

Monthly Update

September 2012

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

The September Monthly Update continues with what happened at the various annual conferences in our United Methodist Church plus news from the public sector.

A Jewish businessman in New York decided to send his son to Israel to absorb some of the culture of the homeland. When the son returned, the father asked him to tell him about the trip. The son said, “Pop, I had a great time in Israel. By the way, I converted to Christianity.”

“Oy vey,” exclaimed the father. “What haff I done?” The father decided to go ask his friend Jacob what to do.

Jake said, “Funny you should ask. I, too, sent my son to Israel, and he also came back a Christian. Perhaps we should go see the rabbi and ask him what we should do.” So they went to see the rabbi.

The rabbi said, “Funny you should ask. I, too, sent my son to Israel. He also came back a Christian. What is happening to our young people? Perhaps we should go talk to God and ask him what to do.” The three of them prayed and explained what had happened to their sons and asked God what to do.

Suddenly a voice came loud and clear from Heaven. “Funny you should ask. I, too, sent my Son to Israel . . .”

In all that we do, we need to remember the reason for “what we are about” as Jesus told his mother and Joseph. Our most important priority is the salvation of those around us. When one of the Methodist preachers once lamented to John Wesley that he had “insufficient time to attend to his studies” since John was forever exhorting them to go out and preach to the people, John replied, “I would that all of the libraries of the world burn than to be guilty of the loss of one soul.” Extreme? Perhaps, but I believe that he had a correct understanding of the value of a soul. Just one soul.

Also, please continue to stand with us financially at the end of these fiscally lean summer months that we have experienced, especially since we are involved in a higher-than-usual number of conferences. Since this is, we believe, the most important election in the history of our country, we will be at a highly-visible conference in Washington, D.C. this month communicating to the public consciousness the reality of what we as United Methodists truly believe – and to counter liberal political views portrayed by our general boards and agencies.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris
Executive Director

September 2012 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

The Will of God will never take you to where the Grace of God will not protect you.

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The Good Stuff

+ "We created for the Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation a prayer wall, where people all across the country can come together and take only five minutes that they will commit to pray for the nation each week. If they will do that, then we will literally have 24 hour a day 7 days a week prayer for America. We believe that it is the foundational underpinning for us to restore this nation."
– Congressman Randy Forbes

Religious freedom is one of the most cherished rights in our land. Our Founding Fathers established our nation while envisioning that religious liberties would be freely celebrated and faith openly expressed. Yet efforts to safeguard our First Liberty are opposed...by activists determined to force people of faith to succumb to anti-life and anti-family policies. The most current example is in North Dakota, where...voters...considered a state ballot initiative to enhance protections for religious freedom. The Religious Liberty Restoration Amendment is a state response to a 1990 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that reduced the level of protection historically afforded religious liberty. Congress reestablished this higher threshold under federal law in 1993 – but states like North Dakota must pass their own measures as nearly 30 other states have already done.

It may come as a surprise to learn that the leading opponent to the religious-freedom amendment in North Dakota is none other than Planned Parenthood®. The abortion seller has contributed more than half a million dollars to oppose the amendment, with donations coming from Planned Parenthood® affiliates across the country.

– Focus on the Family

Of Interest. 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 denomination's U.S. membership in 2010 was fewer than 7.6 million members.

– Heather Hahn, UMNS, as reported in UMNewScope, August 15, 2012.

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Once you realize you are a new creation, the identity crisis is over. – Dr. Joe Stowell

Global Outlook

Nothing ruins the truth like stretching it.

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North Katanga Conference.

"God has got to be super happy," Bishop Bruce Ough emotionally declared after the miracle offering at the West Ohio Annual Conference in June. The goal was to raise \$500,000 "following the lead of our missional partner in Africa, the North Katanga Conference, to purchase a Cessna Caravan plane," Bishop Ough wrote in a preconference letter. By the close of the meeting, the West Ohio Conference had raised more than \$1 million for the Wings of the Morning aviation ministry.

"We thought our \$500,000 goal was audacious," said The Reverend Dee Stickley-Miner, who leads the conference's connection mission and justice office. She continued: "What we experienced, however, was the biblical truth that nothing is impossible with God."

The Greater New Jersey Annual Conference has committed more than \$322,000, and other conferences have also made significant commitments; \$25,000 has been raised within the North Katanga Conference – Responding to the miracle offering, Thomas Kemper, the top executive at the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM), said: "The West Ohio Conference goes beyond financial giving. They develop sustainable and personal partnerships in the four corners of the world—creatively connecting with Global Ministries as a resource to facilitate mission." For five of the last six years, the Conference has led the

denomination in designated giving, supporting ministries around the world.

– Melissa Hinnen, West Ohio Annual Conference, as reported in the July 3, 2012 edition of UMNewScope.

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Annual Conference Reports

Arkansas. The 10th session of the Arkansas Annual Conference gathered in Fort Smith June 10-13. Bishop Charles Crutchfield presided over his final annual conference session before his retirement. The Rev. Andrew Thompson, Wesley scholar for the Arkansas Conference and instructor of historical theology and Wesleyan studies at Memphis Theological Seminary, served as the preacher for the Sunday and Monday night worship services, carrying forward the theme of the gathering, "Holiness of Heart and Life." The conference addressed several issues with financial implications: a task force to study alternatives to the current apportionment formula offered a report – the group's current focus is on moving from an expense-based formula to an income-based formula; begin the process of billing churches directly for the cost of clergy pension funding; how health-care premiums are calculated for retired clergy, with retirees assuming 10% of the cost as of January 2013; and pension and health care joined to form a single committee. Approved resolutions include... a commitment to approach with respect and humility the differences faithful UMs have concerning the issue of homosexuality; encouraging a series of sacred conversations about human sexuality, with a theologically diverse task force to be named by the bishop to develop a curriculum to guide these conversations; deploring and condemning the act of bullying; imploring UMs to decline signing petitions that would bring more forms of legalized gambling up for a vote in Arkansas, and requesting that UMs support the efforts of the Stop Casinos Now Committee. Membership is 135,579, down 0.08%. – Amy Forbus, Arkansas Annual Conference, as reported in the July 3, 2012 edition of UMNewScope

Austria Provisional Annual Conference. The members of Austria Provisional Annual Conference met May 17–20, in Linz under the motto "To Ground Heaven – Our Diaconal Task." The relevance of this motto was particularly shown one day prior to the beginning of conference when the new hospital for child and youth psychiatry of the UM Diaconal Center Spattstrasse was opened. This new institution is unique in Upper Austria and offers therapeutic pedagogy opportunities for 18 children aged from five to thirteen. In his report, Superintendent Lothar Pöll reminded members that diaconal activities belonged to the essence of Christian faith from the very beginning – and that one of John Wesley's fundamental concerns was the ministry with the poor, which evolved into a primary feature of Methodism. Some details from the meeting: the UMC is very small in Austria – but ecumenical guests underscored the importance of the church in the ecumenical setting of the whole country; The Rev. Sebastian Meisel, pastor in the East Germany Annual Conference, will transfer to the Austria Provisional Annual Conference and serve Linz UMC; The church building of Ried im Innkreis UMC had to be sold during the past year; and in spite of a difficult financial situation, the conference lay members moved for an increase in pastors' salaries. The Church Council was commissioned to present a proposal to Annual Conference 2013 for achieving an annual increase in salaries based on the inflation rate.

– Stefan Schröckenfuchs, Vienna /Office of Bishop Patrick Streiff, Zurich, as reported in UMNewScope, June 13, 2012

California-Pacific. With the sounding of a Pacific Islander conch shell, the California-Pacific Annual Conference assembled once again on the campus of the University of Redlands, Calif., June 14-17. Retiring Bishop Mary Ann Swenson called to order the 28th session of the conference and the 161st since the organization of the Pacific Conference in 1851. General Conference delegates reflected on their experiences in Tampa. The report concluded with the delegation's call to "Be the Hope," based on the preamble to the Social Principles of The UMC, and including a commitment to "freely extend all the ministries of the church to all God's children." The session later reaffirmed the Western Jurisdiction's 2004 "We Will Not Be Silent" statement, calling "local churches to make clear their willingness to support and celebrate a pastor who is 'out' concerning her or his sexual identity." Bishop Talbert preached the ordination sermon, "Do the Right Thing," concluding with a repeat of his post-General Conference invitation to "An Act of Biblical Obedience."

[Note: This is calls for rebellion against the teachings of both the UMC Book of Discipline, but more importantly, the Bible. At GC-2012, I heard objection by some in the Southeastern Jurisdiction to our paying the lion's share of expenses – to include "carrying the water" for the Western Jurisdiction. Unfortunately, Bishop Talbert is very much confused on what the Bible has to say about this practice – or about what happens to those in spiritual leadership who rebel against God. – AOM] Bishop Swenson's will retire Sept. 1 and begin as Ecumenical Officer of the Council of Bishops. Membership is 77,799, down 2,369.

– Gary Keene, Cal-Pac Annual Conference, as reported in the July 3, 2012 edition of UMNewScope

Central Texas. The 2012 Central Texas Annual Conference was held in Waco, Texas starting June 3rd. Dr. Joy Moore as the conference preacher gave the message. Besides the inspiring messages brought by Moore, those assembled were treated to

teachings from Dr. Gil Rendle regarding the "wilderness" times the conference and the church in general now face due to the changing world around us. After celebrating the progress made in the areas of professions of faith (+28%), baptisms (+25%), confirmation classes (+102%), churches with gains in worship attendance (+133%), churches with at least one mission team (+68%) and churches engaged in community outreach, justice and mercy ministries (+41%), Bishop Lowry shared several learnings from the past year and detailed how we would address what isn't working and cultivate those processes that have been fruitful. [Members passed] a budget of approximately \$9.75 million, the fifth consecutive year that the conference has passed a budget lower than the year previous. Membership is 166,532, up from 2010 – the 38th consecutive year of membership growth.

– J. Vance Morton, Central Texas Conference, as reported in UMNewScope, June 20, 2012

Greater New Jersey. The Greater New Jersey Annual Conference met May 31-June 2 at the Valley Forge Convention Center in Valley Forge, Pa. The theme was "Making Disciples for the Transformation of the World: Building the Church Through Our Service and Witness-Developing Leaders." Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar presided. The Rev. Dr. Joy J. Moore, associate dean for Black Church Studies and Church Relations at Duke Divinity School, led early morning Bible studies with crowds filling the capacity of the room. Bishop Jong Hoon Kim, of the Seoul Annual Conference of the Korean Methodist Church, gave a message of encouragement during a celebration of ministry service, honoring the 25 retirees, two provisional deacons and six provisional elders. Additional guests included retired Bishop Felton Edwin May, serving as senior pastor of Turning Point UMC in Trenton, N. J.; the Rev. Dr. Robert Williams, general secretary of the General Commission on Archives and History; Wil Wilson, US-2 missionary; and Mutwale Ntambo Wa Mushidi and Kabaka Ndala Alphonsine from the Tanzanian Annual Conference. Actions taken by the conference include: a resolution calling for September 30, 2012 to be a conference-wide "Day of Prayer & Healing" for those who have been hurt through divisive conversations around human sexuality, particularly the issue over the status of LGBT persons in our denomination; minimum salary base for clergy; the 2013 Shared Ministries Budget of \$12,501,344, a 1.2% increase; and the endorsement of two candidates for episcopacy: Rev. Sung H. Ahn and Rev. Dr. Vicki Miller Brendler. The conference had a net gain in membership for the first time in 45 years: 93,655, up 240 from the previous year.

– Heather Fullerton, Greater New Jersey Annual Conference, as reported in the July 3, 2012 edition of UMNewScope

Illinois-Great Rivers. The Illinois Great Rivers Annual Conference (IGRC) was held in Peoria, Ill., June 6–9, under the theme of "Risk-Taking Mission." Conference speaker was Rev. Jorge Acevedo, pastor of Grace Church, Cape Coral, Fla., who led sessions on utilizing teams for effective ministry and Turbo-Charging the Wesleyan Tradition for the Twenty-first Century. Bishop Gregory V. Palmer, presided. Special offerings were received for the furnishing of the recently-completed John Kofi Asmah School in Monrovia, Liberia, \$14,569; the New Hope UMC in Liberia, \$11,459; Africa University, providing scholarships for students, \$8,757; the Tom Brown Scholarship at Wiley College, one of the church's historic Black Colleges, \$6,240; and funds for a mission trip experience for newly ordained clergy, \$3,593. Membership is 138,795, down 1.03%.

– Paul E. Black, IGRC, as reported in UMNewScope, June 13, 2012

Indiana. The fourth session of the Indiana Annual Conference met June 7–9 at the Indiana Convention Center in downtown Indianapolis. The theme was "Making ROOM" based on Acts 2:46-47. The purpose of the annual conference session was to equip, inspire and transform members in order to transform their congregations and communities. Bishop Michael J. Coyner presided. During two business sessions, the conference approved a 2013 income budget of \$13.6 million. Membership is 197,917, down 2,686.

– Daniel R. Gangler, Indiana Conference, as reported in UMNewScope, June 13, 2012

Iowa. The Iowa Annual Conference gathered for its 169th assembly June 2-5, at the Iowa Events Center in Des Moines. During the four-day gathering, conference raised nearly \$80,000 for missions and ministry; collected 1,924 pairs of glasses for continuing eye care in Nigeria and 105 gallons of pull tabs to support the Ronald McDonald House; and packaged 30,000 meals to alleviate hunger in Rwanda. The conference heard from General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA), General Secretary Moses Kumar, who thanked the conference for three consecutive years of 100% payment to the general church apportionments and another year of oversubscribing support to Africa University. Bishop Julius Calvin Trimble presided over a session "as paperless as possible," with more than half of the nearly 1,700 clergy and lay members using electronic devices to read the pre-conference manual and other documents. The conference voted to continue to reduce its carbon footprint and provide documents electronically. In his sermon for the opening worship service Bishop Trimble said, "We can't vote our way into our kingdom potential. . . . Gay or straight, wealthy or poor, we can give ourselves away so Christ can use us, bruised or broken." Following a report on the 2012 General Conference, two moments of personal privilege expressed the concern of many that the actions of the 2012 General Conference of The UMC ran contrary to John

Wesley's first General Rule, "do no harm." More than 500 members of the conference have signed the "Do No Harm" covenant, and more than 70 clergy are among lay and clergy signers of a related "Covenant of Conscience."

The members approved a budget for 2013 with a 0.32% increase: \$15, 674,805. Membership is 175,487, down 4,124.

– Arthur McClanahan, Iowa Annual Conference, as reported in UMNewScope, June 20, 2012

Kansas East. [The] Annual Conference met June 6-9, under the leadership of Bishop Scott J. Jones, at The UM Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kan. The theme was "The Church United: Working for Wellness," continuing the conference's emphasis on each of the four areas of focus identified by the General Conference in 2008. Members of the Kansas East Conference voted June 7 on a motion to create one new annual conference with the Kansas East and Nebraska annual conferences. In simultaneous announcements live-streamed June 9 from the Kansas East and Nebraska annual conference sessions, Jones and Nebraska Bishop Ann Sherer-Simpson reported the vote had passed. The conference adopted a budget of \$5,072,714 for 2013, a 2% increase over the budget for 2012. Membership is 69,955, down 841.

– Lisa Elliott Diehl, Kansas Area, as reported in UMNewScope, June 20, 2012

Kansas West. The Kansas West Annual Conference met May 23-25 in Hutchinson, Kan., under the leadership of Bishop Scott J. Jones. The theme was "Vital Congregations: Dynamic Worship." Members of the Kansas West Conference voted May 24 on a motion to create one new annual conference with the Kansas East and Nebraska annual conferences. In simultaneous announcements live-streamed June 9 from the Kansas East and Nebraska annual conference sessions, Jones and Nebraska Bishop Ann Sherer-Simpson reported the vote had passed. The conference adopted a new formula for determining mission and ministry (apportionment) shares based on a tithe of operating income and a 2013 budget of \$5.9 million. The body also adopted resolutions: 1) requiring local congregations to adopt policies for the protection of children, youth and vulnerable adults that include training in boundary awareness and background screenings by Jan. 1, 2013; 2) encouraging local churches to celebrate clergy appointments to local churches; and 3) encouraging local churches to celebrate laity and lay speakers in the local church. Four local churches were closed. Membership is 79,028, down 1,543 (1.9%) from 2010.

– Lisa Elliott Diehl, Kansas Area, as reported in UMNewScope, June 20, 2012

Memphis. "Extravagant Generosity" was the theme for the 2012 Memphis Annual Conference held June 3-6 in Jackson, Tenn. Interim Bishop Benjamin R. Chamness presided at the Carl Perkins Civic Center and Jackson First UMC in downtown Jackson. Gloria Holt, former lay leader of the North Alabama Conference, was the speaker for the...Laity Banquet. The Rev. Shane Stanford of Christ UMC in Memphis brought the opening worship message: "Running to the Fire." Dr. Douglas Meeks, Cal Turner Professor of Theology and Wesleyan Studies at Vanderbilt Divinity School, led a three-part Bible study. The conference endorsed the Rev. Randy Cooper of Martin First UMC as candidate for bishop.

Of interest to many was a progress report from the Committee on Uniting the Memphis and Tennessee Conferences, presented by Gary S. Shorb, President and CEO of Methodist Healthcare. Shorb reported that the committee is "developing the case for uniting" and "identifying barriers." He said all work will be done "with transparency and inclusiveness."

An understanding of connectionalism in its many forms was the subject of the State of the Church report, "Hold to the Traditions," from Bishop Chamness. He named 12 ways connectionalism manifests itself and lamented "local churches that act more like congregationalists" because they "do not understand the connectionalism" of the UMC. Delegates heard a report on the 2012 General Conference, part of which was a video produced by UM Communications and narrated by Bishop Chamness. The conference approved a 2013 budget of \$9,130,627, a decrease of \$242,536 from 2012. Membership is 82,219, down 1,030. – Lane Gardner Camp, Memphis Conference, as reported in the July 3, 2012 edition of UMNewScope

Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference. The smell of cedar for the blessing of a brand new tabernacle, its dedication and the smudging of those in attendance beginning with the bishop of the Oklahoma Area, Robert Hayes Jr., set the tone for the 70th session of the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference annual conference. Conference was held at the Southwest Region Center, Anadarko, Okla., June 7-10. Bishop Hayes preached for all worship services. With the theme "Renewing Ourselves for Transformation through Prayer, Proclamation and Witness," the opening ceremonies began with the presentation of flags. The American flag and the Christian flag were followed by the flags of the 39 Federally Recognized Nations of Oklahoma. Also included in the procession were the flags of Oklahoma, Kansas and Texas, the states where the 87 churches that make up the conference are located. Serving as worship leader was Marcus Briggs-Cloud, a member of the Miccosukee Creek Nation and member of Norman First American UMC. A lengthy discussion was held following the recommendation of the course to be taken concerning the Judicial Council's determination at General Conference that the apportionment formula for missionary conferences that General Council on Finance and Administration has followed was unconstitutional. The implications of this

decision following the General Conference Act of Repentance to the indigenous persons of the church were discussed. The 2013 budget of \$1,059,184 was approved. Membership is 6,177, down 19.

– Josephine Deere, Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference, as reported in UMNewScope, June 20, 2012

Northern Illinois. Members of the Northern Illinois Annual Conference (NIC) came together to "Celebrate God's Amazing Work" at the 173rd session held June 6-9, 2012 in St. Charles, Ill. In his State of the Church Address, presiding Bishop Hee-Soo Jung spoke of the bold steps the NIC has made since the Harvest 2020 movement was announced five years ago. In that time, 30 new faith communities have been launched, attracting more than 2,000 new worshipers. On the heels of General Conference, Bishop Jung noted change is happening in the denomination but expressed sadness by the lack of movement around sexual orientation. "God's mandate is clear; we must offer our church and Christian fellowship to all people." [Note: What Bishop Jung seems to miss is that the Bible calls sexual practice outside of marriage a "sin." What is so hard to understand about that? – AOM] In legislative action, the session approved more than a dozen resolutions, including a call to end mass incarceration and the building of private prisons, support for raising the minimum wage in Illinois...and continuing partnership with Bolivia. The 2013 budget of \$8,445,523, a decrease from 2012 of 8%, was approved. 2011 NIC membership is 95,667 (down 2.2%). – Anne Marie Gerhardt, NIC, as reported in the July 3, 2012 edition of UMNewScope

Oregon-Idaho. One heard the word hope used to describe the 44th Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference session, meeting in Salem, Oregon June 14-17. Hope for churches that are taking a new look at health and vitality, hope for a new conference structure that focuses on equipping local churches, hope for the people of Africa who struggle to combat malaria, and hope for people seeking full recognition by The UMC. Bishop Robert T. Hoshibata presided. . The session approved a new leadership structure based on "accountable leadership" presided and streamlining the size of leadership groups. An oversight board will provide accountability and feedback to the bishop and Ministry Leadership Team while the team takes on primary management of conference activity. As of July, five districts will move to a four-district organization. The districts met to select new names and chose to become the Columbia, Cascadia, Crater Lake, and Sage districts.

Failure to make changes to the church's position on acceptance of homosexuals at General Conference triggered responses at the session. The conference agreed to encourage local churches to create a statement that specifically welcomes people of all sexual orientations and gender identities in their membership, ministries, and leadership. Conference also approved a resolution that states that the denomination's current stand on homosexuality is "incompatible with the inclusive gospel of Jesus." Conference Membership is 27,364, down 1,362 (4.7%).

– Greg Nelson, Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference, as reported in the July 3, 2012 edition of UMNewScope

Poland Annual Conference. About 50 members of Poland Annual Conference gathered May 31-June 3 at the former Theological Seminary in Klarysew (near Warsaw). The theme of the conference was "Invited! Changed . . . Changing?" A special focus was laid on the discussion of a potential revision of the "Internal Law." This relevant church discipline of The UMC in Poland varies significantly from the Book of Discipline of the UMC, particularly with regard to the understanding of the role of a bishop. The efforts of a team of the Executive Committee of Central and Southern Europe Central Conference to harmonize the "Internal Law" with the Book of Discipline of the UMC were suspended in March 2012 after they had not led to a helpful solution. Bishop Patrick Streiff explained this decision and distributed several documents of the Executive Committee. He also shared that, as a result of this decision, a working group of the Central Conference had been charged to explain the process for becoming an autonomous or affiliated autonomous Methodist Church. To demonstrate the consequences of such a process, Bishop Christian Alsted from the Nordic and Baltic Area gave a lecture on the establishment of a new autonomous united church in Sweden, showing how complicated the process of separation from the worldwide UMC can be. The discussion was very emotional and focused on the use of the title bishop by the general superintendent of The UMC in Poland. There were arguments in favor and against a harmonization of the "Internal Law" with the Book of Discipline. The members agreed that they would need more information for a helpful decision. They commissioned an ad-hoccommittee to work on this issue and to present its results to Annual Conference 2013 to enable a decision. Until then, the results of the discussions of the Central Conference will also be available.

The financial situation of The UMC in Poland is difficult. More than 40% of the budget is covered by reserves, which had been accumulated thanks to the former profit of the UM language schools in Poland. The donations from Connexio, the network for mission and service of The UMC Switzerland-France, amount to 25% of the overall income. The general superintendent announced that he would not run for another term in 2013, after serving almost 25 years. In the closing worship service, two deacons and two elders were ordained. In spite of these ordinations there is still a need of pastors since two pastors are now on voluntary leave and one pastor retired after working three years beyond the official retirement age. The ordination

of the first woman deacon in several decades is expected to take place during the 2013 conference.

– Jörg Niederer, Frauenfeld/Office of Bishop Patrick Streiff, Zurich, as reported in UMNewScope, June 20, 2012

South German Annual Conference. The 10th South German annual conference came together June 12-17 in Baiersbronn und Heilbronn, Germany with Bishop Rosemarie Wenner presiding. The conference theme was "Prayer." This theme was taken up several times during the conference, including in the opening worship service in which pastor Gerda Eschmann preached on 1 Kings 3:9 and emphasized that prayer begins not with speaking but with hearing. In other business, a resolution of the committee for Peace, Justice and Preservation of the Creation was passed, which commits the membership to participating in CO2-Compensation programs. The conference also heard a report on pastor burnout, and passed a resolution that pastors receive a free Sunday each quarter, which does not count as a vacation day. Membership (confessing members) of the conference is 16,436, down 173.

– Dr. Jonathan Whitlock, South German Annual Conference, as reported in the July 3, 2012 edition of UMNewScope

Upper New York. The Upper New York Annual Conference held its third session May 31-June 2, in Syracuse, N.Y., with the theme "Planting God's Future in Hearts and Neighbors: Called to Till." During plenary, the conference adopted a 2013 budget of \$10.7 million budget, the same total as 2011 and 2012 budgets; celebrated the campaign to create a \$1 million scholarship endowment fund for Africa University, which is a three-year project; and accepted the discontinuance of two churches. Membership is just over 182,400.

– Maidstone Mulenga, Upper New York Annual Conference, as reported in UMNewScope, June 20, 2012

West Michigan. The 2012 West Michigan Annual Conference, hosted at Calvin College, June 6-9, took a healthy look at life and the world. Members and guests rejoiced in the present witness and future promise of the young leaders in their midst. A short legislative slate allowed time for exuberant worship and prayer-filled reflection on claiming the power and the hope resident in every disciple of Jesus Christ. The focus on health progressed through the mind, the body and the spirit. Bishop Jonathan Keaton preached from 2 Kings, "a microcosm of divine health initiatives." He reminded all, especially clergy, that "Sabbath is essential for our health and wholeness." Throughout the Conference, silent witness was visible in the registration area-the protest a call to radical inclusiveness and hospitality. [I.e., "acceptance of homosexual practice at GC-2012.] The Conference members voted the 2013 budget: \$6,085,389, a 2.25% increase over 2012. Membership is 61,979, down 935.

– West Michigan Annual Conference, as reported in UMNewScope, June 20, 2012

West Virginia. The West Virginia Annual Conference met for its 44th session June 6-9 at West Virginia Wesleyan College in Buckhannon. Resident bishop, William Boyd Grove, led the session. "I Will be Your Witness: Participation," was the final in a four-year series of themes emphasizing evangelism. More than 1,100 churches were represented by more than 1,000 lay and clergy members. Bishop Marcus Matthews of the Upper New York Area and the Rev. Tex Sample of Phoenix, Ariz., were the featured speakers. [Note: The fact that Tex Sample was one of the speakers is problematic. This fact alone would cause me to question the perspective of the presiding bishop. Sample is known for his far-left views.] The conference passed resolutions supporting passage of an anti-human trafficking law and the establishment of a mineral future fund by the West Virginia Legislature. They also passed resolutions affirming the work of the General Commission on the Role and Status of Women (GCSRW), and one that establishes a Committee on Native American Ministries in the conference. Conference adopted a \$12,113,269 budget for 2013, an increase of \$405,252 (3.46%) from 2012. At the end of 2011, membership is 99,585, down 373.

– Laura Harbert Allen West Virginia Annual Conference, as reported in the July 3, 2012 edition of UMNewScope

Western Pennsylvania. "Dreaming God-sized Dreams" was the theme of the 2012 Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference session, held June 7-10 at Grove City College in Grove City, Pa. Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton described a God-sized dream as "a vision of something that you and I cannot accomplish on our own. It is bold, challenging, and just far enough out there that you can't get there without the spirit's help. "On the way to fulfilling it," he added, "you have to be willing to accept that it may end up differently than you have first envisioned . . . because it is God's dream, not your own."

The members voted to encourage the Pennsylvania General Assembly: to support a bill that would allow the state courts to consider evidence of racism when reviewing death sentences; a Juvenile Justice Bill that would allow resentencing of an individual less than 18 years old when sentenced to prison; an increase in Pennsylvania's tax on beer; to fund alcohol treatment and programs; an apportionment budget of \$9.06 million, a \$200,000 increase over the 2012 budget, was approved for 2013; and a restructuring proposal that streamlines the Conference Connectional Network into a smaller body that will oversee the work of boards and agencies, grouped into four ministry areas. Membership is 177,219, down 2,453.

– Jackie Campbell, Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference, as reported in UMNewScope, June 20, 2012

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When we're reborn – made new in Christ –
It should be plain for all to see
That God has changed us from within
And placed us in His family. – Sper