

Monthly Update

April 2013

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

This edition of the “Monthly Update” contains some of the information that we could not include in the last “Update” because of the information on the decision by the Boy Scouts of America on the homosexual issue. Included here is the information on events in Nigeria and the Philippines deferred to this April Update – to other information about our church.

In my last letter to you, I expressed my gratitude for both your prayers and financial support for our ministry – and included notes of reassurance you had written to us. I feel compelled to add to that since it is such a positive reaffirmation for us. From the faithful supporter in Wilmington, North Carolina quoted in the last letter, she had also written, “Continuing thanks for bringing information...” From Cleveland, Tennessee we read, “Keep up the good work!” From Delton, Michigan, “Thank you for your faithful service to the church.” From Duncanville, Texas we received words of reassurance of our salvation – and continued prayers. From Fairbanks, Alaska, “We appreciate you.” Especially meaningful were the words from a retired Marine gunny sergeant in Jacksonville, North Carolina, “Thank you for your last letter! Keep up the great work!” And then from Evansville, Indiana, “I intended to send this check with my letter. Somehow, I got side tracked and forgot...May the Lord bless and keep you.” In reference to her “Somehow, I got side tracked and forgot...” I would humbly ask, “Don’t we all have those moments in our lives?” But isn’t that so human?

Then we appreciate the messages you include as stickers and return address labels that speak: the Statue of Liberty from Bob in Duncanville, the words “God Bless America” sitting on a red, white, and blue cutout of the United States; the many depictions of the American flag from Coeur D’ Alene, Idaho, Salem, Oregon, Brookhaven, Mississippi & Gladstone, Oregon – to the one with Psalm 33:12, “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.”

An article I received from my native hometown in Texas was interesting. From Austin County, the sheriff, Jack Brandes publicly signed a pledge, “As Sheriff, I will not allow any agency to come to Austin County and unlawfully disarm law abiding citizens or impose any unlawful unconstitutional orders upon my citizens.” Brandes expressed concern about additional unconstitutional issues he will stand up against. This mood reflects the sense of a recently-passed bill HB533 in the Texas legislature that invalidates federal acts in violation of the 2nd amendment and protects citizens’ right to bear arms. I must say that I am proud of people in Texas who are willing to stand up for this crucial right. We need to remember that the Constitution deems our rights as being “God-given” and not originating from any government entity. The 2nd amendment ensures our ability fight for and protect all of our rights.

In one last note, from Rocky Mount, North Carolina, we read, “I want to thank you for all that you do for the Lord and for we Methodists. I pray for you each day...Keep up the good work. May the Lord continue to bless you.” Again, I thank the Lord and all of you for your support as we strive in service for Him who has called us.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris,
Executive Director

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April 2013 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

The strongest reason for people to retain the right to keep and bear arms is, as a last resort, to protect themselves against tyranny in government. – Thomas Jefferson

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The Good Stuff

+ Are you looking for an alternative to AARP since you don't want to contribute to their support of a left-wing political agenda (they have come out solidly behind Obamacare)? Please consider The Association of Mature American Citizens (AMAC). Their address is: The Association of Mature American Citizens, 5 Orville Dr Suite 500, Bohemia, NY 11716.

+ *Keep an Attitude of Gratitude*

[Note: This came to me from Douglas Raine of the Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship in America and gives insight into a well-known speaker who has recently passed away: Zig Ziglar. I have heard him speak on radio interviews and have some of his writings; he is truly powerful. Here is some of the wisdom from Zig that should benefit us all. – AOM]

Dear Friends,

The difference in success or failure is not how you look, how you dress or how you're educated. It's how you think. While it's not always easy, being able to maintain a positive attitude can change your life in profound ways.

Attitude Is Everything: *10 Rules for Staying Positive* breaks down the #1 key to success in a simple, but unforgettable way. No matter what you do in life, the wisdom in this little book will help you succeed!

Live Inspired,

Keep an Attitude of Gratitude

Years ago, I was the public relations director for motivational guru, Zig Ziglar. At the time, he was arguably the best-known, most loved speaker in the world. When audience members heard Zig, they witnessed a man chockfull of energy, vitality and joy. Having worked closely with him and knowing him well, I can tell you that the Zig you saw on stage was the real Zig Ziglar. In fact, I can't remember ever seeing him when he was not happy and upbeat.

The Zig I knew was one carbonated guy.

Every time Zig answered his home phone, he picked up the receiver and said with gusto, "This is Jean Ziglar's happy husband!" And he meant it.

Awhile back one of Zig's closest friends and I were discussing Zig's aura of happiness. "Completely genuine," his friend said. "I have never seen him down." Then he added thoughtfully, but with love, "Hardly what you'd call normal."

"What's Zig's secret?" I asked.

"I think," he said, "it comes down to feeling grateful. Never met a guy more grateful than Zig. Period."

You'd think anyone that grateful must have had an easy life. But that's not so.

Zig started out poor. Dirt poor. His father died when he was six, leaving his mother to raise 11 children alone. The family was virtually penniless. Yet despite their poverty, Mrs. Ziglar instilled a strong work ethic in her children and raised them to believe that both she and God loved them. She also instructed her children to practice saying "please" and "thank you." Those lessons stuck. Her formula of work, love and faith made their difficult lives easier. Gratitude made their lives enjoyable.

Zig once told me, "When we neglect to require our children to say 'thank you' when someone gives them a gift or does something for them, we raise ungrateful children who are highly unlikely to be content. Without gratitude, happiness is rare. With gratitude, the odds for happiness go up dramatically."

+ *World Methodists, Anglicans Conclude 5-year Dialogue*

After five years of work mandated by the World Methodist Council and Anglican Communion, the final meeting of the Anglican-Methodist International Commission for Unity in Mission concluded Mar. 1 in Ocho Rios, Jamaica. A report on key points of agreement concerning the interchangeability of ordained ministries and the awareness of each communion's need of the other has been prepared for both bodies, and a report will be published in 2014.

– The World Methodist Council, as reported in the March 13, 2013 edition of UMNewScope.

+ *Vital Congregations Launches Team Vital*

Team Vital, the newest phase of the Vital Congregations Initiative, launched at First UMC in Forth Worth, Texas Feb. 21–22. Eleven conferences began a two-year journey of learning together, using strategies to grow more highly vital congregations. Team Vital is working collaboratively with the Council of Bishops to double the number of highly vital congregations over the next quadrennium.

The Council of Bishops has committed to leading the church for the next 10 years to grow more congregations that are vital. Bishop John Schol of Greater New Jersey was encouraged by the gathering, saying, “Clearly these are conferences that are committed to moving the UM mission forward by helping clergy and congregations to reach new generations of believers and engage disciples in community mission.”

The Vital Congregations Initiative grew out of the Call to Action Study in 2009, calling for growth of more highly vital congregations—congregations that have life-changing stories, transformative mission, and fruitfulness. Vital congregations come in all sizes, contexts, and racial ethnic groups; but what they have in common is consistent growth over time, engagement of their people in mission and small groups and generous giving. The two-day meeting invited members of Team Vital to explore offerings and challenges and to be in dialogue with other annual conferences, sharing both best practices and the communal narratives of the faithfulness and fruitfulness of their ministry. Team Vital heard a report on the status of vitality in The UMC, demonstrating that between 2010 and 2011 the number of highly vital congregations grew by 1.2%. “This is a significant step,” said Schol. “We are seeing congregations, conferences and general agencies working together to grow more highly vital congregations.”

Dr. Lawrence Peers, a senior consultant at the Alban Institute who specializes in planning and visioning, facilitated the meeting. Additionally, Bishop Schol helped focus the strategies and visions named by the participants toward the mission of The UMC. For more information, visit the Vital Congregations website: www.umvitalcongregations.org

Vital Congregations

– Vital Congregations, as reported in the March 13, 2013 edition of UMNewScope.

+ *Ruthie.*

Gotta share a story I read last week. Goes like this Every Wednesday she puts on her makeup and jewelry, hops in her Buick and drives from her condo to the Medical Center for her four hour volunteer shift. Her name is Ruthie. Ruthie has racked up more than 1,200 volunteer hours since the day, six years ago, when she called the local hospital to ask if they could use an extra hand. Ruthie started out in the ICU reception area, then moved to the cafeteria. Ruthie does what she is asked without complaints. She now folds laundry in the housekeeping department. While Ruthie's contributions may seem trivial to some, says the Center's Director of Volunteer Services, "they free the paid staff to focus solely on the patients." Ruthie enjoys the company and the relationships she has established. She is an attractive single woman (twice widowed) and enjoys the attention she receives especially from the male patients who flock around her. One thing I will mention Ruthie is 103 years of age.

God has a plan for each of us. He delights in our selflessness service to others. There are high profile assignments and there are opportunities tucked away in the basement laundry room. There is brokenness to be mended and there are wounds that need a tender spirit. To Ruthie I say "You go girl" 103 and still finding the time to make a positive impact on the lives of others.

– Charlie Gray devotional, President of the North Carolina United Methodist Men; received by e-mail

+ *Sewing Machines Help Make Gospel Outreach Possible*

CENTRAL ASIA --- Sewing Machines Help Make Gospel Outreach Possible. Ten Christian women in a Central Asian country received sewing machines that will help them generate an income for their families. "Thank you for your blessing," wrote one of the sewing machine recipients. "We wanted to buy a good sewing machine for a long time, but we didn't have funds. It will help us to earn money and to bless other church members." ...

– Voice of the Martyrs

+ *The Growth of Christianity* by Dr. Tim Tennent, President of Asbury Theological Seminary

"The dramatic growth of Christianity in Asia, Africa, and Latin America is summed up in one striking statistic: If current trends continue, by the year 2050, six countries in the world will each have 100 million Christians. And only one of the six—the United States—will be located in the industrialized West."

The Confessing Movement newsletter, February 2013. This originally appeared in the Jan.-Feb, 2013 issue of *Christianity Today*.

Of Interest

+ *Why don't we talk about God's wrath?*

BURKE, Va. (UMNS) — God's wrath is not a popular topic for United Methodists since we like to focus our theology on God's grace. The Rev. Morgan Guyton thinks of wrath as the natural response to injustice and disharmony that God has instilled into creation. — UMNS Daily Digest, Produced by United Methodist News Service, Nov. 7, 2012

+ *United Methodist U.S. Membership Slide Accelerates*

“Liberal Protestantism in America continues its implosion. Meanwhile, African United Methodists will outnumber U.S. church members in 10 years under current rates.” — Mark Tooley, IRD President

Washington, DC—Once the largest Protestant denomination in the United States, new figures released by the United Methodist Church reveal that, while it remains America's second largest Protestant body, its U.S. membership has posted perhaps its largest drop since the 1970s.

The church's 2010 U.S. membership stands at 7,570,980, a drop of 108,870 persons from 2009. The decline largely mirrors trends in other U.S. mainline denominations: in the same reporting year, the Episcopal Church reported a loss of 54,436 members, dropping below 2 million members. In contrast, the Roman Catholic Church and the Assemblies of God have posted membership growth, while the Southern Baptist Convention, America's largest Protestant denomination, has reported stable membership levels.

Since the 1960s, United Methodism in the U.S. has lost nearly 4.5 million members, a nearly record loss for any church in the history of Christianity. Meanwhile, overseas United Methodism has gained 4 million members. Non-U.S. United Methodism now accounts for nearly 40 percent of the denomination and includes 4.4 million members, mostly in Africa. At about 12 million members internationally and growing, The United Methodist Church is one of the top 10 largest Christian communions in the world.

IRD President Mark Tooley commented: “United Methodism's rate of U.S. decline as a percentage is much less than that of the Episcopal Church or Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) but is still tragic. Liberal Protestantism in America continues its implosion. Meanwhile, African United Methodists will outnumber U.S. church members in 10 years under current rates. Global Christianity, including United Methodism, thrives because it is evangelistic and confident about Christian beliefs.

“The...2012 governing United Methodist General Conference, where a record 40 percent of delegates [came] from overseas, [showcased] the clash between dying liberal U.S. Protestantism and dynamic global Christianity.

“Let's hope that United Methodism, on its present course, disengages from failed captivity to American culture and continues to grow internationally and perhaps, someday, even grow again in the U.S. for the first time in nearly 50 years.”

— The Institute on Religion and Democracy, 1023 15th Street NW, Ste. 601, Washington, DC 20005-2601; www.TheIRD.org

+ *Cokesbury brick-and-mortar stores to close*

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (UMNS) — The board of United Methodist Publishing House has decided to close all 57 local Cokesbury stores — including its 19 seminary stores — by April 30, 2013, and redirect its focus and resources to enhancing Cokesbury.com and the Cokesbury Call Center (1-800-672-1789).

— UMNS Daily Digest, Produced by United Methodist News Service, Nov. 6, 2012; Forwarded by CPT W.E. Saunders

+ *New Connectional Table leader named*

DALLAS (UMNS) — The Rev. Amy Valdez Barker has been named executive secretary of the Connectional Table, providing administrative leadership for the body that coordinates the mission, ministry and resources of The United Methodist Church. She [started] her new role Jan. 1, 2013.

— UMNS Daily Digest, Produced by United Methodist News Service, Nov. 7, 2012.

Abortion, Assisted Suicide, Euthanasia & Other Life Issues. + *The Truth about Planned Parenthood (PP)*

With government grants and reimbursements funding nearly half its budget, PP logged a record number of abortions in 2011. The organization's latest annual report, released January 4, revealed these unwelcome figures:

+ 333,964- Abortions PP performed in 2011.

+ 11%--Proportion of clients PP says received abortions that year.

+ 915-Abortions per day, or 1 abortion every 94 seconds.

+ \$1.2 billion-Revenue for fiscal year 2012

+ \$1.5 million-Taxpayer funding PER DAY, including Medicaid reimbursements.

[We must remember that each abortion snuffs out the life of an innocent baby and damages the mother. – AOM]
– Confessing Movement newsletter, February 2013, as originally published in WORLD Magazine, Jan. 26, 2013.

(UM) Bishops *The priorities of 14 new bishops*

+ *Bishops urged to be ‘one in ministry to all the world’*

ST. SIMONS ISLAND, Ga. (UMNS) — In the first presidential address of the quadrennium to the Council of Bishops at Epworth-by-the-Sea, Bishop Rosemarie Wenner encouraged the bishops to lead so that "we may be one in ministry to all the world."
– UMNS Daily Digest, Produced by United Methodist News Service(UMNS), Nov. 6, 2012.

+ NASHVILLE, Tenn. (UMNS) — The 14 new bishops elected in the United States, Africa and Eurasia are committed to increasing the number of vital UM congregations. – UMNS Daily Digest, Produced by UMNS, Nov. 7, 2012.

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"The individual is handicapped by coming face-to-face with a conspiracy so monstrous he cannot believe it exists.
The American mind simply has not come to realization of the evil which has been introduced into our midst."

– J. Edgar Hoover

Global Outlook

“Stress is the trash of modern life – we all generate it but if you don’t dispose of it properly,
it will pile up and overtake your life.” – Terri Guillemets

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The National Council of Churches (NCC). *National Council of Churches Bidding “God Box” Farewell*

Originally constructed for the National Council of Churches, the Interchurch Center looms over the Hudson on Manhattan's Riverside Drive. After 50 years, the council will depart the building for Washington, D.C.

The National Council of Churches confirmed today that the ecumenical council will shut down its historic office on New York’s Riverside Drive, transitioning to a single office in Washington, D.C. A decision to consolidate into a single office has been expected since a report last year by an NCC Governing Board Task Force on Revisioning and Restructuring.

The NCC, once numbering hundreds of staffers, occupied three floors at the Interchurch Center in New York. Completed in 1960, the imposing granite-clad structure was nicknamed the “God Box” and dubbed the “Protestant Vatican on the Hudson” when President Dwight D. Eisenhower laid the cornerstone in 1958. John D. Rockefeller funded the project, along with the neighboring gothic Riverside Church.

The NCC has faced budget difficulties for many years due to declining revenue from participating denominations, known officially as “member communions.” One-third of the council’s member communions are not contributing financially to its work, while another third are giving only token financial support. A brief period in the mid-2000s saw the council increase support from secular political foundations that were attracted to the NCC’s liberal issues advocacy. The council suffered during the 2008 financial crisis when much of the outside funding dried up.

The ecumenical body, which counts thirty-seven (oldline) Protestant, Orthodox, and historically African-American denominations among its members, is also eliminating six positions as part of the “ongoing” reorganization. Transitional General Secretary Peg Birk will now be based in the existing NCC office at the United Methodist Building on Capitol Hill, while three senior staff will remain in New York at what are described in a press release as “satellite offices” – one of which will be at nearby Union Seminary.

The cuts follow another round that reduced the council to a dozen full-time and a handful of part-time and contract staff between May and September of 2012. It is unclear which staff will be departing, but longtime Deputy General Secretary Clare Chapman’s biography page has disappeared from the NCC website, and she is now listed as “senior advisor” on the staff roster.

Additionally, a Washington, D.C. based office staffer tasked with development and “Eco-Justice” responsibilities is no longer listed. Many of the remaining staff appear to be supported by grants related to the council’s anti-poverty initiative and “Eco-Justice” programs. “It is important that we honor this moment with reverence and respect for the Council’s history as an iconic presence in the beloved ‘God Box,’” said NCC President Kathryn Lohre in a press release. "It is equally important that we look with hope upon this new chapter in the Council’s life.”

The NCC Governing Board is next scheduled to meet May 20-21 at a location to be announced.

You may remember that we sent a petition to General Conference several years ago for our church, UMC, to withdraw from supporting the National Council of Churches because of their political intrusion agenda. "This organization long ago sold out the Gospel to embrace a left wing secular political agenda" quote from a church that has withdrawn support. Our apportionments should not be spent to further their work. What a shame that they are moving their offices to the United Methodist Building in Washington, DC. All we can do is to write our Bishops to let them know that the UMC should reconsider our support.

– By Jeffrey Walton, The IRD. E-mail from Mrs. Betsy Kersey, February 13, 2013.

Nigeria.

+ *Solidarity with Nigerian Americans Standing against Boko Haram Terrorists*

“In all Nigerian Christian churches, parishioners worship not knowing whether they will still be alive by the end of the service.” – Faith J.H. McDonnell, IRD Religious Liberty Director

Washington, DC—The Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD) is expressing solidarity with a newly-formed group seeking to counter the Islamic supremacist and terrorist group Boko Haram. The Christian Association of Nigerian-Americans (CANAN) press conference addressed misconceptions and explained why some U.S. Congressmen believe Boko Haram should be designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO).

Opposed to western education and culture, Boko Haram killed almost 1,200 people, primarily Christians, in the northern and central belt states of the West African country between January and September of 2012. The group declared Christians must leave northern Nigeria, convert to Islam, or be killed. In one horrific incident in Bauchi State recently, a suicide bomber killed 3 and injured 48 church members of St. John’s Catholic Cathedral that were departing after services. IRD Religious Liberty Program Director Faith J.H. McDonnell commented: “IRD welcomes the Christian Association of Nigerian-Americans. We will stand with our Nigerian brothers and sisters in combating the evil persecution of Nigerian Christians and all those that are targeted by Boko Haram.

“Close ties bind us to the Anglican Church of Nigeria, the largest province in the worldwide Anglican Communion. One Anglican diocese has been almost completely wiped out by Boko Haram with communicants either killed or exiled. In all Nigerian Christian churches, parishioners worship not knowing whether they will still be alive by the end of the service. The U.S. Congress and Department of Justice urge the State Department to designate Boko Haram as a Foreign Terrorist Organization. Simultaneously, the State Department plans to give Islamists in north/central Nigeria billions of U.S. taxpayer dollars, under the impression that Islamic jihadists act as they do because they have been financially and socially deprived. There has been no monetary recompense at all to the Christian victims of Boko Haram for burned or bombed houses, businesses, schools, and churches, or for murdered breadwinners.

“IRD is upset at the climate of moral equivalence concerning Nigeria by the Administration and by foreign policy Think Tank elites. Some try to blame ‘extreme, militant evangelical proselytization’ for the terrorist attacks. Others push a false narrative of equal blame for conflict between Christians and Muslims.”

What: U.S. Government Action Urged Against Boko Haram

Who: Christian Association of Nigerian-Americans (CANAN)

– The Institute on Religion and Democracy, 1023 15th Street NW, Washington, DC 20005-2601. www.TheIRD.org

The Philippines. UNAIDS has identified the Philippines as one of only seven nations in the world where HIV is increasing dramatically. For the first 30 years of the global pandemic, the archipelago of the Philippines reported relatively few cases among its population of 94 million. The 295 cases registered in June 2012 were 66% higher than reported in June 2011. With about 10 new cases reported daily in the Philippines, government and church leaders are awakening to a potential eruption of HIV and AIDS that may limit national development.

Denominational leaders and institutions recently initiated workshops on HIV and AIDS ministries. Arichea invited pastors, church workers, seminarians and university students to a one-day workshop on AIDS and Issues of Human Sexuality on Aug. 24 at Manila's Central UMC. Co-sponsored by the Center for the Church and Global AIDS, the lectures and discussions not only explored scientific and theological perspectives on HIV prevention, care and treatment but also confronted the stigma the church often expresses toward key populations most immediately affected by HIV-women, men who have sex with men, and intravenous drug users.

Simultaneously, Roman Catholic leadership in the Philippines summoned priests and laity to AIDS seminars. Students, faculty, pastors and administrators also met to discuss HIV and AIDS during Founder's Day celebrations at the 111-year-old Silliman University, sponsored by the United Church of Christ in the Philippines.

The spike in reported HIV infections coincides with a controversial national debate over condoms and family planning.

Reproductive health legislation promoted by Filipino President Benigno S. Aquino III would promote the free distribution of condoms to the poor. It also requires "age-appropriate reproductive health and sexuality education" from the fifth grade through high school. The UM bishops of the Philippines are supportive of the legislation. Arichea said, "It is surprising how closely the new law correlates with UM social teaching." Poverty, lack of education about sexual health, 9.5 million overseas workers-many of whom experience gender violence and sexual exploitation-and limited access to condoms create an environment conducive to the spread of the virus.

At the Protestant workshops, several recurring themes were emphasized. First, workshop leaders expressed the need for education. Second, leaders underscored the importance of testing, counseling and treatment. Third, the role of Christians in combating stigma and discrimination was highlighted. Noting that faith-based communities often fuel stigma, Bishop Arichea called on Christians "to be more accepting and inclusive in their theology and ministry."

[Note: One cannot help but question why they do not promote abstinence – refraining from sexual activity until one is married, then maintaining fidelity in the marriage. This would be a certain preventive for the spread of AIDS. – AOM]

– Donald E. Messer, chairperson of the UM Global AIDS Fund Com., as reported in UMNewscope, October 10, 2012

South Sudan. UMCOR Assists with Water Needs in South Sudan

Since it split off from Sudan in 2011 after a long and brutal civil war, the new country of South Sudan has found its young life fraught with challenges. But in one state at least, Northern Bahr el Ghazal (NBEG) on the new international border, which has taken in a heavy number of returning South Sudanese refugees, the UM Committee on Relief (UMCOR) is making progress in the vital area of water and sanitation.

During all-out war and since then, NBEG state has suffered from seriously constrained resources. The additional population load of returnees further reduced access to safe and clean water, for both the existing communities and the returning refugees. Concern mounted about a spike in sanitation-related diseases such as cholera, as living spaces became overcrowded in areas with poor waste facilities.

UMCOR's South Sudan field office, with funds from the U.S. government's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA, part of USAID), set about helping NBEG communities to improve their water, sanitation, and hygiene. Seven new boreholes have been drilled in the counties of Aweil West and Aweil North, increasing the area's basic supply of clean water. Residents previously had to spend at least two hours fetching water for their households, but with the new boreholes, water is now available within 30 minutes—a broadly accepted delivery time under the international Sphere guidelines on water provision. Such an improved supply has meant that the risk of people using contaminated water has been greatly reduced.

Overall, 34,456 people now have clean and safe water delivered to them; and 80,000 were provided with hygiene and sanitation information to increase their chances of fending off disease.

More than 1,200 households built new latrines. UMCOR employed the approach known as community-led total sanitation (CLTS) to mobilize communities to use locally available materials, making this vital task of improving sanitation conditions more economical and sustainable.

One striking aspect of these improvements is the speed with which they have been achieved. UMCOR's Program Officer with responsibility for South Sudan, Meghan Corneal, made the practical observation: "All this happened during the implementation period of one year, July 2011 to July 2012, as laid down under the OFDA Grant."

– David Tereshchuk, for UMCOR, as reported in the March 13, 2013 edition of UMNewScope.

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Annual Conference Reports

Serbia/Macedonia Provisional Annual Conference.

"On the Way Like Migrating Birds" (Feb. 7–10, Skopje, Republic of Macedonia). The invitation to the 2013 session of Serbia/Macedonia Provisional Annual Conference included an illustration of migrating birds lighting on a wire for a stopover. This illustration was a good match for the theme from Hebrews 13:14: "We don't have a permanent city here, but rather we are looking for the city that is still to come." In the district of Serbia, three young pastors will be ordained as elders on Mar. 24, in Kisač, Serbia. ia. The Rev. Ana Palik-Kunčak will continue to serve as superintendent.

In the district of Macedonia, one ordained elder retired. Macedonia currently has only one young elder and one young local pastor. All other clergy are close to retirement age or serving a local church as retired clergy. The Macedonia district conference elected a new church board in September 2012, presided over by a layperson, who is now the official legal representative in the state. It is a joyful and hopeful sign that a new generation is increasingly taking over leadership

responsibilities. In some local churches, new lay speakers are starting service, accompanied by the Rev. Wilfried Nausner, superintendent. There is reason for hope that young people will hear and explore God's call into the ministry.

Two delegates from Albania participated as guests in the conference. Their presence was a living sign that the body of Jesus Christ is exceeding any borders of nations and ethnicities. The annual conference was probably the first round of global voting on the constitutional amendments approved at the 2012 General Conference.

The next session will take place Apr. 3–6, 2014, in Serbia.

– Office of Bishop Patrick Streiff, Zurich/Switzerland, as reported in the March 13, 2013 edition of UMNewScope.

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"The democracy (Republic) will cease to exist when you take away from those who are willing to work and give to those who would not." – Thomas Jefferson