

Monthly Update

July 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

This edition of the Monthly Update contains some of the serious challenges facing our denomination and a continuation of the annual conference summaries. I could not help but notice one thing as I read through most of the annual conference reports: that of the memorable quotes, resolutions, and prioritizations of the decisions made, I saw a lot of rosy words – but no clear message about our need to bring people into a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. I believe that until we get that right – we will continue the slide into decline with our steady membership drop.

Another article in the Update is one entitled “Regarding the Future of the United Methodist Church”; its conclusion is that it is “time to recognize that traditionalists and progressives are pursuing divergent paths...” This contains information about the continuing controversy over sexuality and our differences being irreconcilable between the two sides: those of us who support the orthodox Christian faith, the Bible as God’s word, and sexuality being only within the context of marriage between a man and a woman, and those who have a “progressive” interpretation of Scripture – those liberal theologically. It really does come down to the authority of Scripture; there can be no “middle ground” in obeying it. Although the group consists of some highly respected clergy and calls for an amicable separation, their conclusion is not our future. We in Concerned Methodists are called to “contend for the faith” in the United Methodist Church and consider that to be our mission field. We believe that there are millions of people in the denomination who are not saved and it is our mission to try to bring them into a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. As we are able to do that, we will see reform and revival come to our Methodist Church.

Once again, this is a “long” Monthly Update with eight pages of information and statistics. We need to pass on as much information as possible on what is happening in the annual conferences across our denomination since the resolutions passed in other places may in the long run impact each of us – in our areas and in our local churches.

As we go into the Fourth of July holidays let us once again remember the factors that go into making the United States a great country: our independence from the most powerful nation on earth at that time – Great Britain, our belief in God, freedom, the free enterprise system, and the “spirit of America” that was key to seeing our country’s military through to victory. While we have been generously blessed by a merciful God, we have strayed from our foundation – and need to get back to Him who has blessed us. In the midst of your celebrations, please remember our great country in prayer – as we would ask that you remember both our United Methodist Church and us in prayer.

And don’t forget to thank any veterans you know for their service to our country.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris,
Executive Director

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July 2014 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

HERE RESTS IN HONORED GLORY AN AMERICAN SOLDIER KNOWN BUT TO GOD.

– On the tomb of the Unknown Soldier

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The Good Stuff.

+ *Vietnam Immigrant*

Mary: “It looks like we did some good after all! On Saturday, July 24th, 2010 the town of Prescott Valley, AZ, hosted a Freedom Rally. Quang Nguyen was asked to speak on his experience of coming to America and what it means. He spoke the following in dedication to all Vietnam Veterans”:

35 years ago, if you were to tell me that I am going to stand up here speaking to a couple thousand patriots, in English, I'd laugh at you. Man, every morning I wake up thanking God for putting me and my family in the greatest country on earth. I just want you all to know that the American dream does exist and I am living the American dream. I was asked to speak to you about my experience as a first generation Vietnamese- American, but I'd rather speak to you as an American.

If you hadn't noticed, I am not white and I feel pretty comfortable with my people. I am a proud US citizen and here is my proof. It took me 8 years to get it, waiting in endless lines, but I got it, and I am very proud of it.

I still remember the images of the Tet offensive in 1968, I was six years old. Now you might want to question how a 6-year-old boy could remember anything. Trust me, those images can never be erased. I can't even imagine what it was like for young American soldiers, 10,000 miles away from home, fighting on my behalf.

35 years ago, I left South Vietnam for political asylum. The war had ended. At the age of 13, I left with the understanding that I may or may not ever get to see my siblings or parents again. I was one of the first lucky 100,000 Vietnamese allowed to come to the US .Somehow, my family and I were reunited 5 months later, amazingly, in California. It was a miracle from God.

If you haven't heard lately that this is the greatest country on earth, I am telling you that right now. It was the freedom and the opportunities presented to me that put me here with all of you tonight. I also remember the barriers that I had to overcome every step of the way. My high school counselor told me that I cannot make it to college due to my poor communication skills. I proved him wrong. I finished college. You see, all you have to do is to give this little boy an opportunity and encourage him to take and run with it. Well, I took the opportunity and here I am.

This person standing tonight in front of you could not exist under a socialist/communist environment. By the way, if you think socialism is the way to go, I am sure many people here will chip in to get you a one-way ticket out of here. And if you didn't know, the only difference between socialism and communism is an AK-47 aimed at your head. That was my experience.

In 1982, I stood with a thousand new immigrants, reciting the Pledge of Allegiance and listening to the National Anthem for the first time as an American. To this day, I can't remember anything sweeter and more patriotic than that moment in my life.

Fast forwarding, somehow I finished high school, finished college, and like any other goofball 21 year old kid, I was having a great time with my life. I had a nice job and a nice apartment in Southern California. In some way and somehow, I had forgotten how I got here and why I was here. One day I was at a gas station, I saw a veteran pumping gas on the other side of the island. I don't know what made me do it, but I walked over and asked if he had served in Vietnam. He smiled and said yes. I shook and held his hand. The grown man began to well up. I walked away as fast as I could and at that very moment, I was emotionally rocked. This was a profound moment in my life. I knew something had to change in my life. It was time for me to learn how to be a good citizen. It was time for me to give back. You see, America is not just a place on the

map, it isn't just a physical location. It is an ideal, a concept. And if you are an American, you must understand the concept, you must accept this concept, and most importantly, you have to fight and defend this concept. This is about Freedom and not free stuff. And that is why I am standing up here.

Brothers and sisters, to be a real American, the very least you must do is to learn English and understand it well. In my humble opinion, you cannot be a faithful patriotic citizen if you can't speak the language of the country you live in. Take this document of 46 pages – last I looked on the Internet, there wasn't a Vietnamese translation of the US Constitution. It took me a long time to get to the point of being able to converse and until this day, I still struggle to come up with the right words. It's not easy, but if it's too easy, it's not worth doing.

Before I knew this 46-page document, I learned of the 500,000 Americans who fought for this little boy. I learned of the 58,000 names scribed on the black wall at the Vietnam Memorial. You are my heroes. You are my founders.

At this time, I would like to ask all the Vietnam veterans to please stand. I thank you for my life. I thank you for your sacrifices, and I thank you for giving me the freedom and liberty I have today. I now ask all veterans, firefighters, and police officers, to please stand. On behalf of all first generation immigrants, I thank you for your services and may God bless you all.

"God Bless America"
"One Flag, One Language, One Nation Under God"

– Quang Nguyen Creative Director/Founder Caddis Advertising, [LLC Notice that he referred to himself as an American, NOT Vietnamese – American. How good it would be here in America if all of the immigrants---no, EVERYONE--- felt like Quang Nguyen? – Comment by Mary, the person who sent the e-mail.]

+ ***U.M. ARMY Heading to Louisiana.*** Armed with hammers and paintbrushes, hundreds of workers with a mission will descend on the Bossier City (June 15–21) and Ringgold (July 20–26) communities in the Louisiana Conference as part of U.M. ARMY (UM Action Reach-out Mission by Youth). Youth age volunteers and accompanying adults each pay to spend a week helping those unable to help themselves. They will be busy with wheelchair ramps, handrails, porch work, painting, minor roof repairs and much more. U.M. ARMY has been serving low income, elderly and disabled individuals since 1979 in Texas, and since 2000 in Louisiana. Brian Smith, U.M. ARMY national executive director, noted that Bishop Cynthia Harvey served as executive director early in the life of the organization in Texas. “U.M. ARMY has been described as the best of a summer camp, mission project and spiritual retreat all wrapped into one,” said Smith. Currently, U.M. ARMY is offering an incentive to help new churches grow with the mission ministry by joining forces with them during the 2014 season. To do so, they are offering some scholarships for smaller groups, or a discount per participant for larger groups. Referrals for work to be completed are given to U.M. ARMY by state agencies, local churches and community organizations. More than 5,000 participants will compose U.M. ARMY this summer in 60-plus cities, helping an estimated 2,200 needy families. In addition to Louisiana, U.M. ARMY has camps this summer working throughout Texas, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Maine and Vermont. Camps have also been held in Florida, Illinois, Oklahoma and Washington. – Louisiana Conference, as reported in UMNewscope; Vol. 42, Issue 21; May 28, 2014.

Of Interest. Regarding the Future of the United Methodist Church

A group of leading pastors and theologians released a progress report on their considerations regarding the future of The United Methodist Church. Hailing from all five jurisdictions, the more than 80 pastors and theologians have engaged in sober and prayerful conversations via conference call over the past two months.

The discussion was launched because the group believes that our denomination is facing a crisis regarding 1.) covenant, 2.) organizational discipline, 3.) authority of Scripture, and 4.) discipleship.

The group believes that it is "time to recognize that traditionalists and progressives are pursuing divergent paths as we try to follow Christ and be faithful to what we understand to be the Gospel." Their statement asks if "it is not time for persons of good faith, representing the spectrum of theological positions within The United Methodist Church, to begin discussing ways to create a 'win-win' scenario for the mental, emotional and spiritual well-being of everyone involved?" "We can no longer talk about schism as something that might happen in the future. Schism has already taken place in our connection," said Dr. Maxie Dunnam, retired pastor, author, and seminary president. "There are conscience-bound persons who find it impossible to live in The United Methodist Church as we presently define ourselves in relation to human sexuality. Others could not live in The United Methodist Church if the present position of the church on human sexuality were changed. Forty years of wrestling with the issue is enough, and has proven the solidity of the belief systems of the two groups." The group lamented the irreconcilable differences that have been manifest over the last four decades within the denomination. At the same time, they agreed that a peaceful parting could be in the best interest of United Methodists. "It occurs to me that we can learn something from the destructive nature of the separations that other denominations have experienced," observed the Rev. Chuck Savage, president of the Georgia United Methodist Foundation. "I don't think we will ever agree on the issues that deeply divide us, however, it is my hope that we will agree on a plan of separation that will serve both traditionalists and progressives well. My opinion is that if we can reach agreement on such a plan both progressives and traditionalists will emerge stronger."

The idea of separation was not an issue that the pastors and theologians wrestled with casually. The group concluded, however, that the denomination was hemorrhaging energy and members over the emotional issues that divide United Methodists and leaders needed to offer a vision for the future. "Those who know me best know that I reluctantly come to a decision that it is time for The United Methodist Church to move forward and out of our present irreconcilable ecclesiastical reality," said the Rev. Larry R. Baird, a former district superintendent and currently pastor of Trinity Church in Grand Island, New York. "We must do so in as faithful, forthright, and compassionate a way as possible. To continue operating as we are is more of a disgrace to the Body of Christ than our inability to resolve the presenting issues and make a common statement of faith that results in compatible directions in ministry and mission."

Although the issues surrounding marriage and human sexuality have been the presenting issues that have caused the divisions in all the other mainline denominations in addition to our own, the group agreed that the real division is theological. "Ten years ago, Lyle Schaller wrote of the division of The United Methodist Church in his book, *The Ice Cube Is Melting*," said the Rev. Dr. Tom Harrison, pastor of Asbury United Methodist Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma. "Is authority located in 'Scripture and Tradition' ('Team Jerusalem') or 'Reason and Experience' ('Team Athens')? He expressed that the division was so severe that separation seemed unavoidable. Our gap has widened since he wrote his book. I'm looking for the best 'win-win' resolution for both sides to this issue."

The group expressed its desire for United Methodists of goodwill to be unsaddled by the current controversies in order to "give each other the freedom to pursue our understanding of God's will." "The energy of the Church that should have been spent on our mission has been focused on this debate," concluded Dunnam. "There is no viable 'third way,' or 'compromise,' so why not be Christian and civil, valuing each other, and work out a separation that will allow both groups to serve the Kingdom with the kind of commitment and passion essential for any powerful witness we wish to make."

Those on the conference calls look forward to working with others of differing theological perspectives in creating a "way of parting that honors the sincerity of those with whom we differ and no longer brings pain to persons made in the image of God."

Regarding the Future of The United Methodist Church. Over the past six weeks more than 80 pastors and theologians have been involved in conversations about the future of The United Methodist Church. These pastors represent all five jurisdictions and more than 30 annual conferences, and many serve as lead pastors of some of the largest congregations in United Methodism. After several consultations via conference call and email, these leading pastors and theologians are issuing the following statement as a progress report on their deliberations.

We have come together because of the crisis besetting our beloved United Methodist Church.

It is a crisis of covenant, where numerous pastors have violated or have announced their willingness to violate our Book of Discipline.

It is a crisis of organizational discipline, where pastors in many of our annual conferences now know they may be disobedient to the will of General Conference without meaningful consequences; in fact, some know they may be disobedient to the Discipline and receive their bishop's blessing.

It is a crisis regarding the inspiration and the authority of the Scriptures, where some believe that, rightly understood, the Bible is the infallible word of God, and where others believe that significant parts of the Scriptures do not provide an accurate understanding of God's heart and mind and may be discarded as uninspired and in error.

It is a crisis of discipleship, where there are dramatic differences in how personal and social holiness is lived out and taught.

– Received by e-mail from a Concerned Methodists associate. Good News Magazine.

+ **Connectional Table (CT)** invites UMs to discuss church's worldwide nature. Downloadable resources for discussion and an online survey about the worldwide issues affecting the denomination are available at a new website at www.umc.org/worldwide-nature. – As reported in UMNewscope; Vol. 42, Issue 24; June 18, 2014.

(UM) Judicial Council.

+ **The Judicial Council Met in Baltimore.** Bishop Minerva G. Carcaño ruled July 15 that the resolution on “Biblical Obedience” by the California-Pacific Annual Conference “does not violate the legal authority of The Book of Discipline in that it does not require any person, office or body within the church to violate The Book of Discipline.” Judicial Council affirmed the ruling while not specifically addressing the content of the 2012 Western Jurisdictional Conference resolution, which it has not been asked to review. Decision 1254 notes the bishop's focus on the fact that the church's Social Principles are not considered church law “but a prayerful and thoughtful effort” to speak on human issues.

A New York Annual Conference resolution, upheld by Bishop Martin McLee, commended both named and unnamed clergy, laity and congregations “whose bold actions and courageous statements help to provide for the pastoral needs of same-sex couples within The UMC.” In Decision 1255 Judicial Council affirms that ruling: “The resolution as adopted is permissible because it is primarily a historical recounting of actions by others, is aspirational, and does not call for action that is contrary to The Book of Discipline.”

The council disagreed with Bishop John Schol's decision allowing conference leadership to establish “A Future with Hope” as a nonprofit corporation and elect a board of directors without prior annual conference approval. “To rule that A Future with Hope corporation is null, void and without effect is impractical and probably impossible as it is now a separately incorporated entity meeting a great humanitarian need,” states Decision 1257. But the decision “serves as a pronouncement” to the conference regarding the importance of maintaining the role of the annual conference in making such decisions. Although Judicial Council upheld two rulings of law from the Texas Annual Conference regarding a question on a pastoral appointment, Decision 1251 notes that the matter raises “legitimate concerns” over a process used by the conference known as the “clergy triad process.”

[Note: Even though this was decided over six months ago, this is of interest and Importance to us. It continues the slippery slope of our denominational agencies and leaders taking the church to normalization of homosexuality. – AOM]

– Linda Bloom, UMNS, as published in UMNewScope, Vol. 41, Issue 44; November 6, 2013.

In regard to this Great Book, I have but to say, it is the best gift God has given to man. All the good the Savior gave to the world was communicated through this book. But for it we could not know right from wrong. All things most desirable for man's welfare, here and hereafter, are to be found portrayed in it. – Abraham Lincoln

Global Outlook

If you seek peace, prepare for war. – Maxim from the old Roman Empire

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Nigeria. Two of the Kidnapped Girls Escape

The Voice of the Martyrs (VOM) is providing assistance to two sisters who recently escaped captivity from Boko Haram. Two sisters, Kamka, 19, and Naya, 16, were sleeping when radical Muslims invaded their home. The armed terrorists entered their brother's room and shot him in the hand before demanding to know where the girls' father was. When they realized the two sisters were not married and their father was not home, they took the girls by force. The Boko Haram terrorist group has declared war on Christians in Nigeria, frequently attacking Christian villages, burning Christians' houses and murdering indiscriminately. They also kidnap teenage girls and force them to convert and marry Boko Haram members.

After forcing Kamka and Naya to walk through the woods at gunpoint, the terrorists immediately put them to work fetching water and cooking. A few days later, the girls were told that both of them were to be married. "We're too young," Naya protested. But the leader then showed them his daughter, a girl of 7 or 8, who was already married. "If we refused to cooperate, we would be killed," Naya told a VOM worker. "The man whom I was forced to marry took me. He picked up his gun and a knife and threatened to murder me if I continued to resist." The sisters cried and prayed together, unsure of what would become of them. But after two weeks, a Muslim woman took pity on them. While fetching water with the girls, she showed them an escape route and told them to run away. The girls escaped under cover of darkness. They knocked on the door of the first house they came to, praying the owner would be friendly. Although he was Muslim, the man took pity on the girls. He allowed them to bathe and eat, and then had his sister take them to a nearby Christian village. The girls were traumatized by their experience but are now doing reasonably well. Since it is unsafe for them to return to their home, VOM is providing care for them at a safe house through one of our project partners.

"I thank God that He has saved us from the hands of these bad people," Naya said. "Everything is now behind me and I'm not afraid anymore. I only want to look forward now." And Kamka is also thankful for God's protection. "I am very grateful that many Christians pray for me," she said. "Despite what I've been through, I still have faith in God."

The Voice of the Martyrs invites you to support our work in Nigeria. Your contributions help believers like Naya and Kamka as well as providing support to families of martyrs and medical assistance to victims of extremist attacks.

– The Voice of the Martyrs, telephone #: 800-747-0085.

Annual Conference Reports

Alabama-West Florida. The conference met June 1–4 at Frazer Memorial UMC in Montgomery, Ala. with Bishop Paul L. Leeland officiating. The theme was "The Great Commission: Engaging Disciples". Guest speakers: Huntingdon College president, J. Cameron West; Dr. Elaine Heath, McCreless Professor of Evangelism at Perkins School of Theology, led Bible study; the Rev. Farley Stuart of Kentucky Annual Conference – presentation on Red Bird Missionary Partnership; Bishop Silvio Cevallos, United Evangelical

Methodist Church of Ecuador. Memorable points or quotes by speakers: West preached at the opening worship service: “Christianity Is a Full-time Job” and at the service of ordination: “Are You Out of Your Mind?” Bishop Leeland: “Send” Model – Seeking, Engaging, Nurturing, and Deploying Disciples. Main actions enacted and resolutions adopted by the conference:

☐☐ Offerings: Imagine No Malaria (\$322,600), Ministerial Education Fund (\$2,500), Pensacola and Baypines flood relief (\$6,000).

☐☐ Reports: task force concerning election of clergy delegates to general and jurisdictional conference.

☐☐ Approved: resolutions on prison reform in Alabama,... against predatory lending; budget of \$10,952 million, a 1.41% reduction from 2014.

☐☐ Celebrated: presentation by disaster response coordinator; Francis Asbury Award (Jeroy Carroll); Alice Lee Award (the Rev. Tonya Elmore); Denman Evangelism Award (the Rev. Kathy Lincks Jorensen [clergy], Jared Parker [laity], T. Matthew Langford [youth]).

Conference statistics: Membership is 141,989, down 2,840. Worship attendance stands at 65,110, down 1%. Church school attendance stands at 25,831, down 3%. Professions of faith stand at 2,484, down 2%. Baptisms stand at 2,013, down <1%. Christian Formation Groups participation stands at 75,789, up 7%. Vacation Bible School attendance is up 2%. People served by community ministries for daycare or education stands at 26,819, up 40%. People served by community ministries for outreach, justice and mercy: 461,107, up 18%. – Mary Catherine Phillips, Alabama-West Florida Conference, as reported in UMNewscope; Vol. 42, Issue 24; June 18, 2014.

Alaska Missionary Conference. The conference met May 30–31 at Anchor Park UMC, Anchorage. The officiating bishop was Grant Hagiya. “Be faithful in our wilderness” in Bishop Hagiya’s sermon, which stressed that our response to declining numbers and a changing culture is to be faithful to God. Outgoing Superintendent Dave Beckett talked about setting the “bar” high enough to be faithful to our ministry settings and to our God. Main actions enacted and resolutions adopted by the conference:

☐☐ Welcomed: new conference superintendent, the Rev. Carlo Rapanut.

☐☐ Celebrated: efforts on behalf of Imagine No Malaria; participated in 5K fundraiser, dinners and a “step challenge” in support.

Conference statistics: Membership is 3,367, down 141. Worship attendance stands at 2,057, up 3. Professions of faith stand at 63, down 63. – Jim Doepken, Alaska Missionary Conference, as reported in UMNewscope; Vol. 42, Issue 24; June 18, 2014.

Austria Provisional Conference. The conference met May 22–25 in Graz. The presiding bishop is Patrick Streiff. Speakers District Superintendents Pavel Procházka (Slovakia) and Petr Procházka (Czech Republic); former superintendent Josef Červeňák – conference teacher. Memorable points or quotes by speakers: Josef Červeňák: a UM understanding of mission – make disciples of Jesus and not of yourself; don’t admire Jesus, follow him; share God’s love with your neighbor. Highlights: The conference celebrated the positive environment throughout the conference, in spite of financial tensions; highlighted the quality of laity training, “Participating in the Proclamation”; recognized two new lay preachers; celebrated successful implementation of the “Flexible Childcare” project; renovated churchowned properties; offered thanks for the launch of the new website www.emk.at; adopted the text of a new brochure on marriage and the family and thanked the host congregation in Graz. One elder was ordained.

– Stefan Schröckenfuchs, Austria Conference, as reported in UMNewscope; Vol. 42, Issue 23; June 11, 2014.

Baltimore-Washington. The conference met May 29–31 in Baltimore at the Marriott Waterfront Hotel with Bishop Marcus Matthews officiating. The theme was “The World as Our Parish”. Guest speakers: Africa University choir; James H. Salley, vice chancellor for institutional advancement, Africa University – Bible study; Bishop Ryang Soo Han, his wife, and eight other pastors from Korea Methodist Church South Conference – cultural exchange guests; The Rev. Susan Henry-Crowe, top executive of the denomination’s

Board of Church and Society; and the Right Rev. Eugene Taylor Sutton, the Episcopal bishop of the Diocese of Maryland. Main actions enacted and resolutions adopted by the conference :

☐☐ Holy Conference: suspended rules for “debate” and participated in “circles of grace” on five resolutions related to human sexuality.

☐☐ Approved: budget of \$17.3 million, adopted with no debate or amendments, a 3.1% increase; resolutions clarifying conference rules, on minimum wage and studying policies and practices with mentally ill clergy; 5 resolutions on human sexuality: ask that the Baltimore-Washington Conference be an inclusive conference, call for the church to agree to disagree on polity affecting LGBT people, encourage the banning of clergy trials for same-gender weddings, encourage removing discriminatory language from the Book of Discipline and speak out against laws discriminating against gays and lesbians in West Virginia.

☐☐ Additional Study: resolution in response to companies using dangerous fossil fuels

☐☐ Awarded: for contributing highest amount of funding for missionary support in the Northeastern Jurisdiction.

☐☐ Commissioned: one missionary for Zimbabwe.

Conference statistics were not available.

– Melissa Lauber, Baltimore-Washington Conference, as reported in UMNewscope; Vol. 42, Issue 24; June 18, 2014.

Czech and Slovak Republics Annual Conference. The conference met May 30–June 1 at Prague 2 UMC with Bishop Patrick Streiff presiding. Speakers: District Superintendents Pavel Procházka (Slovakia) and Petr Procházka (Czech Republic); former superintendent Josef Červeňák – conference teacher. Highlights: The conference discussed the newly translated liturgy for the Czech Republic; recognized 6 new lay preachers; celebrated the work of two missionaries from the Holston Conference, who will be replaced by a family with two young children; celebrated mission ministry throughout the conference. One hospital chaplain retired.

– Regula Stotz, Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe, as reported in UMNewscope; Vol. 42, Issue 23; June 11, 2014.

Detroit. The conference met May 15–18 at Adrian College with Bishop Deborah Lieder Kiesey officiating. Guest speakers: Marcia McFee – guest teacher on M-M-Good Worship; the Rev. DeAnn Dobbs, the Rev. Dr. Anthony Hood – preachers on unity in diversity as the body of Christ. Main actions enacted and resolutions adopted by the conference: Highlights of mission and ministry include mergers, a trained cadre of Spanish-speaking leaders for the Lay Missionary Planting Network; renewed covenant with the Methodist Church of Haiti. Approved: Five questions for candidates running for state office related to gun violence, immigration reform, free and fair elections, funding for public schools and equal rights for all and stance on marriage equality. Resolution calling for grace and love available to all persons (ruling on compliance with The Book of Discipline pending from Bishop Kiesey). New conference structure. Resolution on fossil fuel infrastructure. Recommitment to immigration reform. Support for a \$10.10 minimum wage. 2015 budget that is 5.3% lower than 2014. Delegates to General and Jurisdictional Conferences: will be elected in 2015. Conference statistics: Membership is 86,691, down 2,969. Worship attendance is 39,912, down 1,715. Church school attendance is 10,660, down 278. Professions of faith is 1,883, down 210. Baptisms stand at 1,212, down 274. Worship Communities discontinued: Decker, Marine City and New Hope.

– Kay DeMoss, Michigan Area, as reported in UMNewscope; Vol. 42, Issue 22; June 4, 2014.

Eastern Pennsylvania. The conference met May 15–17 at Philadelphia Area Expo Center, Oaks, Pa. with Bishop Peggy Johnson, officiating The theme was “Growing Vital Congregations”; the. Guest speakers: the Rev. Mike Slaughter, founding pastor, Ginghamburg UMC in Tipp City, Ohio – conference teacher. Bishop Gabriel Unda Yemba, Democratic Republic of Congo. Mass choir from several Korean congregations. Memorable points or quotes by speakers: Slaughter: “We are people of the Resurrection, and we need a mission strategy to bring people into a life-celebrating, sustaining relationship with Jesus Christ.” . . . “I believe the

future of pastoral ministry in many churches is the licensed local pastor.” . . . Three ingredients every “contagious leader” needs: a picture of God’s purpose for new ministry; a strategic plan to realize that vision; and some “repetitious, persistent practices” to inculcate key principles of faith and effective ministry into the hearts and habits of the congregation. Bishop Unda: “The Lord knows me. We are all here because God knows us. I am a witness.” The bishop spoke of the recent deaths of his wife and daughter, his capture and imprisonment by rebel soldiers, and the prayers that he believes stopped his planned execution.

Main actions enacted and resolutions adopted by the conference:

- ☐☐ Approved: budget of \$3,150,000, a decrease of nearly \$285,000.
- ☐☐ Deferred: conversation on resolutions related to human sexuality, which will be held with clergy and laity in the fall.
- ☐☐ Celebrated: “Fulfilling Our Covenant” capital campaign to retire pre-1982 pension debt, surpassed \$3 million goal by \$.7 million in pledges.
- ☐☐ Special Presentation: marking the 150th anniversaries of both the former, all-black, predecessor Delaware Conference and Simpson House, the conference-affiliated assisted-care and nursing facility for seniors in Philadelphia.
- ☐☐ Awards: Denman Evangelism Awards to the Rev. Michael Roberts (clergy), Mary White (laity) and Sierra Shoudt-Reddi (youth); Kim Jefferson Urban Ministry Awards to East Stroudsburg UMC and St. Matthew’s UMC in Reading.

Conference statistics: Membership: 110,948, down 2,374. Worship attendance: 41,779, down 1,279. 172 churches had no professions of faith in 2013. – John W. Coleman, Eastern Pennsylvania Conf., as reported in UMNewscope; Vol. 42, Issue 24; June 18, 2014.

Hungary Provisional Annual Conference. The conference met April 10–13 in Nyíregyháza. The presiding bishop is Patrick Streiff. Speakers: District Superintendent István Csernák; former superintendent Josef Červeňák – conference teacher. Highlights: A special focus was once again on the ministries with Roma, which were intensified by the appointment of a pastor in Alsózsolca. It was encouraging to recognize an impressive number of volunteers involved in various ministries along with increasing numbers of lay speakers and lay preachers. The past year proved that structures are not always easy to deal with, and that the forms of cooperation are not always conflict-free. “Democracy causes difficulties sometimes,” said Csernák. “The future requires the work of the church leadership; it is impossible to follow a one-person pastoral leading style.” There was a proposal for more efficient cooperation between the various bodies in the annual conference. The voting members approved a new organizational chart.

According to a new education act of the Hungarian government, children from the first to the eighth grade are obliged to attend either ethics or religion class. These lessons are part of the official class schedule – and they require the contribution of the churches. UM pastors and properly trained lay people can teach religion classes at public schools. There are 17 schools where UM men and women do this. The conference also discussed how teaching material with basic elements of The UMC could support those involved in this important ministry. – Yvonne Guizan, Lyss, Switzerland, as reported in UMNewscope; Vol. 42, Issue 24; June 18, 2014.

Illinois Great Rivers. The conference met June 4–7 in Peoria. The theme was “Ministry of the Laity”; the officiating bishop was Jonathan D. Keaton. Guest speakers: the Rev. Larry Hollon, general secretary of UM Communications (UMCOM); Barbara Boigegrain, general secretary of the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits (GBPHB); Dr. Colleen Hester, president of MacMurray College in Jacksonville, Ill. Main actions enacted and resolutions adopted by the conference:

- ☐☐ Offerings: Imagine No Malaria (\$40,000, which pushed the conference over its \$2.5 million goal); Conference Disaster Relief Fund (\$7,314); eight Africa University scholarships (\$7,705 for a \$1 million campaign); Tom Brown Scholarship at Wiley College (\$6,025).

☐☐ Approved: changes to clergy health insurance; formation of a streamlined, 21-member Connectional Table to replace current conference structure (places mission, ministry, and finances at the same table).
Conference statistics: Membership is 132,023, down 1,703. Worship attendance is 61,007, down 4.25%. Church school attendance is 20,008, down 7.33%. – Paul Black, Illinois Great Rivers Conference, as reported in UMNewscope; Vol. 42, Issue 24; June 18, 2014.

Indiana. The conference met May 29–31 at the Indiana Convention Center, Indianapolis under the theme “The Outwardly Focused Church” with Bishop Michael J. Coyner officiating. The. Guest speakers: West Ohio Bishop Gregory Palmer; Roman Catholic Archbishop Joseph W. Tobin (Archdiocese of Indianapolis) prayer breakfast speaker. Memorable quote by Farr: “If we are going to go forward, friends, we need to recapture our fire.” Main actions enacted and resolutions adopted by the conference:

☐☐ Celebrated: “God of This City” revival event on Friday of conference. Packed 43,200 food packets for Kids Against Hunger.

☐☐ Launched: “100 New Points of Light” – 100 new faith communities, whether a worship service, Bible study or other organized effort, to reach new people with the light of Christ. Many more than the expected 100 churches decided to answer the bishop’s call. Each congregation will receive seed money from the conference as well as a coach.

☐☐ Raised: more than \$80,000 in cash and pledges from 140 local churches toward the conference’s Africa University Campaign goal. ☐☐ Approved: guidelines and process of Christian conferencing for annual conference members to endorse and elect delegates to the 2016 general and jurisdictional conferences; a graduated scale of retirement health insurance subsidies for retired clergy; 2015 income budget of \$13.6 million, expense budget of \$14.1 million.

☐☐ Heard: about the Church Development “exceed” campaign to raise \$1.5 million to help establish 30 new faith communities by 2020; about the successes of more than 200 congregations participating in the conference’s Fruitful Congregation Journey vitality process.

Conference statistics: Membership is 194,967, down 1,597. Worship attendance stands at 107,231, down 4,121. Church school attendance stands at 38,099, down 1,762. Professions of faith stand at 3,702, down 535. Baptisms stand at 3,286, down 226.

– Daniel R. Gangler, Indiana Conference, as reported in UMNewscope; Vol. 42, Issue 23; June 11, 2014.

Minnesota. The conference met May 28–30 at St. Cloud with Bishop Bruce R. Ough officiating. Guest speakers: The Rev. Adam Hamilton, founding pastor, UM Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kan. Memorable points or quotes by speakers: Bishop Ough: The keys to unleashing fearless, Spirit-led churches are hearts that break for the poor, the lost, the forgotten, and the excluded – and a passion for turning the church inside-out to embrace the needs of those outside the church. Bishop Ough encouraged conference members to share their God stories with others. Hamilton: “People don’t come to church because of your superior theological arguments,” said Hamilton. “They come because you care about them. . . . It’s all about the people.”

Main actions enacted and resolutions adopted by the conference:

☐☐ Celebrated: \$2.7 million raised for Imagine No Malaria, more than any other annual conference to date. 2,091,077 meals packed through “Million Meals Marathon.” Eighty percent of this year’s Love Offering (\$81,759) will go to Feed My Starving Children to help pay for the meals packed; 10 percent will go to Project; and 10 percent will go to Volunteers in Mission scholarships.

☐☐ Launched: a congregational development initiative. Each year for the next seven years, the Minnesota Conference will start one new church, assist 20 churches in revitalizing their ministries, and partner with a vital parent church to multiply its ministry beyond its current site. This initiative aims to raise \$3.7 million over the next few years. A total of \$929,216.03 had been pledged as of May 29, and a \$200,000 lead gift was presented on Thursday before conference attendees.

Approved: open letter to Minnesota Conference leaders, asking them to support ministry that's "unshackled by those rules inscribed in our Book of Discipline that continue to exclude and discriminate against those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) as well as place barriers between them and our clergy persons seeking to minister to all." Resolutions to reduce the carbon footprint of church buildings, boycott SodaStream products, encourage support of a proposed amendment to the state constitution on the election of judges and 2015 apportioned budget of \$6,000,008, less than the 2014 budget.

Eight General Conference petitions related to sexuality.

Name (City) of delegates elected to 2016 General Conference and North Central Jurisdictional Conference: Lay delegates to General Conference: Faye B. Christensen (McGregor), Sara Ann Swenson (Brainerd). Clergy delegates to General Conference: David A. Bard (Duluth), Judy A. Zabel (Twin Cities DS). Lay delegates to North Central Jurisdictional Conference: Dave Nuckols (Minnetonka), Leslie Hobson (Brainerd). Clergy delegates to North Central Jurisdictional Conference: Woojae Im (Oseo), Carol Zaagsma (Mankato). Lay reserve delegates: Walker Brault (Winona), Karen Thompson (Oakdale) and Shirley Durr (Minneapolis). Clergy reserve delegates: Jeffrey Ozanne (Glenwood), Amy Jo Bur (St. Peter) and Paula Colton (Minneapolis). Conference statistics: Membership is 66,342, down 1,327. Worship attendance stands at 30,960, down 4%. Professions of faith stand at 1,381, down 1%. Baptisms stand at 1,021. – Christa Meland, Minnesota Annual Conference, as reported in UMNewscope; Vol. 42, Issue 23; June 11, 2014.

North Alabama. Conference met June 1–4 at Birmingham-Southern College with Bishop was Debra Wallace-Padgett officiating. Guest speakers: Bishop Lindsey Davis (Louisville Area). Memorable points or quotes by speakers: "It is crucial to have a gospel strategy before you have a church plant strategy." **Main actions enacted and resolutions adopted by the conference:**

Offerings: Imagine No Malaria (\$251,129.22, the largest special offering in conference history).

Adopted: a Ministry Action Plan that sets the course for the future as an annual conference.

Vision: Spiritual leaders empowering life-giving congregations to transform the world.

Mission: Discover, develop and deploy spiritual leaders to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Conference Priorities: new faith communities, worship services, ministries to reach new persons, healthy congregations...

New Church Team: reported the conference's new church starts comprise 4% of the worship attendance, 9% of the baptisms, and 12% of the professions of faith in North Alabama.

Awards: Harry Denman Evangelism Award – the Rev. Shane Harris (clergy) and Bobby Jack Kerley (laity); Bridge Builder in disability ministries (11 congregations, Southeast District).

Approved: budget of \$10,155,717; Vulnerable Adults Safe Sanctuary Policy; Louise Branscomb Barrier Breaker Award from Conference Commission on the Status and Role of Women (Cindy Castro and Dr. M.L. Roberts Jr.; honorary award to Belle Carlisle); Wheeler Award from Conference Commission on Archives and History (John Mark "Bruno" Hughes).

Name (city) of delegates elected to 2016 General Conference and Jurisdictional Conference: Lay delegates to General Conference: Steve Lyles (Alexander City), Scott Selman (Vestavia Hills), Zac Riddle (Birmingham) and Carol Toney (Huntsville). Clergy delegates to General Conference: Robin Scott (Gadsden), Dale Cohen (Huntsville), Mary Bendall (Helena) and Tiwirai Kufarimai (Anniston). Lay delegates to Jurisdictional Conference: Charlie Carlton (Birmingham), Pat Meadows (McCalla), Emily Chastain (Fultondale) and Judy Poole (Birmingham). Clergy delegates to Jurisdictional Conference: Glenn Conner (Huntsville), Robert Sparkman (Hartselle), Mark Parris (Gallant) and Julie Holly (Birmingham). Lay reserve delegates: Keith Russell (Decatur), Donald Johnson (Birmingham) and Reid Turner (Alabaster). Clergy reserve delegates: Lori Carden (Helena), Wade Griffith (Birmingham) and Richard Stryker (Birmingham). Conference statistics: Membership stands at 134,008, down 1,468 from the previous year. Worship attendance stands at 66,136, down 1,996. Church school attendance stands at 31,191, down 1,703. Professions of faith stand at 2,056, down 262. Baptisms stand at 1,936, down 192. People served by community ministries for outreach, justice and mercy

stands at 763,254, up 94,940. Total spent by local congregations and local and connectional mission and ministry, beyond apportionments, stands at \$9,099,075, up \$606,119. – Danette Clifton, North Alabama Conference, as reported in UMNewscope; Vol. 42, Issue 24; June 18, 2014.

Red Bird Missionary Conference. The Red Bird Missionary Conference met in its 46th session in the Annville UMC in Annville, KY on May 2–3, with Bishop G. Lindsey Davis presiding. The theme, “A Life of Service Begins with Today,” guided our worship and our business as we were reminded to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. The Rev. Farley Stuart, conference superintendent, preached the opening worship and service of remembrance. The Rev. Steven Riddle preached the mission night worship service. The mission offering of over \$5,000 was designated to “Imagine No Malaria.” The Rev. Kevin Baker led the Bible study on being a servant of God.

Though worship attendance decreased slightly, baptisms of new Christians increased over the previous year. The first balanced budget in 29 years was approved for 2015. Shirley Walker was elected the new conference treasurer.

– The Rev. Farley Stuart, as reported in UMNewscope; Vol. 42, Issue 21; May 28, 2014.

South Georgia. The conference met June 1–3 at Johnny Mercer Theatre in Savannah with Bishop James King officiating. Guest speakers: Bishop Ken Carter (Florida Conference) – conference preacher. Memorable points by speakers: Bishop King: “Change happens quickly, but transition takes time...I need you to be patient and persistent. I need you to be kind and loving. . . . Everything else is adjustable, so we will keep adjusting.” Bishop Carter to ordinands: “God wants to see the church as his dream. As his project. As his mission. God has a dream for this world and it’s all about alleviating human suffering. . . . In the places you are being sent, you will find a layperson who loves their community. They are praying that someone would see the vision with them. . . . To do this work you have to have a vision for a church that does not now exist.” Main actions enacted and resolutions adopted by the conference:

Restructure: June 11, the conference transitioned from 9 to 6 districts: Coastal, North Central, Northeast, Northwest, South Central and Southwest.

Offerings: Imagine No Malaria (\$33,000); toiletries, school supplies, gift cards, baby wipes and more to Magnolia Manor, the Methodist Children’s Home, Open Door Community Center, Vashti, Wesley Community Centers and Wesley Glen.

Approved: budget of \$10,335,776.

Celebrated: one new church (The Waterfront in Richmond Hill); our Wesleyan roots through “John Wesley Moments.”

Conference statistics: Membership is 121,990, down 2,882. Worship attendance is 49,385, down 588. Church school attendance is 30,827, down 5,596. – Karen Witherow, South Georgia Conference, as reported in UMNewscope; Vol. 42, Issue 24; June 18, 2014.

Upper New York. The conference met May 29–31 at the OnCenter in Syracuse, N.Y. with Bishop Mark J. Webb officiating. Guest speakers: Bishop Mike Lowry of the Central Texas Annual Conference, Bible Study Leader. Memorable point: Bishop Lowry reminded the conference, “Wesley had it right in his essential yoking of evangelism and social action, personal holiness and social holiness, vibrant outreach and deep maturing spiritual formation. . . . Intellectually, we know this, but all too often we betray our better impulses to the squalling crisis of the moment. It is not that the clamoring issues of our day don’t merit our attention; they do. It is that we are off balance; we gradually drift into a Church that bears the name of Christ without the spiritual force, holy power, and ultimately love.” Main actions enacted and resolutions adopted by the conference:

There was continued preparation for the act of repentance that will take place at the 2015 session of Annual Conference with two times of learning from the Committee on Native American Ministry.

The leadership also built on work that had begun long ago introducing a new Mission Map with five key roles that the Conference plays in ministry. These areas summed up with the acronym CAUSE: Communicate

our common mission, Align resources for mission and ministry, Unleash a planting culture, Support churches with tools for vitality, Equip and deploy transformational leaders

□□ Resolutions approved included a pair offered by Rev. Steven Clunn. 1) a declaratory decision from the Judicial Council on the constitutionality and validity of ¶101 of The 2012 Book of Discipline and 2) clarification from the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA), the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) and the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) on “the ambiguity of ¶806.9 and whether UMs working with LGBT asylum seekers would be considered a violation of this paragraph.”

□□ There were also two resolutions submitted by young adult lay member Stephanie Henry. Both were passed. The first asked that hydraulic fracking be studied before ever being allowed on conference land. The second asked that there be an individual responsible for looking at environmental sustainability at annual conference on the Sessions committee.

□□ Other business included reaffirming a commitment to raise \$1,000,000 for scholarships for Africa University and committing to raise an additional \$1,000,000 for Imagine No Malaria. A decision was also made to explore a comprehensive financial campaign.

□□ The Board of Pensions and Health Benefits brought four recommendations that were all approved, including a substantial change to how Medicare-eligible retirees receive their care. The conference budget was also approved at \$10,340,438.

Conference statistics: Membership is 164,000, down 4,264. Worship attendance stands at 45,678, down 3%. Church school attendance stands at 11,079, down 5%. Professions of faith stand at 1,885, up 10%. Baptisms stand at 15,457, down 2%.

– Stephen J. Hustedt, Upper New York Conference, as reported in UMNewscope; Vol. 42, Issue 23; June 11, 2014.

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In his album, “America-Why I Love Her,” 1977, John Wayne stated :

“Face the Flag, son, and face reality.
Our strengths and our freedoms are based in unity.
The flag is but a symbol, son, of the world’s greatest nation,

And as long as it keeps flying, there’s cause for celebration.
So do what you’ve got to do, but always keep in mind,
A lot of people believe in peace...but there are the other kind.
If we want to keep these freedoms, we may have to fight again.

God forbid, but if we do, let’s always fight to win,
For the fate of a loser is futile and it’s bare:
No love, no peace...just misery and despair.
Face the Flag, son...and thank God it’s still there.”

– John Wayne