Table remains the center for visioning, mission interpretation, budgeting, and accountability.

The conference approved the proposed \$20.1 million budget and adopted the Health Insurance proposal to keep the same coverage and premiums while raising the life-time maximum from \$2 to \$5 million and increasing mental health benefits. For 2009, the minimum salary approved for pastors under full-time appointments will be \$40,319. Conference trustees were granted permission to sell the current conference headquarters building and land in Raleigh, NC. The proceeds are to be used for building a new conference office building on land previously purchased at the intersection of two major highways east of Garner and near Raleigh.

Resolutions adopted during the conference called for humane mental health reform in North Carolina, support of anti-discrimination and anti-bullying policies in educational institutions, stopping Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids and detention, opposition to intolerance and racism on North Carolina radio stations and fair treatment and support of undocumented young people continuing education through the NC college system. Two resolutions were defeated. One called for holding U.S. civilian political leaders responsible for the war in Iraq while fully supporting military personnel and the other recommended changes by a nonpartisan commission in national health care insurance coverage for all Americans.

The conference also recognized 110 congregations as Acts 2 Churches demonstrating the qualities of Radical Hospitality, Passionate Worship, Spiritual Formation, and Risk Taking Ministry to the World.

Membership is 237,159, up 595 from the previous year. Worship attendance is 84,391, down 1,704. Sunday school attendance is 39,169, down 1,028.

– C. Bill Norton, as reported in *UMNewscope*, June 27, 2008.

North Central New York met in Liverpool, N.Y. May 30-June 1. Bishop Violet Fisher exhorted God's people to embrace change as she brought her last Episcopal Address to this 200th conference session. Bishop Fisher will retire August 31, and the conference was filled with celebration of her ministry. The Conference Choir shared the selection "And What Now." written in honor of Bishop Fisher by Mr. James Welsch. A time set aside for Retirement Celebration included presentation of a gift of \$18,000 from local churches for Bishop Fisher's special fund for work with children and young people, offerings of music and dance, special videos and the anointing of Bishop Fisher.

The conference adopted a resolution to respond to discriminatory practices of Bennigan's Restaurant after NCNY Conference delegates to General Conference witnessed an act of racial discrimination at Bennigan's Restaurant in Fort Worth, Texas. Bishop Violet L. Fisher conferred with General Commission on Religion and Race (GCORR) president Bishop Linda Lee and formed a strategy that included letters to the restaurant's corporate offices, urging them to take the incident seriously and to offer racial sensitivity training to their restaurant staff, offering the resources of GCORR to assist them.

Other actions included passing a resolution seeking to actively work to keep Hebron Orphanages open, designating the

last Sunday in October each year as Disability Awareness Sunday with a special offering, and affirming a resolution authorizing the New ACT (Area Conference Team) to develop specific plans for creation of a new conference in the Northeastern Jurisdiction. A summary report of The Futures Commission, which gathers data pertinent to the new conference boundary, was shared by Dr. Thomas Wolfe. The conference raised \$9,000 to send two youth on the Mission of Peace, and presented the Denman Awards, honoring Pastor Mary Drake serving Mannsville/Lorraine in the Northern Flow District and Lorrie A. Spence of Clifton Springs UMC for their work in evangelism.

The conference adopted a budget of \$4,023,763, representing an overall 3 percent increase.

Membership is 74,483, down 1,866 from the previous year.

– Marilyn J. Kasperek, as reported in *UMNewscope*, June 13, 2008.

South Carolina "dared to change the world" as they met June 1-4 in Florence. The African American Task Force, a sub-committee of the Ethnic Local Church Concerns Committee, conducted eight listening sessions throughout the spring. As a result, it recommended to Connectional Ministries that "a congregational specialist for the African American church be made a full-time position without additional district responsibilities." Similarly, the Committee on Hispanic/Latino Ministries is "in conversation with Ministry Advisory Team" about making the congregational specialist for Hispanic ministries a full-time position. The team is working on it, but chose not to bring a recommendation at this time, said the Rev. Willie Teague.

During Monday night's ordination service, 23 local pastors were licensed, 15 deacons and elders were commissioned as probationary members, and 18 deacons and elders were ordained as full members. Thirty-five retired ministers, spouses and surviving spouses were remembered during the memorial service, and 31 pastors were recognized and thanked for their years of service during the retirement service.

The body considered four resolutions: adopting one that would study the relationship between the conference and Epworth Children's Home, adopting one encouraging divestiture from the government of Sudan and affirming a new program established at Spartanburg Methodist College benefiting students from the "Corridor of Shame." The fourth resolution, which asked for historical accuracy in future resolutions, was defeated.

A budget of \$17.5 million—an increase of 3.2% over 2008—was approved, as was a motion to give \$100,000 from the Permanent Reserve Fund to Epworth for the continuation of the home's Early Intervention Center. Offerings taken throughout the conference totaled more than \$46,450, and will benefit the UM Committee on relief (UMCOR) Response in Kenya, Bethlehem Bible College in Israel and the South Carolina UM Volunteers in Mission. The conference bid a somber goodbye to five churches that were discontinued.

Membership is 239,750, down 1,445 from last year.

– Emily Cooper, as reported in *UMNewscope*, June 20, 2008.

Western North Carolina met June 5-8 at Lake Junaluska. Bishop J. Lawrence McCleskey will retire Aug. 31 following 45 years in ordained ministry, 12 of which he served as a bishop. Delegates honored McCleskey and his spouse, Margaret at a reception on Friday afternoon. On Thursday evening, they gathered to honor retiring Conference Secretary Charles D. "Denny" White who held the position for the past 25 years. The first order of business was to enact changes in conference rules to conform to the reorganization plan adopted at a special session of conference held in February. The plan includes the addition of the 15th district, reorganization of conference structure, development of dashboard indicators and formation of clergy peer groups. On behalf of the cabinet, McCleskey reported six signs of hope for the conference: the creation of the Lake Norman District, the Clergy Health Initiative, the Thriving Rural Churches program, the African-American Initiative, a turnaround in financial stewardship and the "growing of our own" pastors. The conference celebrated several milestones: 100th anniversary of the Social Creed, 100th anniversary of the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits, the 60th anniversary of the Advance for Christ and His Church and the 40th anniversaries of the WNCC Resource Center and the General Commission on Religion and Race.

The conference approved a budget of \$15.4 million. Membership is 293,772, down 683 from the previous year. Worship attendance stands at 126,551, down 987. Church school attendance stands at 62,002, down 1,152.

– Mark L. Barden, as reported in *UMNewscope*, June 20, 2008.

Wyoming met May 29-31 using the theme "Passionate Spirituality: Have You Not Heard," at the University of Scranton and Elm Park UMC, in Scranton, Pennsylvania. In her opening address, Bishop Susan W. Hassinger challenged the 600 lay and clergy registered for the session to raise enough money during the event to purchase a mosquito net each for the Nothing But Nets campaign. Enough was collected to purchase 627 nets at \$10.00 each.

Resolutions were approved allowing transition teams to begin working with other conferences in New York and Pennsylvania toward the creation of new conferences in each state, if approved by Jurisdictional Conference in July. Other resolutions will result in a change of plans for retirees' health insurance; allow charges to send young adult representatives with voice but no vote to conference at a reduced rate; establish a bishop's task force to study disagreement between UMs on the issue of homosexuality; create two new churches in communities now served by six congregations; and set accessibility standards for sites hosting conference and district events open to all.

The conference recognized five retiring pastors. Three new pastors were commissioned and two ordained. Special efforts by two local congregations were celebrated. The Waverly (NY) UMC shared efforts they made to overcome extreme losses in their congregation due to death. They used a grant of \$3,000 from the conference to advertise a contemporary service that has helped them bring in new families and individuals. The Nimmonsburg UMC, in Binghamton, received recognition for its emphasis on radical welcoming. This has led them to be cited as the only church in the denomination listed as a welcoming congregation for seven consecutive years. Their efforts have resulted in an increased attendance of 100% over the past five years.

Bishop Susan Hassinger was thanked for her leadership over the past couple of years. She was presented with a basket of fair trade yarn, representing the purchase of a gift of four llamas and four sheep through Heifer International. Bishop Hassinger's interim assignment to the Albany Area will end September 1.

Membership is 61,534, down 1,379 from the previous year.

– Don Perry, as reported in *UMNewscope*, June 13, 2008.

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Money is something that things run into and people run out of.