

Monthly Update

August 2013

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

This edition of the Monthly Update contains more of the summaries of the annual conference meetings from across the United Methodist Church and other information.

Recently Concerned Methodists exhibited at the National Right to Life conference in Texas. This was after the initial turbulence over the abortion bill had erupted at the capital in Austin. Governor Rick Perry spoke to the assembled people. He told how the protestors had engaged in deliberate actions designed to disrupt the law-making process, how they had yelled and did all they could to stop the proceedings. He opined that the people's actions were characteristic of the "occupy Wall Street" crowd who engaged in aggressive, often-violent behavior, as if they were paid professional demonstrators. At the time of his speech before the conference, the pro-life bill HB2 had not been passed.

Less than a week ago (as of the writing of this letter) a fellow pro-life volunteer was in Austin a few weeks after the initial protests. He told a group of us of the pro-abortion activists' actions designed to again disrupt the legislative process, of how Texas law-enforcement people started screening and searching those entering the capital; they found many carrying bricks, rocks, bags of feces, and other things they could throw onto the legislators. When this young man had joined other pro-life people to give visible support for the legislation, they were advised by the Texas Rangers (not the ball team) and other law-enforcement people to leave for their safety. A protective corridor was made through the pro-abortion activists so they could walk out of the building and be shepherded to safety. As we also learned, when pro-life people started singing the song "Amazing Grace" the pro-abortion demonstrators started chanting accolades to Satan.

Despite opposition, the Texas legislators passed HB2. We see this as a great victory.

More recently we experienced a mild form of this at our own capital in Raleigh, North Carolina. Two friends (one a pastor) and I went to the Legislative Office Building and attempted to speak before the committee charged with handling this state's equivalent of that same legislation, House Bill 695 (HB-695). It contained some common-sense provisions such as requiring a doctor to be physically present during an abortion procedure and for abortion clinics to have the same health standards as ambulatory surgical care facilities. There was strong and vocal opposition. HB-695 passed and as of the composition of this letter the state Senate equivalent S-353 is being considered. Make no mistake about it, we oppose abortion in any of its phases because it is the killing of an unborn baby, but we know that we cannot get an outright ban at this time. While these measures are designed to at least make the procedure safe for women undergoing them, we pray for the day they will come to an end in this country.

Thank you for standing with us in these lean summer months. Please keep us in your prayers along with our country and our church.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris
Executive Director

August 2013 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

Customer Service Is Not a Department...It's an Attitude. – Motto of a business establishment

The Good Stuff. Customer Service

No matter what business you're in, the truth is, you're in the customer service business. After all, if it weren't for the customers, you wouldn't be in business. As flight cancellations and delays wreak havoc on weary travelers, and planes are fuller than ever, the *Wall Street Journal* has managed to find a bright spot: United Airlines Captain Denny Flanagan.

On a flight headed your way, there is a pilot who is literally a gift from the heavens. For 21 years now, Flanagan, a former Navy pilot, has put the friendly in friendly skies. With his sense of humor and personal touch, he individually welcomes aboard every passenger on his United Airlines plane. A father of five, Flanagan has also been known to buy food for planeloads of passengers on delayed flights. He snaps photos of dogs in the cargo hold to show owners their pets are safe, and calls the parents of children traveling alone. "I want to treat them like I treat my family and it works. It's like hospitality. You stand at the door and you greet people when they come in and you say goodbye on the porch and wave to them," said Flanagan, who is 56 and lives in Ohio.

His unique brand of hospitality includes sending handwritten notes to frequent flyers....He has developed quite a following in the air and online. One of the many posts on FlyerTalk.com about Flanagan read: "His effort rubbed off on the crew too, they were great."

Attitudes are truly contagious, and Captain Flanagan's is certainly worth catching!

– E-mail received from Douglas Rainey of the Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship in America

Of Interest.

+ ***UM Committee on Relief (UMCOR)*** The Rev. Jack Amick of the Detroit Annual Conference has been hired to lead international disaster-response efforts through the UM Committee on Relief (UMCOR) beginning July 1.

– As reported in UMNewScope, Vol. 41, Issue 23; June 12, 2013

+ ***Conferences vote on divestment.*** Four UM annual (regional) conferences – New England, Minnesota, Pacific Northwest and Upper New York-voted in June to divest or have their funds divested from companies involved with Israel's occupation of Palestinian land, says Kairos Response, an advocacy group. The West Ohio, New York, Northern Illinois, California-Nevada and California-Pacific conferences already had taken similar action. The companies targeted in the recent resolutions included Caterpillar, Motorola Solutions, Hewlett Packard and, in one case, General Electric.

[Note: Once again, it is interesting to see the reasoning that is evidenced here. It shows a disappointing understanding of the complexities in the Middle East and how Israel has been attacked. There is extreme biblical ignorance here. – AOM.]

– United Methodist News Service (UMNS), as reported in UMNewScope, Vol. 41, Issue 26; July 3, 2013

Annual Conference Reports

Alabama-West Florida. The 2013 Alabama-West Florida (AWF) Annual Conference was held June 2-5, with the theme, "The Great Commission: Seeking Disciples." Bishop Paul L. Leeland welcomed clergy and lay members to Christ UMC in Mobile, Ala. The people of the AWF Conference contributed over \$46,000 in a special offering for Hurricane Sandy relief. Bishop Lindsey Davis of the Louisville Area preached at the opening worship service on Matthew 28:18-20, "Our Primary Task." During his episcopal address, Bishop Leeland acknowledged the clergy of our conference, expressed gratitude for the start of eleven new churches...

More than 500 persons participated in the 2013 Mission Day. Over 1,500 combined volunteer hours were spent on 20 projects. Close to 1,500 UMCOR relief kits were assembled as part of this day and will be sent to the warehouse for immediate use.

President Cam West of Huntingdon College received the Francis Asbury Award and Norma Taylor Mitchell received the Alice Lee Award. Dr. Lawson Bryan reported on the Apportionment Task Force that met to determine the fairness of the current formula (75% is financial strength and 25% is membership), recommending continued use of the formula.

Dr. Wesley Wachob reported on the task force that met to determine the salaries of district superintendents. They took the average top 25 clergy salaries (excluding district superintendents and conference staff) and made that the salary of the district superintendent, which is \$113, 637. The conference established an \$11.109 million budget for mission and ministry for 2014, level

with 2013.

The conference approved a resolution [that] “calls upon the Alabama delegation to the United States Congress and the Florida delegation to the United States Congress to join in a Congressional effort to pass Federal immigration laws that provide for compassion, respect, and justice for immigrant children, workers, and their families.” Another resolution calls upon the Alabama Legislature to, “pass appropriate legislation to curb the activities of predatory lenders.”

Membership is 145,049, down 1,450. Church school attendance stands at 26,830, down 5%.

– Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference, as reported in UMNewScope, Vol. 41, Issue 24; June 19, 2013

Alaska Missionary. The Alaska Missionary Conference met May 31-Jun. 1 at St. John UMC in Anchorage. Bishop Grant Hagiya presided. Main actions enacted by the conference include approval of a new itineration policy, using “core interpreters” and celebration of Samoan ministries. The conference adopted a resolution making Imagine No Malaria the conference mission priority. Proposed constitutional amendments were all approved. Seven persons were commissioned for missionary work in Alaska. Membership is 3,539, down 59.

– Alaska Missionary Conference, as reported in UMNewScope, Vol. 41, Issue 24; June 19, 2013

Baltimore-Washington. More than 1,700 UMs from 637 area churches in the Baltimore-Washington Conference gathered May 29-31 to sow seeds of worship, learning, mission, stewardship and holy conferencing in their continuing efforts to grow disciples for the transformation of the world. The 229th conference session, held at the Marriott Waterfront Hotel in Baltimore, was led by Bishop Marcus Matthews, who once served as a pastor, district superintendent and Council of Ministries director in the conference and returned last September as its episcopal leader. The theme of the session was “Sowing the Seed/Be Light.” During the sermon of the opening worship service, Bishop Matthews asked churches to do three things in the coming year: become prayer stations, bring at least one person to Christ and adopt a public school in its zip code. Members also celebrated additions to God's kingdom during the opening worship service, when, as an offering, the names of 2,341 people whom members brought to Christ during the last year were written on colorful cards and brought forward to the altar. During the session, the members, with no debate and in an unprecedented unanimous vote, adopted a \$16.8 million budget for 2014. Members also considered a number of social justice-related resolutions. Members voted to support efforts to end gun violence, efforts to provide earned sick leave to all workers, and to work to end bullying.

During the session, the conference recognized the Rev. Paul Jones, 95, who was attending his 74th consecutive annual conference session. His presence emphasized the continuing traditions of and heritage of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, the oldest in the denomination. The conference was streamed live and members celebrated the 99th birthday of Eunice Mathews, the widow of Bishop James Mathews and the daughter of E. Stanley Jones. During the ordination service, the kneeler that was used by the ordinands was from the altar rail of Memorial Methodist Church, that Mathew's father, renowned missionary E. Stanley Jones, experienced his conversion to the Christian faith. During the memorial service, the saints of the church were remembered with the tolling of the Cokesbury bell from Cokesbury College, which was established at the denomination's founding Christmas Conference in 1784.

Membership in the Baltimore-Washington Conference is 177,160, down 4,335.

– Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference, as reported in UMNewScope, Vol. 41, Issue 24; June 19, 2013

California-Pacific. “How Firm a Foundation” was the theme for the 29th Session of the California-Pacific Annual Conference, meeting in the chapel at the University of Redlands, Calif. June 13-15. This was the first session for new Presiding Bishop Minerva G. Carcaño. Bishop Murray Finck of the ELCA Synod brought greetings to the closing service of commissioning and ordination, where Highlights include Dr. Phillip Clayton, dean of Claremont School of Theology introducing their new president, the Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Kuan. The cabinet led in the presentation and discussion of the formal realignment of seven Southern California districts into four-North, South, East and West. The conference also has a Hawaii District, which cares for the Hawaiian Islands, Guam and Saipan. The Conference Navigation Team led a process of beginning to discern a new vision. The conference approved the constitutional amendments, and passed resolutions on immigration reform, biblical obedience, revocation of Philippine presidential executive order 546, creation of a task force to end child poverty, demand to release Jonas Burgos in the Philippines, observance of Disability Sunday in the Cal-Pac Conference, Filipino contribution to labor movement in California and mass incarceration.

The conference closed several churches, with a prayer of thanks for over 300 combined years of witness in the name of Christ: Toluca Lake UMC (Toluca Lake), Light of the Canyon (Anaheim Hills,) and St. Paul's, Vermont Square and Tolutatsi Pacific Islanders UMCs (all in Los Angeles.) Membership is 75,202, down 2,471.

– Gary M. Keene, California-Pacific Annual Conference, as reported in UMNewScope, Vol. 41, Issue 26; July 3, 2013

Illinois Great Rivers (IGRC). The Illinois Great Rivers (IGRC) Annual Conference was held in Peoria, Ill., June 5-8, under the theme of “Extravagant Generosity.” The 2013 session completed a five-year journey through the five practices of fruitful congregations. Bishop Thomas Bickerton of the Pittsburgh Area was a special guest.

Laity of the conference collected \$9,555 to help in furnishing the John Kofi Asmah School in Monrovia, Liberia, a school they had built with laity session offerings from previous years. The conference also took offerings for New Hope UMC in Liberia; for the Tom Brown Scholarship at Wiley College; and scholarships for Africa University (\$7,933).

The body approved a agreement with the Northern Illinois Conference and Disciple Bible Outreach Ministries of Illinois, Inc.,

that will partner with the two conferences to provide Disciple Bible Study in the state's prison system. The annual conference also approved a resolution, "A Christian Response to Violence," which called for enforcement of present gun laws, universal background checks on all gun purchases, a strengthening of governmental mental health services and a call for local churches to be places of discussion of the spiritual and ethical issues related to the growing presence of violence in society and communities.

Bishop Jonathan Keaton, in his first year of presiding in Illinois, ordained seven elders and commissioned three provisional deacons and seven provisional elders. A total of 23 pastors, celebrating 567.5 years, retired. Membership is at 133,753, down 1.73%.

– Paul E. Black, Illinois Great Rivers Annual Conference, as reported in *UMNewScope*, Vol. 41, Issue 24; June 19, 2013

Indiana. The fifth session of the Indiana Annual Conference met June 6-8 at the Indiana Convention Center in downtown Indianapolis.

The theme was "Transforming the World: Be a World Changer," based on Romans 12:1-2. Bishop Michael J. Coyner presided over his ninth conference in Indiana. More than 2,000 members and 500 guests experienced the significance of the theme with the presence, music and witness of the UM-related Africa University Choir from Mutare, Zimbabwe. The Rev. Mark Beeson defined what he has experienced to be five essentials of team leadership—the leader, mission, team members, value and cause.

The day before conference, more than 150 volunteers from across the state connected with the community by working at a Habitat for Humanity house and two UM-related community centers, repairing a home, preparing and packing meals at Roberts Park UMC in downtown Indianapolis for homeless residents, plus knitting caps for babies at Riley Hospital for Children. More than 100 members and guests participated in a Fun Run/Walk to raise money and awareness of conference-related campus ministries across the state. During a community outreach on Friday, hundreds of members and residents poured onto Monument Circle in the heart of downtown for a Family Fun Night of food, games, entertainment and music provided by area churches, conference youth and camping ministries.

The three-day session included six worship services, including a memorial service remembering 36 deceased pastors and 36 deceased pastors' spouses, a retirement service recognizing 1,425 years of service by 56 retiring clergy and a closing commissioning-ordination service when 13 provisional members were ordained and 10 candidates for ministry were commissioned.

The conference approved a 2014 income budget of \$13.5 million; approved a campaign to raise \$1.6 million for Africa University; heard a report from the UM Foundation of Indiana celebrating that during the past four years, the foundation's Rejuvenate program has granted \$1.8 million to 419 pastors and their families for education debt retirement of clergy, pastors with financial emergencies, retirement and the Call Anew program; approved continuing funds for Medicare supplements to surviving spouses at \$250 per month; and defeated a proposal to end funding of Medicare supplements in 2014 for retired clergy, resulting in a \$700,000 increase in the 2014 budget. Membership is 196,564, down 1,353.

– Daniel R. Gangler, Indiana Conference, as reported in *UMNewScope*, Vol. 41, Issue 24; June 19, 2013

Iowa. The 2013 session of the Iowa Annual Conference convened under the banner of "Imagine a Healthy Church/Imagine a Healthy World," June 8-10, at the Iowa Events Center, Des Moines. Resident Bishop Julius Calvin Trimble welcomed Bishop J. Michael Lowry (Central Texas) and Bishop Sally Dyck (Northern Illinois) as guest preachers. In her sermon, as part of the service for the ordering of ministry, Bishop Sally Dyck said, "the ministry of the church of Jesus Christ is like rocket science. . . . I assure you, ministry takes all of our gifts, skills, grace and grits! It takes every ounce of who we are." Three new strategic priorities were adopted: "creating world transforming communities of faith," "equipping ourselves and others as transformational leaders" and "directing our resources to our common goals." A budget of \$16,273,502 was approved, representing a 3.8% increase over the 2013 budget. The proposed constitutional amendments were all approved. Two resolutions were approved: one calling for ending human trafficking; the second calling for reducing military spending to meet human needs. Conference membership is 171,706, down 3,781.

– Arthur McClanahan, Iowa Conference, as reported in *UMNewScope*, Vol. 41, Issue 26; July 3, 2013

Kentucky. The Kentucky Annual Conference met June 10-12 in Covington at the Northern Kentucky Convention Center. Our theme for the 2013 conference was "Reach the World, Thriving Faith Communities." Bishop Lindsey Davis presided. Conference began with the opening worship and service of remembrance. Bishop Davis provided words of welcome; retired bishop Al Gwinn preached the sermon, "And Are We Yet Alive?" Bishop Davis presided over the service of commissioning and ordination. Nine persons were ordained elders, and one was ordained deacon. Six were commissioned as provisional elders, and one was commissioned as a provisional deacon. Conference Lay Leader, Lew Nicholls, led morning worship, sharing about his "Encounters with God." Conference celebrated the service of eight retiring clergypersons. Bishop Gwinn preached on "Installed for Eternity" and representatives from the retiring class symbolically passed the mantle to representatives of the newly ordained class.

The new "potato drop" brought together volunteers from our membership with volunteers from other area churches and hotels and the Northern Kentucky Visitor and Convention Bureau to bag and distribute more than 40,000 pounds of sweet potatoes.

Conference received reports from the New Church Development team announcing the intention of starting 40 new churches this quadrennium. The 2014 budget was established at \$9,134,067, an increase of \$134,067 over the 2013 budget. Membership is 152,224, up 363.

– Kentucky Annual Conference, as reported in *UMNewScope*, Vol. 41, Issue 26; July 3, 2013

Louisiana. More than 1,000 UMs gathered at Centenary College in Shreveport, La. June 2-5 to celebrate “Blessings in the Wilderness” during the 2013 session of the Louisiana Annual Conference. Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey delivered her first episcopal address on Monday morning, focusing on newly adopted Core Values for the Louisiana Annual Conference. Bishop Harvey said that ascribing to the five core values of Integrity, Accountability, Unrelenting Love for All People, Courage and Risk, and Holding Nothing Sacred but the Mission will assist the conference in “living into its vision for a preferred future.” A Transition Task Force, appointed to guide the conference in the implementation of major budget cuts and the elimination of several conference offices, issued its report. A Structure Revision Team, appointed to study [the] current structure as a conference, proposed the dissolution of the Conference Ministry Team and a movement toward a strategic visioning entity known as the “Joshua Team.” Members approved the report.

Three persons were ordained elders in full connection with the conference, and two were ordained as deacon in full connection. Five were commissioned as provisional elders, and one was commissioned as provisional deacon. There were 17 clergy retirees. All proposed constitutional amendments from the 2012 General Conference received affirmation. The body passed a resolution, proposed by the conference Native American ministry, asking that the annual conference and its members request that flood insurance rates be kept affordable and encouraging the sustaining of federal flood insurance programs. Membership is 120,935, up 945.

– Betty Backstrom, Louisiana Annual Conference, as reported in UMNewScope, Vol. 41, Issue 24; June 19, 2013

Minnesota. Are we ready for something special in Minnesota? Are we ready to become bold Spirit-leaders? That's what Bishop Bruce R. Ough asked of the 715 Minnesota Annual Conference members who attended the 159th session of the Minnesota Annual Conference May 29-31 at the River's Edge Convention Center in Saint Cloud, Minn. In his inaugural episcopal address, Bishop Ough laid out a vision in which churches can become bold leaders in their communities. Bishop Ough says we have three imperatives: to reach new people, cultivate spiritual vitality, and to heal a broken world. This means we must “embrace and align our work so we can turn outward and engage the world with a burning desire to offer Christ and have a transforming impact.” He added that in order to be transformed, bold leaders pray. In legislative session, members voted to divest of stock of General Electric, which provides goods and services to Israel, a country that continues to build settlements in Palestinian-occupied territories-something The UMC has opposed. Members also approved a resolution to allow for the election of General Conference 2016 delegates in 2014. This is to allow more time for delegates to caucus, conduct research in order to write legislation, and be in fellowship with delegates from other conferences. Additionally, members approved legislation that calls for a study guide on marriage, highlighting the various positions UMs hold on same-sex unions. The committee that will create the study guide must comprise a youth and young adult, as well as clergy and laity from each of the five regional districts.

Members affirmed a resolution to “be in prayer, discernment, and action” regarding same-sex unions, as well as gun control and matters of community safety. Session members also passed a 2014 annual conference budget totaling just over \$6.2 million, at the same level as the 2003 budget. The 2014 budget is organized around our missional areas of Developing Missional Leaders, Equipping Missional Congregations, Extending our Missional Impact, Generating Missional Resources, Aligning Our Work-Leadership of the Annual Conference, and Aligning Our Work-Supporting the Annual Conference. Membership is 67,789, down 2,228.

– Amanda Yanchury, Minnesota Annual Conference, as reported in UMNewScope, Vol. 41, Issue 24; June 19, 2013

Mississippi. Bishop James E. Swanson, Sr. led his first annual conference as the episcopal leader of the Mississippi Conference June 6-9 in Jackson. Members celebrated the 25th anniversary of its merger of several conferences within the state. They also acknowledged another significant event in the history of the Mississippi UMC-the 1963 signing of the Born of Conviction Statement, which 28 Methodist ministers signed, declaring their disapproval of discrimination. They were criticized and their lives were threatened, and many of them left the state. In honor of their bravery, Myrlie Evers, widow of slain civil rights activist Medgar Evers, presented the group with the conference's Emma Elzy Award, given to those for outstanding achievement in race relations. More than 400 youth attended activities planned for them. The theme for 2013 conference was “The POWER of We.”

– Mississippi Annual Conference, as reported in UMNewScope, Vol. 41, Issue 26; July 3, 2013

North Georgia. Bishop B. Michael Watson called to order the 147th North Georgia Annual Conference session under the theme “Bridges to Mission,” marking his fifth year of service in the North Georgia Episcopal Area. Throughout the three-day session at the Classic Center in Athens, June 11-13, North Georgia UMs celebrated their growing commitment and connections to nations around the world as well as to local outreach efforts. The conference welcomed 24 international mission partners from The Bahamas, El Salvador, East Africa, Portugal, the Philippines and Russia, plus World Methodist Evangelism and local mission agency Action Ministries. Each “Bridges” mission partner made a presentation on the floor and then held more in-depth informational sessions in the evening. Each conference attendee was encouraged to take part in two breakout sessions and to consider partnering with one or more “Bridges” mission opportunities. Continuing the focus on mission, conference members and guests assembled 518 UMCOR cleaning kits, donated 67 units of blood through the Red Cross, ran an early morning 5K to raise funds for the North Georgia Conference Housing and Homeless Council and gave more than \$100,000 to the conference special offering for Bridges mission partners.

The conference ordained two deacons and 18 elders. 27 retirees were honored at the retirement service.

The conference established a budget of \$23,994,749 for 2014, representing a 0.2% decrease from 2013. This represents the fifth straight year of a reduced budget. Conference Mission and Ministry budgets comprise 30.1% of the conference portion of the budget versus 28% in 2013. The Annual Conference passed five resolutions on increasing young adult participation by asking each district to nominate at least five adults between the ages of 18-35 as at-large delegates; asking the bishop to consider amending the days of annual conference to include a weekend to pave the way for more young adult participation; amending the guidelines for hosting conference to include a recommendation that the hotels making up the 2,500 bed requirement be signatories to The Code (a policy against the sexual exploitation of children); supporting comprehensive immigration reform; and working together to end bullying. Membership is 362,802, up 3,991. There were 6,347 professions of faith, up 526 from the year before. Persons participating in Christian formation and other small group stands at 141,545, up 5,939 from the previous year.

– Sybil Davidson, North Georgia Annual Conference, as reported in UMNewScope, Vol. 41, Issue 26; July 3, 2013

Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference. The theme for the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference's (OIM) 171st annual conference was “No New Faces-No More Church” referencing the lack of young folks in our churches and the need to look at ministry and church differently in order to grow. Conference was held at Preston, Okla. June 6-9. Presiding Bishop Robert E. Hayes Jr. preached at all worship services. Marcus Briggs-Cloud, well known Native American musician and justice advocate, served as worship leader. Choirs, individuals or groups presented songs in their tribal languages-Choctaw, Muscogee Creek, Navajo, Cherokee and Euchee-representing eight different churches. A proposed budget of \$1,077,404 was approved and all constitutional amendments were approved. Membership is 6,186, up 11.

– Josephine Deere, OIM, as reported in UMNewScope, Vol. 41, Is. 26; July 3, 2013

Pacific Northwest. The 140th session of the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference took place at the Wenatchee Convention Center in Wenatchee, Wash., June 14-16, 2013. Bishop Grant J. Hagiya presided. Members of the conference reduced the budget by 3.36% as proposed by the Commission on Finance and Administration and a variety of related financial items. The body also passed a petition requesting that the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits (GBPHB) exclude companies involved in the Israeli occupation from PNWAC investments. Members supported petitions calling for compassionate immigration reform, increased gun regulation, and mental health measures in Washington and Idaho. A petition to make all conference properties weapons-free by default was referred.

The body affirmed the Western Jurisdiction's Statement of Gospel Obedience that asserts that The UMC is in error on the subject of homosexuality's incompatibility with Christian teaching. It passed a statement “reaffirm[ing] its commitment to working for the full civil and ecclesiastical rights and privileges of all persons, including LGBTQ persons.” The conference voted to approve the proposed constitutional amendments.

A class of 20 retirees was celebrated, and new members were welcomed at the service of commissioning and ordination. Three individuals were ordained as elders. Four individuals were commissioned as provisional elders. Membership is 46,165 down 2,597.

– Patrick Scriven, Pacific Northwest Annual Conference, as reported in UMNewScope, Vol. 41, Issue 26; July 3, 2013

Poland. A few minutes prior to the opening of the conference session, June 14-16 in Klarysew/Warsaw, Bishop Patrick Streiff and the Leading Superintendent Edward Pulecki agreed on a written accord, witnessed by Bishop Christian Alsted, representing the Council of Bishops. As a result they could jointly underline that the Annual Conference in Poland will remain part of the global UMC and change its internal regulations according to the global provisions of The Book of Discipline. The unity of the church will be preserved. This direction will be implemented by newly elected leadership. The accord was welcomed with thankfulness and relief by all conference members. Prior to the session and during the meeting many Methodists in Poland, had prayed for a positive solution.

During the conference session, a new leading superintendent, Andrzej Malicki, was elected according to the present internal regulations. He also signed the written accord afterward, making sure that the newly achieved unity can be carried on into the future. He will use the title “vicar of the bishop” in the future, a title well understood in the Polish, Roman Catholic context. The new cabinet will include three additional superintendents: for the Southern District the Rev. Józef Bartos, for the Western District the Rev. Sawomir Rodaszyski (serving as substitute leading superintendent), and for the Masuria District the Rev. Waldemar Eggert.

– Bishop Patrick Streiff, Zurich/Switzerland, as reported in UMNewScope, Vol. 41, Issue 26; July 3, 2013

South Georgia. The 2013 South Georgia Annual Conference session was held June 2-4 at the Macon Centreplex in Macon, Ga. under the theme “The Least of These.” Bishop James R. King, Jr. presided over his fifth session in South Georgia. Nearly 150 volunteers spent their Monday lunch break packaging more than 30,000 meals, which contain a vitamin packet and a scoop each of rice, soy flour, and dehydrated vegetables. On Tuesday, attendees supported the Conference's local mission agencies, donating movies, toiletries, school supplies, baby wipes and more to Magnolia Manor, the Methodist Children's Home, Open Door Community Center, Vashti, Wesley Community Centers and Wesley Glen.

The Conference approved an \$11.02 million budget for mission and ministry for the next year. Six persons were ordained into the order of elder, and one into the order of deacon. Twenty pastors retired, and seven were recognized for achieving their 50th

anniversary in ministry. Membership is 124,872, down 3,249. Church school attendance stands at 36,423, down 1,703.

– Kara Witherow, Kelly Roberson, South Georgia Conference, as reported in UMNewScope, Vol. 41, Issue 24; June 19, 2013

South Germany. The 11th South Germany Annual Conference gathered June 12-16 in Oberursel und Karlsruhe, Germany with Bishop Rosemarie Wenner presiding. The conference theme was “What Do You believe?” This theme was taken up several times during the conference, including in the opening worship service, in which Pastor Barry Sloan, Director of Evangelism, preached on Acts 2:42. The theme was taken up when we heard from six speakers, who presented different denominations and beliefs: Muslim, Atheist, the Korean Church, Catholic, United Methodist and the German state church. The superintendents presented a paper in which they discussed the strengths and problems of the appointment system. The paper stressed that many interests are in conflict when an appointment is made and that these interests cannot all receive equal consideration. The superintendents asked for trust as the cabinet tries to take all factors into consideration when making appointments. In other business the conference voted to continue funding the adult education program “Essen & Mehr” (food and more) even if the government stops subsidizing the program.

The conference honored five retiring pastors and ordained two women as elders. Membership (confessing members) is 16,462, down 186. The number of baptized members in the conference stands at 13,392.

– Jonathan Whitlock, South Germany Annual Conference, as reported in UMNewScope, Vol. 41, Issue 26; July 3, 2013

Switzerland-France-North Africa. The Switzerland-France-North Africa Annual Conference met June 6-9, in Berne, the capital of Switzerland. Its theme “Dignity Would Be If . . .” was dealt with during the plenary sessions and the time of our gathering; it is also the theme of an exhibition and a number of other activities of the host congregation throughout this year. Bishop Patrick Streiff presided.

One focus of the conference was the question of how to make use of the church properties so that they serve best the strategy “to lead more people to Jesus Christ.” Another focus was revision of church structures so that they serve the same purpose. Conference members approved a new leadership model, which meets both legal requirements and provisions of The Book of Discipline.

Other conference business included discussions on how local churches can be revitalized and how new ministries can be established

in order to share the gospel in an increasingly secularized and culturally diverse society. The conference members approved to add North Africa to the name of the annual conference in order to make this unique part of this area more visible.)

The Switzerland-France-North Africa Annual Conference includes local churches and ministries in Algeria, Austria (1), Belgium (1), France, Germany (1), Switzerland, and Tunisia (1). Membership is 7,474, up 97 from last year.

– Urs Schweizer, Switzerland-France-North Africa Annual Conference, as reported in UMNewScope, Vol. 41, Issue 24; June 19, 2013

Virginia. Nearly 4,000 clergy and laity representatives of UM churches across Virginia gathered at the Hampton Roads Convention Center in Hampton, Va., June 21-23 for the annual conference meeting. The theme of the gathering was “Lord, Teach Us to Pray.” Bishop Young Jin Cho presided over the conference for the first time since he was elected bishop last July. Bishop Cho preached at the closing worship service. Bible study leader was the Rev. Dr. Steve Harper, professor of Spiritual Formation at the Florida campus of Asbury Theological Seminary. Harper is author of 14 books, including several on prayer. A special offering was taken to support children's ministries in four countries: Brazil, Mozambique, Cambodia and Virginia in the U.S. Volunteers helped bag and load more than 20 tons of donated potatoes to be picked up by regional food banks, church pantries, soup kitchens and other local feeding agencies. Co-sponsored by the Society of Saint Andrew, the potato drop will provide 120,000 to 135,000 servings of food to the region's poor and hungry. Members considered 4 resolutions, including 1 calling on the U.S. government and the state of Virginia to increase the minimum wage, and 1 opposing predatory lending practices and calling on the Virginia General Assembly to put a cap of 36% APR on all loans.

– Virginia Annual Conference, as reported in UMNewScope, Vol. 41, Issue 26; July 3, 2013

West Michigan. The West Michigan Annual Conference met May 29-June 1 at Calvin College in Grand Rapids. The focus, “Disciples Made in Michigan: Inspire,” was tangible in the very air breathed by all present. The modeling of servant leadership by Bishop Deborah Lieder Kiesey, a recurring theme of cooperation between the state's two annual conferences, and legislative action one clergy member called, “changing the wind,” all contributed to an overall sense of rekindled hope. Bishop Kiesey named an Area Task Force to raise at least \$1.5 million for Imagine No Malaria. Bishop “Deb” celebrated the action as a person who has overcome another disease-polio-once thought to be unbeatable.

After discussion, the conference approved this statement: “The West Michigan Conference encourages all congregations to welcome into their congregational community gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals and couples, welcoming them into full participation. We encourage pastors to provide pastoral care to all individuals and couples, regardless of their sexual orientation. We encourage our churches to make this openness known in as many ways as possible.”

The conference affirmed support of the right and need for workers to organize and form unions and encouraged members to write legislators to repeal Michigan's Right to Work law; an item asking for balanced use of inclusive language in conference worship was approved; an item encouraging the Michigan legislature to declare churches as “gun free zones”; and all four

constitutional amendments coming from General Conference. 4 persons were ordained elder (average age 48); one person was ordained deacon (age 55); one person was commissioned as a provisional deacon (age 56). Seventeen persons retired. Membership is 60,644, down 1,309.

– Kay DeMoss, West Michigan Annual Conference, as reported in UMNewScope, Vol. 41, Issue 24; June 19, 2013

Western Pennsylvania. Western PA Annual Conference members were blessed by dynamic preaching, insightful creative presentations on disciple making and the joyful participation of church leaders from Zimbabwe during the 2013 conference session at Grove City College June 13-16. The theme was “Disciples Making Disciples.” Presiding Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton urged leaders to make disciple making the top priority in their congregations. In the laity address, conference lay leader Sharon Gregory declared that just as spark plugs provide power for engines, the Holy Spirit can be the spark plug for Christian lives. Members packaged 25,000 meals for “Stop Hunger NOW.” The pre-packaged meals will be delivered throughout the world to meet the needs of the hungry. Eastbrook Mission Barn volunteers at Grove City received 4,507 UMCOR kits. The conference approved an apportionment budget for 2014 of \$9.55 million, a slight increase over the \$9.06 million 2013 budget, but a decrease of more than \$1 million from the originally proposed budget. The total budget for the conference, which includes endowment and other income, was set at \$38.09 million. Other legislative action included support for a Racial Justice Act, encouraging the Pennsylvania General Assembly to enact legislation that would require courts to consider evidence of racism in sentencing.

Legislation growing out of a Judicial Council decision on use of funds given by the former Pittsburgh East District to the East Africa Annual Conference included resolutions asking both the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) and the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) to provide guidelines and insight to Conference Boards of Global Ministries (CBGM) to establish healthy direct partnerships and ensure financial accountability in use of funds. A related petition seeking to recoup funds intended for a church and a maize mill in Uganda was referred to CBGM. Conference membership is 173,928, down 3,291.

– Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference, as reported in UMNewScope, Vol. 41, Issue 26; July 3, 2013

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If you will not fight for the right, when you can easily win without bloodshed;
if you will not fight when victory will be sure; you may come to the moment when you
will have to fight with all the odds against you and a precarious chance of survival".

– Winston Churchill