

The Monthly Update

July 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

In the May and June Monthly Updates, we had expressed concern about amendments to be voted at annual conference meetings that would separate our denomination here in the United States from our United Methodist Church around the world. We had asked you to pray that they would be defeated. As a song popular in World War II, “Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition” – one which talked about the importance of prayer while doing all you human could.

We believe that we have done that – and the results are evident. Just a summary from the Confessing Movement, a sister renewal group, will suffice:

Almost all of the 62 U.S. Annual Conferences have now voted on the Proposed Constitutional Amendments. 44 Annual Conferences have released complete vote tallies while others have voted, but have yet to release any official tallies. For the 44 Annual Conferences whose votes have been tallied, the aggregate totals are as follows: Proposed Amendment 1 received 15,680 (47%) Yes votes and 17,511 (53%) No votes. Proposed Amendment 19 received 24,700 (77%) Yes votes and 7,314 (23%) No votes. None of the 23 Proposed Amendments regarding the World-wide Nature of the Church have passed so far. The five Proposed Amendments that would authorize the creation of Regional Conferences have only received between 34% and 36% of the votes (not the required two-thirds vote). [From a newsletter of The Confessing Movement; May/June 2009]

For those of us in Concerned Methodists, we sent out summarized information with a recommended voting guide in the past issue of *The Christian Methodist Newsletter*. In addition we authored, had printed, and sent out almost 3000 copies of our latest book *On the Brink* that speaks to the problems that we face in our church to leaders across the United States and in many foreign countries around the world (each of you should have received a copy). As you know, it addresses homosexuality in three ways – from an individual perspective, a denominational perspective, and a societal perspective – and talks to how they are interrelated at this point in the life of our United Methodist Church. Not content with the percentages now, we are continuing to communicate information to those conferences that have yet to meet – in our overseas churches.

I knew that we needed to get the word out, so that is what we did. Secondly, having over 3,000 copies of the book *On the Brink* printed ran into considerable expense, added to that of mailing them to delegates around the world. We had two teams here working hard to do all of that – and it did involve considerable labor. Finally, we personally monitored several conferences and “got out the word” with our presence and communication – an “all out effort” to influence this vote.

This effort has not come without a price. At one of our member’s urging, I’ll confess to you that we did not have enough money in the Concerned Methodists’ treasury to pay for all that needed to be done, so I paid for the circulation of this last issue of *The Christian Methodist Newsletter* out of my own funds – on credit. In short, we are presently in debt for \$15,013.95.

Finally, I realize that you feel besieged by requests for money – but would you pray to see how you might help us at this time of need? I appreciate so much your prayers and support because without you, we could not have accomplished what we did.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris, Executive Director

July 2009 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

"I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her commodious harbors and her ample rivers, and it was not there.
I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her fertile fields and boundless forests, and it was not there.
I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her rich mines and her vast world commerce, and it was not there.
I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her public schools system and her institutions of learning, and it was not there.

I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her democratic congress and her matchless constitution, and it was not there.

Not until I went into the churches of America and heard her pulpits flame with righteousness did I understand the secret of her genius and power.

America is great because America is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great."

– Alexis de Tocqueville, nineteenth century French statesman

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Of Interest.

+ **Methodists say "No" to their leaders** By Dr. Bill Bouknight

United Methodists in America are clearly rejecting some proposals of their leaders. Those leaders are the Council of Bishops, the Connectional Table (47 clergy and laypersons), and many of the delegates to the 2008 General Conference. That group was responsible for the 32 constitutional amendments that were approved by at least a 2/3rd vote of the 2008 General Conference. As of this date (June 24), the rank and file United Methodists of America, expressing themselves through their Annual Conferences, have delivered a resounding rejection to the six most dangerous amendments— Amendments I (1), IV (4), X (10), XIII (13), XXIII (23), and XXVI (26). Currently most of the amendments are being rejected by at least a 2/3rd vote. None of them has received even a simple majority (51%) approval. And we haven't heard from most of the Central Conferences yet.

American Methodists are sending some clear messages to their leadership:

1. Many delegates to the 2008 General Conference did not represent very well the beliefs and concerns of United Methodists back home.
2. The leadership of our church should stop tinkering with our organization because organization is not our problem.
3. The main problem of the UMC is spiritual and theological. We no longer have consensus about our mission and message. We're not sure anymore that all persons in their natural condition are lost and need to be saved. We're not sure anymore about the purpose of the cross and whether it was necessary. We have a desperate need for our bishops to lead us in recovering our fundamental beliefs as stated in our Articles of Religion and Confession of Faith.

St. Paul taught us that "if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?" (I Cor. 14:8). Over the past forty years, Methodism's gospel trumpet has often been muted and sometimes silent. We don't need to compromise Christ with culture. We must lift up Christ in order to transform culture. •

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+ **Voting rights challenge concerns race commission**

Washington. The United Methodist Church's racial justice monitoring agency is concerned a U.S. Supreme Court challenge to a key provision of the voting rights law may harm minority voters in several states. The nation's top court recently heard arguments challenging a section of the 1965 Voting Rights Act requiring nine mostly Southern states and specific counties in seven other states to get approval from the U.S. Justice Department or federal courts before they make any changes in electoral laws or procedures. The measure was enacted to protect minority voters from efforts to constrain or dilute their ability to influence electoral outcomes. An attorney for a municipal utility district in Austin, Texas, has brought the case to the nation's top court, saying the law is no longer needed.

Supporters of the law argue that persistent racial voting patterns and continued rejection of hundreds of requests for electoral changes prove that the pre-clearance law is still necessary. Staff of the Commission on Religion and Race attended an NAACP rally outside the Supreme Court while the case was being discussed. The court is expected to rule by June. "The states and counties covered by this law are still struggling with racial discrimination and attempts to constrain the voting rights and political power of people of color," said Jeneane Jones, a commission executive. "Even leaders in

those states agree that the law is still needed. This is an important decision deserving of our vigilant concern, advocacy and prayers for equal justice under the law.”

[Note: We cannot help but wonder why they do not have the same degree of concern about the disenfranchisement of the African delegates that we had observed at the 2008 General Conference. Such a concern would lend more credibility to the concerns they express here.]

– *UMNS Daily Digest, May 19, 2009.*

+ ***America's Biggest Donors Ignore Religious Causes***

According to a new study released by the Institute for Jewish & Community Research (IJCR), higher education, health, and cultural arts organizations receive the lion's share of the largest gifts that individuals, foundations, and corporations contribute to American philanthropy. A Religion News Service release indicates that higher education received nearly half of the dollars from gifts of \$10 million or more. Gary A. Tobin and Aryeh K. Weinberg, the study's authors, analyzed over 8000 gifts of \$1 million or more made between 2001-2003. "Mega-gifts are very concentrated in a few types of organizations. Religious organizations, human services for the needy, and umbrella campaigns like the United Way are the big losers in attracting the largest gifts. Colleges and universities are the biggest winners," according to Tobin, president of IJCR. – *Burt Prelutsky; as reported by the The American Family Association, Pastors and Leaders updates*

Homosexuality.

+ ***Marriage in the Crosshairs***

We reported on the activist judges who forced same-sex marriage (SSM) on the state of Iowa. That victory proved to be just the beginning. Intent on capturing all six New England states by the year 2012, SSM proponents have been very public about their "6 by 12" agenda. Thanks to today's actions in Vermont, they are one step closer to achieving it. Vermont's Senate was expected to overwhelmingly override Governor Jim Douglas' Friday veto of SSM. They did so this morning. That vote was closely followed by the House's single-vote margin to override as well, making Vermont the first state to allow SSM legislatively (Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger successfully vetoed homosexual marriage in California in 2005 and 2007). Steve Cable of Vermont Renewal commented, "This is a sad day in Vermont's history. The Democratic leadership in both the House and the Senate turned a deaf ear to concerns of the people on this issue and instead fast-tracked it through the legislature in just over two short weeks." The legislature's haste is understandable, since SSM has been rejected in each of the 29 states where it has gone before the people. Pro-family losses continued today with the District of Columbia City Council's vote to recognize homosexual "marriages" contracted in other jurisdictions. A new phase of the fight for marriage has begun and pro-family Americans can and will respond.

– *Family Research Council: 801 G Street N.W. Washington, D.C. 20001*

+ ***Two Votes Equal One Big Victory on Marriage***

This week (May 21, 2009), New England's homosexual activists had planned to celebrate the five-year anniversary of counterfeit marriage by welcoming the state of New Hampshire into the fold. But just three days after the May 17 celebration of court-imposed gay "marriage" in Massachusetts, the Granite State cut the party short. In a stunning victory for families that took both sides by surprise, the state legislature pulled an incredible upset yesterday and defeated language that would have made New Hampshire the sixth state to legalize counterfeit marriage. By just two votes (188-186), the House refused to pass the religious exemptions requested by Gov. John Lynch (D)--just hours after the Senate approved the same wording on party lines (14-10). The amendment, which seemed like a done deal Wednesday morning, has now thrown the entire prospect of same-sex "marriage" for New Hampshire in doubt.

That's just fine with state residents, who, according to a new poll, are overwhelmingly opposed to counterfeit marriage. In a survey of sampling households in New Hampshire--all 432,398 of them--64% agreed that the union of a man and a woman should be the only legal definition of marriage in their state. Gov. Lynch used to be among them, saying repeatedly in the days leading up to this debate that he "oppose[s] gay marriage." He later crumbled under the political pressure and broke his promise, saying that he had "a responsibility to look through a broader lens." Instead of standing on principle, Gov. Lynch suggested a flimsy compromise as a condition for his signature.

Now that the provision has failed, voters want to know where his veto is! The bill to legalize same-sex "marriage" has been sitting on the Senate President's desk since the Governor demanded religious exemptions. Since those conditions were not met, Gov. Lynch should demand the bill so he can veto it.

While the state waits on Lynch to hold up his end of the bargain, the bill on religious exemptions now heads to conference. The Speaker and Senate President (both Democrats) will be responsible for appointing the members to the conference committee. Although they're expected to pick liberals who will vote with them, the rules clearly state that they

must include at least one member from the other party. If the bill doesn't pass out of the conference unanimously, it will die. FRC will keep you updated on the committee activity as it happens.

In the meantime, the legislature has now wasted five months of debate on this issue without resolving it. It's time for leaders to move on and get to work on more important topics--like the state's budget, which is currently running a \$500 million deficit! Friends in New Hampshire: contact your members in the House (603) 271-3661 and Senate (603) 271-2121 and urge them to put the issue before the state in a people's referendum. Also, don't let Gov. Lynch off the hook. Call his office at (603) 271-2111 and tell him to keep his (second) promise to veto the bill!

Our hats go off to Cornerstone Policy Research and the entire coalition in New Hampshire who, together with FRC and other groups' ads, alerts, and phone calls, continue to be difference-makers in this debate!

In other breaking marriage news, FRC is happy to report that Congressmen Jim Jordan (R-Ohio) and Rep. Dan Boren (D-Okla.) officially introduced a D.C. Defense of Marriage Act in the U.S. House today to block the City Council's push to legalize same-sex "marriage" in the nation's capital. At a press conference today with area pastors led by Bishop Harry Jackson, Rep. Jordan announced his intent to fight in Congress to protect marriage as the union of one man and one woman.

– *Family Research Council: 801 G Street N.W. Washington, D.C. 20001; May 21, 2009.*

The United Methodist Church.

+ *Change raises trust issues in church*

Nashville, Tenn. Five years ago, The United Methodist Church created a new body – the Connectional Table – to be stewards of the church's ministries, mission and money, and to help run the denomination more effectively between quadrennial General Conferences. This year, amid a global economic crisis that is shrinking church finances, the Council of Bishops is calling for the creation of another group to oversee the work of the church and present a plan for reordering the life of the denomination. The task given to the proposed steering committee sounds a lot like the mandate given the Connectional Table by the 2004 General Conference. Now, some church members are wondering whether the new committee is necessary, as bishops' council President Gregory V. Palmer said, to help the church be more nimble and responsive to rapid changes in the denomination and the economy. Or is the creation of a new body a sign of a larger issue in the church and society, a lack of trust in institutions in a time of relative famine?

[Note: We would agree that there is a lack of trust of the institutions of our church.]

– *UMNS Daily Digest, May 15, 2009.*

+ *Redeploy Church resources, financial officers say*

The UMC is rich in property and human resources, but its debts and obligations to health care are hurting annual conferences. "We are starting to have a cash problem and we need a workout plan," said Barbara Boigegrain, general secretary of the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits (GBOPHB) in a May 6 "state of the church" finance report to the Council of Bishops. Boigegrain announced the formation of a Sustained Advisory Group from among conference treasurers, benefit officers and other actuarial officers to determine the fiscal health of the denomination's 62 U.S. annual conferences. According to Neil Alexander, president and publisher of the UM Publishing House (UMPH), church financial experts are working to discern the consequences of the global economic downturn, including the human and social costs. Stories of economic difficulties vary from church to church, with downsizing of staff and cutting of ministries but increasing outreach to help the needy in their communities. In addition, job uncertainty is causing psychological, physical and spiritual stress, increasing demands on church professional care and counseling. The financial situation has placed stress on payment plans and benefits paid to church and agency staff members and clergy, Alexander and Boigegrain said. Pensions are contracting; pension funding in the United States is at an average of 67 percent, and funding for clergy pensions has dropped to 93 percent. What is needed, Alexander declared, is attentive, non-anxious leaders animated by the gospel, leaders who demonstrate frugality and an ability to curtail spending in dramatic ways. Conversations already have begun regarding reductions of the assets in the church's pension program, Boigegrain said. "Over time, we are going to need to collect higher contributions to ensure that we are able to pay all of the benefits that are ultimately payable." In addition to the Sustainability Advisory Group, the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) is analyzing data to determine the fiscal health of local churches and the degree of dependence upon income generated from endowments, grants and equitable compensation. The agency is participating with other denominations and faith traditions in a 2009 congregational life survey, which examines giving practices, personal finance and spiritual giving practices. In May, GCFA also is releasing a survey of conference treasurers to determine the financial health of annual conferences and provide a year-to-year comparison of local church apportionment payments.

– *Linda Green, UMNS, as reported in Newscope, May 20, 2009.*

+ *General agencies coping with economic crisis*

Top executives of The UMC's agencies reported at a joint meeting of the Council on Finance and Administration and the Connectional Table on May 15, that the economic crisis is forcing them to make hard decisions. The Rev. Larry Hollon, General Secretary of UM Communications (UMCOM), reported a \$700,000 shortfall projected for 2010. He said the agency is limiting travel and spending. The General Commission on the Status and Role of Women is considering salary cuts for its five-member staff and is looking at canceling an International Women's Congress, said General Secretary, Garlinda Burton.

The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry canceled its 2010 spring meeting and is considering canceling other events, said General Secretary, the Rev. Jerome King Del Pino. The General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) and the General Commission on Religion and Race, both based in the UM Building in Washington, are sharing human resource and financial personnel. Jim Winkler, GBCS General Secretary, said that translates into a \$100,000 savings for both agencies. "I am doing all I can to avoid further reduction of staff," he said. Also Neil Alexander, President and Publisher of the UM Publishing House (UMPH), said for only the second time in 60 years UMPH will not be able to distribute \$1 million in "Cokesbury" checks to annual conferences for retired clergy in the United States and in the central conferences. UMPH, which does not receive general church funds, expects a revenue shortfall of \$8.5 to \$9 million by the end of its fiscal year. The General Board of Global Ministries has dealt with a \$4 million reduction and "that may not be the last for 2009," said General Secretary, the Rev. Edward Paup. A review by an independent firm resulted in 220 recommendations on how the agency can cut expenses. Included in that plan is eliminating 41 positions in addition to not filling 20 open positions. "I ask for your prayers," he said. "This is affecting human lives."

However, the executives also reported that the economic downturn has not meant an end to new programs. New ministries to serve youth and the poor are starting even as the agencies make painful cuts in wages and staff to meet budget shortfalls. Despite the decline of the publishing industry (GBOD oversees the work of the Upper Room devotional magazine and other products) and a 26 percent reduction in net assets for 2008, GBOD is moving ahead with plans to start new churches and to hold a global event for young people in Germany in 2011, the Rev. Karen Greenwaldt, GBOD General Secretary, said. UMCOM reported on the "Rethink Church" campaign launched earlier this month.

– *Kathy Gilbert, UMNS, as reported in Newscope, May 27, 2009.*

+ *Hymnal Revision*

In a telephone conference the members of the Hymnal Revision Committee (HRC) affirmed that work on revising the hymns, tunes, and liturgies for The United Methodist Hymnal, authorized by the 2008 General Conference, must be stopped. "The resources required to sustain a dedicated staff and pay for the planned activities are simply not available at this time and will not be available in time for completion of the assignment to deliver proposed content for a new compilation to the next General Conference," Bishop Ernest S. Lyght, chair of the HRC, told the members of the committee. "As a result, and with great regret, we acknowledge that the UM hymnal revision project cannot continue this quadrennium due to unexpected and extraordinary financial constraints resulting from the world-wide economic crisis." Both Karen Greenwaldt, General Secretary of the General Board of Discipleship, and Neil Alexander, President and Publisher of the United Methodist Publishing House, told the committee that special projects in the development of both digital and print resources for the church's liturgical life and music ministries will be pursued on other tracks. The two agencies will collaborate with each other and with worship leaders across the connection in the next months, they said. The Facebook group, New United Methodist Hymnal, will continue as a valuable resource for new and emerging multi-media publishing projects in worship and music for the church.

– *UMNS Daily Digest, May 20, 2009; also as reported in Newscope, May 27, 2009.*

Annual Conference Reports

Austria

The Austria Provisional Conference met May 21-24, 2009, in Graz. The theme was "Come and See!" and the program included inspiring discussions about God's invitation to us to come and see as well as on sharing this invitation with others

who do not yet know Christ. The report of Superintendent Lothar Pöll offered helpful thoughts on Bishop Robert Schnase's book *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations* (also available in German), but he also referred to current political and social challenges in Austria (e.g., hostility against Muslim people, made allegedly in the name of Christianity!). The diaconal center Spattstrasse in Linz, Austria, with many branches all over the country informed the Conference on structural improvements, on the expansion of its ministries as well as on developments in regard to its

leadership. The Conference heard a report about the UM mission in Albania supervised by the Austrian pastor Supt. Wilfried Nausner and his wife Jean. Since there is not yet a Conference structure in Albania, the first Albanian pastor, Rigels Kasmollari, became a probationary member of the Austria Provisional Annual Conference and was commissioned in the closing worship service. Rev. Stefan Schröckenfuchs, pastor in Vienna, was ordained elder during the same worship service. The number of professing members and friends is still slightly growing while the worship attendance slightly decreased last year.

– *As reported in Newscope, June 17, 2009.*

The Bulgaria Provisional Conference met from April 3-5, 2009, in Veliko Tarnovo / Bulgaria. The meeting venue was selected because the American missionary Dr. Albert Long held his first Bulgarian sermon in Veliko Tarnovo at Christmas 1859 (it was then the capital of Bulgaria)so; that is, the UMC in Bulgaria could celebrate 150 years of Methodism in this country. Also, the rebuilt church in Veliko Tarnovo was inaugurated in autumn 2008-for the Church members nothing but a miracle and an answer to countless prayers. To host the Annual Conference was an opportunity to share their joy with the Brothers and Sisters from the other churches in Bulgaria, and also with a delegation from the Athens-Elberton District of the North Georgia Annual Conference, which came to establish a partnership-within the frame of the General Board of Global Ministries program "In Mission Together"-with the Bulgaria Provisional Annual Conference.

– *As reported in Newscope, June 17, 2009.*

The Czech and Slovak Republics Conference met May 29-31, 2009, in Prague, Czech Republic. Various lectures and workshops focused on the theme "Encouragement to Mission," which of course had an obvious relationship with the date of the Conference (the weekend of Pentecost). Ministries like hospital chaplaincy, prison ministry and church planting were introduced to the Conference. In spite of serious economic challenges, several local churches in Slovakia reported a considerable increase in offerings. The small UMC in Slovakia lost three pastors during the past Conference year, which was a painful experience. It was an answer to many prayers that a former probationary pastor, Gabriella Kopas, returned with her family from New Zealand to Slovakia and was willing to resume her service in the UMC in Slovakia again. In the Czech Republic, Jana Krizova was accepted as probationary member. The Annual Conference celebrated the service of Superintendent Josef Cervenak who will-after more than 20 years-leave the responsibility for the work in the Czech Republic in the hands of his successor, Rev. Petr Prochazka, who was, until December 31, 2008, pastor of Plzen-Maranatha UMC.

– *As reported in Newscope, June 17, 2009.*

Detroit Detroit Annual Conference session, held May 14-17 on the campus of Adrian College in Adrian, Michigan. Michigan has one of the highest unemployment rates in the nation and the recent bankruptcies of Chrysler and General Motors have greatly affected the churches of the Detroit Conference. In Constitutional Amendment voting, the conference voted in the affirmative for all 32 amendments, however, only amendments 2, 8, 9, 15, 17, 19, and 22 received a two-thirds majority or greater support. Membership stands at 96,851, down 2,112 from the previous year.

– *Paul Thomas and Ann Whiting, as reported in Newscope, June 17, 2009.*

The Hungary Provisional Conference met April 22-25, 2009, in Budapest. Bible studies, worship services and reports referred to Romans 5:5-the 2009 watchword for the UMC in Hungary-which provides much hope for a Hungarian society suffering from economic, political and also moral problems. The Conference celebrated the colorful ministries for and with Romanies-a strong witness of love and hope. Another reason to rejoice was the development of the host church, Budapest-Obuda UMC, a very dynamic and strong congregation with various outreach ministries founded 10 years ago. The Conference renewed its decision to build a church in Miskolc in order to strengthen the mission work carried out there, long anticipated, and which can only be built with support from the worldwide UM family. At the end of the meeting a delegation from the Petersburg District in Virginia joined the Conference family. They came to explore the possibility of an "In Mission Together" partnership. It is inspiring and encouraging how such partnerships prove to be sources of mutual support and joint mission activities.

– *As reported in Newscope, June 17, 2009.*

Memphis "Bring Jesus to the people, that's what worship is about!" proclaimed Sally Morgenthaler, a nationally renowned worship leader and the keynote speaker at the 2009 Memphis Annual Conference (May 31-June 2 in Memphis). Noting that there's a disconnect between what happens in church and what Christians do "out there" in the world, Morgenthaler encouraged the approximately 1,500 UMs present for the opening Sunday evening worship service to go home to their local churches and bring the outside world in. "That's what changes worship. . . . Worship and mission are inextricably linked!" she declared. [Note: Should not the church be the one that changes the outside world?]

Conference members considered and voted on the 32 proposed Constitutional Amendments (none received the required two-thirds affirmative vote Membership stands at 85,449, down 1,761.

– *Cathy Farmer, as reported in Newscope, June 17, 2009.*

Minnesota During her episcopal address to the Minnesota Annual Conference session, May 26-29 in St. Cloud, Bishop Sally Dyck The majority of those voting favored the 23 amendments to The UMC constitution that deal with the worldwide nature of the church; affirmative vote totals ranged from 64 to 65 percent. The majority voting also favored amendment I (about 75 percent); amendment VI (about 56 percent); and amendment XIX (about 66 percent). Membership is 76,496, down 1,451.

– *Victoria Rebeck, director of communication, Minnesota Conference, as reported in Newscope, June 10, 2009.*

Missouri The Missouri Annual Conference Session met in Springfield, June 5-8. Proposed Constitutional Amendments were voted on Sunday, but results were not announced. Membership in the Missouri Conference stands at 168,728, down 640 from the previous year.

– *Fred Koenig, Missouri Conference Editor, as reported in Newscope, June 17, 2009.*

Oklahoma The 166th business session of the Oklahoma Annual Conference was held May 24-28, 2009, hosted by Oklahoma City University (OCU) and St. Luke's UMC. Delegates voted to close seven churches. The conference statistician reported total church membership of 241,333 people in 2008.

– *As reported in Newscope, June 10, 2009.*

Red Bird Missionary Conference (RBMC) Bishop Lindsey Davis presided over his first annual conference session of RBMC held May 1-2, 2009 at The Joy Center UM outreach center, Big Creek, KY under the theme "Christ the Solid Rock." The conference by a two-thirds majority, the conference voted in favor of Proposed Amendments 8, 19, and 22; approved a change in charge lines; adopted the 2010 budget with no increase in World Service and Programs. Membership is 1,488 up 16 over the previous year.

– *By Ruth A. Wiertzema, as reported in Newscope, May 13, 2009.*

South Carolina At the South Carolina Annual Conference, which met 5/31-6/2 in Florence, S.C., the Conference Board of Pension and Health Benefits announced that they have approved support to the Central Conference Pension Initiative for 2009 by contributing the amount of money equal to the amount South Carolina received from the UM Publishing House for Conference Claimants in 2008: \$15,814.94. Bishop Mary Virginia Taylor and the entire conference responded with a rousing round of applause!

– *As reported in Newscope, June 10, 2009.*

The Switzerland-France Conference met June 4-7, 2009, in Dübendorf and Zurich, Switzerland. The theme of this year's gathering was "Passion-Compassion," and the program included various invitations to share in God's passion for this world. More than 300 delegates and guests from Switzerland, France and Algeria were encouraged to reach out to their neighbors and to provide assistance and hope. Another thematic focus was put on the various realities and spiritual and other needs of the "generation 60+." In spite of financial challenges many local churches face, the Conference members approved to establish a new "60+ Department" employing a part-time specialist who will assist local churches in responding to the needs of elderly people. During the Conference a new "prayer for the connection" was introduced: as of June 2009 all local churches in Algeria, France and Switzerland will receive a monthly liturgical prayer focusing on the ministries and challenges of The UMC in a country in Africa, Asia, Eastern Central Europe or Latin America. The Conference members received candles and were requested to bring them to their local churches and to light them when joining in this prayer. Other business included decisions to dissolve the Commission on Drug Issues and to limit the expenses for central administration and Conference-wide ministries. The Conference heard extensive reports on the situation in France and North Africa. And for the first time a couple (Ruth and Markus Voegelin) were elected Conference lay leaders.

– *Urs Schweizer, Assistant to Bishop Dr. Patrick Streiff, as reported in Newscope, June 17, 2009.*

West Michigan The West Michigan Annual Conference convened June 4 at Calvin College. Conference members approved proposed amendment 1 to the constitution of The UMC. Some other amendments were approved by significant margins, but none of the 23 amendments related to the worldwide nature of the church received the needed 2/3 vote for approval.

– *Ann Whiting, Editor, Michigan Christian Advocate, as reported in Newscope, June 17, 2009.*

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The late General Douglas MacArthur: “In this day of gathering storms, as moral deterioration of political power spreads its growing infection, it is essential that every spiritual force be mobilized to defend and preserve the religious base upon which this nation is founded; for it has been that base that has been the motivating impulse to our moral and national growth. History fails to record a single precedent in which nations subject to moral decay have not passed into political and economic decline. There has been either a spiritual awakening to overcome the moral lapse, or a progressive deterioration leading to ultimate national disaster.” – *As quoted by Dr. J. Vernon McGee, Thru the Bible, Vol. 2, page 44.*