

# Monthly Update

October 2013

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

This “Monthly Update” contains the last of the information from across our United Methodist Church and significant actions passed by the various annual conferences.

Despite the fact that we have an overwhelming amount of data that we had wanted to give you, we still found it important to include information on a group that is an alternative to the Boy Scouts of America (BSA). Our children are such a priceless gift to us from God – and we simply cannot take a chance on their being led astray if there is any way that we can prevent it. As I had shared with you in previous correspondence in the late spring when the BSA was considering accepting “gay” boys into scouting, that once-fine organization was a factor in molding me into the person I am today. I was in Cub Scouts and then graduated on to the Boy Scouts where I achieved the Eagle rank and served as an assistant Scoutmaster to Troop 47M. At the time it was deactivated long after I had gone on to do other things, it was the oldest surviving troop in the entire state of Texas. When I went to college I joined and became a life member of Alpha Phi Omega, the Scout service fraternity. Still later, I became a life member of the National Eagle Scout Association (NESA). I treasure my long association with the Scouts – but recognize how its present leadership has led it off the right path into dangerous territory for its boys. It is for those reasons that I highly recommend you explore this alternative group that is included in “The Good Stuff” of this Monthly Update, chiefly because it does provide a healthy alternative to the direction taken by the Boy Scouts of America.

We all know that what is going on in our society – we are involved in the “culture war” that will affect all of us in its outcome: pushing abortion, homosexual advocacy, and various international confrontations. We face many of the same battles in our United Methodist Church. One of the most important areas is that of homosexual normalization – which we call a “key battle” issue: if we ever lose that battle, we will lose the United Methodist Church. We in Concerned Methodists have been engaged in all areas of the renewal movement since 1989 but very active in the area of opposing homosexual normalization since 1996. We have zeroed in on the successive general conferences and helped stand firm in the ones to include that of 1996 in Denver, 2000 in Cleveland, 2004 in Pittsburgh, 2008 in Ft. Worth, and 2012 in Tampa. Yet the other side is not giving up. One of the tactics they are now using is to get more young people involved in Annual Conference so that they can get elected to General Conference. Youth are generally liberal, believing in the full acceptance .of “gays” into every aspect of the church. In that way, the other side can gain power “from the ground up” and hope to have a majority at the 2016 General Conference. We are doing everything we can to oppose this.

We cannot let up but must continue the fight. Please to pray and stand with us as we continue to do what the Lord has called us to. From the bottom of my heart, I thank you.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris,  
Executive Director

## **October 2013 Update**

The way you live your life is your gift to those who come after. Make it a fantastic one.

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### **The Good Stuff. *Trail Life USA is the Christian alternative to the BSA***

[Note: This is included because it provides a healthy alternative to the errant direction taken by the Boy Scouts of America.]

AFA (the American Family Association) is proud to support a new outdoor adventure program for boys as an alternative to the Boy Scouts of America (BSA). In May, the BSA voted to begin allowing open and avowed homosexuals into its ranks, leading to a mass exodus of families looking to protect their sons. The new group, Trail Life USA, was unveiled publicly for the first time on September 6 in Nashville, TN, to more than 1,200 former Scoutmasters, Eagle Scouts, parents, church leaders and former Boy Scouts of America professionals who attended the inaugural Leadership Convention.

Trail Life USA is a Christian adventure, character, and leadership movement for young men. The K-12 program centers on outdoor experiences that build a young man's skills and allow him to grow on a personal level and as a role model and leader for his peers. Living the Trail Life is a journey established on timeless values derived from the Bible.

"It's God-honoring. It's Christ-centered," says AFA's Randy Sharp, who attended the convention. "We got a sneak peek at some of the curriculum and handbook material. We were thrilled to find the margins of some pages containing scripture for the boys to read, to meditate on, and to memorize." (See story at OneNewsNow)

Trail Life USA is worthy of your support. Please take a few moments to look over their website and watch the introductory video: <http://www.traillifeusa.com/>

If your family is looking for an alternative to the BSA, I strongly recommend Trail Life USA.

– E-mail. Tim Wildmon, President of the American Family Association, P O Drawer 2440, Tupelo, MS 38803.  
Sept. 10, 2013

### **Annual Conference Reports+**

**North Texas.** At the 2013 annual conference Episcopal leader Michael McKee invited the annual conference to imagine the unimaginable. He gave them four goals to aim for:

- 1) Imagine if each of convened a conversation with parents and teenagers so that parents could tell their story of Jesus to their teenagers
- 2) Imagine if 10,000 United Methodists in the North Texas Conference gave up one meal a week during Lent 2014 and donated that money to help eradicate hunger or poverty in their area
- 3) Imagine if every church established a relationship with a public school and supported that school with volunteers, readers and mentors
- 4) Imagine if each one of us worshipped this year at one of our new church starts; and let the church planter know you are coming as a prayer ambassador from your church

There were two major legislative moves. The North Texas Annual Conference voted to elect delegates to the 2016 General and Jurisdictional Conferences at the 2014 meeting, as permitted in the 2012 Book of Discipline, para. 502.3. Secondly, the Commission on the Status and Role of Women (COSROW) and the Committee on Religion and Race were reinstated and defined by name, function, connection and membership. This was done in accordance with the Judicial Council Decision 1225 dated Oct. 27, 2012.

– The Rev. Sheron C. Patterson, communication's officer for the North Texas Conference

**Northern Illinois.** The Northern Illinois Annual Conference met June 5-8, 2013 at Pheasant Run Resort, St. Charles, Ill. Under the theme: Who is My Neighbor? In her first State of the Church address with the NIC, presiding Bishop Sally Dyck said while it's not quite been a year, she already feels likes she's been a part of the Northern Illinois Annual Conference neighborhood for a long time. In the wake of the Newtown and Boston

Marathon tragedies, natural disasters and continued violence on the streets of Chicago, now more than ever she said “the world needs good neighbors.”

“Who is my neighbor? This is the salient question of our time as it challenges us in how we live as followers of Jesus,” said Bishop Dyck.

Bishop Dyck set several goals for the coming year: 100 churches participating in Spanish as a second language courses offered by the conference; 100 churches to begin the process of becoming Immigrant Welcoming Congregations; raise \$1 million dollars for Imagine No Malaria, which a resolution from the floor to do so passed.

On legislative action, annual conference members approved nearly two dozen resolutions which included: divesting from the coal industry; affirming clergy and congregations who support marriage equality; establishing a conference-wide property & liability insurance program; supporting comprehensive immigration reform; and establishing a task force advocating the prevention of gun violence. The annual conference also amended the standing rules to allow for elections of General and Jurisdictional delegates in 2014 – two years before the next General Conference. The 2012 General Conference Constitutional amendments passed by a wide margin. The Annual Conference also set aside time to begin Acts of Repentance to Native American and Indigenous people with future events and book studies planned in the coming year. A budget of \$8,024,211 exclusive of pensions and health benefits passed. \$1,239,267 of this total is directed to support new faith community work of the annual conference. A modest increase of apportionment giving of 1 percent is assumed.

Volunteers assembled 1,178 health and hygiene kits for Church World Service and UMCOR. Volunteers also packed nearly 5,500 pounds of food at the Northern Illinois Food Bank during an afternoon mission opportunity. Their efforts will provide about 4,600 meals to our hungry neighbors in northern Illinois.

The average weekly attendance of the Northern Illinois Conference was 34,717 in 2012, a decrease of 3.2 percent from 2011. Total NIC membership decreased by 1.6 percent to 92,620 in 2012. Meanwhile, average weekly attendance for all Christian formation classes decreased by 6.4 percent to 11,660. New Faith Communities average 2,000 worshippers. The 175th Session of the Northern Illinois Annual Conference will be held June 8-10, 2014.

– Anne Marie Gerhardt, director of communications, Northern Illinois Annual Conference

**Northwest Texas.** The Annual Conference met June 4-6, 2013 at Polk Street United Methodist Church, Amarillo, Texas with Bishop W. Earl Bledsoe officiating. The guest speaker was Bishop Janice Riggle Huie, of the Houston Episcopal Area. Main actions enacted by the conference were: Committed to uprooting ourselves to move beyond our comfort zones and reach people for Christ; discussed the partnership with the United Theological Seminary to create the Christian Academy; and committed to 10 church planters and planting 50 churches over five years. Resolutions adopted by the conference: closed two churches; accepted five churches from the Rio Grande Annual Conference; and approved four constitutional amendments from General Conference 2012. Statistics: Membership, 64,000; worship attendance, 20,000; and church school attendance, 8,000.

– Leia Danielle Williams

**Oklahoma.** The Oklahoma Annual Conference met May 27-30, in Oklahoma City. The May 27-30 meeting in Oklahoma City opened one week after deadly tornadoes strafed the state’s center. Already the church was deeply engaged in the disaster response, and more than \$250,000 in aid donations had arrived in the Oklahoma Conference Treasurer’s Office. During the meeting, Bishop Robert Hayes Jr. of the Oklahoma Area accepted money gifts for the tornado victims from Manos Juntas Mexico, a mission with the poor at Rio Bravo, Mexico; from Lydia Patterson Institute, a border high school at El Paso, Texas; and, from a 15-student touring choir from Africa University. Oklahomans give ongoing support to these United Methodist-related entities. The bishop announced several U.S. annual (regional) conferences pledged funds for the relief effort, too. As part of the meeting, more than 600 delegates volunteered at 14 mission sites during the afternoon of May 29. At three of the locations, groups helped remove tornado debris. “We will always remember this annual conference as the one that took place in the aftermath” of the tragedy, said Bishop Hayes.

Bishop Hayes grew emotional when accepting an offering of coins, wrapped in a shawl, from Methodists in Bolivia to start a new church in Oklahoma. He remarked that wages average \$2 per day in the South American

nation. “So much can be learned from those who have little or nothing in material things but who are rich in the Spirit,” he declared in his episcopal address.

The 2014 apportionment was \$16,663,047, a drop of \$300,000. Church leaders believe the smaller budget will accommodate a big mission: Oklahoma is realigning existing funding in order to emphasize planting more churches and growing more pastors

The annual conference memorialized 33 clergy and spouses who have entered the Church Triumphant and recognized 21 retiring clergy.

Delegates approved all four constitutional amendments.

Membership is 234,588, down 446; worship attendance is 54,362, down 1,320; church school attendance is 26,988, down 1,221.

– Holly McCray, editor of the Oklahoma United Methodist Contact.

**Oregon-Idaho.** The Annual Conference met June 20-23, 2013 in Boise, Idaho under the theme: “Disciple Is a Verb”. The action, commitment and impact of being a disciple was evident at the 45th session of the Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference. In action more than any other attendee was Greater Northwest Episcopal Area Bishop Grant Hagiya. He led his third annual conference session of the month with the theme “Disciple Is a Verb”. Hagiya presided over the Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference for the first time since being assigned by the Western Jurisdiction to supervise three annual conferences: Alaska, Pacific Northwest and Oregon-Idaho. This was his second quadrennium with Alaska and Pacific Northwest.

The conference celebrated the third year of a focus on health and vitality by recognizing the many churches and leaders that have participated in the Congregational Leadership Development program. Participants celebrated several new church starts to renew existing church locations with new ministry, reach out to Hispanic communities and create a network of house-church leaders. Hagiya opened the conference by challenging churches to show measurable increases in worship attendance, baptisms and professions of faith. Yet, at the same time, he recognized that those measures were more closely related to the old “attractional style of doing church.” He called for both clergy and lay leaders to find new ways of “being the church” for the current generation, saying, “We’ve got to be there to pick up people’s lives in these tough economic times. ... The people are hungry.”

On motions from the floor, the conference voted in favor of two statements related to the Boy Scouts of America’s recent change regarding participation by openly homosexual Scouts. In the first motion, the conference “...applaud[ed] the decision of the Boy Scouts of America to accept openly gay Scouts and reaffirm our longstanding support and sponsorship of Boy Scouts of America troops.” In the second, the conference voted to “encourage the churches of the Oregon-Idaho Conference to open their doors to any Boy Scouts of America units that are disenfranchised due to their movement toward social justice and inclusion (which is to say, their recent acceptance of gay youth within their ranks), and to offer those units sponsorship.”

In other action, the conference supported a 4-percent increase in the conference budget, voted to provide retirement funding for quarter- and half-time clergy, reaffirmed that all United Methodist churches should have open membership without discrimination on any basis including marital status, sexual orientation or gender identity. The conference members also voted overwhelmingly in favor of the four constitutional amendments.

**Statistics:** membership, 27,854, down 404; worship attendance, 13,648, down 86; church school attendance, 3,540, down 55.

– Greg Nelson, director of communications, Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference

**Peninsula-Delaware.** The Peninsula-Delaware Annual Conference met June 6-8, 2013 for the 229<sup>th</sup> session at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, Princess Anne, Md. under the theme: “Diversity: Embrace it! Celebrate it!” Almost 600 United Methodists from 487 area churches gathered. The Rev. Tori Butler from the Texas Annual Conference led a Bible study on diversity, where she highlighted the pressing diversity issue of socioeconomic disparity within our conference. She challenged laity to listen to the concerns of their brothers and sisters in faith who did not look or sound like themselves and to pray for the Spirit’s transformational power to be present in their communities. Dr. David A. Anderson, Bridgeway Community Church, Columbia, Md.,

and Bridge Leader Network, spoke to all about his journey as an African-American man married to a Korean-American woman. He has lived, in his personal life, both the racism and the diversity of which he speaks. A record 23 retiring clergy were honored at this year's service. In a brief video, each pastor reflected upon a unique career in ministry and recounted how he or she was blessed and nurtured by the conference and the connectionalism of The United Methodist Church.

Five individuals were ordained as elders in full connection: the Rev. Mary Browne, the Rev. Mary Haggard, the Rev. Steve LaMotte, the Rev. Missy Rekitzke and the Rev. Kristina Schonewolf.

During the business sessions, conference members voted on four Constitutional amendments and nine resolutions. Among the approved resolutions were the Congo Partnership, Imagine No Malaria and recognizing Carey's Camp as a conference historic site after 125 years of continuous operation.

– Doug Lanter, communications coordinator, Peninsula-Delaware Annual Conference

**Rio Grande.** In the 160th year of its origins of ministry, the Rio Grande Annual Conference met at University United Methodist Church in San Antonio, Texas, June 13-15. Approximately 180 delegates received various reports on the state of the annual conference.

During the 2012 annual session, the conference voted to move into a unification process with its sister San Antonio Episcopal Area conference, Southwest Texas, to create a new conference. Both annual conferences strongly affirmed the proposed name, Rio Texas. Primary business items were: The annual conference affirmed to elect its delegation for the 2016 General Conference and jurisdictional conference during the 2014 annual conference session; all four United Methodist Church Constitutional amendments coming from the 2012 General Conference and proposed to the annual conferences for vote were affirmed; and approved a total budget of \$1,437,513, of which \$703,266 is apportioned to local churches, a decreased apportioned amount of \$ 25,772 from the previous year.

**Statistics:** membership, 13,087, down 476, worship attendance, 4,224, down 256, and church school attendance, 1,789, down 12.

– Abel Vega Jr., director of connectional ministries

**Rocky Mountain.** The 45th session of the Rocky Mountain Annual Conference took place at the Denver Marriott Tech Center in Denver, Colo., June 13-16. Bishop Elaine J.W. Stanovsky was the officiating bishop. This year's Annual Conference again took place as wildfires burned along the front range of the Rocky Mountains. All of the petitions in the legislative committees passed. Two of the petitions were brought to the floor on Sunday. One of them would have required clergy to learn conversational Spanish or another new language. It was edited on the floor to instead urge, not require, clergy and lay leadership to learn conversational Spanish or another new language. With these edits made, the petition passed. The other petition that was brought to the floor asked for the Rocky Mountain Annual Conference to divest any stock holdings from several companies who have involvement in the Israeli occupation and that a task force be created to research any other companies that may be contributing. This petition was referred to the Committee on Finance and Administration for study. All proposed constitutional amendments from the 2012 General Conference were affirmed.

Membership in 2012 was 63,318, down from 64,698 in 2011; average worship attendance was 30,257 down from 30,689 in 2011 and average church school attendance (Sunday morning statistics only) 8,719 down from 9,195 in 2011.

– Myranda Hoffman, communications specialist, Rocky Mountain Annual Conference

**Serbia/Macedonia Annual Conference.** The invitation to the 2013 session of Serbia/Macedonia Provisional Annual Conference, which took place from Feb. 7 to 10 in Skopje, 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."

The annual conference meeting had been postponed from autumn 2012 to February 2013. It was a stopover in the midst of many changes regarding the community of the pastors and regarding the ministries of the church.

In the District of Serbia, there was the unique situation that three young pastors could be admitted into full membership with the conference. The ordination as elders will take place on March 24, 2013, in Kisac, Serbia, allowing their families and congregations to participate in this special celebration as well. These people are a blessing for the church and will strengthen the community of young pastors in Serbia. The Rev. Ana Palik-Kuncak will continue to serve as superintendent.

In the District of Macedonia, one ordained elder withdrew from the conference since he did not want to accept a new appointment. The Rev. Mihail Cekov, having reached the retirement age, gave back his varied tasks on the annual conference level. The members of the annual conference thanked him for his longstanding and faithful service and presented him a picture of Skopje — the place where he had started his service as a young pastor faced by the very difficult circumstances of Communist rule. In Macedonia, there is momentarily only one young elder and one young local pastor. All other clergy are close to the retirement age, or they are still serving a local church although being officially retired. The District Conference Macedonia had elected a new church board in September 2012, presided by a layman, who is now the official legal representative towards 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 their 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, as well. 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 from April 3 to 6, 2014, in Serbia.

– Office of Bishop Patrick Streiff, Zurich/Switzerland

**South Carolina.** The Annual Conference met at the Florence Civic Center, Florence, South Carolina from June 9-12 with Bishop L. Jonathan Holston Officiating. Resolutions adopted by the conference:

Resolution to Support Affordable Care Act and Medicaid Expansion – The body passed this resolution to encourage legislators to declare that participation in Medicaid expansion is necessary to the state's economic growth and welfare and to the health, wellbeing and livelihood of hundreds of thousands of South Carolinians. Under the resolution, S.C. United Methodist churches will accept responsibility for becoming actively involved at all levels in the development of support systems for health care in the community; educate and motivate members to follow a healthy lifestyle reflecting our affirmation of life as God's gift; become health advocates; and continue support and provision of direct-health services where needed. The Rev. Amiri Hooker, convener for the Advocacy Ministry Area, which sponsored the resolution, said his group believes the resolution sends a statement that our annual conference believes in the least of these: "the very poor, the very unfortunate, those person listed by Medicaid expansion in S.C."

Resolution to Support Global Maternal and Child Health through the Healthy Families, Healthy Planet Project – The body passed this resolution endorsing the "Healthy Families, Healthy Planets" initiative, a project of the United Methodist Board of Church and Society to educate and mobilize United Methodists on maternal health and the importance of international family planning. It also calls for the conference United Methodist Women and other relevant boards to work together in awareness, education and advocacy.

Resolution Eradicating Poverty in South Carolina – With no discussion, the body passed this resolution to help release the million-plus South Carolinians locked in generational poverty. Per the resolution, the conference will work on seven major goals to achieve improvements and healing for the poor in this state: increase by 2 percent service to the poor in the conference through the Advance Ministry mission institutions; train an advocate for the poor in the conference; work with international partners to reduce by 66 percent malaria-related deaths of children under the age of 5; develop opportunities for more in the annual conferences to become involved with advocacy for health issues such as access to health care, disease and infant mortality; find people on the edge of society not currently being addressed in United Methodist churches; provide short-term mission experiences for young people to explore and reflect on professional Christian service; and build a network of prophetic pastors

and lay members around the conference and provide them with opportunities to work for advocacy and social justice.

Actions taken on proposed constitutional amendments from 2012 General Conference: The S.C. Conference voted on the amendments at annual conference, but results were sent directly to the general church and not released to the body.

Membership: 235,504 up 15; worship attendance is 90,790, down from 92,506; church school attendance – 38,560, down from 39,687.

– Matt Brodie, director of communications for the South Carolina Annual (regional) Conference

**Southwest Texas.** The Southwest Texas Annual Conference met June 6-9 in Corpus Christi, Texas with Bishop Jim Dorff officiating. Guest speakers: the Rev. Jaime Clark-Soles, associate professor of New Testament at Perkins School of Theology; the Rev. John McMullen, retired clergy, Southwest Texas Conference; the Rev. Jasmine Smothers, associate director of Connectional Ministries of the North Georgia Conference. Memorable points or quotes by speakers: “You are laying down the life of the Southwest Texas Conference for the sake of your Río Grande Conference friends, and you’re doing so as equals,” Clark-Soles said. “Even though you are four times the size of the Río Grande Conference in the makeup, the power structure will be 50/50. I think that takes courage, and that is not the way the world teaches us to be. The world teaches it is better to cling to power and dominate and alienate rather than share power to create and liberate. This is laying down a life in order to take it back up again in a more glorious fashion.” Main actions enacted by the conference: Closed a church, Genesis Center in Victoria; Number of people ordained, commissioned or received into associate membership and average age: 26, average age 46; number of people retired: 26; membership is 117,045, down 1,688; worship attendance is 45,993, down 619; church school attendance is 54,720, down 2,092.

– Thomas Monahan, director of communications, Southwest Texas

Conference

**Susquehanna.** United Methodists from 920 churches in central and northeastern Pennsylvania met for the fourth time as the Susquehanna Annual Conference. Messiah College in Grantham, Pa., was the setting on June 13-15, for worship, celebration, and to celebrate a church “Alive in Christ on a Journey of Faith.” Jeremiah J. Park, bishop of the Susquehanna Conference, declared: “God’s presence makes our journey worthy. It is a transforming journey.” The annual conference supported a study proposed by the Divestment Task Force Special Offerings: Stop Hunger Now, \$21,062.; Mongolian Mission, \$19,482, Youth Service Fund, \$5,931, and Mission Central, \$16,549. Membership is 154,994, down 2.0%. Average worship attendance was 64,168, down 1.8%. Church school attendance – 23,139, down 5.2%.

**Tennessee.** There were many firsts for the 46th session of the Tennessee Annual Conference, themed “Expecting Greater Things (2013 — Being Disciples),” which took place once again at Brentwood (Tenn.) United Methodist Church on June 10-12. This was the first annual conference for new Nashville Area Leader Bishop William T. “Bill” McAlilly. Correction: This was Bishop McAlilly’s first “Annual Conference Week” as he initiated his first actual annual conference sessions as presiding Bishop last week in the Memphis Annual Conference at Collierville United Methodist in West Tennessee.

**A 40 Day Walk With God.** Bishop McAlilly called the Nashville Area to a season of prayer that we might step into the “greater things,” which Jesus spoke about in Scripture (John 14:12). Every United Methodist clergy and lay person within our conference area was called to this task. To help facilitate a faithful response to this call to prayer, Area-wide Spiritual Formation Teams developed a 40-day guide to prayer titled, “A 40 Day Walk with God.”

**More on transformation, less on institution?** Another first for the conference was an attempt to intentionally focus reports and presentations officially given on the bar of annual conference to the transformational power of Christ. Bishop McAlilly’s hope for the atmosphere at this annual conference was rooted more in the stories of God’s movement among our communities and less on institutional reporting. With McAlilly’s leadership, a cross-Conference team was established to produce special GODSTORY videos to be shown throughout the

proceedings at both sessions. GODSTORY's featured individuals from both conferences simply telling their transformational God story on-camera.

Extravagant generosity. The annual conference collected donations on behalf of two special ministries: The East Congo Episcopal Area, and Hunger Ministries of the Tennessee Conference. Another first for our dinner hour at annual conference this year was substituting a "normal" meal with the packaging of more than 20,000 meals comprised of beans and rice for the Stop Hunger Now organization. Stop Hunger Now serves 65 countries. It was announced that the totals for the week of annual conference reached \$27,531.81.

Budget: According to Bishop McAlilly, the final approved budget for 2013-14 was "seamlessly" approved for \$12,790,590.00 — a reduction of \$1,003,313.00 or —3.53 percent from the 2012-13 budget.

The Tennessee Conference paid its general and jurisdictional apportionments for 2012 in full. According to Conference Treasurer Jim Allen, this is believed to be the first time in the conference's history that 100 percent of apportionments have been remitted.

Statistical information: membership 118,916 in 2012, down from 119,571 in 2011; average weekly worship attendance was 48,435, down from 49,288; number of professions of faith was 1,800, up from 1,799 in 2011; and Sunday school attendance was 23,967, down from 24,201.

– Kevin Sparkman, communications coordinator of the Tennessee Annual (regional) Conference

Texas. The Texas Annual Conference met May 26-29 at the Hilton Americas in downtown Houston with Bishop Janice Riggle Huie

Officiating. Guest speaker: The Rev. Kenda Creasy Dean. Memorable points or quotes by speakers: The Rev. Kenda Creasy Dean, a United Methodist pastor and professor of youth, church and culture at Princeton Theological Seminary wowed the delegates with her reflections of how churches today are serving or not serving our youth. She reported that research indicates that most youth ministry work is not helping young people see God working in their lives or seeing themselves as God sees them. It reveals that most of church youth ministry work is dedicated to replicating "what we've always done." She outlined the National Study of Youth and Religion, a longitudinal study involving interviews of the same youth at five-year intervals. The study reveals the following five points:

Teens are not hostile to religion. They are just benignly positive — it's a nice thing but they really don't care about it.

Teens mirror their parents' faith.

They are incredibly inarticulate about religion — young people don't seem to have the words to use to talk about religion — especially about Jesus.

Only two out of five teens feel that religion is important and only 8 percent were highly devoted (weekly church attendance, regular prayer and reading the Bible on their own).

Most thought religion wasn't important, that it just doesn't matter.

Findings determined that these youth have a common creed she and others call Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, which means religion helps you be nice, feel good and "otherwise God stays out of the way."

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism includes these five components:

God exists

God wants people to be good and nice to each other

Central goal of life is to be happy

God doesn't need to be involved unless I have a problem

Good people like good dogs go to heaven

MTD is focused on the "me." Dean noted the problem stems from many churches and parents modeling this creed, so it's not accurate to blame youth for creating it. "MTD is now the dominate religion in our country," she said. "It has supplanted Christianity in many churches."

Dean called for leaders who love God enough so that it is contagious. She declared the need for leaders who personalize their mission as God's mission, leaders who focus their whole lives on loving others because God



loves others. "What makes us a church is who we love and that is what young people need to see from us," Dean implored.

Main actions enacted by the conference:

Resolution from delegates regarding changes to endorsement of episcopal candidates was adopted.

Vote approved the Resolution relating to the dissolution of the partnership with Côte d'Ivoire with minimal opposition.

Approved Justice for Our Neighbors as the Conference Advance Special for 2014.

Approved nonbinding motion to select delegates to jurisdictional and General conference who are 15-20 years of age.

Actions taken on proposed constitutional amendments from 2012 General Conference: all were approved.

The proposal to move the elections of delegates to General Conference back one year was defeated.

Number of people ordained: 14; number of people commissioned: 16; average age: 42.7; membership is 284,206, down 276; worship attendance is 105,231, down 568; church school attendance is 41,878, down 2,202.

**Ukraine/Moldova Annual Conference.** The 2013 Ukraine/Moldova Annual Conference declared the theme "FaithHopeLove" in a small village near Uzhgorod, Ukraine from May 31-June 2. It was hosted by the cluster of United Methodist churches in the Uzhgorod area and held at the Kamelot conference center. Bishop Eduard Khegay presided at his first Ukraine/Moldova Annual Conference since his election as Bishop of Eurasia in 2012. He ably covered all of the necessary legislation, and led great conversation on the themes of leadership characteristics and the Eurasia Roadmap 2015 — a long-term plan of greater self-sufficiency and growth for churches in Eurasia.

About 30 delegates and guests representing the conference's 16 churches gathered to discuss the work of the church in Ukraine and Moldova. During the statistical report it was noted that while different churches had faced challenging circumstances, the membership role grew from 408 to 457 – with the 49 new members or 8 percent membership growth in a large part thanks to the efforts of new church development. Some discussion was had concerning how to accurately measure average attendance, as some churches hold multiple worship services during the week, but only account for attendance at the Sunday morning service. Depending on the metric uses, worship attendance either held steady or grew tremendously. It is exciting to note that the number of children and youth participating in the life of the church doubled from 64 to 129. Guidelines were read and discussed concerning differentiating churches and Bible groups. This distinction will be based on membership or church attendance and will set guidelines for representation at annual conference and will help churches determine an appropriate salary for their pastor. In a separate discussion, Bishop Khegay noted that in a conference of 16 churches there are only two ordained elders who serve under the leadership of the two district superintendents.

– Michael B. Airgood, Standard Support Missionary to L'viv, Ukraine.

**Upper New York.** The Upper New York Annual Conference gathered for its Fourth Session from May 30 to June 1, 2013 at the OnCenter in Syracuse. The theme for this year's Session, the second in a four-session series based on the Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:1-9), was Called to Sow: Planting God's Love in Hearts and Neighbors. This Session was Area Resident Bishop Mark J. Webb's first in Upper New York. Bishop Webb presided over a Session for the very first time; he was consecrated on July 20, 2012. "We find ourselves in one of the most challenging times and one of the most exciting times to be the church of Jesus Christ," Bishop Webb told members during the opening worship service at the 2013 Annual Conference. "Despite how people identify and define themselves, this is what I believe about the human condition: We are looking for significance and purpose. We desire hope and healing. We want to live lives that matter, that are abundant." Referencing the Session theme, Bishop Webb said, "Church, we are called to sow! We are called to plant the good news of Jesus Christ in every place we find ourselves." Significant actions taken include the following:

Members supported a 2014 Annual Conference budget of \$10,343,781, a decrease from the 2013 budget.

Two issues brought forth by the Social Holiness Team were approved; members agreed to ask the General Board of Pensions and Health Benefits to divest Conference stock holdings from Caterpillar, Motorola

Solutions and Hewlett Packard, because of the companies' involvement in the Israeli occupation of the West Bank.

Members also approved urging Upper New York churches and members to work against the expansion of gambling in New York State beyond the existing Native American casinos; the state Legislature voted to amend the state constitution; a referendum on the issue is set to go before voters in November.

– Beth DiCocco, writer/editor, Upper New York Annual Conference

**West Ohio.** With much to celebrate, our 44th session opened on June 9 as the first West Ohio Annual Conference to be led by Bishop Gregory V. Palmer, new resident bishop of the Ohio West Area. Nearly 2,700 members and guests were in attendance. The year 2012 ended with 1,040 churches (down 27); 188,059 members (down 5,199); worship attendance of 109,983 (down 1,060); and Sunday school attendance of 31,199 (down 2,334). Stewardship increased with apportioned giving by our churches at 75 percent (up 5 percent) with an increase by 5 percent of the number of 100 percent churches, and giving to the denomination at 94 percent (up 29 percent).

– Lisa Streight, director of communications, West Ohio Conference of The United Methodist Church

**West Virginia.** The 45<sup>th</sup> session of the West Virginia Annual Conference was the first led by resident and presiding bishop, Sandra Steiner Ball, June 6-9, 2013 at West Virginia Wesleyan College, Buckhannon, W. Va. Erin Sears, president of the West Virginia Conference Council on Youth Ministries, also urged attendees to look for Jesus in the unexpected. “God speaks in ways that are unexpected,” she said. A trip to the Central American nation of Nicaragua through the Northeastern Jurisdiction’s Mission of Peace taught her a lot about people. “Through that visit, I began to see life in a different light and how precious every life is,” Sears said. Project Chacocente, established by youth on a previous MOP trip, has raised more than \$60,000 to help people in Nicaragua. The Annual Conference passed a resolution encouraging the church to support the expansion of existing buffer zones to protect cemeteries from oil and gas and coal-mining operations.

Conference adopted a \$12,086,968 budget for 2014, a decrease of \$26,301 or 0.22% percent less than the 2013 budget.

Statistics as of Dec. 31, 2012: membership, 98,691, down 894 from 2011; worship attendance, 43,545, down 1,614; church school attendance, 28,762, up 6,468; 7 elders were ordained, and one deacon and seven elders were commissioned as provisional members. The annual conference also recognized and received two elders as full members from other Methodist denominations. 35 clergy were welcomed into retired relationship with the conference. – Laura Harbert Allen, director of communications, West Virginia Annual Conference

### **Western North Carolina.**

The Western North Carolina Annual Conference was held at Lake Junaluska, N.C. on June 19-23. Preachers for the 2013 session of Annual Conference included Bishop Larry M. Goodpaster. Members of the conference acted on 20 petitions, including the 2014 conference budget of \$15,788,935. During the June 21 evening worship, Bishop Goodpaster was joined by Bishop Hope Morgan Ward of the North Carolina Conference, in an evening mission celebration and together, they spoke of a unified state working alongside one another to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Bishop Goodpaster ordained two deacons and 18 elders as members in full connection at the ordination service on June 22 in Stuart Auditorium at Lake Junaluska Assembly. The average age of those ordained was 46. In addition, 21 provisional members were commissioned including 6 deacons and 15 elders.

Membership is 290,751, down 900; worship attendance is 117,566, down 2,621; church school attendance is 52,628.

– Skyler Nimmons, Communications, Western North Carolina Conference

**Wisconsin.** The 2013 Wisconsin Annual Conference took place at the Madison Marriott West in Middleton June 7–9. The Conference session featured the theme “Live the Fruit of the Spirit,” the new theme for the new quadrennium. Conference attendees lived their ministry by giving generously for Ingathering, amassing \$5,858

and a number of items including more than 50 infant hats; 46 bedding kits; 124 layette kits; 134 Sewing kits; 159 cleaning buckets; 175 sweaters; 257 birthing kits; 450 Health kits; 1,065 kits for Harbor House Crisis Shelters, Northcott Neighborhood House, United Methodist Children's Services of Wisconsin, and Solomon Temple; and 2,005 schoolbag kits. The offerings included \$1,868 for Summer Developers and Rising Sun Camp at the Opening Worship service, and \$2,546 for the Clergy in Transition Fund at the Ordination and Commissioning service. Visit our Wisconsin Conference UMC home page at [www.wisconsinumc.org](http://www.wisconsinumc.org) to review featuring links to archived video that was live streamed, and recaps of events from each day.

Several Conference action items were voted on for implementation in the coming year. All were passed. Some of the approved items included: the 2014 budget, continued partnership with the Hmong House of Good News, Cedar Crest, Inc., and Hillcrest Family Services; the chartering of Whitewater: Cristo La Roca UMC, the discontinuance of Neillsville UMC, and the abandonment of Reedsville UMC; and the approval to elect delegates to General Conference a year earlier than previous years, in 2014. Click here to view the list of all action items voted on at this year's Conference.

– Amanda Rehrauer,

Communications Assistant, Wisconsin Conference

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If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ.

Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battlefield besides is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.

– Martin Luther