

Monthly Update

October 2012

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

This edition of the Monthly Update is a continuing analysis of annual conference summaries from around the world. It is one of those “good news-bad news” reports. The United Methodist Church in the United States continues to decline, but the Methodist Church in the “Third World” countries is increasing. Do you think that maybe they might be able to teach us something? It appears so. Not only are the churches in Africa growing, but those in Eastern Europe and the Philippines as well.

We know about the churches in Africa – they are often made up of people who come out of witchcraft, voodoo or Ju-Ju worship – and into Christianity. The transformation they feel is very pronounced since they come out of spiritual darkness into the light. The situation in the Philippines is similar – they come out of tribal religions into the light – and the change is palpable. Those in the Eastern European countries have been under the atheistic yoke of communism and know what it is to live in a society with no spiritual light; when they become Christians, they see a dramatic change in their lives. This is a lesson in the priceless treasure we have in this country.

This past week I attended a series of briefings at the Values Voter Conference in Washington, DC that dealt with many of the issues and problems in our country and abroad. Foremost were the loss of freedoms and the spread of Islam – not only overseas but here within our United States. It is not by accident that this has happened. I cannot help but trace the gradual erosion of our national freedoms and fiber back to the 1960s when the Supreme Court ruled that prayer in public schools was illegal.

Let us strive to be vigilant in guarding the freedom that we have here in America – the freedom to worship the God who has brought so much joy, light, and spiritual freedom to so many people who have been living in darkness – and to us.

Assuredly, we need to “pray as if it is all up to God – and to work as if it is all up to us” in fighting for the values that we hold so dear. Think carefully about your vote in this the most important election in our country’s history. I firmly believe that the future survival of our country depends on who is elected to the White House.

Also, this year has been an extraordinarily good one in terms of what has been accomplished in our United Methodist Church – but in the process we have had an extraordinarily high number of conferences and meetings to attend. This, coupled with the seasonal drop in giving to the support of Concerned Methodists, has created some financial challenges for us. Could you help us out at this time by sending along a gift? We appreciate your partnering with us – and I would ask that you continue to do so.

Ours is a challenging time. I also ask that you continue to pray, pray, pray.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris,
Executive Director

October 2012 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

If the church wants a better pastor, it only needs to pray for the one it has.

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The Good Stuff.

+ **Chick-Fil-A.** With all of the controversy surrounding the owner's expression of his opinion that marriage should be between a man and a woman, and the subsequent call for a boycott of the chain by radical homosexual activists and apologists, I saw something refreshing a few weeks ago. A picture of a sign above a McDonald's Hamburger place with the following words on its marquis: "We support Chick-Fil-A. Now try boycotting us."

+ **Dunkirk Rescue Repeated.** Reminiscent of the rescue of over 150,000 soldiers from the beaches of Dunkirk in World War II, after the tragic and treacherous attack on the Twin Towers in New York on September 11, 2001, there was a similar rescue effort to get people off the island of Manhattan that day. Over 500,000 men, women, and children were rescued by boat by people on that day in nine hours... no training... no nothing... just people helping people!!!

+ **America Goes Back to Church En Masse**

Fourth National Back to Church Sunday Exceeds All Previous Records

COLORADO SPRINGS, Co. – On Sept. 16, in the largest grassroots movement of its kind, 13,152 congregations of various denominations, styles and theologies united in a single cause to invite an estimated 7.5 million friends, family, neighbors and coworkers to attend church on National Back to Church Sunday. Participating churches saw an estimated 38 percent increase in their attendance. "I've heard from a number of pastors and churches that this was a great tool they used to mobilize their people and reach their community," said Ed Stetzer, president of LifeWay Research, a supporting partner of National Back to Church Sunday. "Many are enthusiastic about the focus the fourth annual National Back to Church Sunday has injected into their congregations." The movement is based on the simple principle that 82 percent of people will come to church if invited by a friend, according to Thom Rainer's "The Unchurched Next Door." Yet, from a recent LifeWay Research study, only 48 percent of church members invited their unchurched friends to church in the last six months.

"We turned National Back to Church Sunday into our Back to Church Weekend, starting with a free garage sale for our community and distribution of more than 100 brochures about our church," reported Pineview Baptist Church in Thomasville, Ala. "We are a small church averaging about 30 people in weekly worship attendance, but we estimate that almost 200 people walked through our doors this weekend. This was a great way to spread the word about our worship service and make people feel welcome."

Brian Loughmiller, mayor of McKinney, Texas, issued an official proclamation of Sept. 16 as National Back to Church Sunday in their community. A representative of his office was scheduled to present the proclamation in person at Eternity Community Church.

At Victory Christian Center in Victorville, Calif., every child went home Sunday with a tote bag of school supplies. In Medina, Tenn., attendance at ThatChurch.com rose to 171 from an average of 135. "We also baptized nine people on National Back to Church Sunday," said Ronnie Ragan, campus pastor.

The number of churches participating doubled from 3,800 churches in 2010 to 7,600 churches in 2011 and skyrocketed to a total of 13,152 churches this year. With a 38 percent increase in average attendance, 97 percent of responding pastors said they will participate in National Back to Church Sunday next year. "Churches now have the opportunity to capitalize on the momentum created by National Back to Church Sunday," said Philip Nation, director of adult ministry publishing at LifeWay Christian Resources and spokesperson for National Back to Church Sunday. "By their attendance, people have shown they are interested in making a connection with

church and with God. We have to show them the way.”

Many will employ the 30-Day Church Challenge (www.30daychurchchallenge.com) to engage returning National Back to Church Sunday visitors and to transform their congregations. Featuring inspirational sermons, weekly challenges, video-based lessons and the “30-Day Church Challenge” book, the five-week series based on the biblical model of the church, found in the book of Acts, will challenge church congregations to devote themselves to authentic community, develop worship lifestyle, commit to spiritual growth, embrace stewardship and generous lifestyle and engage in sharing God’s love and the gospel with others.

The next National Back to Church Sunday is September 15, 2013. Churches are now registering at www.backtochurch.com/roster. Reports of this year and future plans are being posted at www.facebook.com/backtochurch.

National Back to Church Sunday (www.backtochurch.com) is the single largest annual community outreach in the nation, sharing the simple message and mission of inviting everyone in America back to church. The campaign empowers churches and church members with the tools they need to welcome their neighbors, friends and loved ones back to church, while providing the unchurched an easy way to find a welcoming church in their community. LifeWay Christian Resources (www.lifeway.com), in operation since 1891, is one of the largest Christian resource organizations in the world. LifeWay Research exists for the purpose of equipping church leaders with insight that will lead to greater levels of ministry effectiveness through research-based books and reports based on statistically validated surveys. LifeWay Research is one of the most trusted sources of information about the church, culture and faith.

For more information go to the following website: www.backtochurch.com/roster.

– As received by e-mail from one of our associates.

Of Interest

+ ***Jurisdictional Conferences elected 11 New Bishops***. In Jurisdictional Conferences across the U.S. July 18-21, 11 new bishops were elected: five in the Southeastern Jurisdiction, three in the Northeastern Jurisdiction, and four in the South Central Jurisdiction. The formula approved by General Conference entitles a jurisdiction with 300,000 church members or fewer to have 5 bishops. Jurisdictions with more than 300,000 members are entitled to 1 additional bishop for each 300,000 members or major fraction thereof.

+ **In the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference**: Dr. Sandra Lynn Steiner Ball, 50, Peninsula-Delaware Annual Conference; The Rev. Martin McLee, 56, New England Conference; The Rev. Mark J. Webb, 47, Susquehanna Conf.

+ **In the South Central Jurisdictional Conference**: The Rev. Cynthia Fierro Harvey, 53, deputy general secretary of the UM Committee on Relief (UMCOR); The Rev. Gary E. Mueller, 58, North Texas Conference; The Rev. Mike McKee, 60, Central Texas Conference.

+ **In the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference**: The Rev. L. Jonathan Holston, 53, North Georgia Conference; The Rev. Kenneth H. Carter, 55, Western North Carolina Conference; The Rev. William T. McAlilly, 55, Mississippi Annual Conference; The Rev. Dr. Deborah Wallace-Padgett, 46, Kentucky Annual Conference; The Rev. Young J. Cho, Virginia Annual Conference.

Additional information on the new bishops is available at <http://elections.umc.org/election-ballots/>

– As reported in the July 25, 2012 edition of UMNewScope

+ ***Jurisdictional Conferences assign Bishops***

+ **North Central Jurisdiction**: Dakotas/Minnesota Area (Dakotas & Minnesota)-Bishop Bruce Ough; East Ohio-Bishop John Hopkins; Illinois Great Rivers-Bishop Johnathon Keaton; Indiana-Bishop Michael Coyner; Iowa-Bishop Julius Calvin Trimble; Northern Illinois-Bishop Sally Dyck; Michigan Area (Detroit, West Michigan)-Bishop Deborah Lieder Keisey; West Ohio-Bishop Gregory V. Palmer; Wisconsin-Bishop Hee-Soo Jung.

+ **Northeastern Jurisdiction**: Boston Area (New England)-Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar; Harrisburg Area (Susquehanna)-Bishop Jeremiah J. Park; New Jersey Area (Greater New Jersey)-Bishop John Schol; New York-Bishop Martin McLee; Philadelphia Area (Eastern Pennsylvania, Peninsula-Delaware)-Bishop Peggy A. Johnson; Pittsburgh Area (Western Pennsylvania)-Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton; Upper New York-Bishop Mark Webb;

Washington Area (Baltimore-Washington)-Bishop Marcus Matthews; West Virginia-Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball.
+ South Central Jurisdiction: Arkansas-Bishop Gary Mueller; Dallas Area (North Texas)-Bishop Michael McKee; Fort Worth Area (Central Texas)-Bishop Michael Lowry; Great Plains Area (Kansas East, Kansas West, Nebraska)-Bishop Scott Jones; Houston Area (Texas)-Bishop Janice Riggie Huie; Louisiana-Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey; Missouri-Bishop Robert Schnase; Northwest Texas-New Mexico Area-Retired Bishops William Hutchinson and Dan Solomon, interim (recommendation of College of Bishops to be approved by Council of Bishops); Oklahoma Area (Oklahoma, Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conferences)-Bishop Robert E. Hayes Jr.; San Antonio Area (Rio Grande, Southwest Texas)-Bishop James Dorff.

+ Southeastern Jurisdiction: Alabama-West Florida-Bishop Paul L. Leeland; Birmingham Area (North Alabama)-Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett; Charlotte Area (Western North Carolina)-Bishop Larry Goodpaster; Columbia Area (South Carolina)-Bishop Jonathan Holston; Florida-Bishop Kenneth H. Carter; Holston-Bishop Virginia Taylor; Louisville Area (Kentucky, Red Bird Missionary)-Bishop Lindsey Davis; Mississippi-Bishop James Swanson; Nashville Area (Memphis, Tennessee)-Bishop William McAlilly; North Georgia-Bishop B. Michael Watson; Raleigh Area (North Carolina)-Bishop Hope Morgan Ward; Richmond Area (Virginia)-Bishop Young Jin Cho; South Georgia-Bishop James King.

+ Western Jurisdiction: Greater Northwest Area (Alaska Missionary, Oregon-Idaho, Pacific Northwest)-Bishop Grant J. Hagiya; Los Angeles Area (California-Pacific)-Bishop Minerva Carcaño; Mountain Sky Area (Rocky Mountain, Yellowstone)-Bishop Elaine Stanovsky; Phoenix Area (Desert Southwest)-Bishop Robert Hoshibata; San Francisco Area (California-Nevada)-Bishop Warner Brown.

– As reported in the July 25, 2012 edition of UMNewScope

+ **2011 Numbers Show UM Members Still Sliding in U.S.**

The UMC saw a reduction of at least 71,971 U.S. members in 2011. This snapshot comes from reports from 55 of the 59 U.S. conferences, which followed spring and summer annual conference gatherings. The vast majority disclosed declines between 2010 and 2011 in membership, worship attendance or church-school participation – three commonly used metrics for charting disciple making. Twenty-eight U.S. conferences reported losses in all three categories. Eighteen noted membership drops of 2% or more. Eleven U.S. conferences increased in worship attendance, and five gained members. Only three report both membership and worship growth. The General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) will release the official 2011 figures next spring. But it's already clear the denomination continues its decades-long decline in U.S. membership even as it grows worldwide. Efforts to make new disciples in the U. S. are not keeping pace with either the nation's population growth or the death rate of the denomination's older members. The UMC [as a whole] is still growing [not only] in Africa but also in Eastern Europe and the Philippines. In the decade between 1999 and 2009, the denomination's membership grew by 25%. GCFA reports The UMC now has more than 12 million members around the globe.

However, the denomination's financial base is shrinking. Indeed, 16 U.S. conferences reported planned budget reductions either this year or in 2013. As of 2010, about 99% of the money that supports general church operations through apportionments – including mission work around the globe – came from the U. S. For decades, giving increased even as U.S. membership declined, but after the 2008 economic crisis, giving dropped. The denomination's U.S. membership in 2010 was fewer than 7.6 million members. Still, the numbers reported by U.S. conferences did show some bright spots. The Greater New Jersey Conference, for example, experienced its first membership growth in 45 years. Its membership stands at 93,655, up by a net of 240 from the previous year. The Kentucky Conference saw its membership grow by 1,036 to 151,858, and its worship attendance increase by more than 450. That is the largest increase in both categories the conference has seen since its formation in 1996 through a merger of two conferences in the state, Bishop Lindsey Davis said. Both Davis and Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar of New Jersey focus on new church starts; they also agree that it's critical to work with young church members and particularly young clergy. Devadhar spends time with clergy in each district.

– Heather Hahn, UMNS, as reported in the August 15, 2012 edition of UMNewScope

(UM) Bishops. Evaluations for Bishops

The Book of Discipline <<http://www.cokesbury.com/forms/ProductDetail.aspx?pid=679753>> requires each conference episcopacy committee "to establish and implement" a procedure to evaluate its bishop at least every four years. The process includes self-evaluations, as well as feedback from other bishops and church leaders in the annual conference where the bishop serves. The Book of Discipline defines bishops as elders "set apart for a ministry of servant leadership, general oversight and supervision." Bishops must possess "a vital and renewing spirit," "an enquiring mind and a commitment to the teaching office," "a vision for the church," "a prophetic commitment for the transformation of the church and the world," "a passion for the unity of the church," "the ministry of administration" (§403.1) – As reported in the July 25, 2012 edition of UMNewScope

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Quit griping about your church; if it was perfect, you couldn't belong.

Global Outlook

When you get to your wit's end, you'll find God lives there.

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Nigeria. A UM pastor, the Rev. Shuayibu B. Mamman, and his son, Josiah Shuayibu, are among those killed in recent Muslim-Christian violence in Nigeria. Mamman served UMCN Unguwan Yoro at Kaduna, under the Abuja District, according to church officials. – UMNS, as reported in the July 25, 2012 edition of UMNewScope

Sierra Leone. The Rev. Isaac Momoh Ndanema, who died June 1 at the age of 107, was Sierra Leone's oldest evangelist and church builder in the conference. In June 2010, in recognition of Ndanema's service, a church in eastern Freetown was renamed the Isaac Ndanema UMC. – As reported in the July 18, 2012 edition of UMNewScope

Annual Conference Reports

Alaska. At the May 25-26 session of the Alaska Annual Conference, held at St. John UMC in Anchorage, conference members committed to a restructure, designed to be more nimble, cost effective, and missional. Bishop Grant Hagiya presided. Two items of ongoing study are (1) an itineration policy allowing all of Alaska clergy to go outside the state to share the work of this missionary conference; and (2) moving expenses, which used to be handled by the General Board of Global Ministries but will be handled by the conference. This is going to be a continued concern as Alaska has a high turnover of clergy and our moving costs are great. The Alaska Conference will join the Pacific Northwest and Oregon-Idaho Conferences in "The Great Northwest Episcopal Area" – and share one bishop. Membership is 3,598, down 135. – Alaska Annual Conference, as reported in the July 18, 2012 edition of UMNewScope

California-Nevada. The 2012 California-Nevada Annual Conference Session took place at the Sacramento Convention Center with Bishop Warner H. Brown Jr. officiating. Guest speakers Rudy and Juanita Rasmus, pastors of St. John's Downtown UMC in Houston, Texas, gave testimonies and challenged conference to love God and love people...and to practice self-care. Bishop Brown threw out the first pitch at the June 21 Sacramento River Cats (Triple-A baseball team) game. The offering for Imagine No Malaria and other INM activities raised more than \$27,500. A resolution calling for a "Study Committee for an Inclusive Conference" was adopted [calling] for Cal-Nevada "to study and evaluate alternative ways of being a 'Wesleyan Church,' such as the creation of regional central conferences or of an autonomous church," and invites other conferences, jurisdictions, or related UM entities to participate.

The annual conference approved legislation concerning "We Will Not Be Silent." It states, in part, that the conference "will not be silent concerning full participation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons at all levels in our church and society ... [and] will seek to remove all discrimination within our church and society against persons based upon sexual and gender identity." The conference approved a resolution to support the non-violent dimensions of "Occupy Wall Street." Also adopted were resolutions in support of organizations and programs on bullying; homeowners facing foreclosure and eviction; the Violence Against Women Act, particularly as it pertains to Native American Women; ending the death penalty in California; the Palestinian village of Wadi Foquin; and no war with Iran. A recommendation seeking protection for Iranian dissidents in Iraq was approved.

Membership is 77,943, down 1,015 from the previous year. Average worship attendance stands at 35,931, down 1,024. Average attendance in Sunday church school stands at 7,548, down 189.

– Cate Monaghan, California-Nevada Annual Conference, as reported in the July 18, 2012 edition of UMNewScope

Dakotas. More than 500 members of the Dakotas Annual Conference gathered in Sioux Falls, S.D., June 6-9, with Bishop Deborah Lieder Kiesey presiding. The approved budget for 2013 is a total of \$7,317,754, an increase of \$21,784 from 2012. Members approved a proposal from the Council on Finance and Administration and the Stewardship of Resource Link to develop a model to change the current apportionment formula to tithing at 12.5% beginning in 2014. A sexual ethics policy was approved. Extend Health for medical benefits was approved for retired clergy and their spouses. Members attended workshops that focused on equipping the local church to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Membership is 36,732, down 708.

– Doreen Gosmire, Dakotas Conference, as reported in the July 25, 2012 edition of UMNewScope

Eastern Pennsylvania. The Eastern Pennsylvania Annual Conference met May 17-19 at the Philadelphia Expo Center in Oaks with Bishop Peggy Johnson presiding. The conference welcomed Gary Harke, executive director of the Pennsylvania Council of Churches, and Steve Drachler of UM Advocacy in Pennsylvania, which is leading an effort to defeat allowing "Pay Day Loans" in the state. Chris Franklin, of Stop Hunger Now, spoke about their vision of "a world without hunger." Delegates packaged 35,600 dehydrated, high protein, and highly nutritious meals to be distributed to schools and orphanages in Haiti by the organization. Conference welcomed the Revs. Mutwale Ntambo Wa Mushidi and Kabaka Ndala Alphonsine, missionaries to Tanzania. The Rev. David Ryan, Congo Partnership team, introduced Adolphe Yamba Yamba from DR Congo, who related the economic, medical, and educational needs of the country. The UM Men distributed 50,000 pounds of potatoes for delegates to take back to their churches or community food banks. The youth created a "Penny War" among the districts and raised more than \$1,200 for the Youth Service Fund.

Offerings included \$10, 673 for Imagine No Malaria and for scholarships for undergraduate students and \$3,365 toward scholarships for seminary students. Scouts and leaders from Pack 397 from Lansdale: Christ and Troop 141 from Hatfield built the cross used throughout the conference. In business, the conference: approved the discontinuance of 9 churches; approved 18 conference advance specials; underscored the importance of education in the success of our society; urged churches to advocate to restore civil and factual election campaigns; and approved a capital campaign to raise \$3 million toward \$14 million needed to fund pre-1982 pension over the next eight years. Fall Session will be held on Nov. 10 to approve a budget for 2013. Membership: 115,798, down 2,452. Worship attendance: 42,727, down 1,453. Sunday school attendance: 14,433, down 4,771.

– Suzy Keenan, Eastern Pennsylvania Conference, as reported in the July 25, 2012 edition of UMNewScope

Kentucky. The 2012 Kentucky Annual Conference session was held June 11-13 at the Northern Kentucky Convention Center in Covington. Bishop Lindsey Davis presided. The theme of the 2012 session was "Sent to Heal." Prior to this year's conference, Bishop Davis and the Cabinet called for the churches of the conference to

receive a special mission offering to benefit two ministries: over \$70,000 will be divided between a medical clinic at Wesleyan Seminary of Venezuela and programs at Red Bird Mission and Henderson Settlement. In other business, the conference: adopted a resolution to encourage state and local governments "to restrain exorbitant interest by establishing a cap of 36% for all small loans and any other protections necessary to protect individuals from lending abuse"; adopted a resolution to drop the I-word. This resolution encourages people not to use the word illegal to describe people; passed a recommendation from the Conference Board of Pension to replace the current health plan for active clergy and retirees under age 65 with a Consumer Directed Health Plan (CDHP); approved a recommendation for the distribution of earnings from the Eastern Kentucky Health Education and Welfare Fund; approved six proposals dealing with the \$53 million unfunded liability of the retiree health plan. The 2013 budget was established at \$9 million, remaining stable at the same level as the 2012 budget. Membership is 151,858. – Cathy L. Bruce, Kentucky Conference, as reported in the July 18, 2012 edition of UMNewScope

Nebraska. The Nebraska Annual Conference met June 6-9 at Lincoln St. Mark's UMC. Highlights included: Kansas Bishop Scott Jones (reporting from the UM Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kan.) and Nebraska Bishop Ann B. Sherer-Simpson simultaneously announced the results of a vote to combine the current three UM conferences in Kansas and Nebraska into one new conference, effective Jan. 1, 2014. The vote affects the Kansas West, Kansas East and Nebraska annual conferences of the church – and endorsed the Great Plains Area name and the temporary location of the area office in Wichita. Conference members approved a budget of \$6,933,064, a 6.1% decrease from the 2011 budget. Special guest, Marcia McFee, designed all the worship services and also taught each morning. Special guest Simon Benjamin, director of the Nigeria/Nebraska Partnership Orphanage, provided a status report on the orphanage, presented more information during the Nigeria/Nebraska Partnership luncheon on Friday and was a special guest of the Children's Annual Conference. Benjamin taught the children a song in his native tongue (Housa).

Offerings included UM Global AIDS Fund, \$2,690; Epworth Village, \$3,600; Imagine No Malaria, \$10,056; Nigeria/Nebraska Secondary School Scholarship Fund, \$3,637; Youth Service Fund, \$3,113; Nebraska/Nigeria Partnership Fund (Orphanage), \$6,175 as well as contributions for supplies for UM Committee on Relief kits totaling \$5,807.67, with another \$2,544 donated to cover shipping. A truck stationed onsite accepted more than 160 cleaning buckets, which made up part of the \$3,922 total kits awaiting transport to the UMCOR depot at Sager Brown. Craig Transport, owned by Wade and Ginger Craig of Farnam, Neb., donated the truck and transportation for this year's collection. Membership is 76,357, down 611. Worship attendance: 30,012, down 107. Church school attendance: 8,864, down 194. – Kathryn Witte, Nebraska Conference, as reported in the July 18, 2012 edition of UMNewScope

New England. The New England Annual Conference met at Gordon College in Wenham, Mass., June 6-9. Bishop Peter D. Weaver gave a state of the church address that focused on congregational vitality. Conference highlights included: the theme of congregational vitality was manifested in a focus on congregational development, new church starts, and signs of vitality in the ministries of our local congregations. In business, the conference approved a 2013 budget of \$7,510,615; approved 32 resolutions including: a renewed call for a peace treaty between Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the U.S.; a new set of conference advance specials; amendments to conference policies that include parsonage guidelines for local churches; and an invitation for churches to join Imagine No Malaria. Conference membership is 93,658, down 2,209.

– Alexx Wood, New England Annual Conference, as reported in the July 25, 2012 edition of UMNewScope

North Georgia. Bishop B. Michael Watson presided over the 146th session of the North Georgia Conference, June 12-14, featuring the Rev. Eddie Fox, director of World Methodist Evangelism, as keynote speaker. The conference, nearly 3,000 members strong, gathered in Athens for three days under the theme, "Seeing the World Through the Waters of Baptism." Bishop Watson shared his vision for the mission of the conference,

emphasizing, among other things, strengthening ministry to children and youth, camping and campus ministries, strengthening lay and clergy partnership, and expanding our global impact by building bridges of partnerships between North Georgia and Uganda, El Salvador, Bahamas, Israel, Portugal, Russia, the Philippines, locally with our own Action Ministries organization, and to the entire world through World Methodist Evangelism. The Bishop also explained the continued effort toward efficiency and effectiveness at the UM Center. In other business, the conference collected \$135,496 toward World Methodist Evangelism; approved a budget of \$24,036,338; approved a realignment of the Connectional Ministry teams to support the Vital Congregation effort. The five teams are Witness, Outreach, Resourcing, Leadership, Discipleship (or W.O.R.L.D.); passed a resolution in support of repealing the Georgia Illegal Immigration Reform and Enforcement Act of 2011; celebrated 20 years of new church development and revitalization and the 87 churches that have been launched; gave 85 pints of blood at the Red Cross Blood Drive; passed a resolution designating Epworth, Ga. UMC as a historic site. Membership is 358,800, up 1,070 from last year; average worship attendance was 127,413, up 1,198; there were 5,821 professions of faith last year; total apportionment funds received were \$25,068,897.

– Glenn Hannigan, North Georgia Annual Conference, as reported in the July 18, 2012 edition of UMNewScope

Pacific Northwest. Clergy, laity, and guests joyfully returned to the TRAC Center in Pasco, Wash. June 21-24 for the 139th session of the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference (PNW) with Bishop Grant J. Hagiya officiating. Three teaching sessions were provided by Dr. Jim Winkler, general secretary of the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS). Members of the PNW delegation to the 2012 General Conference shared of their experience in Tampa and offered reflections on the state of the connection. The body affirmed support for the Jamaa Letu orphanages in the Congo and added the Inland NW PET (Personal Energy Transportation Hand Bike) project as a conference advance special. Approved resolutions included two petitions on the issue of inclusion and affirmation of GLBT persons. The conference adopted a budget of \$2,433,121 for 2013, –0.27% from 2012. Membership is 48,762 down 1,284.

– Patrick Scriven, John Shaffer, and Karyn Kuan, PNW A.C., as reported in the July 25, 2012 edition of UMNewScope

Peninsula-Delaware. The Peninsula-Delaware Annual Conference was held at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, June 7-9. Bishop Peggy Johnson welcomed clergy and laity to the 228th session of the Conference. The Rev. Adam Hamilton led three teaching sessions. In legislative action, the conference raised minimum salaries by 4%, passed resolutions clarifying its position on health/dental coverage for those on incapacity leave, allowed churches to make their campuses smoke free, and updated its Safe Sanctuaries Policy. It also passed a balanced budget of \$5,750,000, the same as 2012. Membership is 86,332, down 1,051. Average attendance stands at 32,989, down 1,026.

– John W. Van Tine, Conference Secretary, as reported in the July 25, 2012 edition of UMNewScope

Rio Grande. Now in the 159th year of its origins of ministry, the Rio Grande Annual Conference met at University UMC in San Antonio, Texas, June 14-16. Under the theme of "Navigating Our Way into the Future," approximately 190 delegates received various reports on the state of the annual conference. This annual conference decided to unify with the Southwest Texas Conference and create a new conference – seeking permission for completion no later than 2016. The Commission on Equitable Compensation presented an 8% minimum salary increase for 2013. Delegates approved a total budget of \$1,373,891, of which \$736,269 is apportioned to the local churches, an increase apportioned amount of \$ 61,147 from the previous year. Conference membership is 13,563, down 282. Worship attendance is 4,480, down 117.

– Abel Vega Jr., Rio Grand Annual Conference, as reported in the July 18, 2012 edition of UMNewScope

South Carolina. Bishop Mary Virginia Taylor led the body in the opening service of worship for Annual Conference 2012, June 10-13 in Florence. The conference passed a 2013 budget of \$16.9 million, elected new conference officers, approved three new resolutions, authorized the expansion of the Redistricting Task Force study to include the entire conference organization, approved reports of Connectional Ministries and Pensions & Health Benefits, and much more. Conference ended hours early-at 5:47 p.m.-instead of the scheduled 9 or 10 p.m. The Rev. Willie Teague and Cynthia Williams presented the Connectional Ministries report to the body, noting that the Judicial Council found a few defects in the new Conference Connectional Ministries structure. They will submit the revised plan to the Judicial Council by July 13. Herman Lightsey, presenting the report for Pension and Health Benefits, said that active premiums would increase 1% for the year 2013. The consumer-driven health plan will continue for 2013 as an option, and the board expects to bring a recommendation to the body next year about whether part-time clergy would receive mandatory coverage in 2014. The board is also looking at several options for retiree healthcare, Lightsey said. For more information, visit www.advocatesc.org.
– Jessica Connor, South Carolina Annual Conference, as reported in the July 18, 2012 edition of UMNNewScope

Susquehanna. "Something very exciting is happening in our churches as we are understanding that the church is what happens when we take the good news of Jesus Christ into our communities and into the lives of people," proclaimed Bishop Jane Allen Middleton in her keynote address that opened the third session of the newly formed Susquehanna Conference held at Messiah College in Grantham, Pa., June 7-9. Under the theme "The River Flows," the annual gathering drew 1,500 persons to celebration, holy conferencing, and worship. Guest speaker, Bishop J. Michael Lowry of the Central Texas Annual Conference, presented two topics to the conference, "Revitalizing Congregations" and "New Places for New People." Bishop John Yambasu of the Sierra Leone Conference in Africa was the special guest of the conference. "You gave us hope," he said in his address to the conference, recalling the ten years to 2002 in which one-half million people died, and one-half million were maimed. "Since 2009 alone, \$280,000 has been sent [to us] for pastoral support. Over \$47,000 in program support was given, and the total of all support funds has grown to almost \$608,000. The number of full-time clergy has risen from 43 in 2008 to 65 in 2012." Bishop Yambasu continued, "One of the most modern high schools in the country has been constructed in great part due to contributions from the Susquehanna Conference, and has been named 'Bishop Middleton High School.'" Legislative action included approval of: a proposal to modify the structure of the conference so as to align with the focus and goals of the Susquehanna Conference; a resolution to oppose payday loan legislation in Pennsylvania; a plan for funding ministry for 2013 that reflects a decrease of 1.9%; membership is down 2%.

– Gerald F. Wolgemuth, Susquehanna Annual Conference, as reported in the July 18, 2012 edition of UMNNewScope

Texas. The Texas Annual Conference met June 4-7 at the Convention Center in Galveston, under the leadership of Bishop Janice Riggle Huie. Featured speakers for the conference were Jorge Acevedo of Grace United Methodist Church, Cape Coral, Florida and Greg Jones, consultant to the conference Strategic Assessment Team. Acevedo encouraged the conference leaders to work in teams to "turbocharge the Methodist tradition." Jones asked the delegates to imagine a "new church" and to use our areas of focus to build that church: investing in the young, creating vital congregations and growing transforming lay and clergy leaders. Delegates to the conference contributed 2,641 lbs. of food to the local food bank during the four-day conference. Many delegates exceeded the requested two cans of food. Three resolutions were adopted: to support abolishing human trafficking, a call to civility, and calling UMs out of the pew to serve as a transforming force in the world. The conference adopted a budget of \$23,371,449 for 2013 – a –0.42% percent decrease over the budget for 2012. Membership is 284,850, down 2,486.

– Paula Arnold, Texas Annual Conference, as reported in the July 25, 2012 edition of UMNNewScope

West Ohio. Held at Lakeside Chautauqua, June 10-13, the focus of the West Ohio Annual Conference was global health: eliminating the diseases of poverty. In attendance were 2,142 lay and clergy members. Bishop Bruce R. Ough presided. The Miracle Offering this year was dedicated to adding the final dollars needed for the purchase of the Cessna Grand Caravan for Wings of the Morning (www.wingsofthemorningfund.org), a multi-conference campaign for \$1.6M started a year ago, and health kits for those in need. By the end of the 2012 Annual Conference, West Ohio members responded to the needs of God's people by giving more than 14,000 health kits valued at nearly \$200,000. After spontaneous calls from the membership for more offerings for the purchase of the plane, members generously gave \$986,754. The spirit of giving swelled up from the congregation and when calls to reach \$1M rose from floor of the session, five churches pledged another \$37,500, bringing the total West Ohio Conference giving for the purchase of the plane to a miraculous total of \$1,024,254! Bishop Thomas Bickerton (Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference) presented the message for the opening service. Thomas Kemper (general secretary, General Board of Global Ministries) reflected on Jeremiah 8. Bishop Ntambo Nkulu Ntanda (North Katanga Area, Democratic Republic of the Congo) preached from Acts 3:1-12. In total, ten recommendations were made, discussed and voted on by the membership throughout the week. The entire list of recommendations with text and results are available on the West Ohio 2012 Annual Conference web pages (www.westohioumc.org). Health kits are being distributed in Ohio and beyond; thousands of pounds of collected potatoes will feed hungry people; and a plane will be purchased that will provide needed healing to our sisters and brothers in the North Katanga Conference.

Membership is 193,258, down 6,742. Worship attendance stands at 111,043, down 1,350. Church school attendance stands at 33,533, down 2,261 – Lisa Streight, West Ohio Annual Conference, as reported in the July 18, 2012 edition of UMNewScope

Western North Carolina. The 2012 Western North Carolina Annual Conference gathered at Lake Junaluska, June 20-24, under the theme "Lessons by the Lakeshore." Preachers for the 2012 session, in addition to Bishop Larry M. Goodpaster, included Dr. Jan Love, Atlanta, Ga.; the Rev. Fredrick Outlaw, Montgomery, Ala.; the Rev. Sylvia Wilhelm, Lexington, N.C.; and Bishop G. Lindsey Davis, Crestwood, Ky. The lead teacher for the event was the Rev. Adam Hamilton, who led a three-part teaching series, "Leading Beyond the Walls." The 2013 conference budget of \$15,772,756 was approved, a reduction of \$1,030,525, or 6.13%. The laity report was delivered by Robert Upchurch, conference lay leader; Mildred Carter, UM Women president; Hank Dozier, UM Men president; and Josiah Howard, Conference Council on Youth Ministries president. Dean Martin, youth leader at New Hope UMC in Union County, gave the 2012 Laity Address, speaking to the conference's common theme of revitalization and how to be a vital church.

Jane Boatwright, president of the Foundation for Evangelism, presented the Harry Denman Awards for Evangelism to Haley Melton, a middle school youth from New Hope UMC in Union County; the Rev. Chris Westmoreland, senior pastor of Assurance UMC in Huntersville, N.C. and the Rev. Duncan Overrein, assistant pastor of Crossfire UMC in North Wilkesboro, N.C. Membership is 290,821, down 830 from the previous year. Worship attendance stands at 120,187, down 736. Church school attendance stands at 55,628, down 528. The total number of persons participating in Christian formation groups stands at 115,263, up 6,042 from the previous year. The number of mission teams sent from the local church stands at 5,813, up 33%.

– Skyler Nimmons, Western North Carolina Annual Conference, reported in the July 18, 2012 edition of UMNewScope

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Some minds are like concrete – thoroughly mixed up and permanently set.