

Monthly Update

October 2015

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

This “Monthly Update” contains the last of the reports from the annual conferences held in our denomination from across the nation and around the world. In thinking of the issues addressed and the actions passed, there is cause for concern – but also for optimism. So many times people ask me, “Why do you keep trying to reform the United Methodist Church? It is a lost cause.” My response is often, “First of all, it is not a lost cause. There are a lot of good thing going on that give us cause for hope.” Or, “God has called me to contend for the faith. I am doing what He wants me to do.” Or, “Nothing is ever a lost cause. God is in the miracle business.” Or, “I don’t believe God is through with the United Methodist Church yet.” Or, “The United Methodist Church has such a rich past; it can have an even more brilliant future!” All of these reasons are cause for optimism.

From the Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference, we have a petition to the General Conference to change the Book of Discipline to set term limits for bishops. The petition, approved on the consent calendar, would eliminate life terms for bishops elected in U.S. Jurisdictions and replace it with an initial eight year terms with the possibility of re-election quadrennially. This is interesting in that it is similar to one I had introduced to the 2008 General Conference in Ft. Worth, Texas. The whole idea is to bring accountability to that leadership body by limiting the amount of time that they can serve rather than their being elected for life as are the Supreme Court justices.

On the other side of the coin are the petitions going to the General Conference that would change our Book of Discipline on its position calling homosexuality a sin – which it is. This seems to be an ongoing battle that will not be resolved until we will either have revival or the Lord will come back.

As I write so often, we need to pray. I would offer yet again that we would open our Bible to Psalm 91 and pray it aloud – over our United Methodist Church and over our country, the United States of America. Prayer is the most effective thing that we can do and that is something that we should continue. Then I would urge you to inform yourselves. Next I would ask that you inform others. Finally, I ask that you take a stand – for truth, for the Bible, and for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We need to do this in our world and in our own United Methodist Church.

Thank you for partnering with us with your gifts, your prayers, and your very kind notes. They are appreciated so much.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris
Executive Director

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October 2015 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

Fewer things are harder to put up with than the annoyance of a good example. – Mark Twain

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Annual Conference Reports

Peninsula Delaware. The 231st Peninsula-Delaware Annual Conference was held June 4-6, 2015, at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, Princess Anne, Maryland with the theme Equipping a New Generation; Officiating Bishop: Peggy A. Johnson.

Bishop Johnson opened with a greeting before introducing the Rev. Jasmine R. Smothers. Smothers brought a message of willingness to change and grow and expressed the necessity to allow death in order for new life to emerge. If we are unwilling to die for change to occur, we are truly not willing to follow God's plan for the church.

Teaching Sessions. During Friday morning teaching sessions the Rev. Mike Slaughter used humor, brief videos and persuasive stories to describe how Christians can make transformation: not by screaming Jesus, rather by DOING JESUS!

He asked, “Do you ever ask why God has not responded to the needs of your neighbors?” Then he answered: “God is probably waiting for you to respond! People aren’t looking for meetings, they are looking for MEANING!” says Slaughter, who has been lead pastor at Ginghamburg for 36 years. There he threw out top down church structure (pastor/committees/congregation) in order to engage people in a missional model that puts congregations in mission first, undergirded by a very small administrative team.

Resolutions adopted by the conference:

- Resolution in support of global Christianity
- Conference Historic Site’s - Bethel Church in Lewes, Delaware & Old Union Church near Odessa in New Castle County, Delaware
- Resolution in support of a fair living wage in Delaware and Maryland

Elected Delegates. General Conference lay delegates elected are: Kevin Goodwin and Lawrence Pelham

General Conference clergy delegates are: the Revs. Derrick Porter and Meghan Shitama Weston

Northeastern Jurisdiction lay delegates are: Bill Westbrook and Sam Mitchell

Northeastern Jurisdiction clergy delegates are: the Revs. Robbie Townsend and Vicki Gordy-Stith

The current membership is 79,899, down from 81,143 last year. Worship attendance is 30,003, down from 30,147 last year. Church school attendance was 7,891, down from 8,974. Amount given to missions was \$441,027, down from \$544,405.

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

Poland Conference. 70 years of witness and service in MasuriaWhen the Poland Conference of The United Methodist Church met June 26-28, 2015, it was not by chance that Ostroda was chosen as conference site. The United Methodist Church in Masuria celebrates an important anniversary this year. In 1945, at the end of World War II, most of the Germans left East Prussia towards the west, the majority of protestant pastors joined them. Those who were not able or did not want to leave their home, sent an appeal for help to other protestant churches and asked them to send pastors to Masuria. The Methodists were able to respond. In many villages and towns, they assumed responsibility for worship services and other gatherings of those who were still living there. A number of small worship places in villages had to be given up in the past 70 years, but there are still a number of United Methodist congregations in Masuria, which are situated close together, while in other parts of Poland it is not uncommon that the distance between neighboring local churches is 100 km [i.e., 62.2 miles] and more. It is also in Masuria that some United Methodist congregations gather in church buildings, which are several hundred years old. On June 27, 2015, a thanksgiving service was celebrated on the occasion of the anniversary, “70 years of witness and service in Masuria.” Politicians and delegates from other churches were

present, as well. During the conference meeting, Adrian Myslinski, was ordained deacon. In Poland, this is still the first step on the journey towards becoming an ordained elder. Two other people were accepted as candidates: Jaroslav Bator and Monika Zuber. Zuber once again starts a period of two years as candidate for the ordained ministry. There were plans to discuss and approve the revised version of the United Methodist lawbook, the Book of Discipline, in Polish this year. In May 2015, the local churches had been asked to submit comments and wishes to the commission on the Book of Discipline. However, since several delegates presented their remarks, concerns and wishes to many articles at the opening of the conference session only, it was not possible to do what was planned. Instead, the conference members agreed on a process for the submission of further feedback to the commission and on an extra conference session on March 19, 2016. Then the revised lawbook should be in its final version and ready for approval. In this final version it shall state that The United Methodist Church in Poland is part of the worldwide United Methodist Church and that the Book of Discipline of the worldwide United Methodist Church is applicable in Poland, as well.

Delegation to 2016 General/Jurisdictional Conferences. Andrzej Malicki and Olgierd Benedyktowicz were elected as delegates to 2016 General Conference. The next regular session of the conference will be June 24-26, 2016.

– Bishop Patrick Streiff, Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe

Red Bird Missionary Conference. The 47th gathering of the Red Bird Missionary Conference occurred May 16 at Hope United Methodist Church and the campus of Henderson Settlement in Frakes, Ky. The Rev. Robert Amundsen preached the opening worship service, which included recognition of members of local churches who died during the last year. Bishop G. Lindsey Davis led the conference in a one-day business session. He preached at the Mission Night service where more than \$4,900 was raised for the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) as it helps with the Ebola crisis. The conference also participated in the recognition of Rev. Steven Riddle as an associate member of the Red Bird Conference. The Rev. Farley Stuart was elected clergy delegate for General Conference. Charlotte Davis was voted lay delegate. Marilyn Osborne was picked to represent the laity for Southeast Jurisdictional Conference, with Glenn Saylor as alternate. Amundsen was elected clergy delegate for that event. The Rev. Greg Wingo will be the alternate clergy delegate. The Conference also approved the nomination of Stuart for the episcopacy in the Southeast Jurisdiction.

– The Rev. Farley Stuart, superintendent, Red Bird Conference

Rio Texas Conference. The Rio Texas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church held its first annual meeting at the American Bank Center in Corpus Christi from June 11-14. The conference dedicated the offerings from worship services, more than \$13,000, to relief efforts for the spring floods that devastated victims in San Marcos, Wimberley, Blanco and other communities across the conference. Approximately 1,500 voters, plus friends, family and other United Methodists, gathered to participate and witness the historic gathering. This is the first conference since the Southwest Texas Annual Conference and the Rio Grande Annual Conference voted to become the Rio Texas Conference in June of 2014. The Southwest Texas Conference and Rio Grande Conference became the Rio Texas Conference on January 1, 2015. San Antonio Area Bishop James E. Dorff presided over the four-day meeting. “The work of United Methodists has been alive and well in this region for well over 150 years. The names, the forms, the languages, the missional outposts (or churches as we now call them) and the annual conferences have all been in transition during these many years,” said Bishop Dorff. “This transitioning continues through the Rio Texas Annual Conference. In the midst of these transitions and this newness of life, one thing has held steady: our purpose. We have been here all these years to live out the biblical mandate to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. As we gather for session number one, our task is the same. May we never lose sight of our calling. It is what has brought us this far, by God’s grace.”

He was joined by seven bishops for several worship services held at the Selena Auditorium in Corpus Christi. They all have strong ties to the former Rio Grande and Southwest Texas Conferences.

Delegation to 2016 General/Jurisdictional Conferences. General/Jurisdictional Delegation Even though the former Southwest Texas and Rio Grande annual conferences elected their delegates separately, they will be

seated as one at both conferences; General Conference in May in Portland, Oregon, and the South Central Jurisdictional Conference in July in Wichita, Kansas.

Statistics. Nine elders and three deacons were ordained with an average age of 49. Current membership as of January 1, 2015: 123,442

Average worship attendance: 47,446; Church school attendance: 16,899

Since the Rio Texas Annual Conference came into being on January 1 of 2015, statistics for previous years are not available.

– The Rev. Will Rice, director of communications and media in the Rio Texas Conference

Rocky Mountain. June 11-14 at the YMCA of the Rockies, Estes Park, Colorado. Bishop Elaine J. W. Stanovsky welcomed the Rev. Rebecca Parker, co-author of the book, “Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of This World for Crucifixion and Empire...”

The conference adopted its sixth annual Valentine’s Resolution on Global HIV and AIDS, which endorses the United Methodist Global AIDS Fund as a “mission of the month for February 2016 and urges every congregation to take a special collection Feb. 14 to support United Methodist Global AIDS Fund.

Delegation to 2016 General/Jurisdictional Conferences. Elected as delegates and alternate delegates to the 2016 General Conference were Doug Palmer, Kunle Taiwo and Reasa Currier, laity; and Kent Ingram, Brad Laurvick and Megan Armstrong, clergy. Six laity were elected for the 2016 Western Jurisdictional Conference: Harvey Tukutau, Margaret Hotze, Judy Hill, Liwliwa Robledo, Glenna Brayton and Diana Huerta. The six clergy elected for Jurisdictional Conference were Skip Strickland, Cathie Kelsey, Jessica Rooks, Eric Smith, Michael Dent and Sione Tukutau. Alternate laity for Jurisdictional Conference are Laurie Day, Ruth Wills and Curtis Gay. Alternate clergy delegates are Elizabeth McVicker, Jerry Herships and Melanie Rosa.

Current overall membership is 59,619, down from 61,095. Current worship attendance is 28,358, compared to 29,254 last year.

– Charmaine Robledo, director of communications, Mountain Sky Area

South Carolina. Imploring the risen God to transform our hard hearts into hearts of love and caring, no matter our trials, Bishop Jonathan Holston preached the opening worship service of Annual Conference. By the time annual conference ended Thursday, June 11, the body had passed a \$16.8 budget for 2016, elected delegates to United Methodist General and Jurisdictional conferences, voted on new resolutions and petitions, ordained and commissioned 33 clergy, launched a new \$1 million Imagine No Malaria initiative for next year and packed more than 285,000 Stop Hunger Now meals for hungry families in Uganda. And it was all coordinated by a new conference secretary, the Rev. Ken Nelson, whom Holston lifted up for a “job well done.”

Delegation to 2016 General/Jurisdictional Conferences. For the first time, the body used electronic balloting to vote both on legislation and to elect delegates. While the process had a high learning curve and some connectivity issues, the technology overall speeded up the voting process, plus allowed for quicker and more accurate tallying of votes, particularly in very close delegation elections.

Delegates elected. Annual conference spent four days electing its lay and clergy delegates to the 2016 General and Southeastern Jurisdictional conferences. There were 51 lay nominees and 827 clergy nominees. The body unanimously passed a nearly \$16.8 million conference budget for 2016, plus elected Elizabeth Westbury as the new conference treasurer. **Conference approved resolutions** to oppose bullying in all its forms and to authorize the sale of the property owned by the Board of South Carolina United Methodist Camps and Retreats Ministries (Sewee Coastal Retreat Center). A third resolution, “Supporting, Recognizing and Honoring the Services of Law Enforcement Officers,” was withdrawn. **Petitions struck down.** The South Carolina Conference has voted not to petition General Conference on two issues: deleting language in the denomination’s Book of Discipline on homosexuality as incompatible with Christian teaching and withdrawing two United Methodist entities from the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice. Dates for next year’s annual conference will be June 5-8, 2016, again at the Florence Civic Center despite the Committee on the Annual Conference’s desire to move the location to Greenville. The body did not approve setting aside the standing rules (which require a two-year advance notice) to allow a vote on Greenville for 2016. Nelson instead proposed Greenville at the site for 2017.

South Georgia. The 2015 South Georgia Annual Conference session was marked by ballots and bonding. Held June 3- 6 at the University of Georgia Tifton Conference Center, more than 1,000 United Methodist clergy and laity gathered to conference in the Wesleyan tradition and elect delegates to the 2016 General and Jurisdictional Conferences.

Delegation to 2016 General/Jurisdictional Conferences. General Conference clergy delegates: The Revs. Don Adams, Buddy Cooper, Jay Hanson and Bob Moon; lay delegates: Bill Hatcher, Allison Lindsey, Larry Price and Carl Childs. Jurisdictional Conference clergy delegates: The Revs. Jim Cowart, Denise Walton, Scott Hagan and Robert Beckum; Clergy alternates: Doreen Smalls and Stacey Harwell-Dye; lay delegates: Marianne Wright, Richard Shinhoster, Kelly Roberson and Miriam Hagan. Lay alternates: Gloria Morgan and Rus Black.

In other action, conference members:

•Christine Pohl, associate provost and professor of Church and Society/Christian Ethics at Asbury Seminary, led three teaching moments. During her second teaching moment, she reminded attendees that every community is held together by the promises made to one another. “Speaking truth in love means speaking of the goodness and grace we see,” she said.

•Approved a \$10,336,776 million budget for mission and ministry for the next year.

Annual Conference 2015 ended with a Service of Sending Forth as Bishop King encouraged each person to be the light of the world.

Membership stands at 118,712, down 3,278 from the previous year. Worship attendance stands at 49,358, down 27. Church school attendance stands at 33,129, up 2,302 from 2013. The 2016 Annual Conference session will be held June 8-11, in Tifton, Georgia.

– Kelly H. Roberson, director of communications, South Georgia Conference.

Susquehanna Conference. Bishop Jeremiah Park opened the 2015 Susquehanna Conference, The United Methodist Church, with these words, “Praise be to God for the journey we’ve been taking together; we’ve come this far by grace and faith.” The annual gathering of 1,500 people for celebration, holy conferencing and worship was held at Messiah College in Grantham, Pennsylvania on June 11-13. The theme “Equipping Vital Congregations” was the third under a quadrennial theme: “Alive in Christ, Together.”

Mission Central launched a capital campaign under the banner of “Mission Central: An Unfolding Story.” Activity data for the year 2014 revealed: 1,807,486 total lives reached, total warehouse output of \$7,533,985 (59 percent Pennsylvania, 26 percent United States, 15 percent international.) Mission Central operating donations totaled \$533,165 with operating expense of \$510,992. The number of warehouse volunteers in 2014 totaled 8,108. Total number of Mission Central in the Northeast is 30.

Legislative action addressed:

- 1) Mental wellness — Adopted
- 2) Support of positive investment — Not divestment — Not adopted
- 3) Shares of ministry — Adopted, as amended
- 4) Welcoming of LGBTQ people — Adopted
- 5) A change in the guidelines for the chairperson of Administrative Council — Forwarded to General Conference with no comment
- 6) A change in the guidelines for the lay leader in the local church — Forwarded to General Conference with no comment
- 7) Eating habits — Forwarded to General Conference with no comment
- 8) Styrofoam containers — Forwarded to General Conference with no comment
- 9) Extractive industries — Forwarded to General Conference with no comment
- 10) Fossil fuel investment screens — Forwarded to General Conference with no comment
- 11) Transfer of the Fishing Creek and Riverside United Methodist Churches — Approved by 2/3 vote

Delegation to 2016 General/Jurisdictional Conferences. General Conference clergy: The Revs. Larry Leland, Matthew Lake, Beth Jones, Thomas Salsgiver and Anna Layman Knox; laity: Lisa Bender, Eileen Vizthum, Warren Heil Jr., Milton Loyer, Layne Miller

Jurisdictional clergy: The Revs. Dennis Keller*, Kathleen Kind*, L. Fitzgerald Reist, Catherine Boileau and Mark Reisinger

Jurisdictional laity: Anne Horton*, Kirby Hickey*, Paul Ilyes Jr., Toni Oplinger and Eleanor Loomis. Alternates to General Conference. Jurisdictional alternates: Jon Konieczny, Lucy Obrzut, the Rev. Charles Sprenkle and the Rev. Paul Amara.

Membership: 2013: 152,413 — 2014: 150,436, down 1.3 percent. Worship attendance: 2013: 62,369 — 2014: 61,015, down 2.2 percent. Professions of faith: 2013: 2,501 — 2014: 2,096, down 16.2 percent. Young adults in small groups: 2013: 3,386 — 2014: 3,215, down 5.1 percent. Other adults in small groups: 27,018 — 2014: 26,509, down 1.9 percent.

– Gerald “Jerry” Wolgemuth, director of communications for the Susquehanna Conference

Texas Conference. 2015 Texas Conference. May 24-27, 2015, Houston, Texas. Officiating Bishop: Janice Riggle Huie. Speaker: Gil Rendle. Memorable quote: “One of the significant issues facing many congregations,” he said, “is whether we actually believe that an encounter with Christ should make a difference in our lives and our communities. Congregational identity hinges on a clear understanding of identity and purpose because what attracts people to your church is knowing who you are and what you do.”

Resolutions and voting results

Delegation to 2016 General/Jurisdictional Conferences. Clergy delegates. General Conference: The Revs. Chap Temple, Kenneth Levingston, Morris Matthis, Lacey Warner, Ben Trammell, Steve Wende, Matt Idom, Janice Gilbert & Ed Jones. Jurisdictional: Revs.

Keith Whitaker, Jessica Lagrone, Kip Gilts, Jim Bass, Silverio Sanchez, Marilyn White, Jonathan Bynum, Guy Williams & Tom Pace. Alternate: the Revs. Rob Renfro, Justin Coleman, Vincent Harris and Jeff Olive. Lay delegates for General Conference are: Reggie Clemens, Don House, Gil Hanke, Eddie Erwin, Andy Hernandez, Tom Wussow, Marquice Hobbs, Sue Sullivan and Melba Wilson. Jurisdictional lay delegates: Oscar Garza, Stacie Hawkins, Sterling Allen, Carolyn Huntsman, Donel King, Clarence Estes, Bryan Tullos, Bill Brown and Richard Hyde. Alternates lay delegates are: Leah Taylor, Donna West, Enid Henderson, Ken Tielke.

2014 Statistics: Current Membership: 285,508, up from 285, 488 last year. Current Average Worship attendance: 103,301, down from 104,375 last year. Current Average Church School Attendance: 38,882, down from 40,173 last year.

Upper New York Annual Conference. Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar told members of the Upper New York Conference that the disciples didn’t ask Jesus to show them how to preach, do miracles or do ministry. “They asked him to teach them how to pray,” Devadhar said. “Having been with Jesus, having seen Him perform miracles, and having watched Him take time to pray, they might have realized it was the power of Jesus’ prayer that enabled Him to do what He did. So they asked Jesus to show them how to pray,” said Devadhar, bishop of the Boston Episcopal Area.

Resolutions approved included:

- Creation of Bridging Team
- Supporting the Turtle Island Trust and the people of Ganienkeh
- Ending the celebration of Columbus Day
- Health insurance for all clergy and local pastors
- Protecting Seneca Lake
- Formation of the Upper New York Conference United Methodist Historical Society.

Resolutions for General Conference 2016 that were affirmed included:

- Potential consensus among faith communities regarding income inequality
- A Fruits of Repentance resolution calling for an end to the celebration of Columbus Day
- Prayer and support for members of the armed forces and veterans

- Cross-referencing The Book of Discipline with The Book of Resolution
- Allowing licensed pastors to be elected as clergy delegates to General Conference, Jurisdictional Conference and Central Conference and vote on the Constitution.

Delegation to 2016 General/Jurisdictional Conferences. General Conference lay: Dr. Scott Johnson, Greg Forrester, Riley O’Flynn, Carmen Vianese, Marthalyne Sweet and Blenda Smith. General Conference clergy: The Revs. Bill Allen, Bill Mudge, Rebekah Sweet, Colleen Preuninger, Thom White Wolf Fassett and John Martin. Jurisdiction lay delegates: Ian Urriola, J.J. Warren, Ashley Riddell, Julius Archibald, Laurel O’Connor, Shirley Readdean, Suzanne Allen and Hudda Aswad. Jurisdiction clergy: the Revs. Michelle Bogue-Trost, Holly Nye, Cathy Stengel, Sherri Rood, Darryl Barrow, Aaron Bouwens, Stephen Cady II and Rick Ladue.

The current membership is 160,638, down from 164,257 last year, while worship attendance is 44,652, down from 47,592 last year. Church school attendance was 10,655, down from 11,177.

– Stephen J. Hustedt, director of communications for the Upper New

Virginia. The 2015 Virginia Conference was held June 19-21 at the Berglund Center in Roanoke, Va., centered on the theme “From Members to Disciples.” Bishop Young Jin Cho presided. During the opening session, Bishop Cho asked retired Bishop Charlene Kammerer, who led the Virginia Conference 2004-2012, to pray for victims of the June 17 shooting of nine members of Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Charleston, S.C. Rev. Young Bong Kim, pastor of Korean United Methodist Church of Greater Washington, preached for “A Service of Remembrance and Holy Communion.” Bishop Kammerer preached for the mission service and for ordination. The Rev. Tim Bias, general secretary of Discipleship Ministries, led Bible study.

Bishop Cho said an important accomplishment during this conference year was the conference-wide conversation on human sexuality held Nov. 22, 2014. "We sat down together and shared with one another our differences on this issue and sought a way that we can be one in our mission. It was not an easy process to plan and prepare for this conversation, but the task force team and common table did a great job in organizing and leading us in this conversation," he said. "Of course, not everyone was happy about this conversation, but we took the first step toward a holy conversation on this divisive issue. I hope we are more open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and humbly seek for God’s will to be done on this issue in our churches." Bishop Cho said the upcoming year will have many challenges, and 2016 General Conference will be crucial for the future of our denomination. He expressed hope that in the midst of these discussions and conferencing, The United Methodist Church would not forget the most important thing: our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. The bishop said he will keep focusing on the necessity of prayer by spreading this culture to Virginia churches and challenging clergy and laity to devote at least one hour daily to spiritual disciplines. The bishop plans within this new year to visit each district to encourage this act of prayer.

Five churches were discontinued: Arlington UMC, Arlington District; Mount Hope UMC, Richmond District; Mount Zion UMC, Danville District; Ottobine UMC, Harrisonburg District; and Wesley Chapel UMC, Staunton District.

Delegation to 2016 General/Jurisdictional Conferences. Laity delegates to General Conference: Martha Stokes, Warren Harper, Shirley Cauffman, Nathaniel L. Bishop, Darlene Amon, Virginia Greer, Joyce Winston, Gene Mims, Beth Christian, Alison Malloy Marshall Bailey. Clergy delegates to General Conference: Tom Berlin, Meredith McNabb, Denise Honeycutt, Clarence Brown, Tammy Estep, Ted Smith, Ileana Rosario, Peter Moon, Kendall Soulen, Mark Ogren, Rob Vaughn. Laity delegates to jurisdictional conference: Larry Burian, Neill Caldwell, Janet Ayers, Willard Douglas, Jacob Paysour, Olivia Hinton, Michael Monge, Vicki A. Boger, Virginia Turner, Raymond Nations, Brenda Brooks. Clergy delegates to jurisdictional conference: Seonyoung Kim, Keith Boyette, Bob Cooper, Alex Joyner, Beth Givens, Tommy Herndon, Marc Brown, Jason Stanley, Jeffrey Mickle, Greg West, David Ford. Clergy alternates: R. Bruce Johnson, Brenda Biler, Alan Combs, Thomas Barnard, Won Un, David McAlister-Wilson, Kathleen Overby Webster, Ed Walker, David Rash, John D. Copenhaver and Paulo DaSilva. Laity alternates are: Aimee Hong, Rachel Wright, Zach Ferguson, Leon Newbanks, Lori Valentine de Segovia, Nancy Yarborough, Nina Winkler, Carlos Liceaga, Joel Joyner and Charles Pearre.

By a 989-868 vote, the conference approved a petition urging General Conference to eliminate the sentence: "The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching" from the United Methodist Book of Discipline. The vote was taken by written ballot. Members also voted to encourage all United Methodist boards and agencies, conference boards and agencies and local churches to avoid investment in companies with revenues from the extraction and/or mining of thermal coal. The resolution also encourages investment in companies focusing on development and utilization of renewable energy sources and improved energy efficiency.

Members approved a 2016 budget of \$32,315,000, down 1.24 % from the 2015 budget. As of the end of 2014, membership stood at 327,647 down .92 percent from 2013. Worship attendance stood at 102,884, down from 104,231 at the end of 2013. Reaffirmations of faith were at 4,250. For 2014, there was a 2.5 percent decrease in apportionments towards mission and ministries from 2013.

– Madeline Pillow, editor of The Advocate, Virginia Conference.

West Michigan. Location of conference gathering: Calvin College, Grand Rapids MI. Dates of conference gathering: June 4-7, 2015.

Officiating bishop: Bishop Deborah Lieder Kiesey. Guest teacher: Rev. Adam Hamilton

•Approved a petition to General Conference endorsing "The Third Way" legislation proposed by the Connectional Table.

•Approved a petition to General Conference asking general boards and agencies to divest from companies involved with illegal Israeli settlements on Palestinian lands.

Election of delegates and alternate delegates to the 2016 General Conference and jurisdictional gathering was held in 2014.

Membership stands at 57,533, down 1,694 or 2 percent from the previous year.

Worship attendance stands at 32,911 down 1,990 or 5 percent from 2013.

Church school attendance stands at 7,589 down 843 or 10 percent from 2013.

West Ohio. Nearly 2500 clergy and lay members and guests from across the conference convened at Lakeside Chautauqua on the shores of Lake Erie for the 46th session of the West Ohio Annual Conference, held Sunday, June 7 through Wednesday, June 10. This year continues the theme "Becoming the Beloved Community: Taken, Blessed, Broken and Given," using the word "Broken" to shape the direction of this year's annual conference session. Week in Review video.

Delegation to 2016 General/Jurisdictional Conferences.

•Election of eight lay and eight clergy delegates to both General and Jurisdictional conference, as well as eight alternates. Demographic charts for the elected delegation were shared with the members.

Voting on 11 Recommendations:

PASSED Recommendation No. 7 Petition to the 2016 General Conference of the United Methodist Church for a Study and Global Conversation about Marriage. (electronic vote) (Will be submitted to General Conference)

INDEFINITELY POSTPONED Recommendation No. 8 Petitioning the 2016 General Conference to Form a Task Force to Consider All "Common Way" Plans to Keep our Church United Despite Differences on Same Gender Marriage and Ordination Eligibility (vote by show of hands)

PASSED AS PLURALITY BALLOT (electronic vote) (All will be submitted to General Conference)

1.Recommendation No. 9 Resolutions Petitioning the 2016 General Conference Regarding Fossil Fuel Divestment Petition for General Conference Regarding General Board of Pension and Health Benefits Investments

2.PASSED Recommendation No. 10 Petition for General Conference Regarding a Change in The Book of Discipline

3.PASSED Recommendation No. 11 Petition for General Conference Regarding a Change in The Book of Resolutions

As of December 31, 2014, the number of West Ohio churches was 1,029 (down 22); membership stands at 175,791 (down 6,648); average weekly worship attendance is 104,555 (down 3,403); average weekly church school attendance is 28,756 (down 1,589).

For more highlights of annual conference, visit our website, our YouTube Channel, and our Facebook page.

– Lisa Streight, conference communications

West Virginia. The 47th session of the West Virginia Annual Conference met June 11-14 at West Virginia Wesleyan College in Buckhannon, W.Va. Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett presided. The Conference also welcomed the gifts of Native American storytelling and music from boe harris and Ragghi Rain-Calentine. The United Methodist Church is engaged in a formal Act of Repentance Service for the Healing of Relationships with Indigenous Persons; the West Virginia Conference will hold that worship service during next year's conference session. Calentine and harris were hosted by West Virginia Commission on Native American Ministries chairperson, Ellie High. The conference concluded a year-long emphasis on the treatment and prevention of HIV/AIDS. Conference gave approval to the board of trustees to pursue limited and controlled timber harvest at Spring Heights, the conference's camping and outdoor ministry in Roane County. The conference adopted a budget of \$12,159,191 for 2016, an increase of \$132,952 or 1.10 percent from the 2015 budget. A petition to amend the preamble to the United Methodist Social Principles was supported.

Delegation to 2016 General/Jurisdictional Conferences. General Conference. Laity: Jim Berner, Judi Kenaston, Erin Sears. Clergy: Mary Ellen Finegan, Sharletta Green, Ellis Conley. Jurisdictional. Conference. Laity: Richard Shaffer, Connor Kenaston, Royce Lyden. Clergy: JF Lacaria, Lauren Godwin, Mark Flynn. Membership is 97,363, down 1,328. Worship attendance stands at 40,563, down 1,257. Church school attendance stands at 18,715, down 740. Small group participation increased by more than 14 percent, up 136 to 1,089 in 2014. The conference gave \$3,284,875 in 2014 to United Methodist and non-United Methodist missional causes; up more than \$44,000 from 2013.

– Laura Harbert Allen, director of communications for the West Virginia Conference

Western North Carolina. The Western North Carolina Conference met June 17-21 at Lake Junaluska Conference and Retreat Center in Lake Junaluska, N.C. Bishop Larry Goodpaster, presided over this gathering with over 2000 registered members.

Delegation to 2016 General/Jurisdictional Conferences.

General Conference. Laity: Jennifer Davis, Jennifer Burton, Lynne Gilbert, Coley Hooker, Jr., Amy Johnson, Shannon Sherfey, Sandy Hieronymus, Henry Dozier, Jr., Robert Upchurch, Tonya Lanier. Clergy: Kim Ingram, Amy Coles, David Christy, Ashley Crowder Stanley, In-Yong Lee, James Howell, Jeremy Troxler, Sam Moore, John Boggs, Jeff Patterson. Jurisdictional Conference. Laity: John Howard, Sarah McKinney, Andrew Woods, Neffie Connie Locklear, Cindy Thompson, Jane Boatwright Wood, Wade Loftin, Rey Rodriguez, Kathy FitzJeffries, Joseph Williams. Reserve delegates: Ann Aldridge, Fred Cantler, Harry Underwood, Rebekah Lisk. Clergy: Sally Queen, Shelly Webb, David Hockett, Angela Pleasants, Stephanie Hand, Lory Beth Huffman, Chris Westmoreland, Laura Beach, Dawn Hand, Jan Brittain. Reserve delegates: Uiyeon Kim, Talbot Davis, Andy Lambert, Charles Kyker

Resolutions discussed by the conference:•Resolution 20- Just Save One HIV and AIDS- capitalizing on World HIV/AIDS Day to emphasize United Methodist Global AIDS Fund in December 2015, including education and information to all United Methodists in Western North Carolina. ADOPTED.

•Resolution 21- Promote Healthy Conversations- Under the bishop's guidance, the Vision Alignment Team with the Justice and Reconciliation Team, shall collaborate to develop plans that lead, model, resource and cultivate holy conferencing and congregation roundtable study and conversations for the full participation of all. ADOPTED.

•Resolution 22- Parsonage Home Inspections for Pastoral Transitions- Beginning in 2016, the Western North Carolina Conference will require that a church/charge undergoing a pastoral transition shall arrange and pay to

have its parsonage inspected by a third-party licensed home inspector prior to the pastoral transition.
ADOPTED.

•Resolution 23- Removal of Language in ¶161 in The Book of Discipline- NOT ADOPTED.

Commissioning and Ordination: Number of people ordained: two deacons, 26 elders

Commissioned: 28 (four provisional deacons, 24, provisional elders).

Average age: 38.18 years.

Some statistics: Membership has declined less than 1 percent from the previous year and stands at 285,904.

Worship attendance stands at 113,711 each Sunday, down about two percent from the previous year. Professions of faith last year, 4284 compared with 4520 the year before.

70,280 persons engaged in mission last year (about 15,000 more than the previous year) and 74,431 adults in small groups. More than the year before.

The offerings taken on Wednesday evening and Sunday for Missional Faith Communities and Ministries totaled \$51,105.16 dollars.

A complete look at the proceedings of the 2015 Annual Conference can be found at AC2015.org.

Our next conference will meet June 15-19, 2016, at Lake Junaluska.

– Michael Rich, web and communications manager

Western Pennsylvania. About 1,500 United Methodist clergy and elected lay members gathered at Grove City College June 11-14 for the 2015 Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference session, which was focused on the theme Reaching Higher, both spiritually and as church leaders. From Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton's opening worship message emphasizing the need to lead from within, through celebrations of the ministry of 21 clergy who retired, to the commissioning of four younger clergy as provisional members and the ordination of four new elders, the emphasis was on excellence in leadership. At the ordination service, Bickerton read some directions and advice for preachers from the 1840 Book of Discipline. While many would say conditions were different or easier than today, the bishop said, "This is not a whole new ballgame. It's the world's latest version of the same story. Life is hard. Ministry is challenging. Disciple-making is confusing and, for some, irrelevant and unbelievable. "This business of transforming the world takes leaders that are not just leading from within but determined and focused on leading into the world with purpose," he said, offering three simple rules for today's preachers:

•Care for others deeply:

"Your reality is a gospel that is filled with tenderness, compassion, empathy and love even for those with whom you do not agree and, on significant occasions, do not like. And, as a result, you will be dancing on hot sand because you care and it pierces you and, at times, it hurts," Bickerton said. "One of your greatest temptations will be to grow callous and hard and build up defenses that lessen the degree to which you love. Care for others deeply!"

•Be converted as often as you convert.

"There are colleagues and friends around you today who will testify to you that this is nothing short of an endurance test. To get to the end of the road and still have faith in the midst of constant pressure and temptation to do otherwise is nothing short of a miracle. ..Miracles happen today."

•Imitate Christ

"Strive for pure thoughts, kind words, controlled tempers. Seek that which is good, pure, honest and true, and when you fail, seek forgiveness from the very one who offered you those gifts to begin with. Imitate Christ."

Four new provisional members –Jack L. Tickle III, Benjamin Phipps, John D. Mize, and Andrew Bell Jr. were commissioned. Bishop Jonathon Holston of South Carolina preached at the commissioning service. In a message entitled "What's Love Got to Do With It?" based on Romans 12:9-21, he said, "We can become so heavenly bound that we are no earthly good." He reminded listeners that "love is more powerful than hate," adding, "love has everything to do with it!"

Imagine No Malaria At the opening worship Thursday afternoon, conference members brought forward \$91,059.53 in offerings from individuals and churches for the Imagine No Malaria campaign to end deaths from

malaria in sub-Saharan Africa. Bishop Bickerton leads the denomination's Imagine No Malaria effort, which has reached 88 percent of its \$75 million fundraising goal.

Mike McCurry, a faculty member at Wesley Theological Seminary and former presidential press secretary who serves on the INM executive team, came to the service from Washington. He recognized the bishop for his leadership and thanked the conference for taking the lead in INM when it began and not only pledging \$1.8 million, but raising \$2.1 million for the effort. McCurry presented Bickerton with a plaque and a photo book illustrating the people affected and progress made against malaria.

State of the Church ReportIn his State of the Church address, Bickerton outlined what he described as hills and valleys Western Pennsylvania United Methodist churches and people have been through over the past few years. Assisted by the Rev. Greg Cox, director of connectional ministries, he highlighted the work of the cabinet and conference staff in evaluating the current situation using a book by Bishop Robert Schnase, then developing some short-term goals and creating a list to "Key Performance Indicators" or KPI's to hold themselves accountable and make an impact on ministry with the Conference.

Among the examples:

- A robust plan for New Church Starts. "Amy Wagner and our Parish & Community Development Committee is doing great work in our midst to lay a solid foundation for this transformation," the bishop said.
- Making Clergy Peer Learning and Excellence in Ministry a priority. Susan Moudry has joined the staff to develop opportunities for learning, engagement, and leadership development among those in ministry.
- Congregational Intervention— both intervention when there is a crisis and intervention to assist a church on the journey toward excellence.
- Called & Sent – a collaborative effort between the Camping & Retreat Ministries and the board of ordained ministry to improve the manner in which a life-changing camping experience might be transformed into a specific call from God to consider ministry as a life vocation.

"There is no doubt that ...there are mountaintops and valleys in this journey of discovery," the bishop said. "But this is a group that has its hiking shoes on and is working together to "find our voice" as an annual conference."

General/Jurisdictional Conference electionsThroughout the conference, members cast ballots to elect clergy and lay delegates for the denomination's 2016 General Conference and the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference. Balloting continued until 24 delegates and Delegation to 2016 General/Jurisdictional Conferences. General Conference. Laity: Sharon Gregory, Nancy Denardo of Port Vue United Methodist Church; Rich Hoffman of Charter Oak United Methodist Church; Paul Morelli of Lakeside United Methodist Church in DuBois; Diane Miller, president of the Conference United Methodist Women, and Vicki Stahlman, Conference Sessions Team Chair and member of Brookville Evangelical United Methodist Church. Clergy: the Revs. Eric Park, pastor of Butler First United Methodist Church; Johnstown District Supt. Alyce Weaver Dunn; Robert Zilhaver, pastor of Lakeside United Methodist Church in DuBois; Amy Wagner, Conference director of Congregational Development and Revitalization; William B. Meekins Jr., Assistant to the Bishop, and John Seth, pastor of Christ United Methodist Church in Youngwood. Jurisdictional Conference. Laity: Erie-Meadville Lay Leader Don Blystone; Tina Whitehead, who serves as a volunteer missionary in Israel/Palestine; Faith Geer of St. Paul's United Methodist Church in Allison Park; Peggy Ward of Greenstone United Methodist Church in Pittsburgh; Kayla Schwanke of Russell United Methodist Church in Kane District, and Tracy Merrick of First United Methodist Church in Pittsburgh. Alternate lay delegates are: Joe Emigh of Cochranon United Methodist Church; Donna Burkhart of First United Methodist Church in Erie, Eric Duda of Lowville United Methodist Church, Conference Treasurer Larry Bridge, Richard Thomas of Port Vue United Methodist Church, and Sydney Widdersheim of Christ Community United Methodist Church in Butler. Clergy: the Revs. Seth McPherson, associate pastor at Christ United Methodist Church in Bethel Park; Sung Shik Chung, pastor of Otterbein United Methodist Church in Greensburg; Greg Cox, conference director of connectional ministries; Randy Bain, pastor of Oakland United Methodist Church in Johnstown; Stephanie Gottschalk, Conference Missions Coordinator; and John Ciampa, pastor of Harrison City Community United Methodist Church. Alternate: Pat Nelson; Tom Parkinson, pastor of Faith United Methodist Church in Fox Chapel; Butler District Suptintendent Joel Garrett; Joseph Stains, pastor of Mt. Hope United Methodist Church in South Fork; Janet

Lord, Conference Coordinator of Ministerial Services; Thomas Strandburg, pastor of Mt. Lebanon United Methodist Church.

Legislation. approved a shared ministry budget of \$9.7 million; increased the basic cash compensation for clergy by 3 percent to \$40,334 for elders serving full time; approved three general evangelists—Christine Rogan, John Zimmerman and Luella Krieger; and set policies and practices for Conference mission partnerships. In addition, after debate, the conference members approved forming a task force to research companies that may be contributing to the occupation of Palestine and whether divestment of these companies would be advisable. The task force would formulate recommendations to the 2016 annual conference regarding possible divestment from Conference portfolios. Conference members also accepted a petition of Roulette: Riverside and Fishing Creek United Methodist Churchess, in the Kane District, just east of Port Allegany, to become part of the Western PA Conference. Pastor Randy Headley of the Port Allegany Charge has been providing pastoral care and oversight of the two churches since July 2014 and both congregations voted by a two-thirds majority to join WPAUMC.

General Conference Petitions. Also approved was a petition to the General Conference to change the Book of Discipline to set term limits for bishops. The petition, approved on the consent calendar, would eliminate life terms for bishops elected in U.S. Jurisdictions and replace it with an initial eight year terms with the possibility of re-election quadrennially. It would not apply to incumbent bishops.

Petitions growing out of recommendations made in Judicial Council rulings (Decision 1230) involving complaints and administrative actions brought against East Africa Bishop Daniel Wandabula were approved and will be sent to the General Conference. One notes that the appeal process in administrative matters is not clearly delineated and proposes several changes to the Book of Discipline to provide clarity by creating an administrative review process.

Another petition would change P.50 of the Constitution to give the Council of Bishops the authority to hold its individual members accountable for the work. In addition changes are proposed to Disciplinary paragraphs dealing with the Episcopal complaint process that would “enhance the accountability of bishops and increase consistency by lodging the accountability function in the global church.” Some of the proposed changes are designed to ensure that complainants receive fair hearing in proceedings.

Other petitions to the General Conference that were approved, called for the denomination to withdraw from the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Rights; to change language of Paragraph 161J of The Book of Discipline regarding the sanctity of life and abortion. The petitioners said the current wording “has been used by some United Methodists as a means for one-sidedly advocating for public policies advancing elective abortion.” Their proposed amendments “would more clearly align our church with biblical, historic Christian teaching that defends unborn children and their mothers from abortion.”

During the annual conference, members volunteered to pack meals for Stop Hunger Now and completed 50,000. Many also filled a large truck with used shoes to be reclaimed or recycled by Funds2org, which, in turn, gives money to the Erie UM Alliance for ministries to the homeless and to All God’s Children ministry to those with disabilities. Members also brought UMCOR kits and material, which were collected by volunteers from the Eastbrook Mission Barn, an UMCOR Depot.

New Church Starts. Amy Wagner, director of Congregational Development and Revitalization, gave a history of new church starts that occurred during the 1700s and 1800s. She explained that never in our history has there been more than four years without starting a new church. Currently, there are several new worshipping communities supported in part by our annual conference: The Heights Faith Community, Allegheny River Valley, Roots of Faith, Faith Acts, Faith on 68 (Rochester), Connect Church (Blairsville), Charter Oak Crossroads Campus, Point Marion Fijian Language Community, and Laketon Heights.

Receiving Denman Awards for Evangelism were Michael Gionti of First UMC in Titusville, General Evangelist John Zimmerman and Steve and Wendy McPherson of Brookville Evangelical UMC.

Statistics. Worship attendance is 54,085 down from 56,053. There were 1922 new members entering by profession of faith, down from 2201 the previous year. There were 32,296 youth, young adults and adults in Christian formation groups, up from 25,466 the previous year. Sunday School attendance was 15,960. The number of people engaged in mission was 11,288, up from 7532 the previous year, with 1488 participating in UM Volunteers in Mission work. That total is up from 1464 the previous year.

Wisconsin. The Wisconsin Annual Conference celebrated our theme of “Cultivate and Nurture” June 12-15 at the Madison Marriott West. Highlights from guest speakers included the Rev. Elaine Heath, McCreless Associate Professor of Evangelism at Perkins School of Theology; the Rev. Susan Henry-Crowe, top executive of the United Methodist Board of Church and Society; Bishop Han Ku Kim, Dongbu Conference; Dr. Olusimbo Ige, director of global health at the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries; and Mark Miller, assistant professor of church music at Drew Theological School. Bishop Han Ku Kim preached during opening worship on Friday and again greeted annual conference members during opening plenary that afternoon. Bishop Kim, who is visiting Wisconsin for the third time, said our conference has inspired him to encourage more women to enter into ministry in the Dongbu Conference in Korea. He said that for the first time, 30 percent of the Dongbu Annual Conference members are women, and 30 percent of its delegates to the General Conference are women. “I was challenged to help more women be elected as delegates when Bishop Sharon Rader and Bishop Linda Lee visited Dongbu conference,” Bishop Kim said. “I thank the two bishops and female members of Wisconsin Conference for being a model.” He went on to say, “May God intervene in all the churches, the clergy, and the members of Wisconsin Conference so that the church may grow, the businesses do well, and the families be happy. I pray in the name of the Lord that Wisconsin Conference may be able to go out to the world with the slogan, ‘The world is my parish’ and be a model conference for The United Methodist Church.”

The Rev. Elaine Heath led Bible studies on Saturday and Sunday, where she discussed the Third Great Awakening and what it looks like to “fail forward.” She said that failure is not our enemy, but our friend. “This is a time of a rapid culture shift where pioneering is required.” She explained that the new awakening is Eucharistic; small communities of faith are where this will happen. She said that we need to make space for the apostolic innovators. Heath explained, “The bad news is that change calls into question who has the power, who gets to preside, who gets to wear the stole. There is a very special role for people who now have power and influence. These people love God, have been faithful, will continue to be faithful the rest of their lives. Make sure that the people in the old system are being cared for in the new structure. They’re providing resources for the apostolic innovators.”

The Rev. Susan Henry-Crowe delivered an inspiring sermon at the service where six people were ordained elders, five people were commissioned for the work of an elder, and 12 people were licensed as local pastors. Henry-Crowe cited Genesis 12:1 and encouraged the clergy to not be distracted by the location of their ministry, but rather to focus on the people they can affect with their ministry. “There will be sites and sightings,” she said. “Vibrant places attract people, but that’s not the real question. The question is, what will the sightings be? What will you let yourself see? Children living in poverty next door to the church? People suffering with addiction? Ministry will not be as much about the place as what you will let yourself see.”

Dr. Olusimbo Ige presented a moving Imagine No Malaria progress report. On a personal note, she told the conference that she and her husband both came down with malaria a week after their honeymoon. But “we didn’t die” because we had access to medicine and health facilities. “Some people die because they don’t have medical support, but some are living thanks to The United Methodist Church,” she said. Ige ended her presentation by thanking the Wisconsin Conference. “You have given a child hope, a family hope, a mother hope that they will be able to live,” she said.

Mark Miller provided amazing music throughout the weekend and led a special worship on Sunday evening, open to the public. Miller explored worship resources that revived and inspired attendees through plentiful songs and abundant advice, but also said that it is important to recognize the healing role that music can play in worship. “When we come to worship, we’re there to give thanks, but also to recognize that we’re all broken and suffering,” he said. “We need to acknowledge brokenness and suffering before healing can take place. Music breaks us open; music has a way of accessing those places where we can say, ‘We’re vulnerable; heal me God.’”

Transitioning to a new conference structure

As of July 1, 2015, the Wisconsin Conference has transitioned from eight districts and four superintendents to five districts and five district superintendents, as voted at annual conference 2014. Bishop Jung discussed this

transition in his State of the Church Address. “This isn’t simply the adding of one district superintendent. This is another step that moves us forward as we pursue our Kingdom vision together. This change that you have supported will enhance our shared ministry; yes to get the job done of being the church in our communities, but also to nurture our spirits and strengthen our connections. Your bishop and superintendents, directors and all Conference staff are committed to lead and serve, act and love through their professionalism and gifts demonstrating shared values in supervision ministries, common vision, and God’s kingdom goals as they reach out to all of our congregations and the great wide world.”

The Rev. Sam Royappa, dean of the cabinet, said that change and transition has been the major theme of meetings over the last year, and that the cabinet is working closely with Bishop Jung to facilitate change in a way that honors the three missional reasons for change: effectiveness or fruitfulness, intentional leadership presence, and creative ministries across the conference. “As a cabinet, we act missionally, while thinking institutionally,” he said during the cabinet address on Saturday.

Don Greer, coordinator of circuit ministries, also gave an update on changes coming to the circuit structure of the Wisconsin Conference, partially as a result of the new districts, but also as a culmination of a two-year journey to visit every Wisconsin church alongside Bishop Jung. During their visits with each church, Greer asked the congregation members about what was and was not working with their ministry. The result of this research is Circuit 2.0, a plan that implements many changes — including new, smaller circuits that are contained within new district lines, and a new numbering system that is consecutive within the district rather than the entire state. “We are Imagining Wisconsin Anew in such a way that we reach new people and new ministry,” Greer said. “The circuit ministry is focused on revitalization.”

Enrique Gonzalez, director of congregational development, reported that there are three new church starts that began in 2014, including Urban Poiema in Milwaukee, a new Korean church in Madison, and The Vine in New Richmond.

In his State of the Church Address, Bishop Jung echoed his excitement for the new faith communities in Wisconsin. “We are experiencing success in Milwaukee with Urban Poiema and with our new Korean ministry in Madison; new Hispanic communities are being launched in Monroe, Sheboygan, Fox Valley areas, and the Vine new faith community nested in New Richmond. I am so excited

that our system changes are already being made visible in creating and joining a new cultural climate for new church planting for new people, diverse people, and young creative people in so many and varied places in Wisconsin. They join a long list of successful new church and new faith ventures, and I pray are only the beginning of a wave of new faith reaching some of the 65-plus percent of people in most of our communities who are unconnected to a faith community, or have never connected.”

Voting on Action Items. Twenty-one Conference action items were voted on for implementation in the coming year. Some of the approved items included the Budget; a continued Covenant Affiliation with three Health & Welfare Ministries; a Rainbow Covenant Program to encourage mission giving; a motion to require the Council on Finance and Administration, the Discipleship Leadership Council and the Bishop with the Cabinet to provide quarterly updates regarding any strategy to change apportionment funding priorities; a resolution Holding Israel Accountable for Its Actions in Palestine; and more. The conference voted on endorsing petitions to the 2016 General Conference. Lay delegates provided a wealth of information about General and Jurisdictional Conferences to those in attendance at Friday’s laity session with presentations, open floor questions, and a skit that discussed the upcoming quadrennial events.

Statistics. Membership: 71,343; Worship attendance: 34,877; Church school attendance: 9,636.

– Submitted by Michele Virnig and Amanda Rehrauer

Yellowstone Conference. Officiating bishop: Elaine J. W. Stanovsky. Guest speaker: Rev. Rebecca Parker was keynote speaker.

Memorable quotes: Parker: “All life struggles to survive. Hear the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor.” “Our spiritual depth are the resources that need to be there. Our first response needs to be to deepen our prayer.” (Quoted from an Ojibwe prayer)

Resolutions adopted by the conference: None – all petitions voted on were binding legislation.

Delegation to 2016 General/Jurisdictional Conferences. General. Laity: Don McCammon. Clergy: Tyler Amundson. Jurisdictional. Laity: Peg Plimpton (alternate to General Conference); Alternate: Diane Martin, Alice Swett and Steve Martin. Clergy: Jeremy Scott (alternate to General Conference); Alternate: David Anderson, Mark Calhoun and Kama Hamilton Morton.

Statistics.

Current membership: Not listed

Last year's membership: Not listed

Current worship attendance: Not listed

Last year's worship attendance: Not listed

Current church school attendance: 1,510 children in Sunday School; 746 in youth group; 2,899 adults in Christian Formation groups

Last year's church school attendance: Not listed

Professions/reaffirmations of faith for 2014: 208 and 2013: Not listed

Adults and young adults in small groups for 2014: 1,510 children in Sunday school; 746 in youth group; 2,899 adults in Christian formation groups and 2013: Not listed

Worshippers engaged in mission for 2014: 2,555 and 2013: Not listed

Amount given to mission for 2014: Not listed and 2013: Not listed

– Charmaine Robledo, director of communications, Mountain Sky Area

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Yellowstone Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church: Statisticians Report For the Year 2014

June 6, 2015

Prepared By: Rev. Jesse Bale, Conference Statistician

For: The Yellowstone Annual Conference, 2015

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ in the Yellowstone Annual Conference,

On June 6, 2015 I submitted the statistics of the Yellowstone Annual Conference (YAC) to the General Board on Finance and Administration (GCFA) via the Ezra Data Management System. The statistical information that you submitted to the YAC gives our Bishop, cabinet, and conference leadership a snapshot of the YAC. The data can be interpreted to give an idea of our strengths, weaknesses, and how we might move forward in our tri-state mission field. The data that you shared tells stories of creativity, triumphs, and challenges. It is important to acknowledge what is going well with joy and thanksgiving. We must bear witness to the challenges with both sobriety of heart and mind, and the boldness to overcome our struggles.

It is important to note that the data we submitted to GCFA, which will also be used by our own conference leadership to do important tasks such as calculating mission shares, and setting the budget for the YAC, is skewed because 1 in 5 of our congregations did not submit data. However, even with the missing data, we are still able to get a reasonable idea of what is happening overall in the conference. This is because many of the churches that did not submit are fairly small, which means they do not disrupt the data as much as the larger congregations do. What is happening in 80% of our churches is probably similar to what is happening in the other 20%. However, it is still a basic responsibility that all congregations submit the data.

In previous years it was common practice to submit false numbers for non-submitting congregations, basing those false numbers off of the last time the congregation did submit. This will no longer happen. False data is no better for our purposes than no data. Please encourage the clergy and lay members of the congregations who did not submit to do so next year. Encourage them with kindness, and ask if they need help understanding the Ezra system, which we all know can be cumbersome. The names of the non-submitting churches can be found on page three.

Included in the wonderful things going on in our conference is that our ministries worked with the Holy Spirit to lead 166 people to profess the Christian faith for the first time, and 42 people were restored to the faith. 102 infants were baptized, as were 21 adults. 1,510 children participated in Sunday school, and 746 teenagers participated in youth group. 2,899 adults are active in Christian formation groups. 2,555 people engaged in mission, serving 34,392 of our neighbors. Thanks be to God for all of these people, and for their stories.

As we celebrate, we also must be aware of our challenges. Because of non-submitting churches, it is difficult to get an accurate grasp on worship attendance and membership trends this year. Unfortunately, we will likely be reporting the greatest losses in per capita membership and worship attendance in the denomination in part because of missing data. It does appear that we are continuing to lose both members and worship attendees. This would put us on track with national trends, but because of our small conference size, continuing losses will mean an inability to continue business as usual sooner than it will affect larger conference.

The finances of our congregations remains fairly stable with a 1% decrease in giving towards annual budgets, and a 37% increase in giving towards capitol campaigns. At the same time, many congregations have been able to cut overhead costs through methods such as energy consumption reduction, and paying off loans. Stability in finances gives us some room to maneuver as we consider the numbers, and step boldly into the future, unafraid, because we know whose hands hold the future.

Respectfully Submitted,

– Rev. Jesse M. Bale, Conference Statistician

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If you seek peace, prepare for war. – Roman maxim