

Monthly Update

August 2015

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

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

Concerned Methodists recently exhibited at the National Right to Life conference in New Orleans. We talked with many people and gave out a great deal of information. Many attendees told us, “I am so glad to see you here.” Many were Roman Catholics who often added, “I need to take your material and give it to some friends I have who are Methodist.”

One highlight of the conference was Friday night when the Louisiana Right to Life had sponsored a “Mardi Gras” evening. I am no fan of that event, but it is big in the city. Guest speaker Governor Bobby Jindal is a capable orator and forceful leader. Then on Saturday morning, they had several other presidential candidates address our conference: Marco Rubio, Ted Cruz, Rick Perry, Ben Carson, among others. Dr. Ben Carson and Ted Cruz were especially energetic and forceful, with Dr. Carson showing a sharp sense of humor.

At the meeting with a supporting church in Alabama, I ended my summary of things in our society and denomination with, “We use your donations as efficiently as possible; for this trip I planned to visit family in South Georgia, so I’m driving my own car, paying all of the expenses for travel (since I will deduct it from my income taxes) and for most of my meals since I would eat at home anyway – to minimize the cost to Concerned Methodists.” Economizing is one of the many ways that we minimize expenses. Yet again, I thank you for partnering with us by your notes, prayers, and gifts as we “contend for the faith.”

It is with a great deal of sadness that we tell you about two special people: John McCarthy and Colonel (Ret.) Harold Owen, both of whom have passed away. John was one of the four founders of Concerned Methodists over twenty years ago. Hailing from New York, he was very Irish in the way he approached life and is how we often related to each other. During World War II, as a young Marine, he hit the shores of Iwo Jima – and was wounded twice on the first day, then spending over a year in military hospitals recovering from the effects of his injuries. I had teased him with, “John, you used to be a Marine, didn’t you?” and “What happened? Everybody loves the Irish, don’t they?” Of course, at that time there were a whole lot of Japanese who didn’t like anybody who was American.

COL Owen had retired from the Air Force after having flown over 23 types of planes in WW II and Korea – and staying qualified as a pilot until he was 82 years old. He was a key member of the Texas A & M University staff with many contacts in that community. On my visit to him, he introduced me to one of the men working in the kitchen for his church’s United Methodist Men’s breakfast, a former president of A & M. His saying I had listed in a book was, “Keep a positive attitude. It makes you feel better, look better, act better, and gives a better impression of yourself.” Both men will be sorely missed.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris,
Executive Director

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August 2015 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

If winter comes, can spring be far behind? – Chinese Proverb

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The Good Stuff.

+ **Bible Bee!** On May 31, 2005 at the age of 23, Shelby Kennedy went home to be with the Lord after an intense struggle with cancer. Shelby was described as a Christian who had an unusual spiritual gift of faith, a special person who radiated joy, life, and hope to everyone she met. Although Shelby had minimal energy and needed to use a wheelchair most of the time she was awake, what energy she had was focused on proclaiming Jesus Christ. Her testimony of hope in the midst of a fiery trial sparked a spirit of revival in those around her. Much of what kept Shelby's joy alive in her last days was time spent studying the Word of God. Shelby is the inspiration behind The Shelby Kennedy Foundation, a nonprofit ministry established in her name to encourage children and youth to grow in Christ through study of the Bible and Scripture memorization. Shelby's testimony sparked an incredible vision to launch a world-class Bible Bee!

For more information on their ministry, you may contact them by phone: 210-489-7311. At times they experience high call volume, so you may also go to the following website: <http://www.biblebee.org/page.php?name=aboutus>

+ **The words "Under God" should be added to our pledge of allegiance.** As many of you are aware, it was the Knights of Columbus who submitted to congress that the words "Under God" should be added to our pledge of allegiance. Both Houses of Congress passed the law and it was signed by President Eisenhower in 1954. The information below was based on a poll taken by NBC on what percentage think we should keep the words in our pledge verses the percent who want it removed. Official versions of the pledge through the years were as follows:

1892 – "I pledge allegiance to my flag and the republic for which it stands: one nation indivisible with liberty and justice for all."

1892 to 1923 – "I pledge allegiance to my flag and to the republic for which it stands: one nation indivisible with liberty and justice for all."

1923 to 1924 – "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States and to the republic for which it stands: one nation indivisible with liberty and justice for all."

1924 to 1954 – "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands;

one nation indivisible with liberty and justice for all."

1954 to Present – "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under GOD, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

NBC had a poll on this question. They had the highest Number of responses that they have ever had for one of their polls, and the Percentage was the same as this: 86% to keep the words, "IN God We Trust" and "God" in the Pledge of Allegiance, 14% against.

It is said that 86% of Americans believe the word "God" should stay. Therefore, I have a very hard time understanding why there is such a mess about having "In God We Trust" on our money and having "God" in the Pledge of Allegiance. Why is the world catering to this 14%?

In God we trust!

– Received by e-mail from Doug Child, an associate in our ministry, who had received it from Frank R. Turner, On Jul 2, 2015.

+ ***Governor defends Ten Commandments monument at state capitol.***

Recently, the Oklahoma Supreme Court ruled that a Ten Commandments monument at the state capitol must come down. This ruling is contrary to a U.S. Supreme Court ruling in 2005 that a Ten Commandments monument at the Texas state capitol was constitutional. Oklahoma Attorney General Scott Pruitt said, "Quite simply, the Oklahoma Supreme Court got it wrong...the court completely ignored the profound historical impact of the Ten Commandments on the foundation of Western law." The state attorney general is appealing the ruling, and Governor Mary Fallin has ordered the monument to remain on capitol grounds. She said in a statement, "During this process, which will involve both legal appeals and potential legislative and constitutional changes, the Ten Commandments monument will remain on the Capitol grounds."

This assault on Oklahoma's Christian heritage is alarming. Anti-God bullies have been fighting to remove religion from the public square. This is about religious liberty and recognizing that the Ten Commandments are the basis of all of our laws. Governor Fallin has taken a bold stand by defending the Ten Commandments monument. As secular groups attack our freedoms, it is important that governors stand up against this assault.

– Received by e-mail from the American Family Association; Thursday, July 23, 2015.

Of Interest.

+ ***Funeral for Marine killed in Chattanooga to be held at Hixson UMC.***

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. (July 22, 2015) -- Funeral services for one of four Marines who died in a July 16 attack on Chattanooga military facilities will be held at Hixson United Methodist Church, the Chattanooga Times Free Press reports. Sgt. David Wyatt will be buried in Chattanooga National Cemetery. Funeral Services will be held at 1 p.m., Friday, July 24 at Hixson UMC with the Rev. Reed Shell and Navy Chaplain Commander James Storie officiating. "I ask you to surround Reed Shell and Hixson UMC in prayer," the Rev. Brenda Carroll, Chattanooga District superintendent, wrote this morning on a Facebook page for Chattanooga clergy. "They could use our prayers as they minister and deal with all that goes with media presence and a huge crowd," Carroll wrote. "As we continue in prayer for these families burying their loved ones, and for our city, I also pray for you as you lead people of faith and bring others to know Jesus." Hixson's website announced that "video will not be permitted in the church or during the service...We are currently awaiting approval from the family to set media locations at the church site," the Hixson website also said. "The designated funeral procession route will be announced Thursday afternoon."

– The Call, Vol. E15, Number 13; July 18, 2015. Website: <http://holston.org/about/communications/>

+ ***Statistics of the UM church in the United States.*** In the September Monthly Update, we will include more background information and other data. Church membership for 2013: 7,344,124 (laity only, excluding clergy); clergy membership, 44,469; total active churches, 32,608; average weekly worship attendance, 2,908,352; (U.S.) annual conferences, 57; (U.S.) episcopal areas, 46. A partial listing of the Annual Conference reports show a decline in membership in excess of 82,000, with the remaining data expected to show a further drop. – AOM

+ ***AFA Encourages Americans to Support First Amendment Defense Act.***

[Note: We in Concerned Methodists are not involved in the political process as a ministry, nor do we endorse candidates, political parties, or any type of specific activism. However, we are very concerned about any abridgement of our rights, especially our Constitutional rights regarding the First Amendment, which guarantees our freedom of religion. – AOM]

American Family Association Action Alert Urges Americans to Contact Representatives to Further First Amendment Protections

TUPELO, Miss.—American Family Association (AFA, www.afa.net) is encouraging Americans to contact their U.S. Representatives about the newly proposed First Amendment Defense Act, which will protect churches and faith-based organizations from government penalties or actions regarding their religious convictions. In response to the Supreme Court ruling last month that legalized same-sex marriage, Rep. Raul Labrador (R-Idaho) has

introduced the First Amendment Defense Act (H.R. 2802). The religious freedom bill would ban the federal government from punishing churches, charities or private schools for actions in opposition to same-sex marriage.

In an Action Alert sent to its one million-plus friends and supporters and posted on its web site today, AFA is urging Americans to support the bill by contacting their member of Congress so swift action can be taken by lawmakers. “This First Amendment Defense Act is not only important to all Americans, but time-sensitive as well,” said AFA President Tim Wildmon. “Many Republicans say they hope to pass the bill before they head home on the summer break, but they need your voice to get other legislators to move on it quickly. Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy needs to hear from your Representative, but it won’t happen unless our Representatives hear from concerned citizens. Even if your Representative is already a co-sponsor of the First Amendment Defense Act, he or she needs to hear from you. Take a moment to urge these lawmakers to push for a floor vote within the next three weeks. Our religious freedoms depend on it.” The bill, says AFA, is crucial because if it passes, for example, the government could not revoke the tax-exempt status of churches that refuse to perform same-sex weddings because of their religious beliefs; nor could the government deny federal grants or contracts for food banks, adoption agencies or similar agencies—or to any individual or institution that doesn’t choose to uphold same-sex marriage practices. H.R. 2802 would also protect Christian radio and television stations that are licensed by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to use the public airwaves. Some opponents are already urging the FCC to revoke licenses and shut down certain stations. AFA added in its alert that Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.), who controls the floor schedule, has given no indication he’ll schedule a vote in the remaining three weeks before the House’s long August recess.

AFA is urging those concerned to visit the Action Alert web page and send a letter to their Representatives—either a pre-written message from AFA or their own letter in the space provided. AFA is also suggesting that letter-writers additionally call their Representatives’ offices after sending their message, as elected officials have repeatedly said it only takes a few phone calls from voters in their district to move an issue to the top of the list.

In the wake of the recent Supreme Court decision, AFA is making important resources available to help pastors, leadership and other ministries to protect themselves, their churches and their religious liberties. American Family Studios, a division of AFA, has produced a short documentary that provides legal analysis of the dangers posed to religious liberty by the recent Supreme Court ruling. In addition, AFA is offering insights from AFA General Counsel Patrick Vaughn in a commentary titled “Will a gay marriage storm crush your church?,” which will help churches understand the dangers of taking no action on this important matter. Alliance Defending Freedom has also produced a handbook, “A Legal Guide for Churches, Christian Schools, and Christian Ministries,” which walks churches through every step of adopting strong marriage policies, including sample resolutions and statements.

AFA offers its friends and supporters several mobile apps through <http://www.afa.net/resources/mobile-apps/>. The AFA Action Alerts app, with breaking news and action alerts, is available for the iPhone and iPad on the Apple App Store, on Google Play and on the Amazon Appstore for Android. The AFR (American Family Radio) app is available for Apple and Android products, and the AFA Action app with, for example, voter information at election time, is available on Apple and Android platforms.

For more information on American Family Association, visit www.afa.net.

<http://www.afa.net/who-is-afa/press-releases/2015/07-july/afa-encourages-americans-to-support-first-amendment-defense-act/>

– Press Release by the American Family Association; Deborah Hamilton; Tuesday, July 14, 2015.

+ **Character Assassination.** Congressman Bill Flores (R-Texas) knows more than he'd like to about the character assassination of Christians. The Texas Republican found out about RightWingWatch's misinformation machine the hard way this week, when the brainchild of liberal billionaire George Soros took time out from distorting FRC [i.e., the Family Research Council] to put a bulls-eye on his back. Flores became the object of the blog's smear campaign for a conversation he had with me on "Washington Watch" Tuesday. In it, he talked about the breakdown of the family and how the violence and unrest in Baltimore is a symptom of a broader cultural problem. "The single best indicator of whether or not a child is going to be in poverty or not is whether or not

they were raised by a two-parent household or a single parent household, so the breakdown of the family has contributed to poverty. Look at what is going on in Baltimore today. You see the issues that are raised there. Healthy marriages are the ones between a man and a woman because they can have a healthy family and they can raise children in a way that's best for their future, not only socially but psychologically, economically, from a health perspective." This is hardly an extreme line of logic. Senator Rand Paul (R-Ky.) made an almost identical statement this week on Laura Ingraham's show. "It's something we talk about not in the immediate aftermath, but over time," he said. "The breakdown of the family structure, the lack of fathers, the lack of sort of a moral code in our society. This isn't just a racial thing. It goes across racial boundaries," Paul explained. FRC's MARRI team has volumes of research demonstrating exactly that. Still, RightWingWatch's bullies pounced on the interview and manufactured a phony controversy that Politico fueled with the headline, "Congressman Links Baltimore Crisis to Same-sex Marriage." That's a leap of Grand Canyon proportions. Yet the media continues to perpetuate and propagate these lies to damage the careers of well-meaning, principled conservatives. Bill Flores didn't link the Supreme Court case on marriage to the Baltimore riots. He simply refused to back away from the evidence-based argument that redefining marriage leads to the dissolution of marriage, which will result in cultural chaos. That may be a foreign concept to liberal operatives like RightWingWatch, but it isn't to a majority of Americans. – Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council, e-mail.

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Your tongue is the tattletale of your heart. – Dr. Robert Jeffress, pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas

Global Outlook

When governments fear the people, there is liberty. When the people fear the government, there is tyranny.

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

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China. *There Are More Christians Than Members of the Communist Party in China*, By Dr. Riley Case

I was impressed, many years ago, by Kenneth Scott Latourette's mammoth *History of Christian Missions in China*. It was not a hopeful book. For the most part, the history of Christian Missions in China is the story of failed efforts. The first Christians in China were the Nestorians, followed by the Franciscans, the Jesuits, the Russian Orthodox, more Roman Catholics, and finally the Protestants. By 1928, when Latourette wrote the book, Christianity could claim only 2.5 to 3 million adherents in China, less than 1% of the population. Missionaries had made a lot of mistakes, not the least of which was the effort to "help" China by seeking to impose Western civilization and ways of thinking upon a land which already had its own understanding of "civilization."

The book was more discouraging because I perused it (I don't think I totally read it because it is 930 pages long) in the 1960s at a time when it appeared that Christianity, because of the Communist takeover of China, had failed one more time. In 1949 China banned Christianity. I remember a presentation by Eugene Stockwell of the Board of Missions, who had been a missionary in China, who basically pronounced a eulogy over the church in China. The Communists had seized all of the Methodist properties. All the missionaries had been evacuated, and the Board of Missions had no contact with former Methodists in China.

Never mind, at least as far as the progressives were concerned. Progressives, it might be noted, tend to be more interested in matters like equality and inclusivism and brave new worlds than with Christian converts. In the 1960s and 70s liberation theology never knew a revolution it didn't like. Millions died in the Cultural Revolution from 1966-1976 but this was necessary to create a worker's paradise. In 1978 United Methodism's Women's Division offered a book for its mission study entitled *China Search for Community*. Christianity, according to the book, may have died out in China but it had been replaced by Maoist values which had much to commend them. Because of these values "the experience of the People in China today, their way of living and interacting, is in some way "Christian" aside from any considerations about religious adherence or belief."

The book explains: And so one comes to the great paradox that...in China they are implementing the second great commandment far better than has been done by Christendom at any period, while at the same time rejecting altogether the first one....I think China is the only truly Christian country in the world in the present day, in spite of its absolute rejection of all religion. (p. 55)

For those enamored with social planning and scientific advancement, Maoism should have proved the progressive mantra that as history moves forward learning replaces religious dogma and reason replaces unthinking obedience. The UMW study book explained: "China is...further on the way to the true society of mankind, the Kingdom of God if you like, than our own....We don't know what back-slidings and failures will occur, but on the whole, I think they are more advanced."

Progressives have a strange view of the Kingdom of God. Was China under Mao really an example of the coming Kingdom of God? As we all know China would further undergo times of hunger, repression, cynicism, despair and the suppression of basic human rights in the 1980s and 1990s. Atheism and secularism offered no hope, no purpose, and, despite government planning, little wealth.

The last twenty-five years, however, have brought major changes in China. China has experimented with some free market principles and, while still with a Communist government, has a rapidly expanding economy. It is presently the chief rival to the United States as a major power on the world scene.

But there is another reality usually overlooked by world observers. China also has a fast-growing Christian Church. Our God, that is, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, acts in unexpected ways. Christianity never did die out completely in China. Despite tremendous suffering and persecution the Church in China has come to life. This is happening without missionaries, without the influx of financial support from western nations, and, for that matter, apart from western civilization. It is doing this without institutional denominationalism, without boards and agencies and bishops and monitoring groups who make sure proper diversity is evident at all levels. It is doing this without Christian colleges and Christian hospitals. It is doing this without Boards of Church and Society telling the political powers how they ought to run the nation.

The Financial Times Magazine of Great Britain in its November 8/9 issue carried a major story on Chinese Christianity which opened with these words: "There are now more Christians in China than members of the Communist party." No one is certain how many Christians there really are in China at the present time but some are estimating about 100 million compared with 86.7 million members of the Communist Party. The article quotes Fenggang Yang, director of the center on religion and Chinese society at Purdue University: "By 2030 China will almost certainly have more Christians than any other country..."

Even more than the United States? According to the article the Communist government is alarmed: Chinese officials often cite the experience of Poland, where they believe the Catholic Church helped destroy communism. Consequently there is presently a new campaign of repression against Christians. This intentional campaign to reign in the rise of Christianity started on April 28 with the demolition of one of the most beautiful Protestant cathedrals in the Zhejiang Province, the Sanjiang Church in the coastal city of Wenzhou. Along with this has been harassment, removal of crosses, and arrests. The official explanation has to do with zoning violations and building codes but few persons buy that argument. Isn't it the Christians who are causing the trouble in Hong Kong with their demonstrations? (a reality not recognized in the U.S. media reports of the demonstrations). Furthermore, the Christians in China are not the older, mostly female, mostly uneducated peasants of rural areas, the types of persons that characterized Christians before the revolution, but educated and financially secure young people. They may represent only 7% of the population but it is a significant 7%. 11.8% of the people of Hong Kong are Christian. 10% of Wenzhou's population are Christians. (China's population is 1.3 billion.)

We would wish to have more contact with our Chinese sisters and brothers in Christ. The pastors have little theological training since there are no opportunities. Roman Catholics are cut off from Rome. Protestants are cut off from denominations in other parts of the world. We know that the Church in China tends to be charismatic and millenarian. There are portions caught up in a prosperity gospel. There are other parts that are synchronizing with Chinese folk religion.

All the same the work of God carries on. It may not be a bad thing that China's Church has little contact with the west. Moral standards are in flux in America. The traditional understanding of marriage is being undermined in America. Freedom is becoming license in America. In the west the test is whether growing secularization will mean the demise of religion. In China the test is whether the rise of Christian faith will mean the demise of atheism and secularism, and perhaps even Communism.

Stay tuned.

– Dr. Riley Case, Happenings Around the Church 11.25.14

Annual Conference Reports

Alabama-West Florida. The 2015 Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference was held May 31-June 3 in Montgomery, Alabama, with the theme, “The Great Commission: Nurturing Disciples.” Bishop Paul L. Leeland welcomed clergy and lay members to Frazer Memorial UM Church in Montgomery. Imagine No Malaria was the beneficiary of the 2015 missional offering. At this service, \$91,602 was collected. The opening worship service of the 2015 Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference session was held Sunday evening, May 31, in the sanctuary of Frazer Memorial United Methodist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. Bishop Mike Lowry of the Central Texas Conference preached the sermon based on Psalm 89:5-18 and Acts 12:1-17...expressed that one of the most encouraging things going on across the Christian community is the reawakening and recovery of spiritual formation and small groups for prayer and Bible study. Thirty-three clergy and clergy spouses who had passed were remembered today during the Service of Remembrance and Holy Communion. Fifteen clergy were recognized upon their retirement by the Rev. Jim Sanders during Monday's order of the day. Together, the retiring clergy have over 440 years of service in our conference. The Rev. Neil McDavid spoke on behalf of the retiring class. The Service of Commissioning and Ordination was held Monday evening in the sanctuary of Montgomery First United Methodist Church...and included the commissioning of two provisional deacons and six provisional elders and the ordination of one deacon in full connection and four elders in full connection. Bishop Mike Lowry of the Central Texas Conference preached a sermon titled, “No Reservation, No Retreat, No Regret” based on Psalm 46:1-3 and Acts 28:30-31.

The conference was honored by the outstanding leadership of several guest speakers. The Rev. Jorge Acevedo, from Grace Church in the Florida Conference, led two Bible study sessions. Bishop Mike Lowry of the Central Texas Conference preached the opening worship service and the Service of Commissioning and Ordination. We welcomed Sheri Atland, Campaign Director with Imagine No Malaria and Marcus McKinney from the Historic Black Colleges. Drexel Gilbert gave the Mary Ellen Bullard Leadership Address at this year's laity banquet. The Rev. Jackie Slaughter and The Rev. Brian Miller led the conference in a poignant moment where we honored the history and significance of the 50th anniversary of the Selma to Montgomery march. An emotional, collective singing of “The Lord's Prayer” concluded this very meaningful order of the day on Tuesday afternoon.

The 2016 General and Jurisdictional Delegation was elected at this year's conference. The delegates are: General Conference Delegation – Steve Furr, laity; Pat Luna, laity; Beverly Maddox, laity; Clara Ester, laity; Dawn Hare, laity; Lawson Bryan, clergy; Larry Bryars, clergy; Jeremy Pridgeon, clergy; Robin Wilson, clergy; John Brooks, clergy. Jurisdictional Conference Delegation - Frank Moore, laity; Robert Powell, laity; Frank Dunnewind, laity; Tripp Gullledge, laity; Gene Floore, laity; June Jernigan, clergy; Rurel Ausley, clergy; Cory Smith, clergy; Tonya Elmore, clergy; Emily Kincaid, clergy; Susan Hunt, laity alternate; Antonius Barnes, laity alternate; Duane Keck, laity alternate; Paulette Thompson, laity alternate; Dan Morris, clergy alternate; Jackie Slaughter, clergy alternate; Allen Newton, clergy alternate; Rob Couch, clergy alternate.

Fourteen petitions and two resolutions passed before the annual conference. The conference established a \$10.9 million budget for mission and ministry for 2016, a 0.4 percent reduction from 2015.

Statistics: Membership is 139,918, down 1 percent; worship attendance 63,781 down 2 percent.

– Mary Catherine Phillips Director of Communications, Alabama-West Florida Conference.

www.awfumc.org/ac2015.

Alaska. Officiating bishop: Grant Hagiya. Guest speakers: Tom Wilson, Northwest United Methodist Foundation; Belinda Denicola, Enlisting volunteers for General Conference; Kelli Williams, Alaska Child and Family; Ray Buckley, native speaker for theme “Restoring the Sacred Circle”; Via letter, David Mahaffey, bishop of the Orthodox Dioceses of Sitka and Alaska; Julie Frisbee, Imagine No Malaria; Heather Wilson, United Methodist Committee on Relief, Western Jurisdiction; Resolutions adopted by the conference: None. Election of delegates and alternate delegates to the [General and Jurisdictional] conference delegates are: The Rev. Carlo Rapanut, General and Jurisdictional delegate; the Rev. Doug Handlong, General alternate and Jurisdictional delegate; the Rev. Evelyn Erbele, reserve delegate; and Dan Wilcox, reserve delegate. Lay delegates are: JoAnne Hayden, General and Jurisdictional delegate; Jim LaBau, General alternate and Jurisdictional delegate; Fran Lynch, reserve delegate; and Linda Haynes, reserve delegate.

Statistics: Membership 3,367 in 2014; 3,539 in 2013 – a loss of 172; Worship Attendance – 2,023 in 2014; 2,057 in 2013 – a loss of 34; Amount given to mission – \$167,325 in 2014; \$206,903 in 2013 – a loss of \$39,577. – Jim Doepkin, for the Alaska Conference.

Arkansas. Bishop Gary E. Mueller is the officiating bishop. The Rev. Paul Rasmussen, senior pastor of Highland Park United Methodist Church in Dallas, Texas, preached during Sunday night’s opening worship as well as Monday night’s service. Virginia Area Bishop Young Jin Cho opened the Monday morning session of with a meditation on the process and power of prayer. Cho urged the church to go beyond mere knowledge of God or strategy for ministry. Instead, he said, we need to develop a close relationship with God rooted in a dialogue of prayer. “Prayer is the major thing in our life and ministry,” he said. “Prayer should go first.” He guided the body in prayer for revival using Tongsung Kido, a Korean tradition of individuals praying aloud simultaneously around a common theme; and then in intercessory prayer with a prayer partner. The Rev. David M. Wilson, supt. of the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference, led an Act of Repentance Service Toward Indigenous People, as set forth by a resolution at the 2012 General Conference.

The Rev. Lisa Yebuah, pastor of inviting ministries at Edenton Street United Methodist Church in Raleigh, North Carolina, preached the closing worship service, focusing on the belief that an act of blessing has power beyond the moment in which it is spoken. **Resolutions adopted by the conference:** a petition concerning juvenile justice to General Conference 2016; end the Conference’s self-insured healthcare plan for clergy and conference employees, [and] a recommendation that any local church/charge with full-time clergy increase the salary for each of those positions by \$12,000; approved new formula for calculating apportionments away from expense-based budgeting to a revenue-based (in 2017, apportionments will be figured as 10 % of a church’s adjusted gross income).

Election of delegates: Clergy delegates. General Conference: The Revs. Mark K. Norman, Dede Roberts, Rebekah Miles, John P. Miles II. Jurisdictional Conference: The Revs. Wes Hilliard, Brittany Richardson Watson, John Embrey, Maxine Allen. Clergy Alternates: The Revs. David Bush, Pam Estes. Laity delegates. General Conference: Karon Mann, Todd Burris, Karen Millar, Asa Whitaker. Jurisdictional Conference: Elizabeth Fink, Miller Wilbourn, Brian Swain, Brandon Bates. Laity Alternates: Makala Strang, Katye Dunn.

Number of people ordained, commissioned or received into associate membership, and average age: 7 commissioned, 9 ordained.

Statistics: Current membership: 132,250, a decrease of less than 1% from last year – 132,438; worship attendance: 50,216, an increase – 50,169; church school attendance: 20,792 (a decrease of less than 1 percent). Last year's church school attendance: 22,032

– Amy Forbus, editor, Arkansas United Methodist

Baltimore-Washington. Meeting less than a mile from where the Methodist Church began in 1784, and just a few miles from where riots broke out in late April 2015, more than 1,200 clergy, laity and guests gathered at the Marriott Waterfront Hotel in Baltimore with Bishop Marcus Matthews presiding. They heard and saw riveting reports of how the church has responded following the riots that devastated the Sandtown-Winchester

neighborhood of southwest Baltimore, and took action to approve a special offering June 7 throughout the conference to raise money for refurbishing the five churches in the neighborhood. Bishop Matthews started the gathering by inviting members to stand and pray for the city of Baltimore; later, Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake greeted the assembly, thanking United Methodists for opening their doors on the day after the unrest.

Conference members gathered in small groups, sitting in circles of 10 to 12 people...[and] took time to listen to one another discuss four resolutions... seeking the conference's blessing before being sent on to the 2016 General Conference: the first petition sought to remove the sentence, "The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching" from the Book of Discipline. The other three resolutions concerned issues between science, theology and the church. Following the Circles of Grace, members voted on each petition. The first petition was approved by a vote of 539 yes to 234 no. That petition will now go to the 2016 General Conference noting how the Baltimore-Washington Conference voted. Only General Conference has the authority to change the Book of Discipline, and they next meet in May 2016.

The other three petitions received mixed results. A petition that sought the General Conference to re-adopt a resolution in the Book of Resolutions around "God's Creation and the Church" was approved by BWC members, 642 to 127. Two other petitions – one opposing the teaching of creationism in public schools, and one on climate change – were defeated, 370 to 403, and 330 to 438.

At the memorial service, members celebrated the lives of bishops, clergy, clergy spouses and laity who had died in the previous conference year. In other actions, conference members: Honored the retirement of 16 clergy, representing more than 490 years of service, and paused in moments of somber reflection during an Act of Repentance Service and reconciliation between Native American people and The United Methodist Church.

Elected delegates to the 2016 General Conference: Clergy – the Revs. Terri Rae Chattin, Joe Daniels, Charlie Parker, Cynthia Moore-Koikoi, JW Park, and Ginger Gaines-Cirelli; Laity – Delores Martin, (Chair of the delegation); Jen Ihlo, Charles Moore, Cynthia Taylor, Tom Price, and Ken Ow. Jurisdictional Conference: Laity – Kelly Robier (alt.), Christopher Schlieckert, Jordan Andrian, Sherie Koob, and Sarah Ford; Clergy – the Revs. Conrad Link (alt.), Joan Carter-Rimbach, Edgardo Rivera, Evan Young, Sarah Andrews, and Tony Love. Alternates. Laity – Mitty Quinn, Richard Wilson, and Matthew Sichel; Clergy – the Revs. Jason Jordan-Griffin, Mary Kay Totty, Melissa Rudolph, and Marlon Tilghman.

[An] honored guest at this session was Bishop Seung Chul An of the Korean Methodist Church (The BWC has a partnership with the South Conference in Korea), and approved a \$17.2 million budget.

Statistics: 2014 membership is 168,412, down from 169,701. Worship 61,713, from 63,480. Church school attendance 18,301, from 19,035. The 2016 Annual Conference Session will be June 1-3, at the Washington Marriott Wardman Park in Washington, D.C.

– Erik Alsgaard, editor, Ministry of Communications

California-Nevada. Addressing more than 1,000 attendees, San Francisco Episcopal Area Bishop Warner H. Brown Jr., told the 167th session of the California-Nevada Annual Conference: "God can create a people, a powerful people, out of the most unlikely candidates... He looked around the world and found this ragtag bunch that he shaped into a people... We are standing as the church for the healing of our society." This is the second year the annual conference met in Burlingame, California, near San Francisco, after many consecutive years meeting in Sacramento. Bishop Bobby R. Best, presiding prelate of the Ninth Episcopal District of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church served as the preacher for the Service of Ordination. He preached from the theme, "Activating Idle Faith." Bishop Best challenged the ordinands, and those gathered, to lend their support and voice to eliminate police brutality, poverty and racism. He said, "Prayer is critical and crucial, but it ought not to be the only thing we do... . We have to do something after we pray... . We have to do some things after we finish saying what we believe... God expects us to be an arm of extension for him for his grace and his glory." [Also,] Bishop Brown welcomed the Rev. Tevita Nawadra Banivanua, associate general secretary of the Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma, who participated throughout the session.

The annual conference celebrated the chartering of three new United Methodist churches: Cambodian Bayside United Methodist Church, Alameda, California; First Taulanga-U Tongan United Methodist Church of Sacramento, California; and Reno First Tongan United Methodist Church, Reno, Nevada. Five congregations were designated as mission congregations: East Salinas Family Center, Salinas, California; Mision Metodista Hispana, Soledad, California; San Jose Tongan Fellowship, Sunnyvale, California; Hmong Fellowship, Marysville, California; Korean Fellowship, Clovis, California.

Two years ago, the annual conference session launched a conference-wide Imagine No Malaria initiative to raise \$2 million over a two-year period to conclude at the end of 2015. The conference celebrated raising \$1.75 million towards the \$2 million goal. Last September, Bishop Brown along with the four district superintendents, launched the \$100K District Challenge in which each district attempted to raise \$100,000 by the annual conference session toward the goal. More than \$377,000 was raised resulting in two district superintendents taking pies to the face on the stage, and two district superintendents shaving their heads. In other action, legislation passed included: selling the current conference center office and purchasing another location; a petition to the 2016 General Conference to amend the United Methodist Book of Resolutions ¶4071, Investment Strategies; and support of efforts to separate local law enforcement from U.S. immigration issues; a budget of \$6,168,408 budget 2016, a 3 percent increase from 2015.

In what has become a tradition for Bishop Brown's episcopacy, he washed the feet of the newly commissioned ordinands. Three elders in full connection were ordained, and two provisional deacons and 12 provisional elders were commissioned on Friday evening. Five licensed local pastors were received as well. Twenty-three clergy and spouses who died in the past year were remembered during a memorial service. Ten clergy retired, representing more than 245 years of service.

General Conference Delegates: Lay – Emily Allen, Burt Yin, Randall Miller; Clergy – The Revs. Jeffrey Kuan, Greg Bergquist, Karen Oliveto. Jurisdictional Conferences Delegates: Lay – Gayle Shearman, Wesley Hingano, Emily Bennett, Emma Kerr-Carpenter, Rob Dunning, Mari Kawaguchi, Ruby Bago; Clergy – Siosifa Hingano, Odette Lockwood-Stewart, Dale Weatherspoon, Felicisimo Cao, Elizabeth Brick, Bener Agtarap, Schuyler Rhodes. Reserves: Lay – Katherine Kim, James Eychaner, Kyna McNaught, Nina Klepac, Beverly Pool; Clergy – Kathy LaPoint-Collup, Myrna Bernadel-Hughey, Motoe Yamada-Foor, Jola Bortner, Jeong Park.

Statistics: Membership is 74,228, down 538. Worship 31,099, down 429. Church school attendance 6,754, up 633. Professions of faith 1,236, down 151. Baptisms 724, down 92. – Larry R. Hygh Jr., director of communications, California-Nevada Annual Conference

California-Pacific. Official Summary of the 31st Session of the California-Pacific Annual Conference. Opening worship on Thursday, June 18, 2015, ushered in the Spirit of God to warm the hearts of almost 1,600 gathered, and others via livestream, as Resident Bishop Minerva G. Carcaño called to order the Conference. Dr. Kim Marcus With the theme of, “Judgment, Justice, Joy,” session focused on Acts of Repentance with a particular emphasis on the communities of native persons throughout the California-Pacific region. Dr. Marcus, a spiritual leader for the Serrano-Cahuilla people in this region, was invited and present to perform a Native American greeting ceremony offering Native American Words of Welcome and Blessing. Bishop Carcaño, in the Episcopal Address, shared with those gathered that the faithfulness of our local churches has been strengthening her own discipleship and hope for the church and the world. She shared the story of the ongoing work of ministry with the local churches in the San Bernardino area and the joint effort with them, the Cabinet, and Conference Staff as an example of how we might together inspire the world as passionate followers of Jesus so all may experience God's life-giving love. Such Connectionalism is the same attitude that she encouraged our Conference to adopt in the approach to General Conference 2016.

Major decisions made at the 31st Session included the establishing of the Conference Connectional Table to replace the Navigation Essential Ministry Team, the placing of the Congregational Loans Sub-Committee within the Council on Finance and Administration, providing Retiree Healthcare through One Exchange, a private medicare exchange broker, and approved the 2016 Budget of \$12.8 million, which is the same total budget

amount as our 2015 Budget. The ministry of 17 clergy persons who moved into retired status was celebrated. Together, these retiring ministers gave over 509 years of active service as United Methodist clergy persons.

The Conference received a check of \$200,000 from San Diego First United Methodist Church as a contribution to Cal-Pac's Imagine No Malaria effort; in addition, just over \$7,000 was received for Imagine No Malaria and over \$9,000 was received in Special Offerings of which \$4,236.25 was for Philippines Church Building Mission with Indigenous People, \$1,942 for Latin America and the Caribbean, and \$2,917.90 for Oklahoma Indian Missionary Endowment for Leadership Development.

The annual Memorial Service remembered 4 Bishops, 3 Bishop's Spouses, 18 Clergypersons, and 17 Clergy Spouses who had gone on ahead to eternal life since the last annual conference session; the preacher for this service was the Rev. Faith Conklin whose sermon was entitled "Obituaries and Maternity Clothes." The Ordination Service was the final service of the 31st Session: 4 on the Elder track, and the ordination of 10 new Elders.

The Czech Republic/Slovakia Annual Conference met June 5-7 in Bratislava, Slovakia. A theological presentation at the opening of the Czech Republic-Slovakia Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church and personal reports from several local churches at the end of the meeting referred to the conference theme, "Our Hope in Christ," surrounded the other conference business. Because the conference covers two countries with different legal situations, organizational, administrative, and financial, issues are dealt with separately at the respective district conferences. Annual conference meetings focus on cross-border and joint matters, as education and lay and ordained ministry. One of the highlights of this year's conference occurred on the closing Sunday, when Gabriella Kopas, Pavle Kocev, and Štefan Rendoš, all from Slovakia, were ordained elders. Another co-worker from Slovakia, Ivan Lukac, was admitted as pastor on probation, and Štefania Sklenárová was commissioned to serve as local pastor. In the Czech district, there was also a new local pastor starting his ministry: Jirí Kantor. This means there are now 16 active clergy members in the Czech district and 11 active clergy members in the Slovak district. Just prior to the annual conference, the district conference of The United Methodist Church in Slovakia met. Participants continued the conversation on the future focus areas of ministry. After a meeting with the bishop in November 2014, in which the potential and the problems of the current situation had been discussed, regional groups had met and prepared their reports, which they now presented to the district conference. As a result, three priorities for the future work emerged:

1. More intense cooperation of the local churches, with the aim to strengthen the existing local churches and to support growth.
2. Creation of opportunities for and activities with youth, enabling them to shape the mission of the church with their gifts and talents.
3. Strengthening the awareness and willingness of all members and friends to actively participate in the mission of the church – with their gifts and talents, their time, and their financial opportunities.

For all priorities, the participants in the Slovakia district conference considered it important to remember the three basic dimensions motivating to such a ministry: to strengthen the vertical dimension of the relationship with God, to develop the horizontal dimension of the fellowship with one another, and to live out a faith radiating love and thus having a social impact.

– Submitted by Bishop Patrick Streiff, Zurich

The Dakotas. Over 600 members and visitors of the Dakotas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church gathered in Fargo, North Dakota with Bishop Bruce R. Ough presiding. The Rev. Jorge Acevedo, lead pastor at Grace Church, a multi-site United Methodist congregation in Southwest Florida, led two teaching sessions at this year's conference. "Jesus wants your church to be fruitful" – and it begins with being faithful, Acevedo said. God wants Pentecost to happen in your life and in your church. Acevedo shared four ways Grace Church has tried to model its ministries around the movements of grace that Methodism founder John Wesley identified reach, connect, form and send ministries. Approved a budget of \$7,026,664, an increase of \$91,231 from 2015.

Statistics: Membership is 36,243, down 213. There were 803 professions of faith in 2014 up from 756 in 2013. Worship attendance is 21,669, up 858. Church-school attendance (Sunday morning statistics only) is 5,793, up 69.

– Doreen Gosmire, associate director of communications, Dakotas Conference

Desert Southwest. The 26th session of the Desert Southwest Annual Conference at the Glendale Renaissance Hotel in Glendale, Arizona, began on Thursday, June 18, with Bishop, Robert T. Hoshibata presiding. Resolutions adopted by the annual conference: Divest from Caterpillar, Screening Investments in Illegal Settlements, Economic Inequality, Inclusivity, Native American Sunday Observance and Support, Petroleum and Natural Gas Investments, Resolution Endorsing Science and Evolution. Election of delegates and alternate delegates for 2016. General Conference: Clergy delegate – The Rev. Dan Hurlbert, and Reserve The Rev. Anthony Tang; Lay delegate – Jim Nibbelink, and Reserve Billie Fidlin. Jurisdictional Conference: Clergy – The Revs. Elizabeth Rambikur, Sharon Ragland and Javier Olivares, and alternate delegates: The Revs. Nancy Cushman, Candace Lansberry; Lay delegates – Marjie Hrabe, Diana Marie Volere, Paul Gomez, and alternate delegates Matthew Harris, Danielle Coyco. 14 people were commissioned or ordained.

Statistics: membership for 2014 is 33,629, down from 34,851; worship attendance 23,508; church school attendance 4,202; Professions/reaffirmations of faith 1,242 vs. 1,228 for 2013; worshippers engaged in mission for 2014 – 11,235, an increase – 8,743.

At the start of the conference, Bishop Hoshibata asked the body to breathe in with God's spirit and breathe out with God's love. At the close of the 2015 Desert Southwest Annual Conference on June 21, he...called everyone to go back to their congregations and say that we made a commitment to let God's Spirit come into our lives to refresh us, renew us, so we can become agents of love and peace. Then he again asked everyone to breathe in God's spirit and breathe out God's love.

– Christina Dillabough, director of communications in the Desert Southwest Con

Detroit. Members of the Detroit Conference voted on unification of Michigan's two annual conferences and creation of a single Michigan Board of Camping and Retreat Ministries, but the results were sealed until the West Michigan Conference votes. Bishop Deborah Lieder Kiesey officiated. The conference also raise[ed] of \$1,634,362 for Imagine No Malaria.

The Rev. Jorge Acevedo, pastor of Grace Church of Greater Fort Myers, Florida, as the keynote speaker, said "if the only place people can get into your church is through the front door on Sunday morning you are toast. We try to be Christian rather than training to be Christian." Acevedo said, "The faithful life is not without pain. . . . we choose either the pain of discipline or the pain of regret."

Resolutions adopted by the conference including a resolution asking General Conference to base the formula for equalization of annual conference membership on average attendance of clergy and laity, a revised Clergy Sexual Ethics Policy for the Michigan Area, and a recommendation that congregations study then question government leaders about the 2016 Budget for Pentagon spending.

2016 delegates. General Conference: Clergy–The Revs. Charles Boayue, Joy Barrett, Melanie Carey; Laity–Jackie Euper, Wayne Bank, Diane Brown. Jurisdictional: Clergy–the Revs. Megan Walther, Matthew Hook, Laura Speiran; Laity–Alexander Plum, Claudia Bowers, Ruby Anderson. Alternates: Clergy–the Revs. Sherry Parker, Tara Sutton; Lay–Ruth Sutton, Isaac Garrigues-Cortelyou.

Statistics: membership is 83,145, down from 86,691 last year; worship attendance was 38,087, down from 40,759 last year.

– Kay DeMoss, senior writer and content editor the Detroit and West Michigan conferences.

East Ohio. Met June 15-18, 2015, at Lakeside Chautauqua in Marblehead, Ohio with Bishop John L. Hopkins presiding. Delegates in Attendance: 1,481 delegates (701 clergy, 780 lay) Theme: Jesus is Calling Us Up.

Statistics: Number of people ordained – 13 (11 elders, 2 deacons), retired – 42; membership is 150,928 – down 3,563; weekly worship attendance is 58,018, down 2,253; church school attendance is 17,155, down 797;

professions of faith are 2,271, down 145; baptisms are 1,669, down 166. The following resolutions came before the body during the week: On Jail and Prison Ministry – adopted; Commending Ohio General Assembly for Anti-poverty Work – adopted; Oppose Legalized Marijuana in Ohio – adopted. [Of especial interest was] A Call to Respond to the Palestinian/Israeli Conflict asks that ...the East Ohio Conference encourage local churches to boycott products made by Israeli or American companies operating in Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories, submitted by the EOC Church and Society Committee – not adopted. The following petitions to General Conference came before the body: annual conferences will actively recruit, and retain clergy of color – not supported; clergy have the right to review their Supervisory File annually, so that clergy will have total knowledge of its contents – supported; Regarding Use of Language asks that the Book of Discipline, ¶161F be amended – not supported; Regarding Standards and Conduct for Ordained Clergy calls for amending Book of Discipline ¶304.310 presents a barrier to keeping qualified clergy of all sexual orientations and gender identities from serving our church, submitted by the East Ohio Reconciling Ministries Network and East Ohio Methodist Federation for Social Action – not supported.

– Rick Wolcott, director of communications

Eastern Pennsylvania. May 14-16, 2015, Greater Philadelphia Expo Center, Oaks, Pennsylvania. Officiating bishop: Peggy Johnson.

Guest speakers: The Rev. Susan Henry Crowe, United Methodist Board of Church and Society; The Rev. J. Cliff Christopher, Horizons Stewardship Co.; and Bishop James Swanson, Mississippi Conference.

Resolutions adopted by the conference: “Affirming Our Covenant and Accountability” urges the conference to demand clergy accountability to the Discipline’s “rules of our common covenant,” and to call upon clergy to challenge those rules only “through legitimate channels of holy conferencing, rather than breaking that covenant.”; Substitute motion to resolution passed authorizing the conference trustees to “negotiate the best possible outcome” with fast-growing Wesley United Methodist Church in Quarryville, Pennsylvania, which recently decided to leave the denomination, but also demanded a more accountable process in the event another congregation decides to leave the denomination. That process would require dialogue between the bishop, district superintendent and church members to clarify the implications of their withdrawal, and it would require authorization of any negotiations be given by the annual conference and by a vote of the congregation at a church conference.; Approved revised, conference-wide standards for ensuring “Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church” policies based on new Pennsylvania child safety laws; Called for churches to oppose solitary confinement in prisons and to support payment of equitable, living wages—including at least \$15 per hour for church employees—and “a full, fair funding formula for Pennsylvania schools.”; Calling for the bishop and Conference Sessions Commission to make racial justice and white privilege a key element of the 2016 Annual Conference; Calling for conference leaders to help congregations and communities advocate for fair, non-racial policing policies and practices, including establishment of independent citizen review boards to monitor and recommend improvements in police conduct.

Elected 2016 delegates. General Conference: Clergy – The Revs. Dawn Taylor-Storm, Jeffrey Raffauf, Robert Wilt, and Lydia Munoz; Lay – Judith Ehninger; Mary White; Aaron Joseph Smith; and Clarita Krall. Jurisdictional: Lay – Krystl Johnson, Ann Jacob, Jordan Harris and Lenora Thompson; Clergy – The Revs. Joseph DiPaolo, Tracy Bass, Christopher Kurien and Robin Hynicka. Alternates: Clergy – The Revs. Irving Cotto, Melinda McKonly and Sutja Bang; Lay - Ross Brightwell, Jane Bonner and David Koch.

Statistics: ordained, commissioned or received into associate membership: 8 elders and 1 deacon ordained; 10 deacons commissioned. Membership: 107,849, down from 111,041. Worship: 39,905, down from 40,910. Church school: 12,145, down 13,033.

– John W. Coleman Jr., director of communications, Eastern Pennsylvania Conference.

Florida. The Florida Annual Conference was held at Bethune-Cookman University in Daytona Beach, Florida June 10-13, with Bishop: Kenneth H. Carter, Jr. presiding. Guest speaker Rev. Adam Hamilton, senior pastor,

Church of the Resurrection: “I was trying to be Super Pastor, with my cape on. ... I needed lay people to be equipped and inspired. We needed to unleash the power of the laity.”

Five resolutions were adopted: 1. A request that the Federal Communications Commission limit the advertising of sexually oriented products. The request will be sent electronically and by U.S. Postal Service to the FCC, and Florida Conference members are encouraged to write in support of the request to the FCC, local television stations and cable and satellite providers.; 2. Support of the human rights of Florida farmworkers. The Florida Conference calls on Publix Super Markets and Wendy’s restaurants to join the Fair Food Program developed by the Coalition of Immokalee Workers of Southwest Florida.; 3. Encouragement of a just resolution process Instead of church trials for resolving complaints against ordained pastors who officiate at same-sex weddings or congregations that host them.; 4. Resolution in support of unborn children and expectant mothers. After discussion, voting members approved a resolution substantially amended from the original proposal. The amended resolution calls for the conference to encourage use of appropriate birth control, facilitation of adoption, support for crisis pregnancy centers and affirmation of the sanctity of life of the unborn child as well as the safety of the expectant mother.; 5. Resolution calling for stronger local church support of Creation Care ministries. Churches are to have committees that adopt creation care practices and plan ways to implement them in all areas of ministry and mission.

Elected 2016 delegates. General Conference: Lay delegates – Molly McEntire, Derrick Scott III, Alice Williams, Mickey Wilson, Russ Graves, Jeremy Hearn, Rachael Sumner, Carlene Fogle-Miller, Janet Earls; Clergy – The Revs. Sue Hauptert-Johnson, Alex Shanks, Rinaldo Hernandez, Dionne Chandler Hammond, Harold Lewis Sr., David Dodge, Cynthia Weems, Jacqueline Leveron, Sharon Austin. Jurisdictional Conference: Lay delegates – Tiffania Icaza Willetts, Alexia Michelle Valle Velez, Martha Gay Duncan, Marie Anne Pierre-Louis, Paulette Monroe, Rod Groom, Joyce Waldon Bright, Rodney Akers, Benjamin Spangler; Clergy – The Revs. Joanes Martin, Geraldine McClellan, David Allen, W. David McEntire, Audrey Warren, Jay Therrell, Bob Bushong, Armando Rodriguez Jr., Kevin James. Alternates: Lay – Rushing Kimball, Kelly Minter, Walter Dry, Brittany Erin Cott, Frances Jennings, Michael Reed Coffey and Gary Sanders; Clergy – The Revs. Vicki Walker, Wayne Wiatt, Catherine Fluck Price, Melissa Cooper, Jamie Westlake, Annette Stiles Pendergrass and Joe MacLaren.

Statistics: ordination – 47 elders, deacons and local pastors were ordained, commissioned or licensed, with an average age of 40; Membership is 253,000, down from 262,000. Current worship attendance is 132,000, down from 135,000 last year.

– Susan Green, managing editor for the Florida Conference

Great Plains. Officiating Bishop: Scott J. Jones. Resolutions adopted by the conference: Church closings (seven total, with one reopening with a new name); Referred a resolution to reinstate a group health plan for clergy to the Board of Pension and Health Benefits; Laity equalization plans related to the conference Board of Ordained Ministry, campus ministries and related to General and Jurisdictional delegates; Direct the Mercy and Justice team to study ways the Great Plains can assist United Methodist missionaries and Palestinian Christians in the Holy Land; Encourage General and Jurisdictional conference delegates from the Great Plains to engage in dialogue with other delegates at these conferences to change the jurisdictional boundaries.

Petitions passed by the conference: Geographic consideration for election of bishops: Would urge delegates to Jurisdictional conferences to include geography and cultural values along with sex, race and national origin as they consider their votes; Limit the number of bishops from individual annual conferences: Would limit the number of active bishops from one annual conference to two serving in a jurisdiction at any given time.; Acknowledge of diverse beliefs regarding homosexuality: Would strike references of homosexuality as being incompatible with Christian teachings and would eliminate restrictions against practicing homosexuals being certified as candidates, ordained as ministers or appointed to serve in the church. It also would lift restrictions on United Methodist pastors conducting same-sex marriages and would lift restrictions on annual conferences and United Methodist agencies from providing funding to homosexual-related caucus groups and similar agencies. The petition would eliminate the performance of same-sex marriages from the list of offenses that would initiate a

church trial. We did have one clergy member, Rob Schmutz of Park City, Kansas, turn in his credentials immediately after the vote. [emphasis added]

The conference considered, but did not pass, three petitions dealing with fossil fuels.

Election of delegates. General Conference: Clergy – The Revs. Adam Hamilton, Amy Lippoldt, Mark Holland, Zach Anderson, Cheryl Jefferson Bell, David Livingston; Lay – Courtney Fowler, Oliver Green, Shayla Jordan, Dixie Brewster, Lisa Maupin, Wesley Gately. Jurisdictional Conference: Clergy – The Revs. Junius Dotson, Eduardo Boussan, Stephanie Alschwede, Nathan Stanton, Ashley Prescott, Kibum Kim; Lay – Keith Olsen, Randall Hodgskinson, Esther Hay, Karelle Leeper, Bob Aderholt, Sandy Simmons. Alternates: Clergy – The Revs. Rebecca Hjelle, Anne Gatobu, Rick Just; Lay – Carl Nord, Steve Baccus, Shane Hinderliter.

Statistics: Number of people ordained, commissioned or received into associate membership and average age – 21; membership is 219,095, down from 221,043; worship attendance is 87,645, down from 90,082; church school attendance is 27,285, down from 28,607; professions/reaffirmations of faith for 2014 are 4,074, down from 4,392.

Greater New Jersey. The 2015 Greater New Jersey Conference (GNJC) met May 28-30 in Wildwood, New Jersey, with Bishop John Schol officiating. The conference passed six resolutions concerning human sexuality. The first four will be brought as resolutions to General Conference to Strike from the Book of Discipline the phrases: We do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider the practice incompatible with Christian teaching; Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches; Homosexuality and performing homosexual unions or weddings is a chargeable offense; and United Methodist funds cannot support the acceptance of homosexuality or supporting homosexual ministries.

The GNJC will work for the full inclusion of all people including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered persons and that we oppose the continued restrictions of church law that restricts the full inclusion of LGBT people; and the GNJC will make a public statement supporting and upholding marriage equality in civil law and that we spiritually, emotionally and prayerfully support clergy who are brought up on charges for performing homosexual unions or performing same-sex wedding ceremonies.

Election of delegates. General Conference: Clergy – The Revs. Tom Lank, Eunice Vega Perez, Jisun Kwak and Varlyna Wright; Laity – Lynn Caterson, Bethany Amey, Judy Colorado and Rosa Williams. Jurisdictional: Clergy – The Revs. Drew Dyson, Grace Pak, Tanya Bennett and Gina Hendrickson.; Laity – Stephen Quigg, June McCullough, Jee Hei Park and Creed Pogue. Alternates: Clergy – Chris Heckert, Steve Bechtold and John DiGiamberardino; Laity – Carolyn Pendleton, Cyndi Kent and Sherrie Shumate.

Statistics: membership: 90,718, down from 91,094 last year; Professions/reaffirmations of faith for 2014: 2,268, down from 2,294.

– Jeff Wolfe, conference editorial manager

Holston. Leaders of 887 United Methodist churches of the Holston Annual Conference met June 7-11, 2015, at Lake Junaluska Conference Center with Bishop Mary Virginia “Dindy” Taylor presiding. During the five-day meeting they took an offering of \$150,366 for children in poverty within Holston communities and \$54,692 offering for “Change for Children,” supporting ministries in both Holston and Africa. For the 15th year, Holston churches collected food, school, health, sewing, cleaning and other supplies for Africa. Valued at \$225,680, the goods were blessed by Taylor before being transported to the South Carolina coast and shipped to missions led by Maria Humbane of Zimbabwe’s Ishe Anesu and to Helen Roberts-Evans for United Methodist schools in Liberia.

Resolutions and petitions. The conference voted: To “table indefinitely” a General Conference petition to delete language in the Book of Discipline regarding homosexuality. The 531-to-227 vote followed an emotional 50-minute discussion including eight people at the microphones who spoke for or against the motion and the issue.; Voted in favor of a resolution to “reduce the abuse of clergy by laypersons,” to be implemented through a task

force formed to create a plan.; and Voted against a resolution to reduce local-church giving to the conference budget from the current rate of 10 percent to a maximum of 7.5 percent.

Election of delegates and alternates to General and Jurisdictional conferences. General Conference: Clergy – The Revs. David Graves (leader), Kim Goddard, Sandra Johnson, Carol Wilson, Wil Cantrell and Randy Frye; Laity – Del Holley, Emily Ballard, Becky Hall, John Tate, Robert Lockaby and Karen Wright. Jurisdictional: Clergy – The Revs. Mark Flynn, Paul Seay, Dennie Humphreys, Eddie Fox, Jerald Russell, and Lauri Jo Cranford; Laity – Joyce Moore, John Eldridge, Charlotte McKee, Carolyn Kidd, Anne Travis and Sam England. Alternates: Alternates: Clergy – The Revs. Kristen Burkhart and Catherine Nance; Laity – John Powers, Justin Haynes.

In other actions, the conference: Accepted Bishop Taylor’s challenge for each member to give at least \$10 and 10 hours of service in the coming year to support children in poverty within Holston communities.; Commissioned Bert “Wildcat” Emmerson as Holston’s third Appalachian Trail chaplain. Emmerson, a member at First United Methodist Church of Maryville, Tennessee, departed June 15 for a 2,200-mile ministry journey from Maine to Georgia.; Recognized 26 retiring clergy and their collective 664.5 years of service.; Recognized 11 ordinand elders, 13 provisional elders, two ordinand deacons, one provisional deacon, three associate members, and 22 local pastors.; approved a \$9.7 million budget for 2016, reflecting a 10 percent cut in the requested budget to offset shortfalls and unrealized income.; approved the discontinuance of Petros United Methodist Church in Oak Ridge District and also learned that Morley Memorial UMC will merge with Ingles Chapel UMC on the Ewing Circuit in Big Stone Gap District.; received congratulations for giving \$7.147 million to the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) over the past decade.

Statistics: membership is 164,076, down 405; worship attendance 65,981, down 466; church school attendance 30,040, down 1,483; professions of faith 2,004, down 15; baptisms 1,636, up 20.

* * * * *

You can do anything that anyone else can do, and you can probably do it even better than they can if you just try a little harder. – Weeks Parker