

Monthly Update

September 2011

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

In the past Monthly Updates, we have discussed the reports from the annual conferences across our connection in our United Methodist Church around the world. It is interesting in the issues with which the various conferences deal. One can only contrast the areas of concern of the delegates with the other “world class” issues – such as the persecution of people in China who were spreading the good news of Jesus Christ and the future survival of Israel. There was far more information that we had wanted to include but which was deferred to the next month’s issue of the Update. We need to discuss the subject of Israel. We also need to remember – September 11th – and what it entailed.

Why should we, as Christians, stand with Israel? The Bible says that we are to, “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.” It also tells us that He will bless those who bless Israel and curse those who curse Israel (Numbers 24:9b). The Jews are His chosen people. History has shown that those who persecute them will be brought down or meet with a disastrous end. I firmly believe that one of the reasons that we as a country have prospered is because we have in the past supported Israel. I also believe that when we fail to support her and become one of her enemies, we as a country will fall. We have a vested interest in her. Finally, from a logical standpoint she is the only free country in the region. It is difficult to understand why our national leadership would not support her right to exist.

But these are not purely political issues but deeply spiritual ones as well. Israel and the Jews are foundational to who we are as Christians. We also know that the mortal enemies of Israel are the countries surrounding it who are dominated by Muslims. From having served in Operation Desert Shield/Storm in the Persian Gulf, I know that regardless of the rhetoric used these folks will not be satisfied as long as one square foot of land exists that is known as “Israel.” To Muslims, Israel is the “Little Satan”; we are the “Great Satan.”

We also need to sift through the rhetoric of advocating for a “Palestinian State” to the reality of the situation. It is about undermining the integrity of Israel as a nation. As a former Army man, I am very familiar with the military realities at issue here. The 1967 borders of Israel were effectively indefensible. It is national suicide to force them back from the territory they won by conquest. Ironically, some of the UM annual conferences passed resolutions supporting a “Palestinian State.” They are tragically misguided.

The recession in which we find ourselves causes many to be concerned about finances. We are. That is only normal. I would ask that you pray not only for our country and our world, but that the Lord will provide us the means to do His work.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris,
Executive Director

September 2011 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

Nourish friendships. "Good friends are good health."
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The Good Stuff Houston Prays Its Respects

By the time Saturday's prayer event rolled around, Americans had plenty of reasons to be on their knees. News of the country's credit rating was just beginning to spread, and people everywhere awoke to the headlines of the tragic attack on U.S. Navy SEALs. The elite team lost 30 heroes when their military helicopter was shot down by the Taliban over Afghanistan. U.S. officials said it was the deadliest incident for our forces in the entire 10 years of the Afghanistan war. Several of the men were from Team Six, which, just three months ago, had killed the most wanted man in the world.

It was in this dark hour that tens of thousands of people gathered in Houston to pray for God's mercy on our nation. Families across Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and other states poured in to Reliant Stadium for "The Response," understanding that America has to get back to the point where our trust isn't in what we do--but what God does. As grateful as we are for our military and economy, both are vulnerable in a society that ignores the Author of its blessings. But despite the gloomy backdrop of Saturday's event, it should give Americans real hope that people in this country aren't giving up. They're following the prescription of Scripture to humble themselves before the Lord and pray for the nation. May we be encouraged, as the Psalmist was, that "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we will remember the Name of the Lord our God."

– Family Research Council website: frc.org; 801 G Street N.W. Washington, D.C. 20001. P: 202/393-2100

(UM) General Board of Church and Society DREAM Act Should Be Passed, Not Altered, 3 Leaders Say

[Note: This reflects "politicking" at its worst. This is an example of how our leaders continue to be involved in political endeavors, often against the priorities of the laity, and show how your apportionment dollars are used to pay the salaries of these church bureaucrats. This also exemplifies why our denomination continues to decline. Contrast this with the article about the folks in China who risked their freedom to take the gospel message to that country's people. – AOM]

Three UM leaders sent a letter July 18 to the U.S. Senate subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees & Border Security urging them to pass the DREAM Act. The bipartisan legislation, recently reintroduced by Sen. Richard Durbin, D-Ill., in the Senate and Reps. Howard Berman, D-Calif., and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, R-Fla., in the House, would provide a process for undocumented students brought to the United States as children to become legal citizens. The letter was signed by Bishops Minerva Carcaño (Phoenix Area) and Julius Trimble (Iowa), and Jim Winkler, chief executive of the General Board of Church & Society (GBCS). Carcaño chairs the Council of Bishops immigration committee and heads an interagency immigration task force.

Some other faith leaders recently encouraged passage of an "altered" act that would limit full rights of DREAM students' citizenship. The altered act would eliminate the students' ability to petition for legal status for immediate family members, for example. "We believe it is immoral to create a permanent second class of citizens who do not have access to full citizenship, and we do not support calls for legislation that would do so," the UMs emphasized. Their letter was sent to subcommittee chair, Sen. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., and its ranking member, Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas. "For too many years the U.S. immigration system has kept hundreds of thousands of promising young people from pursuing their dreams, including higher levels of education," the UMs state. "For too long, these students who recognize the United States as their only home have been denied the opportunity to further contribute to the U.S. economy and society."

Durbin has introduced the legislation to each Congressional session since 2001. The act, Development, Relief & Education for Alien Minors (DREAM), gives undocumented students a chance to earn legal status if they came here as children, are long-term U.S. residents, have good moral character and complete two years of college or military service in good standing.

The UM leaders point out that students who fulfill the DREAM Act's "rigorous eligibility requirements" could still take up to 14 years to attain citizenship. They also will not have the right under current immigration laws to sponsor anyone beyond immediate family members. "Adding the additional barrier preventing DREAM Act-eligible students from eventually reuniting with immediate family members is redundant, unnecessary and punitive," the letter declared.

– GBCS staff, as reported in *NewScope*, July 20, 2011

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If I have a thousand ideas and only one turns out to be good, I am satisfied. – Alfred Nobel

Global Outlook

The greatest barrier to success is the fear of failure. – Sven Goran Eriksson

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China. Caught by Police in Communist China!

“This will be a very quick update from China. About a week ago my team was caught by the police with Gospel literature and evangelistic books in Kashgar, China. I had taken my team to far northwestern China to distribute books and literature in Muslim towns. We had several good days of work on the street during the overnight hours and then we arrived in "KASHGAR!" This city was unlike any other I've visited, and I've been to many.

“Kashgar is a Muslim town that looks and feels more like a Muslim nation than a Chinese city. The Gospel is not tolerated and every foreigner entering the city is followed and watched very closely. We went out on our first evening in the usual careful way. After taking a taxi for a couple miles, we began walking back toward the city in the dark and away from most people. We placed just three Gospel books along the way while nobody was looking (or so we thought). When we arrived back at our hotel we were greeted by the police who demanded that we open our backpacks. They had each of the three books in their hands. The English speaking head of Religious affairs told us that we had been followed ever since we arrived in the city and gave us details about everywhere we had been. He also informed us that we had been secretly filmed that night. They did their job very well!

“After taking us to our room and going through all of our belongings, they left our hotel with about 100 lbs of tracts and books. We were finally able to get to bed around 5:00am. Day two began with us being taken to the police station to be questioned for 8 hours. Each of us [was] questioned separately and I was told to write a report on all of my activities in China. I used it to share the Gospel and tell them of their need for repentance and faith in Jesus. All day in the police station, the officers browsed through and read our Gospel material!

“Our passports had been taken and we were stuck at the hotel for another two days before they finally allowed us to leave the city and Province. Our interrogator, Officer Maxhoom, finally gave us our passports as we waited for our train to take us away. Thankfully our visas were not cancelled and we are currently in an "undisclosed" location resupplied and ready to hit the streets for the last few days of our time here.

“Please continue to lift us up to the Father.

“For China and the Savior Who spilled His Blood for Her”

– Dennis Green, April 19, 2011. Dennis is part of a group involved in “illegal” Christian evangelization in China.

Israel. Israel's right to defend her borders

As it stands now, “Palestinians will be authorized to seize East Jerusalem in September, with U.N. permission” according to an Associated Press just report.

"The West Bank Palestinian leadership formally decided Monday to press ahead with efforts in September to win U.N. recognition of a state in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem." Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas met with members of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (the same P.L.O. historically linked with violent terrorists of Hamas) and decided they will unilaterally seek United Nations permission to seize Israeli land without negotiation or consideration of Israeli sovereignty.

"Leading members of the Palestine Liberation Organization and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah movement met and later said in a statement that the goal is to bring a state of Palestine into the family of nations of the world....Only the U.N. Security Council can add a nation to the world body, and the U.S. government has repeatedly expressed its opposition to the move, signaling it will veto such a resolution," said one AP reporter. Abbas said last week on Lebanese TV: "President Obama says he wants to see an independent Palestinian state by September." No wonder Abbas met with PLO leaders and decided to seize the moment, and East Jerusalem with it.

"Palestinian officials hope U.N. recognition would force Israel to make concessions when negotiations resume...The statement did not say what form of U.N. recognition the Palestinians are seeking or what steps they might take after such a nod from the world body," said AP.

Haaretz newspaper in Israel confirmed a unilateral vote will be forced upon Israel by the U.N. this September. "Israel's new ambassador to the United Nations Ron Prosor urged Jewish American leaders on Monday to form a clear and

operational plan ahead of the United Nations vote in September regarding unilateral recognition of a Palestinian state," the report said. Prosor also said that "regardless of the outcome of the UN vote, a Palestinian state will not be created and added that the UN is not authorized to dictate borders between countries." He stressed that "a unilateral recognition of a Palestinian state will bring about another cycle of violence that will only lead to a dead end."

Abbas, who claims 116 of the 195 member states of the UN General Assembly are willing to recognize a Palestinian state, has stressed that his government would go through with the declaration if negotiations with Israel remain deadlocked. Israel hopes for 30 nations against, but America is the only among them who could veto the U.N. land grab.

"Unilateral moves are not constructive," Prosor said after his first day on the job, emphasizing that there was still time to act before the vote.

Haaretz newspaper in Israel reports President Obama has privately given a 30-day ultimatum to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, to either forfeit their land and revert to Obama's 1967 border plan, or face punishment by the United Nations. A U.N. vote to recognize Palestine (and seize Israeli land) is scheduled for September, which could be vetoed by the United States, but...recent actions cast doubt upon whether the U.S. will veto any U.N. land-grab.

"We're about to crash into the wall. We're galloping at full speed toward a situation where Israel will cease to exist as a Jewish state," said Israeli President Shimon Perez. "Whoever accepts the basic principle of the 1967 lines will receive international support from the world," Peres said. "Whoever rejects it will lose the world." Perez is liberal, and encourages Netanyahu to sell Israeli land for peace.

Netanyahu voiced his "vehement objection to starting peace talks on the basis of the 1967 lines, which he called 'undefensible' in both the Knesset and the U.S. Congress," said Haaretz. Netanyahu is conservative, but without American help he stands alone in trying to preserve, not only Israel's current borders, but their right to exist.

The bottom line is: Without the USA's veto of the U.N. plan, Israel will soon cease to exist as a nation. Both Perez and Netanyahu agree Israel will soon cease to exist, but one says "compromise" and the other says "no compromise." We must demand Congress defend Israel, since Obama won't. Please sign our petition today...

Congressman Louis Gohmert (R-TX) led 45 Members of Congress with Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT) by introducing House Resolution #271 supporting Israel's right to defend its own borders, against attack by Hamas terrorists, Iranian nuclear ambitions, and the Obama Administration. The resolution reads in part: "Expressing support for the State of Israel's right to defend Israeli sovereignty, to protect the lives and safety of the Israeli people, and to use all means necessary to confront and eliminate nuclear threats posed by the Islamic Republic of Iran, including the use of military force if no other peaceful solution can be found within reasonable time to protect against such an immediate and existential threat to the State of Israel."

Chaplain Klingenschmitt further commented: They will declare independence and cause a war. Abbas and the PLO do not want concessions "during negotiations." They plan to declare independence and fight for their newly claimed land, with the U.N. and [President] Obama's approval. There is war coming in September. If Israel refuses to comply, [President] Obama will not veto, the U.N. will grant land, and Muslims will attack Israeli territory to seize East Jerusalem and the 1967 borders.]

"Thank you for standing with Israel and with me. I appreciate your love for God and God's chosen people, who are under attack from all sides in these last days."

– Chaplain Gordon James Klingenschmitt. These are the views of Chaplain Klingenschmitt, who was vindicated by Congress after being honorably but involuntarily discharged from the Navy in 2007 after facing court-martial for praying "in Jesus name" in uniform, are his own personal views, not the views of any political party, government, or organization.

Annual Conference Reports

Annual Conference Switzerland–France–North Africa. The Annual Conference Switzerland–France–North Africa met June 16–19 in Winterthur and Zurich (Switzerland) under the theme "Where Heaven and Earth Meet." Bishop Patrick Streiff urged more than 1,000 church members and friends gathered for the closing ordination service to leave the comfort zones of a regular, secure (congregational) life and to make a radical turn to reach out to people in need. Conference business included lectures (with retired Bishop Walter Klaiber from Germany, among other guests), reports, interviews and discussions on The UMC mission statement. Reports from the various conference bodies also often referred to the task to make disciples. Connexio, the network for mission and service, reminded the conference of its various activities in Asia, Eastern Europe, Africa and Latin America, which also help to make disciples of Jesus Christ; donations considerably decreased last year. Serge Frutiger (clergy) and Christine Schneider-Oesch (lay) were elected as delegates for General Conference 2012. – Office of Bishop Patrick Streiff, Zurich, as rep. in *NewScope*, July 13, 2011

Baltimore–Washington. “Connect as One through Radical Hospitality” was the theme of the 227th session of the Baltimore–Washington Conference, which met May 26–28 in Baltimore. The Council on Finance and Administration announced its commitment to lower the benevolence factor over the years so that in 2016 it resembles a tithe, with churches paying 10 percent of their total income. An \$18.5 million budget was adopted, and the benevolence factor for 2012 was decreased from 19.5 to 18 percent. Members voted to refer five petitions to the 2012 General Conference, including a resolution that gives pastors the right to determine if a same-gender marriage or civil union may be held in their church in civil jurisdictions where such unions are allowed;... and a resolution to remove from the Discipline the statement that “the UMC does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.” Lay delegates elected to General Conference: Tom Price, Sandy Ferguson, Darius Butler, Melissa Lauber, Edith Williams, Charlie Moore and Jen Ihlo. Clergy delegates: T.R. Chattin, Laura Easto, Conrad Link, Rodney Smothers, J.W. Park, Joe Daniels and Joan Carter-Rimbach. Lay delegates elected to Jurisdictional Conference: Darlynn McCrae, Michael Parker, Chris Schlieckert, Delores Martin, David Hosey, Sylvia Simpson and Ralph Williams. Clergy delegates: Chris Holmes, Ianther Mills, Joye Jones, Mary Kay Totty, Victoria Starnes, Rod Miller and Evan Young. Membership is 181,940, down 3,146.

– Shaun Lane, Baltimore–Washington Annual Conf., as reported in *NewScope*, July 13, 2011

California–Nevada. The 163rd session of the California–Nevada Annual Conference climaxed a season of preparation grounded in a study, Catch Fire in 50 Days. Lay delegates elected to General Conference: Randall Miller, Emily Allen and Yoshiro Nakajima. Clergy delegates: Odette Lockwood-Stewart, Kah-Jin Jeffrey Kuan and Dale Weatherspoon. Lay delegates elected to Jurisdictional Conference: Delilah Fakalata, Gayle Shearman, Laddie Perez Galang, Katherine Kim, Aaron Rhodes, Robert Dunning and Emma Rhodes. Clergy delegates: Greg Bergquist, Siosifa Hingano, Elizabeth Brick, Motoe Yamada, Karen Oliveto, Staci Current and Kristin Sachen. Lay delegate reserves for Jurisdictional Conference: Blanche Farnam, Tom McHugh, Beth Snyder, Brendan Spohn and Helen Roland. Clergy delegate reserves: Felicisimo Cao, Susan Griffin, David Niu, Mark Zier and Chris Shiber. Members also forwarded resolutions to the 2012 General Conference: end discrimination against homosexual clergy, end discrimination in clergy charge, end discrimination and confusion in funding, offer the blessings of Christian marriage to homosexual couples, remove discriminatory language about homosexuality, update civil equal rights and remove condemnatory language on homosexuality. Membership is 78,958, down 1,417.

– Cate Monaghan, California–Nevada Annual Conference, as reported in *NewScope*, July 13, 2011

Desert Southwest. The twenty-seventh session of the Desert Southwest Annual Conference opened on June 23 with a service of remembrance and resurrection and closed on June 26 with Bishop Minerva G. Carcaño presiding. Conference passed resolutions on visioning an AIDS-free world, energy conservation and the use of renewable energy, and a conference commitment to kindness[?]. Nine petitions to General Conference passed concerning discriminatory and unwelcoming language in The Book of Discipline on human sexuality [Read “supporting homosexual advocacy.” – AOM] Clergy elected to General Conference: Jane Tews; to Jurisdictional Conference are Robert Glenn Rynders and Sharon Ragland. Clergy alternate is Anthony Tang. Lay delegate elected to General Conference is Sharon Lorraine Scobie; to Jurisdictional Conference are Gwen Garrett and Dakota Lee Staren. Membership is 37,951, down 2.6%.

– Stephen J. Hustedt, Desert Southwest Annual Conference, as reported in *NewScope*, July 20, 2011

Eastern Pennsylvania. Nearly 1,000 members of the Eastern Pennsylvania Annual Conference met May 19–21 at the Philadelphia Expo Center with the theme, “Journeying with the Poor.” Lay delegates for General Conference: Mary White, Judith K. Ehninger, Thomas Gibson, Ruth A. Daugherty and Brenda Tildon. Clergy delegates: James B. Todd, Robin M. Hynicka, Lillian C. Smith, Dawn Taylor-Storm and Tracy L. Bass. Lay delegates to Jurisdictional Conference: Jordan Harris, Candace Carter, George Hollich, Elisabeth (Lisi) Santos Fisher and Ann Jacob. Clergy delegates: Doris K. Dalton, Alan J. Smith, Joseph DiPaolo, Christopher Kurien and Andrew Foster. Lay alternate delegates: Lenora Thompson, Jason Perkowski and Jane Bonner. Clergy alternates: Dorothy Watson-Tatem, Michele Wright Bartlow and Bronwyn Yocum. Resolutions included for immigration reform; urging Gov. Corbett to tax natural gas drilling related to the Marcellus Shale drilling; discontinuing four churches and merging two. Membership is 114,991, down 3,373.

– Suzy Keenan, Eastern Pennsylvania Annual Conference, as reported in *NewScope*, July 13, 2011

Eurasia Episcopal Area. The Eurasia Episcopal Area has one annual conference and four provisional annual conferences. They met during May, June and July, all under the theme, “See, Now Is the Acceptable Time” (2 Corinthians 6:2) An essential part of all five conferences was the attention given to the ongoing “Road Work” needed to progress according to the Eurasian Road Map. One of the new ordinands, Oleg Starodubets, was appointed district superintendent for the Central Asia District. Indigenous leaders started to be recruited and trained in the South and neighboring Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan nine years ago. Lay delegates to General Conference: Vladimir Ditmar (Northwest Russia Provisional Annual Conference), Eleonora Glazyrina (Ukraine and Moldova Provisional Annual Conference), Sergey Pugachev (Central Russia Annual Conference), Nelli Shakirova (East Russia and

Central Asia Provisional Annual Conference), and Olga Tselisheva (South Russia Provisional Annual Conference). Clergy delegates: Yelena Chudinova (East Russia and Central Asia Provisional Annual Conference), Alexander Kozorezov (South Russia Provisional Annual Conference), Andrei Kim (Northwest Russia Provisional Annual Conference), Sergei Nikolayev (Central Russia Annual Conference), and Vasily Vuksta (Ukraine and Moldova Provisional Annual Conference). – Hans Vaxby, as reported in *NewScope*, July 20, 2011

Holston. The Holston Annual Conference (June 12–15, Lake Junaluska, N.C.) lived into its “Christ for the World” theme, raising \$100,192 to build a South Sudan orphanage for 50 children and establish two scholarships at Africa University. Presiding Bishop James Swanson and lay leader Mary Ruth Richards asked members to support the revitalization plan in their “State of the Church” report. Keeping its 2008 covenant agreement with the East Africa Conference, Holston Conference commissioned newly retired Rev. Fred Dearing to serve as district superintendent in South Sudan. Dearing and his wife, Libby, are relocating to Yei, Sudan, where Holston missionaries already serve. A \$10.6 million budget for 2012 was approved. Lay delegates elected to General Conference: Del Holley, John Tate, Bob Lockaby, Anne Travis, Jay Garrison, Becky Hall and Megan Watson. Clergy delegates: Carol Wilson, Randy Frye, Stella Roberts, David Graves, Eddie Fox, Wil Cantrell, and Sandra Johnson. Lay delegates elected to Jurisdictional Conference: Paul Brown, Patty Muse, Joyce Moore, Georgia Lister, Danny Howe, Jackie Watson, Brenda Haymore, Teddy Stevens and John Powers. Clergy delegates: Dennie Humphreys, Mark Flynn, Jerry Russell, Don Hanshew, Nathan Malone, Beth Tipton, Amy Probst, Kim Goddard and Aaron. Membership is 166,133, down 492. – Annette Spence, as reported in *NewScope*, July 20, 2011

North Georgia. The 2011 North Georgia Annual Conference united under the theme “Engaging in Ministry with the Poor.” Bishop B. Michael Watson presided over the 145th session of the gathering of nearly 3,000 UMs (June 14–17, Athens, Ga.). Clergy elected to the 2012 General Conference: Sharma Denise Lewis (head and the first African American woman to lead the North Georgia delegation), Jonathan Holston, James Cantrell, Phil Schroeder, Jane Brooks, P. Alice Rogers, Kyle Edward Tomlinson, John Anderson Simmons, Nora Martinez, Jamie Jenkins, Chuck Savage, Steve Wood and David Bevel Jones. Lay delegates: Jane Finley, Lyn Powell, Mathew Pinson, Joe M. Whittemore, Jeff Jernigan, Bill Stikes, Tonya Murphy, Leon Jourolman, Dianne Spencer, Joe Kilpatrick, Richard Williamson, Bill Martin and Marjorie Kimbrough. Clergy elected to the 2012 Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference: Wiley Stephens, Elizabeth Larocca-Pitts, David Allen Grady, Richard Winn, James Ellison, Dianne Parish, Joy Melton, Karen Kagiyama, Leon Matthews, Renita Thomas, Richard Hunter, Bridgette Young and Mike Cash. Lay delegates: Keith Cox, Gary Fuller, Jasper Russell Sr., Hank Huckaby, Dianne Traynham, Debby Stikes, Micah Arrington, Janet Sligar, Elizabeth Corrie, Al Stocks, Sue Raymond, Robert Fincher and Jack Camarda. Clergy reserve delegates: Jimmy Moor, Susan Allen Grady, David Walters, Glenn Ethridge and Davis Chappell. Lay reserve delegates: Charles Miller, Tom Cook, Ida Florine Tarver Jones, Lowell Kirkman and Christian Higgins. CF&A presented a budget of \$24,042,913 for 2012. This reflects a five percent decrease from 2011, the third year in a row that the budget has been reduced. Membership is 357,741, up 1,467. – Glenn Hannigan, North Georgia An. Conf., as reported in *NewScope*, July 13, 2011

Peninsula–Delaware. The 227th session of the Peninsula–Delaware Annual Conference was held on the campus of the University of Maryland Eastern Shore in Princess Anne, June 9–11. Additionally, the Annual Conference approved the 2012 Covenant Funding budget in the amount of \$5,750,000. Lay delegates elected to General Conference: Demetrio Beach, Kevin Goodwin and Lawrence Pelham. Lay delegates to Jurisdictional Conference: Betty Gooch, Marie Van Der Wall and Shane Hinderliter. Lay alternates: Regina Nichols, Boe Harris and Glen C. Pruitt. Clergy delegates elected to General Conference: Sandra Steiner Ball, Derrick Porter and Jack Shitama. Clergy delegates to Jurisdictional Conference: Charlotte Nichols, John Mitchell and Boyd Etter. Clergy alternates: Amy Yarnall, Jonathon Baker and Chris Pennington. The 2010 conference membership was 86,332, a 1.2% decrease from 2009. – The Rev. Dr. Richard Vance and the Rev. John Van Tine, as reported in *NewScope*, July 13, 2011

Rio Grande. Now in its 158th year, the Rio Grande Annual Conference met at University UMC in San Antonio, Texas, June 16–18. Under the theme “Moving Forward to Do God’s Will,” presiding Bishop Jim Dorff and approximately 220 delegates received reports. Bishop Dorff emphasized that the “time is now” to respond to the growing population in the Episcopal area. The conference is in partnership with the Methodist Church of Colombia. Edgar Avitia and Cindy Johnson were elected to the 2012 General Conference as clergy and lay delegates, respectively. Alternate delegates and observer team members elected were Alex Valverde, Sandra Cabrera, Robert Lopez, Daniel Soliz, Javier Leyva, Samuel Blanco, Leticia Ortegon and Jeremiah Gutierrez. Delegates approved a total budget of \$1,428,979, of which \$675,122 is apportioned to the local churches. Conference membership is 13,845, up 58. – Abel Vega Jr., Rio Grande Annual Conference, as reported in *NewScope*, July 20, 2011

Rocky Mountain. The Rocky Mountain Annual Conference gathered with the theme, “Harvesting Hospitality: God’s Kingdom at the Doorstep,” June 16–19 at Denver Tech Center. In the episcopal address, Bishop Elaine Stanovsky challenged the conference to

work to create a culture of accountability, experimentation, and call for the upcoming year. For General Conference, the Rocky Mountain Annual Conference approved all petitions eliminating discriminatory language about homosexuality from The Book of Discipline. The conference also passed legislation aimed at addressing immigration ministries within the local church and created a special offering for Hispanic Ministry. Clergy delegates to General Conference: Brad Laurvick, Jessica Rooks and Trudy Robinson. Clergy delegates to Jurisdictional Conference: Joel Kershaw, Eric Smith, Walter, “Skip” Strickland, Charles Schuster, Sione Tukutau, Bob Kaylor and Kent Ingram. Clergy alternates: Carolyn Waters, Marv Vose and Emily Earnshaw. Lay delegates to General Conference: Judy Hill, Kunle Taiwo and Diana J. Huerta. Lay delegates to Jurisdictional Conference: Gary Dyer, Philip Cardin, Elaine M. Johnson, U Kyaw Win, Rachel Marston, Mary Ann Tabor and Martha Conant. Lay alternates: Doug Palmer, Brenda Moland and Dave Bates. Membership is 65,847, up 68. – Matthew Graham and Walter “Skip” Strickland, as reported in *NewScope*, July 13, 2011

Southwest Texas. More than 1,300 lay and clergy delegates gathered in Corpus Christi June 8–11 for the 42nd session of the Southwest Texas Conference, a session that made history in welcoming the first deaf lay delegate to ever participate in worship services and business sessions. “The time is now,” said presiding Bishop Jim Dorff. “The declines in worship attendance and membership in our annual conference, in this mission field God has provided, they’re just not what God wants from us. This is a spiritual issue.” In 2001, the board introduced a new health plan to streamline the out-of-pocket payment process in order to exercise “good management and good stewardship.” Delegates also voted to petition General Conference with a membership clause that includes people regardless of “race, color, national origin, status, economic situation, sexual orientation, gender choices and gender identity.” Membership is 118,733, down 50. – Rachel L. Toalson, as reported in *NewScope*, July 13, 2011

Texas. The 2011 gathering of the Texas Annual Conference (May 29–June 1) shined a spotlight on the challenges facing the conference and denomination, while simultaneously testifying to God’s ability to sustain and strengthen the church. Declining membership and worship attendance were coupled with historically low apportionment receipts (84%). Bishop Janice Riggle Huie’s episcopal address called for change in order to curb the “creeping crisis of relevancy” and general decline. Renovation is a key to revitalization. Conference lay leader Leah Taylor stated, “A vital disciple is a changed follower of Christ.” Bishop Huie explained the denomination’s Call to Action recommendations in light of transformation already occurring in the annual conference. Taylor noted that the Call to Action “gives us a tool to use as we look at how we might change for the future.” Keynote speaker Rev. Adam Hamilton, UM Church of the Resurrection (Leawood, Kan.), said, “Change, innovate, improve or die,” while holding an iPod and a 45 record in his hands. Lay delegates elected to General Conference: Don House (College Station), Andy Hernandez (Montgomery), Reggie Clemons (Houston), Gil Hanke (Nashville, Tenn.), Leah Taylor (Houston), Gib Walton (Houston), Eleanor F. Colvin (Houston), Tom Wussow (Kingwood), Donna Schlitt (Houston) and Sue Sullivan (Texarkana). Clergy delegates: Elijah Stansell (Huffman), Chap Temple (Cypress), Morris Matthis (Sugar Land), Nancy Kellond (Spring), Steve Wende (Houston), Jim Welch (Kingwood), Kenneth Levingston (Spring), Tommy Williams (Houston), Janice Gilbert (League City) and Matt Idom (Palestine). Lay delegates elected to the Jurisdictional Conference: Eddie Erwin (Houston), Donel King (Houston), Sterling Allen (College Station), Carolyn Huntsman (Lovelady), Ben Lohmer (Houston), John Worsham (Houston), Melba Wilson (Port Arthur), Scott Atnip (Huntsville), Marquice Hobbs (Houston) and Bill Brown (Tyler). Clergy delegates: Keith Whitaker (Pearland), Justin Coleman (Houston), B.J. Hightower (Houston), Ben Trammell (Richmond), Pat Sparks (Missouri City), Cynthia Harvey (New York, N.Y.), Tom Pace (Houston), Jessica LaGrone (Conroe), Rob Renfroe (The Woodlands) and Jim Bankston (Houston). Conference membership is 285,016, down 2,115. – Eleanor L. Colvin, Texas Annual Conference, as reported in *NewScope*, July 20, 2011

West Ohio. The 42nd Session of the West Ohio Annual Conference began with music from the Marty Ford Experience, ushering in vibrant praise and a spirit of celebration that would continue June 6–9 under the theme “Unleashing New Life.” Resident Bishop Bruce R. Ough, in his episcopal address, focused on the impact of a transformed life that comes from giving oneself to Christ. The Rev. Dr. Terry Teykl spoke of the need and passion for reaching the lost and unbelieving. Recommendations adopted included a call to align UM investments with resolutions on Israel/Palestine, guiding principles for the State of Ohio biennium budget, et. al. Membership is 200,045, down 5,844. – Lisa Streight, West Ohio Annual Conference, as reported in *NewScope*, July 20, 2011

Wisconsin. The Wisconsin Annual Conference took place at the Chula Vista Conference Center in the Wisconsin Dells June 12–15, featuring the theme “Love Unconditionally,” which was woven throughout the four days of activities. Bishop Linda Lee spoke of love as the connecting fiber that brings people together and breaks down barriers. The conference welcomed delegates from the Dong Bu Conference in South Korea to honor the sister partnership between the two conferences. Approved action items included petitions to the 2012 General Conference, resolutions to speak out about health care and collective bargaining rights, support for the “20/20: Visioning an AIDS-Free World” campaign, and the closing of University UMC and Waldwick UMC. The approved petitions included marriage equality, removal of discriminatory language about homosexuality, longer tenure appointments, stewardship

emphasis, etc. Lay delegates elected to General Conference: Lisa King (head), Dorthy Radley and William Stimeling. Clergy delegates: Dan R. Dick, Amanda M.D. Stein and Steve Zekoff. Jurisdictional Conference lay delegates: Judy Vasby, Diane Odeen and Chris Reynolds. Clergy delegates: Steve Polster, Jeremy Deaner and Sam Royappa. Lay alternates: Gail Burgess, John Lawson, Tom Popp and Jennifer Southworth. Clergy alternates: Dan Schwerin, Carrie Kreps Wegenast, Jorge Mayorga Solis and Jennifer Arneson.

– Michele Virnig and Katelin Hillbo, Wisconsin Annual Conference, as reported in *NewScope*, July 20, 2011

Yellowstone. The forty-second session of the Yellowstone Annual Conference was held June 10–13 at Crowne Plaza Hotel in Billings, Mont. Denver Area Bishop Elaine Stanovsky presided. The conference went on record in support of the repeal of the death penalty in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming—portions of each are embraced within Yellowstone Conference boundaries. Conference members adopted a budget for the year 2011 that represents an 8.75% decrease from the current year’s budget. Membership of Yellowstone’s churches is 14,279, down 550. – Bob Phelps, Yellowstone Annual Conference, as reported in *NewScope*, July 20, 2011

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If I get money in my right hand, I let it go out of my left hand as quickly as possible
lest it find its way into my heart. – John Wesley