

The Monthly Update

April 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

There is a lot of talk urging you to “invest in...” which are terms used relating in some way to your money. In the public sector, it is a way of talking about spending your tax money. This expenditure may or may not be a good use of taxpayer money when examined in detail. In other contexts it may be used by retailers to get you to buy their products. The same advice applies: it may or may not be a good use of your money. There are some ministries who use this term to try to get you to support what they do. Again, this may or may not be a good use of your money. In each of these areas and all others, look at what is being done and ask yourself, “Is this a responsible, efficient use of funds? Are my taxpayer dollars being used wisely? Is my money being used to purchase this product or service, or to give to this ministry being used efficiently?” it is important to look beyond the rhetoric to the reality and judge for yourself.

As in the past, I can assure you that those of us in Concerned Methodists use the funds you contribute to our ministry as wisely, efficiently, and effectively as we can. The same applies to our time; since there is far more to do than the available time, we strive to maximize the use of that as well. Since we are all volunteers and we minimize overhead, we are able to accomplish both goals.

In this month’s edition of the Monthly Update a disproportionate amount of space is devoted to the issue of our annual conferences that are coming up, a pastor and congregation that has chosen to separate itself from our denomination, and initiatives in Cuba and for Russia.

We are dealing with important issues at this time. As I have stated in the past, I firmly believe that this may very well be the most crucial time in the over 200-year history of the Methodist Church, and as manifested now in the United Methodist Church. The overriding surface issue is that of homosexual normalization which will be result if the amendments to our constitution pass which would make the American church into a central conference.

Please do everything in your power to inform others, and pray that these amendments will not pass.

Please, I ask you – pray.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris,
Executive Director

April 2009 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

The great people of the Bible had one thing in common: they spent time alone with God, getting to know Him.

– Warren & Ruth Myers, “How to have a quiet time”

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Of Interest

+ ***Conferences to consider church structure***

United Methodists meeting in this year’s annual sessions will vote on 32 proposed constitutional amendments, many of them related to the denomination’s structure as a global body. Delegates to the 62 U.S. annual conferences and the 73 conferences in Africa, Europe and Asia will consider 23 amendments approved earlier by the 2008 UM General Conference, the denomination’s top legislative body. The amendments, proposed by the Task Force on the Worldwide Nature of the Church, are for the creation of regional conferences to establish a uniform denominational structure.

The legislation would make it possible to create a U.S regional conference in the future. Each annual conference would belong to a regional conference that will be able to organize into jurisdictional conferences if the amendments are passed by the 2009 annual conference sessions. The remaining nine amendments are related to church and conference membership; annual and jurisdictional conference composition, including boundaries; inclusiveness of the church; representation of newly created conferences at general, jurisdictional and central conferences; the judicial council; episcopal elections; fiduciary responsibility; and clergy participation in the election of delegates to general, jurisdictional and central conferences. “Amendments may be debated, but may not be amended,” said the Rev. L. Fitzgerald Reist, II, secretary of the General Conference. Voting on changes to the church’s constitution occurs in the year following General Conference to provide annual conferences with time to familiarize themselves with the proposed amendments, he said. “This is an attempt by the General Conference to be flexible and respond more appropriately in a rapidly changing world,” Reist added. All constitutional amendments must be approved by a two-thirds vote of the total number of voting members of all annual conferences worldwide. The Council of Bishops is expected to announce the results during its 2010 spring meeting.

Another proposed amendment would allow lay people on the committee on investigation to vote on matters of ordination, character and conference relations of clergy.

Bigger voice for clergy. If annual conferences approve proposed constitutional amendment XIX, deacons, associate members and provisional members may join ordained ministers in full connection in voting for clergy delegates to general, jurisdictional and central conferences. To be eligible to vote, local pastors must have completed the course of study or master of divinity degree and have served under appointment for two consecutive years immediately preceding an election.

The annual conference is the "basic unit" of the church, according to the denomination’s Book of Discipline. It may include an entire state, part of a state or even parts of two or more states. During the annual conference gatherings in the United States, Africa, Europe and the Philippines, one-year appointments of all conference clergy members are announced. New deacons and elders are ordained, candidates for ordination approved, special projects and ministries recognized and budgets are set. A bishop presides over each annual session.

U.S. conference changes

In 2007, delegates to the North and South Indiana Conferences voted to merge, an action that was approved by the North Central Jurisdictional Conference in 2008. The new Indiana Annual Conference will have its first conference session June 25-28 in Muncie.

Delegates to the 2008 Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference approved specific plans for the creation of two new annual conferences from the uniting of six conferences from the New York state portions of Wyoming and Troy along with all of the churches in Western New York and North Central New York. The Pennsylvania portion of the Wyoming Conference will join the Central Pennsylvania to create a new conference in Pennsylvania, and the

Vermont portion of the Troy Conference will become part of the New England Conference. The effective date for the change is July 1, 2010.

Annual conference members from Central Pennsylvania and Wyoming are expected to vote on a recommendation that the new Pennsylvania conference be named the Susquehanna Annual Conference, which is the name of river that winds throughout much of the conference boundaries.

The first session of 2009 conference gatherings was held in January when the Gwaten Conference of the United Methodist Church of Nigeria convened. The U.S. gatherings begin in May when the Red Bird Missionary Conference convenes May 1-2 in Big Creek, Ky., and will conclude June 28 with the adjournments of the Desert Southwest Annual Conference.

List of annual conferences

The United Methodist Council on Finance and Administration lists the following annual conference meeting dates and places:

U.S. ANNUAL CONFERENCES

North Central Jurisdiction

Dakotas, June 3-6, Rapid City, S.D.
Detroit, May 14-17, Adrian, Mich.
East Ohio, June 15-18, Lakeside, Ohio
Illinois Great Rivers, June 3-6, Peoria, Ill.
Indiana, June 25-28, Muncie, Ind.
Iowa, June 4-7, Ames, Iowa
Minnesota, May 27-29, Saint Cloud, Minn.
Northern Illinois, June 7-9, Saint Charles, Ill.
West Michigan, June 4-7, Grand Rapids, Mich.
West Ohio, June 8-11, Lakeside, Ohio
Wisconsin, June 14-17, Appleton, Wis.

Northeastern Jurisdiction

Baltimore-Washington, June 4-6, Baltimore Md.
Central Pennsylvania, June 4-6, Grantham, Penn.
Eastern Pennsylvania, June 16-18, Oaks, Pa.
Greater New Jersey, May 28-30, King of Prussia, Pa.
New England, June 18-20, Wenham, Mass.
New York, June 10-13, Hempstead, N.Y.
North Central New York, May 28-30, Liverpool, N.Y.
Peninsula-Delaware, June 11-13, Princess Anne, Md.
Troy, June 10-13, Saratoga Springs, N.Y.
West Virginia, June 11-14, Buckhannon, W.Va.
Western New York, June 19-21, Buffalo, N.Y.
Western Pennsylvania, June 11-14, Grove City, Pa.
Wyoming, June 4-6 Scranton, Pa.

South Central Jurisdiction

Arkansas, June 14-17, Rogers, Ark.
Central Texas, June 7-10, Southlake, Texas
Kansas East, June 3-6, Baldwin City, Kan.
Kansas West, May 20-22, Salina, Kan.
Louisiana, June 7-10, Kenner, La.
Missouri, June 5-8 Springfield, Mo.
Nebraska, June 10-13, Lincoln, Neb.
New Mexico, June 3-6, Odessa, Texas
North Texas, June 7-9, Plano, Texas

Northwest Texas, June 10-13, Midland, Texas
Oklahoma, May 25-28, Oklahoma City, Okla.
Oklahoma Indian Missionary, June 4-7, Anadarko, Okla.
Rio Grande, June 11-13, San Antonio, Texas
Southwest Texas, June 3-6, Corpus Christi, Texas
Texas, May 24-27, The Woodlands, Texas

Southeastern Jurisdiction

Alabama-West Florida, June 7-10, Montgomery, Ala.
Florida, June 11-13, Daytona Beach, Fla.
Holston, June 14-17, Lake Junaluska, N.C.
Kentucky, June 3-6, Covington, Ky.
Memphis, May 31-June 2, Jackson, Tenn.
Mississippi, June 11-14, Jackson, Miss.
North Alabama, June 4-6, Trussville, Ala.
North Carolina, June 10-13, Greenville, N.C.
North Georgia, June 16-18, Athens, Ga.
Red Bird Missionary, May 1-2, Big Creek, Ky.
South Carolina, May 31-June 3, Florence, S.C.
South Georgia, June 7-10, Columbus, Ga.
Tennessee, June 14-16, Brentwood, Tenn.
Virginia, June 14-17, Norfolk, Va.
Western North Carolina, June 11-14, Lake Junaluska, N.C.

Western Jurisdiction

Alaska Missionary, June 5-7, Anchorage, Alaska
California-Nevada, June 17-20, Sacramento, Calif.
California-Pacific, June 17-20, Redlands, Calif.
Desert Southwest, June 25-28, Glendale, Ariz.
Oregon-Idaho, June 11-14, Salem, Ore.
Pacific Northwest, June 18-21, Tacoma, Wash.
Rocky Mountain, June 17-20, Grand Junction, Colo.
Yellowstone, June 11-13, Billings, Mont.

CENTRAL CONFERENCES

(Complete information on some conferences is unavailable.)

Austria Provisional, May 21-24, Graz, Austria
Bicol Philippines Provisional, April 1-4, Legazpi City, Philippines
Bulacan Philippines, March 24-27, Malolos City, Bulacan, Philippines
Bulgaria Provisional, April 3-5, Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria
Czech & Slovak Republics, May 29-31, Prague, Czech Republic
Denmark, May 7-10, Copenhagen, Denmark
East Mindanao Philippines, April 23-26, New Corrella, Davao Norte, Philippines
Estonia, June 11-14, Tallinn, Estonia
Finland-Finnish-speaking Provisional, June 25-28
Finland-Swedish-speaking Provisional, June 3-7, Ekenas, Finland
Germany East, May 13-17, Ellefeld (Vogtland), Germany
Germany North, April 16-19, Berlin, Germany
Germany South, June 17-21, Deutschland, Germany
Gwaten Nigeria, Jan. 15-18, Jalingo, Taraba, Nigeria
Hungary Provisional, April 22-25, Budapest, Hungary
Liberia, Feb. 11-15, Bong County, Liberia
Lukoshi (Congo), July 19-22, Kayembe Mukulu
Middle Philippines, May 18-22, Macatbong, Cabanatuan City, Philippines

Mindanao Philippines, May 21-24, Kidapawan City, Philippines
Northwest Katanga (Congo), July 26-29, Musumba
Northwest Mindanao Philippines, April 16-19, Cagayan de Oro City, Philippines
Pero Nigeria, Feb. 29-March 1, Jalingo, Taraba, Nigeria
Palawan Philippines Provisional, Feb. 16-21, Palawan Philippines
Pampango Philippines, April 22-25,
Philippines, April 27-30, Tagaytay City, Philippines
Philippines East, April 13-18, Cubao, Quezon City, Philippines
Poland, June 19-21, Ostroda, Poland
Serbia-Macedonia Provisional, Oct. 15-18, Kisac, Serbia
South Congo, July 5-8, Lubumbashi
Southern Nigeria, Nov. 26-30, Jalingo, Taraba, Nigeria
Southwest Katanga (Congo), July 12-15, Likasi
Southwest Philippines, March 2-6
Sweden, May 20-24, Malmo, Sweden
Switzerland-France, June 4-7, Duebendorf and Zurich, Switzerland
Visayas Philippines, May 28-31, Cebu City, Philippines
West Middle Philippines, May 25-30, Bataan, Philippines
Western Angola, Oct. 5-11
Zambia Provisional, June 21-24, Ndola, Zambia

– *United Methodist News Service (UMNS); a UMNS Report by Linda Green; March 10, 2009. Green is a news writer for UMNS based in Nashville, Tenn.*

+ **GracePoint United Methodist Church starts over**

Bryson Butts, founding pastor of GracePoint United Methodist Church, announced to the congregation on March 1 that he was resigning from The United Methodist Church effective immediately and would start another church in northwest Wichita. The entire church-leadership team and most of the congregation moved three miles away to form GracePoint Community Church, meeting at Northwest High School. Before the split, the United Methodist congregation had an average worship attendance of 700.

“We were surprised,” said Kansas Area Bishop Scott Jones. “We would have liked to have some opportunity to discuss this in advance to see if the issue could have been resolved in a different way. While we knew there was some disagreement about the church’s desire to expand faster than we were able to support, we were unaware of Bryson Butts’ decision to leave The United Methodist Church.”

Butts surrendered his clergy credentials and is no longer a United Methodist minister.

In January, Butts and other church officers incorporated GracePoint Community Church as a new Kansas corporation.

Started in 2003

GracePoint was started by the denomination’s Kansas West Conference in 2003. The first public worship service was in January 2004, and the congregation was chartered in January 2005. The remaining congregation will continue to worship at Maize South Middle School.

“We do not see this as a ‘church split’ because our church is ONE behind the decision,” writes Butts in his weblog at BrysonButts.com. He said that the move was made to have multiple locations for ministry. “A non-denominational structure will allow us the liberty to spread the message of Jesus - and our campuses - across the city,” he wrote. “Our vision is truly a movement of God and does not fit traditional church systems. We will align ourselves with other churches that are similar in style and vision so that we can work in unison to make a kingdom difference.”

Butts’ announcement sent Jones and the Kansas Area appointive cabinet searching for a new senior pastor. The Rev. Steve Spencer was appointed to succeed Butts, effective March 6. Spencer preached his first sermon on March 8 before 150 people, including a number of people from other United Methodist churches.

– UMNS; a UMNS Report by Lisa Elliott Diehl; March 17, 2009. Wichita, Kansas. Diehl is director of communications for the Kansas Area of The United Methodist Church.

(UM) Men. Specialists to help men mature spiritually

Newly commissioned men’s ministry specialists will serve congregations by supporting clergy and lay leaders in ministry to help The United Methodist Church reach more men. Launched in 2008, the initiative from United Methodist Men

provides specialists to serve congregations by supporting clergy and lay leaders in ministry with men. On March 8, seven men were commissioned during the meeting of the denomination’s National Association of Annual Conference Presidents to provide information and resources to help congregations develop ministries for men. A dozen more men will be recognized as specialists during the 10th National Gathering of United Methodist Men July 10-12 in Nashville.

According to the Rev. David Adams, top executive of the denomination’s Commission on United Methodist Men, the program is a response to the shortage of qualified leadership in men’s ministry and the leadership emphasis of the church’s four areas of focus. The possibilities for the denomination are diminished by the spiritual condition of men, he said. The specialists will motivate, inspire and serve as “coaches for the conference and district to connect with local churches and connect to the commission,” Adams said. The program motivates leaders through vision, inspiration, cooperation and encouragement,” he added. “This is about men helping men know Christ so that others can find Christ.”

Each of the men commissioned was recommended by his pastor for the specialist position. They also participated in a No-Man-Left-Behind leadership training session sponsored by Orlando, Fla.-based Man in the Mirror ministries.

The commission, working the United Methodist Board of Higher and Ministry and Ministry, created an on-line curriculum that includes church history and polity, safe sanctuaries, and sexual ethics that men must complete before receiving certification as a specialist in the United Methodist Church.

In addition, United Methodist Men is developing a 12-hour advanced lay speaking course in men’s ministry as a resource that provides an understanding of men’s ministry principles, essentials and benefits. A version of the training will be a workshop at the men’s gathering in July.

– UMNS by Linda Green; March 12, 2009.

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We are as close to God as we choose to be, not as we want to be. – J. Oswald Sanders

Global Outlook

I have a duty to fulfill every second.

– Richard Wurmbrand, *With God in Solitary Confinement*, p. 44.

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Cuba. Cuba visit brings changes to covenant

The United Methodist Florida Conference’s longstanding relationship with the Methodist Church in Cuba will continue, but there will be some changes. That was the message from meetings in Cuba in late February between Florida Bishop Timothy Whitaker, Cuban Methodist Bishop Ricardo Pereira and officials from the Cuban religious affairs office. “The (Cuban) government has made it clear that it would like the relationship of the Methodist Church in Cuba and The United Methodist Church of the Florida Conference to continue,” Whitaker said after returning from a three-day trip to island nation. “They understand the historic nature of this relationship and they favor international relationships.

“At the same time, the structure of the relationship is definitely going to change,” he added. “From the government’s point of view, the time of the covenant between the two churches is completed. ... There is now a new beginning in the relationship between the two churches, but that relationship will be different.”

In an e-mail message to the Florida Conference, Pereira echoed Whitaker’s assessment of the meetings.

“The visit of Bishop Whitaker has been very fruitful,” he said. “We had the opportunity to see that during 125 years of Methodism history in Cuba, we have been able to keep the relationship with the church in Florida. It’s important for Methodists in Florida to know that this relationship will go forward. I quote an officer from the Cuban government when I say: “(The relationship) can and should be kept and

strengthened.” Caridad Diego, head of Cuba’s Office of Religious Affairs, and two of her associates met with the bishops. Roberto Chaple, a professor of Old Testament at Evangelical Methodist Seminary in Havana, served as interpreter.

Signed in 1997

The late Bishop Cornelius Henderson, who served as bishop of the Florida Area from 1996 until his death in 2000, and the Rev. Rinaldo Hernández Torres, on behalf of Bishop Gustavo Cruz of Cuba, signed the Cuba/Florida Covenant in 1997. The covenant was designed as a formal relationship between the conferences to strengthen both in their ministries. Since its inception, many members of the two conferences have traveled to and from the two countries, sharing ideas and resources. The relationship between the two churches existed long before the signing, however. In 1873, the Florida Conference sent a missionary to Key West to start a ministry among Cubans living there. Two Cuban lay pastors returned to Cuba in 1883 to start congregations. From 1883 to 1968, when Cuban Methodism became independent, one bishop served both conferences. Specific details about the future relationship will be determined in meetings between Pereira and the religious affairs office, Whitaker said. “We accentuated the positive because Caridad Diego really did emphasize that they want the relationship to continue, and she articulated that the policy of the government is to favor international relationships — a lot of their churches have international relationships,” Whitaker said.

One likely change, Whitaker said, will be the way Florida Conference caravans -- church teams that travel to Cuba to work with churches there -- will be coordinated. He anticipates fewer caravans will be permitted and they will be organized through Pereira’s Havana office, which will be accountable to the Cuban government. The format for the caravans might be similar to visits made by United Methodist Volunteers in Mission teams. “There have still been UMVIM teams going to Cuba within the last six months, and the way those teams function is different from the way the caravans have been functioning,” Whitaker said. “They are in and they are out. We expect that the visits of the caravans will be similar to UMVIM visits.” Whitaker also anticipates financial contributions to the Methodist Church in Cuba will be handled primarily through Pereira’s office, with possible accommodations made for districts or churches located a considerable distance from Havana. “I was very graciously received,” Whitaker said. “I felt freedom to state my thoughts and feelings, and I had the opportunity to do that. ... They were supportive of the relationship, and we were not surprised that they want to have changes.”

The bishops also met with Jonathan Farrar, the chief of mission in the United States Interests Section in Havana. He serves under the U.S. Department of State. “We talked a lot about religious life in Cuba and the general political situation,” Whitaker said. “He’s been very supportive of the work of all of the churches.”

New seminary

A tour of the new Evangelical Methodist Seminary, located in the historic section of downtown Havana, was included in the bishops’ itinerary. The Methodist Church in Cuba recently launched the seminary in an effort to accommodate the unique schedules of pastors who are already serving churches. The seminary building has been renovated in keeping with specifications of the historic district. “(It’s) a big undertaking of the Methodist Church in Cuba ... and so far, it’s going well,” Whitaker said. The seminary currently has 15 professors and 70 students, Pereira said. Pereira also said the Cuban church has grown at an annual rate of 10 percent for the past eight years. “It is still a priority to extend its ministry to new places and to keep growing with new members,” he added. “The Florida Conference can join us in supporting and equipping new house churches, providing salary support for missionaries and pastors, and strengthening the new Evangelical Methodist Seminary.”

[Note: I have personally attended a conference in which Bishop Pereira preached and ministered. I am convinced he is powerful man of God. – AOM]

– *UMNS; a UMNS Report by Jenna DeMarco; March 12, 2009. De Marco is a freelance writer based in Nashville, Tenn. This article was supplied by e-Review Florida United Methodist News Service.*

Russia. Russia Initiative event highlights youth

The importance of youth and young adult ministry held center stage in San Diego at the 2009 consultation of the United Methodist Russia Initiative. 14 students and young professionals brought a spirit of newness and a sense of continuity to the March 5-7 event, the 14th such consultation since The United Methodist Church was reborn in former Soviet territories. “We are at a time of changing generations,” said the Rev. Sergei Nikolaev. “Young people born into or joining the church are becoming mature leaders.” The denomination in Russia was reactivated almost 20 years ago, having once had mission work in St. Petersburg and on the far east coast around Vladivostok. The

Russia Initiative includes Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus, and is part of the United Methodist episcopal area of Eurasia. Today, the initiative covers 116 United Methodist congregations, all with indigenous pastoral leadership, according to Bishop Hans Växby, leader of the Eurasia Area. The United Methodist seminary currently has 48 students in residential and extension programs. A second seminary center is located in Almaty, Khazakstan.

A delegation of 27 from Russia and Ukraine and some 140 U.S. participants attended the consultation, sponsored by the California-Pacific United Methodist Annual (regional) Conference. The conference is deeply involved with the United Methodists in the Vladivostok area.

– *UMNS; a UMNS Report by Elliott Wright; March 13, 2009. Wright is the information officer of the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries*

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To receive Jesus as your ruler means to deliberately turn your back on all sin and no longer try to run your own life. – Booklet “Living in Christ” pub. by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, p. 4