

Monthly Update

August 2012

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

We are presenting in this August Monthly Update news of what is happening at the various annual conferences in our United Methodist Church as well as other news of pressing interest in the public arena.

For this past week, I have been at Lake Junaluska for the meeting of the Southeastern Jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church involved in the election of five bishops to the Council of Bishops. Despite the fact that I have seen numerous such elections before, this was an especially interesting process. Of the five new bishops, all seem to be evangelical and to represent a cross section of groups. The first elected was a black clergyman from the North Georgia Conference (the largest in the United Methodist connection) and elected on the first ballot – which is unusual in this process. The last elected was a Korean-American, by all calculations, the most spiritual and evangelical of the group. I was highly pleased with the choices.

During the election of the last and fifth bishop, it was a long process involving numerous ballots with three candidates rising to the top: a Native American man, a black clergywoman from the Black Clergywomen's Caucus and also from the North Georgia Conference, in addition to the candidate finally elected. Yet there was more than one speech decrying the "lack of diversity" and "white privilege" – which put a damper on the process. As I had remarked to another member of our delegation, "Jesus talked about 'straining out a gnat...' in relation to these criticisms." It really is a shame when some cannot see the truth because of their own preconceived yet unrecognized prejudices. These accusations, more than any other factor, serve to divide the races and cause disharmony in the church. Let us hope that they will cease.

Please continue to pray for us as we "contend for the faith" in obedience to Him who has called us. Above everything else, we want to "be about our Father's business" in all of our actions. Also, please continue to stand with us prayerfully and financially during these fiscally lean summer months, especially as we are involved in a higher-than-average number of conferences – the last being in Washington, DC next month. We especially strive during this election year to educate non-United Methodists to the reality of stances taken by the grassroots laity – that are often at odds with what is portrayed in public political circles. This year – 2012 – is especially critical to the future of our country. Again, please pray.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris
Executive Director

August 2012 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

Church leaders have a big responsibility to watch over our souls, for one day they will give an account to the Lord for their work among us.

– As quoted in *Our Daily Bread*, December 20, 2011

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The Good Stuff

+ ***A CALL FOR FAITHFUL BISHOPS***

"We earnestly pray for faithful bishops to lead the way in scriptural teaching of the doctrine of holy matrimony. Scriptural teaching is what the bishops are ordained to do. They have forgotten the terms of their consecration. They have failed. Wesley grasped that failure in his time, but sought patiently to renew it from within. But within the next twenty years, faithful bishops will arise, likely out of Africa, who will regain the momentum for reconciliation."

– By Professor Thomas Oden, in *FIRST THINGS*, June/July 2012 issue; June 2012 e-newsletter; the Confessing Movement

+ ***Observations...***

Recently I had the privilege of speaking at a United Methodist seminary. My subject was: "Five Truths about Evangelism that I wish I had learned in Seminary." Those five truths are the following:

* All people can be divided into two categories: lost and found, and some of the lost are in every congregation.

* The Word of God is the only real authority we have.

* Until a person faces his sin, he/she cannot really comprehend or receive the grace of God.

* The Gospel always has a cross at its center.

* A Bible-based, Spirit-filled sermon has enormous, mysterious power.

– By Dr. Bill Bouknight; June 2012 e-newsletter from the Confessing Movement

Of Interest

+ ***Foundation Screens Private-Prison Stocks***

The UMC Foundation at its May meeting took a stand against profiting from companies engaged in privatization of prisons. In an action affirming a recommendation by its investment committee, the foundation's board of directors amended the foundation's investment policy to add a screen for all of its portfolios and holdings. The board's decision follows the January announcement by the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits that it would prohibit investments in private-prison companies.

– United Methodist News Service (UMNS), as reported in *UMNewScope*, June 20, 2012

+ ***Churches Hosting Free Medical Clinics***

Three UM churches in South Carolina are opening their doors to provide free, walk-in medical clinics. Murray UMC in Summerville, New Hope UMC in Ridgeville and Wesley UMC in Ladson will host monthly clinics that will be staffed by volunteer physicians. Read the full story online.

– UMNS, as reported in *UMNewScope*, June 20, 2012

Homosexuality. Homosexual-themed classroom materials

Do you ever feel weary or burdened after hearing yet another report about the continual onslaught of sexualized messages in our children's schools? And finding out how well-funded all the sexual advocacy groups targeting our classrooms with their messages are certainly doesn't make things any easier. Well, I have some good news for you: we've got a refreshing story to share with you that will encourage your heart. These brave parents and local school board members in Erie, Ill.—a town of only 1,600 people—are resisting pressure from national activist groups and liberal media. They made their voices heard after discovering plans to introduce materials from GLSEN—the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network—into their elementary school, which serves children between the ages of 4 and 9.

The good news is, the school board listened to the parents' concerns and voted 5-2 to reject the GLSEN material. But as a result, gay-activist groups have launched a national campaign to pressure the board into reversing its vote. However, the school board says it's not changing its vote, no matter what GLSEN does. Parents and citizens in this community are standing firm for their kids, their schools and their community values. Those actions are having a ripple effect that will

empower other parents nationwide.

If you have concerns about whether this type of curriculum is headed to your local schools and how you can respond, you'll want to check out TrueTolerance.org. This online resource provides examples of homosexual-themed classroom materials to be aware of, as well as tips on how to respond to efforts to introduce them in your children's classrooms in a loving, fact-based way.

– For faith and family, Tom Minnery, Senior Vice President, Focus on the Family

– E-mail, June 23, 2012; CitizenLink® Report

(UM) General Conference 2012.

+ Report from RENEW:

Dear Allen,

Well, General Conference is behind us and by now most of you have read the articles and analyses of all that happened there. I wanted to give you an update on the women's ministry issues and how we ultimately fared at GC 2012. While extremely disappointed our legislation that passed overwhelmingly in committee never came to the floor...we believe that a partial victory is an important step forward.

Having served at three general conferences now..., this time was pivotal for women. The amount of support for our legislation and cause from delegates, clergy, and church leaders I encountered in Tampa had decidedly increased. The church is ready for changes in women's ministry in the UMC and it is only a matter of time before this is officially adopted by the General Conference.

That is, if it ever is allowed to come to the floor. It was shameful that protests and violators of the rules of the conference were allowed to eat up valuable time which caused many important legislative pieces to be left to die on the agenda calendar due to lack of time. Our legislation was one of those pieces.

Until the leadership of the General Conference recognizes how these disruptions make the process so ineffective, I fear we will continue to be mired in inefficiency the painstaking work of our delegates disregarded.

NO ONE should be allowed to violate the bar of the conference. And if that means banning protesters from the conference center and putting security personnel at every entrance to the delegate floor, than so be it. Cutting deals, acquiescing to rule-breaking groups (many not even United Methodists)...should not be tolerated. I pray that these disrupters will be put in their proper place at the next GC...where they can no longer hinder the important work of the church....

I can't begin to thank the three women who were part of our team at General Conference enough for their hard work and dedication for the RENEW Network. They put in long hours of monitoring committees, making contacts, and keeping the Coalition informed on important happenings at the conference.

The team consisted of myself, Kathryn Kiser from Carrollton, Texas, Nancy Johnson from Hollywood, Georgia, and Marget Sikes of Tunnel Hill, Georgia. I will be posting their reports soon on their observations and thoughts regarding the conference.

Thank you for your service and dedication!

In Christ,
Liza Kittle

+ *GBHEM Response to General Conference Action*

Kim Cape, general secretary of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) shares agency plans based on General Conference action. "In cooperation with the Financial Administration legislative committee, the general secretaries crafted the budgeting of \$5 million for Central Conference Theological Education and \$7 million for a Young Clergy Initiative out of our proposed World Service budget with no new money. Instead of taking the 6.6% cut proposed by GCFA, we volunteered to take a cut of approximately 10% in order to fund these new initiatives. . . .

"The money saved by reducing board sizes was invested in Central Conference Theological Education and young clergy support. . . . The Central Conference Theological Education Initiative leadership will be convened by the Council of Bishops. GBHEM is moving forward to implement the Young Clergy Initiative. [A Young Clergy Summit is planned for Aug. 20–21 in Nashville.] . . .

"We are taking advantage of technology to expand our reach and make training and resources available as quickly and cheaply as possible. Whenever possible, we are replacing costly travel with electronic meetings using Go-To-Meeting, WebEx, and other programs."

– Kim Cape, GBHEM , as reported in the June 6, 2012 edition of NewScope

+ *Statement on Security of Appointment*

In response to a number of inquiries directed to the General Board of Higher Education (GBHEM) related to the security of appointment and the most recent questions about General Conference action, GBHEM general secretary, Kim Cape, has issued a statement that reads, in part:

“I am urging caution in interpreting General Conference action. At the request of the General Conference, the Judicial Council has scheduled a review of the security of appointment legislation at their fall 2012 session. “While General Conference Secretary Fitzgerald Reist is correct that ¶334 was not changed to mirror changes to ¶337, which removed security of appointment, there are different interpretations of what it means to have both paragraphs in The Book of Discipline 2012. . . . “It is also important to remember that the ministry legislation does not go into effect until January 2013, so there is time for these issues to be clarified. For the 2012 appointment cycle, security of appointment clearly remains in effect.”

– GBHEM, as reported in UMNewScope, June 20, 2012

+ *Question Raised on Security of Appointment.* In a June 11 statement to the Council of Bishops, the Rev. L. Fitzgerald “Gere” Reist II, secretary of the General Conference, suggested that the language in the 2012 Book of Discipline “does not eliminate the security of appointment for elders.” Other denominational leaders question Reist’s interpretation of what the 2012 General Conference accomplished when it met Apr. 24–May 4 in Tampa, Fla. At issue are two potentially contradictory sections of The Book of Discipline. The 2012 General Conference deleted, in ¶337, the required security of appointment for elders in good standing. The changes allow a bishop to recommend an elder be put on transitional leave. However, the assembly left ¶334.1 intact. The latter paragraph says, in part: “Every effective elder in full connection who is in good standing shall be continued under appointment by the bishop.” Some bishops contend that General Conference did not so much eliminate security of appointment as modify it. “Someone having an appointment is not the same thing as them being appointed to serve a church,” Indiana Area Bishop Michael Coyner said in an email to bishops that he shared with UM News Service. “Transitional leave is an appointment and so is a part-time appointment.” Ultimately, Reist and Coyner agree the Judicial Council must decide the matter. Questions regarding the elimination of security of appointment will go before the Judicial Council at its next meeting in October, and this debate could come under consideration. “My statement to the Council of Bishops was not a statement of law but a statement of the fact of the language remaining in the Book of Discipline,” said Reist.

– Heather Hahn, UMNS, as reported in UMNewScope, June 13, 2012

(UM) General Board of Church and Society (GBCS).

+UM Commitment to “Just, Humane Immigration Policies”

[Note: This reflects policies of the GBCS that we believe are misdirected priorities and misuse of UM money. Why is their no concern about obeying the laws of our nation? A nation without borders is vulnerable to every hostile force seeking to bring about harm that country. This would lead to anarchy and national chaos. Note that these church employees do not refer to the fact that they are advocating for people who are in this country illegally. The GBCS would object vociferously if we advocated for United Methodists everywhere to refrain from giving money into the general church fund. – AOM]

The General Board of Church & Society (GBCS) Civil & Human Rights work area has compiled a 70-page journal of grassroots actions by UMs across the United States in support of just, humane immigration policies. The Immigration Reform Grassroots Journal includes events ranging from prayer vigils to meetings with members of Congress. It documents more than 570 events, actions and resolutions advocating reform of U.S. immigration laws. It records actions in 46 states and the District of Columbia, 2009–2012. “That’s almost 200 events per year or one public event every 42 hours,” emphasized Bill Mefford, director of GBCS’s Civil & Human Rights work area, which compiled the journal. According to the bishops, UMs are advocating for:

- + Passage of the DREAM Act that provides a path to full citizenship for undocumented (i.e. illegal) students;
- + End to privately run detention facilities;
- + Greater use of alternatives to detention, especially in cases where only civil charges are involved;
- + End to Secure Communities and any other federal programs that force local law enforcement to act as immigration Officials.

– Wayne Rhodes, GBCS, as reported in the June 6, 2012 edition of NewScope

+ **“Workplace discrimination”** – The GBCS is among 37 religious groups to sign a letter in support of legislation banning “workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity...” – As reported in UMNewScope, June 20, 2012

(UM) General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM). Methodists Open New Office in the Holy Land

The UMC is increasing its ministry in the world with a new office in the Holy Land. Serving the global Methodist family, the office will expand current work and will in part be a base for educating Holy Land pilgrims about a range of Middle Eastern and Israeli/Palestinian issues. The General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) is developing the Methodist liaison office in partnership with the British Methodist Church and the World Methodist Council. Thomas Kemper, who leads GBGM, outlined the plans to directors at the semi-annual meeting in March. According to Kemper the office will “embody our commitments to peace and justice and underscore our concern for the future of the declining Palestinian Christian community.” [READ THIS TO BE: Anti-Israel]

– Melissa Hinnen, GBGM, as reported in the May 23, 2012 edition of NewScope

(UM) General Commission on Religion and Race (GCORR). The General Commission on Religion and Race (GCORR), the agency in charge of monitoring racial matters in The UMC, has expressed concern about the situation involving Bishop W. Earl Bledsoe, an African-American bishop who has said he is being pressured to retire. The commission said in an open letter to top agency executives that Bledsoe’s case raises “several denominational issues” that the commission must address. The commission’s letter was signed by Erin Hawkins, the commission’s top executive; Wisconsin Area Bishop Linda Lee, its president; and Phoenix Area Bishop Minerva Carcaño, its vice president. The issues include the question of whether clergy at all levels of the church receive evaluations under “rigorous, consistent and commonly understood policies and processes. . . . Weaknesses in the system of evaluation can potentially make all clergy leaders regardless of race or ethnicity, gender, age or cultural group vulnerable to inequitable or discriminatory behavior and the church to legal action,” said the letter. [Note: The GCORR was almost eliminated at the recent General Conference in Tampa. This elimination was a part of the Plan UMC proposal – and something which I heartily supported. - AOM]

– UMNS Supports for Ban on Workplace Bias

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Christians at war with each other cannot
be at peace with their heavenly Father.

– *Our Daily Bread*, May 27, 2012

Global Outlook

God desires that we show respect to all people,
because everyone bears His image.

– *Our Daily Bread*, May 29, 2012

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Haiti. Haiti Programs Need Medical Volunteers UM volunteer medical teams are now welcome to schedule mission service to the denomination’s existing partner health programs in the Port-au-Prince area, including King’s Hospital, Partners in Development, Grace Children’s Hospital and the TB clinic at Hospital General. Volunteers also can work at one of the nine Methodist Church of Haiti clinics or participate in the church’s mobile clinic pilot project.

Liberia. Library Construction at Gbarnga School of Theology in Liberia

A new \$300,000 library to replace the building looted during Liberia’s civil war is under construction on the campus of the Gbarnga School of Theology. “The library was up to first-floor level when I left for school in early January,” said the Rev. Yatta Young, dean of the seminary (studying for a D.Min. at Saint Paul School of Theology in Kansas City, Mo.)

“The former library building and other structures on the UM Mission campus (where the school is located) were destroyed by warring factions. What little they left standing was destroyed by the elements: rain, sunshine, moisture, humidity, and termites. The books and furniture were used as wood for cooking. Toward the end of the crisis, some were bartered for food. That business was called ‘buy your own thing.’ That meant that you had to pay some money for the book even if your name was written on it,” Young said.

She said there is no special funding for the construction. Bishop John Innis is raising funds for the construction and the Liberia Annual Conference and UM members have been asked to get everyone involved in fundraising. “Each category was asked to decide the amount each person should give. So each group, for example faculty members, agreed on a certain amount that each would contribute to the library,” Young said. And “we have received funds from friendly folks abroad.” She said the \$300,000 estimate for completion does not include installing shelves for books or buying furniture. “The seminary is open to all denominations and so is very popular. The challenges we face are enormous.

– Vicki Brown, GBHEM, as reported in the June 6, 2012 edition of NewScope

World Council of Churches. The top executive of the World Council of Churches condemned Sunday’s massacre in Syria as “morally and ethically unacceptable” and urged Syria’s government to stop the ongoing violence against its own people. “We, as churches, cannot but condemn this inhumane act and manifest our feelings of solidarity with the families of the victims, mourning their beloved ones,” said the Rev. Olav Fykse Tveit in a statement released May 29 from his headquarters in Geneva..

– UMNS Daily Digest,

June 1, 2012

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Annual Conference Reports

Alabama-West Florida. The 2012 Alabama–West Florida (AWF) Annual Conference was held June 3-6 in Mobile, Ala. with the theme, “Partnership in the Gospel . . . Serving the World.” Bishop Paul L. Leeland welcomed clergy and lay members to Christ UMC in Mobile. Dr. Belton Joyner delivered the sermon during opening worship. Membership is 146,782, down less than 1% from the previous year.

– Mary Catherine Phillips, Alabama–West Florida Annual Conference, as reported in UMNewScope, June 13, 2012

Alaska Missionary Conference. The Alaska Missionary Conference gathered at St. John UMC in Anchorage, May 25–26. Bishop Grant Hagiya presided. The conference committed to restructure, designed to be more...cost-effective. It was announced that the Alaska Conference will join the Pacific Northwest and Oregon-Idaho Conferences in “The Great Northwest Episcopal Area” and will share one bishop across a slice of the Western United States. Membership is 3,598, down 135.

– Alaska Missionary Conference, as reported in the June 6, 2012 edition of

NewScope

Baltimore-Washington. With hands, hearts and voices that have upheld and nurtured the Word of God for 228 years, members of the Baltimore-Washington Conference reached out to claim a new generation of believers at their annual session May 30–June 1. In his episcopal address on the state of the church, Bishop John Schol acknowledged that he is not a biblical literalist and believes “gay and lesbian people are children of God, loved by God and saved through the love of Jesus Christ. . . .” Members adopted a \$17.1 million budget for 2013, a reduction of more than a million dollars. The reductions are intended to ensure that as much money as possible stays in local churches for mission and ministry. Bishop Schol invited members to come forward to the altar to pray. Many streamed forward, but during that time of music and prayer, Marge Shiflet of Providence UMC in Kempton, stayed in her seat, stunned. Shiflet, who was going blind in her left eye, said she felt the presence of the Holy Spirit and her vision suddenly cleared. “I’m not this kind of person. This kind of thing doesn’t happen to me,” Shiflet said. “I’m going to see my doctor, but this feels like a miracle.” [Note: It is a shame that she is “not that kind of a person.” God performs miracles today – whether she believes it or not. - AOM] Membership statistics unavailable at this time.

– The Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference, as reported in

UMNewScope, June 13, 2012

Bulgaria Provisional Annual Conference. “To Be a Church Together” was the motto of the meeting of Bulgaria Provisional Annual Conference, which was held Mar. 30–Apr. 1, in Pleven/Bulgaria. More precisely this area will be called Bulgaria/Romania Provisional Annual Conference in the future, because “to be a church together” is also manifested in the reality that The UMC in Romania belongs to the Methodist work in Bulgaria. Rares Calugar, local pastor in Cluj, Romania, was officially commissioned for this service. He is supported by active lay people, who carry on – voluntarily or partially Employed – the faith-sharing and serving ministries in the villages around Cluj. The ministry with children and youth in Mizia and Voyvodovo was one of the examples presented to the conference.

– Office of Bishop Patrick Streiff, Zurich/Switzerland, as reported in the May 30, 2012 edition of NewScope

Burundi and East Africa Annual Conferences. There was an overwhelming attendance by delegates this year at the 22nd Annual Conference of Burundi and East Africa Annual Conference (EAAC). Delegates celebrated upon receiving the news of the restoration of Burundi as an Annual Conference. Celebrations continued during the ordination of 43 pastors (37 from Burundi, 6 from EAAC), the commissioning of 58 provisional elders (34 from Burundi, 24 from EAAC). In his opening remarks, Bishop Daniel Wandabula disclosed that, “Unlike the past session, [this] session is unique given that we are witnessing great achievements: the recent decision made by the General Conference to grant Burundi the status of an annual conference within the East Africa Episcopal Area. We begin the quadrennium with Burundi as a conference and pray that stability returns to Burundi.” The church membership in the Area had increased to 300,265, up 68,341 from last year. Further activities included recognition of four new districts in Kenya and Uganda that brought the combined total to 32 districts in Burundi Annual Conference and East Africa Annual Conference. [Contrast this with the shrinkage in the UMC in the USA.]
– Grace Nakajje, East Africa Episcopal Area, as reported in UMNewScope, June 13, 2012

Czech Republic/Slovakia Annual Conference. The Annual Conference Czech Republic/Slovakia met May 11–13, 2012, in Michalovce under the leadership of Bishop Patrick Streiff. When Czechoslovakia split into two countries in 1993, the annual conference did not separate. This meeting took place for the first time in the easternmost part of Slovakia, where several churches are... close to the Ukrainian border. The UMC is a small church in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The UMC has ministries with children, students, drug addicts.
– Peter Baur, the office of Bishop Patrick Streiff, Zurich

Detroit. The Detroit Annual Conference, held May 17–20 on the campus of Adrian College in Adrian, Mich. with Michigan Area Bishop Jonathan D. Keaton presiding. 7 benchmarks, developed by the leadership team in consultation with the members of the cabinet, chairs of conference agencies, and members of the conference program staff, are grouped into 3 categories: creating new churches and revitalizing existing congregations, developing principled leaders, and mission engagement for local churches. They also: designated all churches and ministries of the conference to remain concealed weapon-free zones, regardless of any changes made to the concealed weapon laws in Michigan;... and urged members of the conference session to contact the two Michigan senators to indicate their desire to prevent a war with Iran. The conference also approved a \$9.7 million budget for 2013, less than 1% higher than the previous year, which increased funding to program ministries by nearly 13%. Two deacons were ordained and six provisional elders were commissioned; average age of those ordained was 50, and this is the first time in recent history that an elder has not been ordained during the annual conference session. Membership is 90,324, down 2,302.

– Paul Thomas, Detroit Annual Conference, as reported in the May 30, 2012 edition of NewScope

Hungary Provisional Annual Conference. About 55 members and guests participated in the annual meeting of Hungary Provisional Annual Conference, which was held Apr. 11–14, in Szeged/Hungary. The past year with its many challenging questions regarding the state recognition of The UMC in Hungary offered a number of opportunities to think...the annual motto of The UMC in Hungary, and to live it: “Be Joyful in Hope, Patient in Affliction, Faithful in Prayer” (Romans 12:12). The new annual motto, “The Church’s One Foundation Is Jesus Christ!” emphasizes very clearly that the foundation of The UMC in Hungary is not its state recognition. Conscious focus on the true foundation of the church should thus lead to the question how The UMC in Hungary can mobilize more energy and strengthen the local churches so they can reach out to people beyond their borders, to share God’s love with them and to help them growing as disciples of Christ.

– Office of Bishop Patrick Streiff, Zurich/Switzerland, as reported in the May 23, 2012 edition of NewScope

Louisiana. The ministries of Bishop William W. Hutchinson and Mrs. Kay Hutchinson were celebrated throughout the conference, culminating in a service of sending forth. Held June 3–6 on Centenary College’s campus in Shreveport, this was our last annual conference session with Bishop Hutchinson as our episcopal leader. Members voted to accept an amended version of the 2013 conference budget – \$7,431,578, a 9.34% decrease. Membership is 119,990, down 892.

– Betty Backstrom, Louisiana Annual Conference, as reported in UMNewScope, June 13, 2012

Minnesota. 760 Minnesota Annual Conference members [met] in session on May 30–June 1, at the River’s Edge Convention Center in St. Cloud, Minnesota. On social issues, members affirmed a resolution against a proposed amendment to the Minnesota state constitution that would reinforce a statutory ban on marriage between same-sex couples; agreed to “drop the ‘I’ word (illegal) when referring to individuals who may not have immigration documentation; and resolved to ask

federal legislators to investigate Israeli practices of home demolitions; passed a 2013 annual conference budget of just over \$6.2 million, \$130,000 lower than the 2012 budget [and]is at the 2003 budget level continuing a trend of decline. Membership is 70,126, down 2,110.
– Victoria Rebeck, as reported in UMNewScope, June 13, 2012

Missouri. The Missouri Conference gathered in Springfield June 8-11 under the theme "Louder than Before: Hearing a New Voice." Bishop Robert Schnase presided. The results of our recent new church starts are an additional 2,250 people in worship." Bishop Schnase reported on General Conference, saying in part, "I hope that the paralysis of General Conference itself becomes the stimulus for change four years from now. . . . We've got to focus on horizontal learning rather than vertical change in the in The UMC, partnering in learning and vitality. . . . As long as I have breath, I am going to focus on making vital congregations that make new disciples of Jesus Christ." Main actions enacted by the conference included approval of a .5% decrease in the budget. Membership is 164,678, down 2,643.

– Fred Koenig, Missouri Annual Conference, as reported in the July 3, 2012 edition of UMNewScope

Nebraska-Kansas. *Nebraska, Kansas UMs Approve One-conference Proposal*

On June 9, Kansas Bishop Scott Jones and Nebraska Bishop Ann Sherer-Simpson simultaneously announced the results of a vote to combine the current three UM conferences in Kansas and Nebraska into a new conference Jan. 1, 2014. The vote affects the Kansas West, Kansas East and Nebraska annual conferences of the church. The motion was approved by at least 70% in all three conferences. On Aug. 23–24, 2013, there will be a uniting conference at the Bicentennial Center in Salina, Kan. The announcement to have one bishop serve the episcopal areas of Nebraska and Kansas was made in September 2009. There are nearly 1,000 congregations and more than 229,000 UMs in the states of Nebraska and Kansas.

– UMNS, UMNS, as reported in UMNewScope, June 13, 2012

North Alabama. The 2012 North Alabama Annual Conference met May 31–June 2 on the campus of UM-related Birmingham-Southern College. Guest speakers were Bishop James Swanson of the Holston Conference and the Rev. Michael Slaughter, lead pastor of Ginghamburg UMC in Tipp City, Ohio. In legislative business, the conference: adopted the proposed budget of \$9,273,761 for the year 2013; approved a request for a Judicial Council ruling on the legality of the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) and UM Women (UMW) participation in the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice; and voted to close seven churches. Membership is 139,535, down 3,935. [Note: Rev. Slaughter along with Rev. Adam Hamilton had introduced a petition at GC-2012 that would have led to the watering-down of the UMC's stance against homosexual practice. I for one have little confidence in the pastoral leadership of both preachers. – AOM]

– Danette Clifton, North Alabama Annual Conference, as reported in UMNewScope, June 13, 2012

Oklahoma. Under the theme "Celebrate the Plan," laity and clergy rejoiced in living for Christ by serving in several ways during the 2012 Oklahoma Annual Conference, held May 27–30 and hosted by Boston Avenue UMC in Tulsa. In the service of ordination, Bishop Robert E. Hayes Jr. mirrored Jesus' example by kneeling and washing the feet of three deacons and nine elders. On July 18–21, the Oklahoma Annual Conference and the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Annual Conference will co-host the South Central Jurisdictional Conference, in Oklahoma City.

– Holly McCray, Oklahoma Annual Conference, as reported in UMNewScope, June 13, 2012

Red Bird Missionary Conference. Bishop Lindsey Davis presided over the 44th annual conference session of Red Bird Missionary Conference on May 18–19, at Beverly UMC, Beverly, Kentucky. The theme of the Conference was "Look for the Blessing." The conference heard of the approval for a \$30,000 grant from GBGM; Membership is 1,467, down 49.

– Ruth A. Wiertzema, Red Bird Missionary Conference

South Georgia. Fellowship, worship, Bible study and celebration marked the 2012 South Georgia Annual Conference session, held June 3–5 at the Macon Centreplex in Macon, Ga. Bishop James R. King, Jr., presided and greeted attendees with his trademark, "Greetings, beautiful people!" The 2012 session was shorter than usual, just two full days instead of three. Meeting under the theme of "Let the Redeemed Say So" from Psalm 107:2, this year's conference session focused on and emphasized the timeless values of witnessing and evangelizing. In other actions, members approved an \$11.75 million budget for mission and ministry for the next year and also approved a 10.13% reduction in the remaining 2012 budget.

Membership is 128,121, down 2,586.

– Kara Witherow and Kelly Roberson, South Georgia Annual Conference, as reported in UMNewScope, June 13, 2012

Wisconsin. The 2012 Wisconsin Annual Conference took place at the Chula Vista Conference Center in the Wisconsin Dells May 31–June 3. The conference session featured the theme “Live, Give, Love . . . Beyond All Expectation,” the culmination of our 2009–2012 quadrennial themes. Bishop Linda Lee was thanked and honored for her eight years with the Wisconsin Conference UMC. Several Conference action items were approved for implementation: continued partnerships with the East Angola Conference, Native American communities, and the Hmong House of Good News; a resolution to increase awareness of human trafficking; and a resolution to propose action plans to address the issue of cyber bullying. Conference statistics were not available at the time this report was submitted.

– Michele Virnig, Wisconsin Annual Conference, as reported in UMNewScope, June 13, 2012

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The world needs a peace that passes all misunderstanding. – As quoted in *Our Daily Bread*, December 12, 2011