

Monthly Update

September 2015

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

This “Monthly Update” contains some “tough” information that we may not want to read but we need to. From last month’s Update letter, I had mentioned that Concerned Methodists had exhibited at the National Right to Life conference in New Orleans. I had stayed in New Orleans for an extra day because of meetings in Mississippi and Alabama on my return trip. As I walked to one of the local restaurants I knew about, two young ladies on the sidewalk asked me for a donation to support Planned Parenthood. Wrong move. I stopped and for about six minutes, engaged one in the realities of what that organization does, and that it is the largest abortion provider in the United States. When she tried to shift the conversation away from the truth, I brought her back to it and, since she was black, added, “Do you know what the biggest killer of people in the black community is?” When she didn’t answer, I responded, “Abortion.” Then I told her that since 1973, abortion has killed over 18 million unborn black babies in the womb. After going on to the Café du Monde, I returned along the same street and noticed that she was gone, replaced by a guy. I engaged him in conversation and drove home the same reality.

Since the Supreme Court’s Roe v. Wade decision, abortion has claimed the lives of over 53 million babies in America. More than eight times as many infants have been killed through abortion than Jews murdered in the Nazi concentration camps. Abortion is truly the Holocaust of our time. Planned Parenthood alone slaughters over 325,000 children every year or at a rate of 37 every hour; just one precious baby is too much.

On to another crucial issue, The National Council of Churches crafted a letter of religious “voices” praising the Iran nuclear deal and urging Congress to support what it describes as the “most robust monitoring and inspection regime every negotiated” and “moves us a step closer to a world without nuclear weapons.” As Institute on Religion and Democracy President Mark Tooley commented, “Already Iran is effectively at war with many of its neighbors through proxies in Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and elsewhere, which this deal will help underwrite. The NCC letter continues a longtime religiously Utopian tradition of addressing the world as it wishes it to be instead of reality. Such illusions, if treated seriously, undermine the pursuit of genuine peace with justice.” We need to defeat this.

But make no mistake – the biggest battle takes place in prayer, on your knees crying out to our Father in heaven to pour out His mercy on our country, our denomination, on our families – and on each one of us. In John 15:7 we have, “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.”

Thank you for partnering with us with your gifts and your prayers. Please continue to offer up a “Psalm 91 prayer” for our country – and for us.

In His service,
Allen O. Morris,
Executive Director

+++++

September 2015 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

When an atheist called him a “moron” for believing in God, Dr. Ben Carson responded to an atheist with, “I believe I came from God, and you believe you came from a monkey,” he told him, “and you’ve convinced me you’re right.”

* * * * *

Annual Conference Reports

Illinois Great Rivers. The Illinois Great Rivers Conference was held June 10-13, under the theme, Healing the Circle, which included an Act of Repentance toward indigenous people. Conference speakers the Revs. Fred Shaw and Thom White Wolf Fassett prepared lay and clergy members for the Friday service by recounting the history of relations between the white population and Native Americans through the years. The audience sat quietly as the two speakers told stories from American history that many said they “had never heard before.” During the Act of Repentance, three conference pastors—the Revs. Dan Lybarger, Gary Billiot and Danira Parra told of their personal experiences. Lybarger recounted history which took place within the conference borders. Billiot shared from his own personal experience in the southeastern United States and Parra shared her story growing up as a person of both Native American and Hispanic heritage. “It was easier to be seen as Hispanic, although I am only one-fourth Hispanic,” Parra said. “When you are Native American, it’s like you don’t exist.” Parra noted that Illinois has the largest Native American population of any state without a reservation. We have had a wonderful mission partnership with a third-world country in Africa,” Parra said. But we have Third World countries in the United States. They are called reservations.”

Legislatively, the conference approved a proposal to close three of the conference’s five camps due to declining attendance over the past 10 years. Discussion was passionate and spirited as four counter-proposals were also debated. In the end, the conference session voted 492-292 to adopt the proposal of the Commission on Camping and Retreat Ministries and urged the Commission to grant a non-profit group, Jensen Camp Foundation, the right of first refusal on the sale of Jensen Woods Camp in Timewell, Illinois. The other two camps closing will be Living Springs Camp in Lewistown and Epworth Camp in Louisville, Illinois.

Delegation to 2016 General/Jurisdictional Conferences. General Conference: Clergy – The Revs. Sylvester Weatherall, Andy Adams, Sara Isbell, Robert Phillips, Chris Ritter; Laity – Rhonda Whitaker, Bunny Wolfe, Bobby Davis, Kimberly Woods, and Steve Schonert. Jurisdictional delegation: Clergy – the Revs. Randall Robinson, , Roger Ross, Janice Griffith, Rose Booker-Jones, Beth Fender; Laity – Larry Weber, Marian McCray, Anish Hermon, Fred Iutzi, and Carol Sims. Alternates: Clergy – the Revs. J. Keith Zimmerman, Nicole Cox, Dennis Price, Melissa Calvillo, Carolyn Yockey, and J. LaVon Wilson.

Membership 129,587, down 2,338. Average worship attendance 59,200, down 1,669. Professions of faith 1,915, down from 2,202.

Bishop Jonathan Keaton ordained nine elders in full connection and three deacons in full connection. He commissioned nine provisional elders and one provisional deacon. Two pastors had their orders recognized and became provisional elders and one was elected to associate membership. A total of 25 pastors, representing 584 years of service, retired.

– Paul Black, director of Communication Ministries for the Illinois Great River Conference;
Annette Spence, editor of *The Call*.

Indiana. May 28-30, 2015 in Indianapolis, Indiana. “Share Your Story” was the theme of the 2015 Indiana Annual Conference held May 28-30 at the Indiana Convention Center in downtown Indianapolis. Bishop Michael J. Coyner called the conference into session May 28 with more than 2,000 members and guests in attendance. Paula and Ed Kassig, parents of the late Abdul-Rahman “Peter” Kassig, spoke at the annual prayer breakfast May 30, and shared how prayer has sustained them through the loss of their son, who was held hostage and killed by the Islamic State. The Kassigs are members of Epworth United Methodist Church in Indianapolis.

Delegation to 2016 General/Jurisdictional Conferences. The results are as follows (listed in order of election). **Laity** – General: Tyler Best, Allison Curts, Ed Fenstermacher, John Lomperis, Amy Land, Leanna Zimmerman, Doris Clark, and Jim Ottjes; Jurisdictional: Manet Shettle, Douglas Worthington, William Amerson, Christopher Hancock, Nancy Low, Ian Hall, Greg Tielking, and Kate Singer; Jurisdictional Alternates: Austin Yim, Kenneth Einselen, and Carolyn Johnson. **Clergy** – General: Frank Beard, Kim Reisman, Tony Alstott, Dave Neckers, Lisa Schubert Nowling, Russ Abel, Mitch Norwood, and Beth Ann Cook; Clergy – Jurisdictional Conference: Cindy Reynolds, Jill Howard, Mike Dominick, Greg Pimlott, Mark Fenstermacher, Daniel Cho, Samuel Padgett, and Robert Land; Jurisdictional Alternates: Darren Cushman Wood, Brian Williams, and Stephen Austin.

During business sessions, conference members also:

- Voted unanimously to launch a \$6 million campaign to build a new Discipleship Center at Epworth Forest.
- Approved the 2016 budget of \$13.7 million.

The Conference debated several proposed petitions for the 2016 General Conference concerning a variety of issues. The results of these petitions are as follows:

Passed: Supporting Adoption and Common Ground on Abortion, Abortion and Disability, Affirm Christian Principles for Bioethics, Withdraw from the Religious Coalition for Reproduction Choice, and Making General Conference Work.

Defeated/Withdrawn: Church Resolutions to be placed in Book of Discipline (WITHDREW), Delete Para 341.4 of the Discipline, Complainant as party to just resolution and Membership of the University Senate.

The conference ordained one deacon and 12 elders, retired 38 elders, deacons and local pastors from active ministry and remembered 41 clergy and 34 clergy spouses who had died this past conference year. Membership is 193,060, down 1,930 (est.); average worship is 102,238, down 4%; church school (children and youth ministries), 31,128, down 5%; professions of faith, 3,258, down 11%.

– Skyler Nimmons, director of communications, Indiana Conference.

Iowa. The Iowa Conference will “Change a Child’s Story,” even as it positions itself for a dynamic future based on ministry achievements of the past at the annual meeting June 6-9 at the Iowa Events Center in Des Moines with some 1,600 laity and clergy with Conference Bishop Julius Trimble. The initiative, titled “Change a Child’s Story,” is the unanimously endorsed proposal of the Poverty to Opportunity task force. [Members] promise[d] to invest one million hours reading with and to children...

Actions: 25 years of the Iowa Conference-Nigeria Partnership were celebrated in an energetic morning of vibrant drumming; the observance offered glimpses of the years of building relationships, digging wells, establishing medical clinics, supporting primary and secondary schools, guiding agriculture and being in ministry together as partners. The Workforce Design Task Force called for “adaptive change” to guide the Iowa Conference into the future. Emerging from the Strategic Priorities (2013), the task force “spent a lot of time prayerfully listening and

then praying some more as we considered what we heard,” according to Lynn Calvert; the final proposals to implement the proposed “pathway process,” including the work of a Healthy Conference Implementation Team, will be presented in 2016 and 2017. The Rev. Adam Hamilton, senior pastor of the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas, offered three teaching sessions; he called on the people of the Iowa Conference to “radiate possibility, focus on people and be ready for change.” “Jesus invites us to come close and then go out,” Bishop Trimble said in his Episcopal Address. “Jesus never asked his followers to play church [and] he is expecting a response from us.” Terry Montgomery, conference treasurer/director of administrative services, reported that the financial health of the Conference has improved in the last year.

- The approved 2016 budget is \$14,810,617, a decrease of \$1,203,480 (8.1%)
 - Imagine No Malaria Campaign Director Sheri Atland presented an award to the Iowa Conference for surpassing the \$2 million goal
 - Heifer International recognized the Iowa Conference for its contributions of over \$3 million in recent years
 - The Conference supported a resolution expressing support of the Connectional Table proposal to the 2016 General Conference that the denomination take a more open stance on homosexuality
 - Eight persons were ordained as elders; Thirty-four clergy retired; at the Memorial Service 29 clergy & 21 spouses were remembered. Statistics: membership declined 3,369 (2%), worship attendance declined 2,888 (5.4%), local church income was flat at \$83,947,193; 2014 apportionment receipts: 485 (62%) churches paid 100%; 79 churches paid 10% or less.
- Delegation to 2016 General/Jurisdictional Conferences. General. Clergy – Lilian Gallo Seagren, Katie Dawson, Brian Milford, Barrie Tritle, Diane Wasson Eberhart and Thomas Shinkle. Lay – Phil Carver, Norma Morrison, Becky Hereen, John Rothlisberger, Darcy Rubenking, and Craig Scott. Jurisdictional. Clergy – Sean McRoberts, Mike Morgan, Lanette Plambeck, Tom Carver, Nate Nims, and Brian Oliver. Laity – Margaret Borgen, Lindsay Drake, Kae Tritle, Marcia Young, Richard Hofmeyer, and Lisa Larson. Alternates. Clergy – Heecheon Jeon, Scott Kisker, Beverlee Bell, Steve McElroy, Deborah Wise, and John Louk; laity – Beverly Spencer, Dorothy Higdon, Lauren Wise Loonsfoot, Ryan Russell, Nitza Dovenspike and Noreen Kahler-Miller.

– The Rev. Arthur McClanahan, director of communications, Iowa Conference

Kentucky. Fellowship, worship, teaching moments and celebration were the hallmarks of the 2015 Kentucky Annual Conference session, held June 8–12 at the Sloan Convention Center in Bowling Green, Kentucky. Bishop Lindsey Davis presided. The theme of the 2015 Kentucky Annual Conference was “Reach the World, Discovering Unexpected Joy in Giving.” The 2015 Kentucky Annual Conference opened with Shelby Street, president of the youth delegation, leading us into a time of worship. Bishop Davis delivered the sermon. His text was taken from Matthew 28:16 -20 and was titled “A Healthy Church.” Bishop Davis reminded us that, “We are called to be salt and light in a world full of darkness.” And that the church’s mission is to be outward focused. Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball and Bishop Al Gwinn, along with district lay leaders and members of the cabinet, served communion.

Bishop Davis presided over the Service of Commissioning and Ordination. The service was full of the symbols of ministry: the towel and basin, the paten and cup, the water of baptism and the cross of Christ, who calls people into ordained ministry. During the Memorial Service, 16 clergy and seven spouses were honored. Bishop Al Gwinn delivered the sermon, reminding those to “never lose sight of the destination.” He reminded us that, as we live our lives, we each have an impact that will be felt long after we are gone.

In keeping with our theme of “Discovering Unexpected Joy in Giving,” the Rev. Jorge Acevedo, presented the conference with three teaching sessions on stewardship. Acevedo taught about the correlation between personal finances and stewardship. He shared his belief that most people would like to be generous and that generosity leads to a life of abundance. However, he also stated that “financial mismanagement is the thief that is robbing Americans of their ability to live abundantly.” In very practical terms, he addressed the conflict that arises from the coexistence of these realities.

In the business portion of conference, we heard reports from various ministry areas, including camping and retreat ministries, higher education ministry, and the Board of Ordained Ministry. Military chaplains were introduced, and Bishop Davis offered prayed for their ministry. The Rev. Kevin Stamps, pastor of The High Ground, was recognized for having the most professions of faith in the conference with 75 professions of faith within the past year. The Denman Award for lifelong commitment to evangelism, for clergy, went to the Rev. Ben Hahn. Jan Stumbo was the recipient of the Denman laity award. Bishop Davis recognized Corbin District Superintendent, the Rev. Farley Stuart for his election as a delegate to General Conference from the Red Bird Missionary Conference, as well as his endorsement for the episcopacy by that same conference. Randy Coy discussed the new healthcare plan for conference retirees and reviewed the current conference healthcare plan, including the upcoming tax regulation which will take effect in 2018. A prayer of thanksgiving was said for the ministry of the three churches that were closed this year. The 2016 budget was approved.

Petitions: Clergy Pension Preserved: Not supported; Complainant as party to just resolution: Supported; Definition of Just Resolution: Supported; •Revision of Episcopal Complaint Process: Supported; Petition on General Church Apportionment Formula: Supported;

Discipline ¶ 340 (Responsibilities and Duties of Elders and Licensed Pastors): Not supported; Addition of Discipline Paragraph 673 (District Committee on Marital Covenants): Withdrawn.

Delegation to 2016 General/Jurisdictional Conferences. General Conference clergy: the Revs. Bill Arnold, Tom Grieb, Maxie Dunnam, Iosmar Alvarez and Jean Hawxhurst Jurisdictional Conference Clergy: the Revs. Julie Hager Love, David Grout, Michael Powers, John Hatton and Eric Bryant. Clergy Alternates: the Revs. Esther Jadhav, James A. Williams and David Garvin.

General Conference Lay: Lew Nicholls, Linda Underwood King, Jan Brown-Thompson, Brenda Glover and John Denham

Jurisdictional Conference Lay Delegates: Michael Watts, John Crissman, Ed Shytle, Josiah Brock and Paul Whalen.

Lay Alternates: Tim Roach, Cierra Patterson and Mary Watley Suntken.

2 deacons were ordained; 5 elders ordained. Membership is 151,486, down 666. Worship attendance is 53,404, down 1,286.

– Cathy Bruce, associate director of Connectional Ministries for Communications

Louisiana. June 7-10, 2015, more than 1,000 United Methodists from throughout Louisiana gathered in the Gold Dome at Centenary College in Shreveport for their conference. "This is not your mama and daddy's church," said Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey during her episcopal address. "We must lead with greater boldness than ever before." Fierro Harvey encouraged Louisiana's United Methodists to "be all in." "You can't be lukewarm," said Harvey, who also encouraged clergy and laity to be "more efficient and effective with what you DO have." Compelling vision takes deep, hard work, she emphasized. "Stop, be still, quiet yourself. Be slow and deliberate."

Emphasizing a strong missional focus, the Louisiana Conference dedicated more than \$22,092,755 to missional efforts in 2014. The 10th anniversary of Louisiana's collision with

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita was remembered several times. Most memorable was a presentation of video shot immediately after the storms hit. The Louisiana Conference has as its priority the development of new faith communities, with a commitment of 10 percent of the Conference budget apportioned for this purpose. A new Benchmark Project will involve 16 of our local congregations participating in this initiative for congregational vitality.

Four people were ordained elder and one person was ordained deacon and received into full connection with the conference. Lifetime Achievement Awards were given to the Louisiana Methodist Children's Home and to United Methodist Committee on Relief. The Harry Denman Awards and the Bishop and Kay Hutchinson Endowment Scholarships were also presented during The Wesleys. Membership is 118,725, down 1,385; average worship attendance is 39,764, down 991. Professions of faith stand at 1,513, down from 1,772.

Memphis. “Offering Christ to a Hurting World” was the theme for the 2015 Memphis Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church that took place May 31-June 3 in Jackson, Tennessee, with Bishop William T. “Bill” McAlilly presiding. McAlilly said, “I want Christ to use you to change the world.” 2015 marked the conference’s 175th anniversary (176th session); The Memphis Conference, which dates to 1840, covers West Tennessee and Western Kentucky. 18 Memphis Conference clergy and spouses who passed away in the previous year were remembered. After separate clergy and laity sessions on Monday morning, Bishop McAlilly led the Monday morning service with his “Wake Up to Love” message. He probed the notion that too often “our first love of Jesus” is being replaced with “church stuff” and that “loyalty to the institution” prevents us from tending to our own souls and serving others.

Monday’s retirement service celebrated the Memphis Conference’s retiring clergy that numbered 17. During the ordination service, four were ordained as elders, four were commissioned as elders, and one was commissioned for provisional membership.

Attendees celebrated the year-long effort that raised \$226,457.34 for Imagine No Malaria by wearing red on the last day of annual conference. Lynn McAlilly, married to Bishop McAlilly, shared her passion for children, education, literacy and ending poverty – issues that are all intertwined – with a presentation about two initiatives: “Partner Today” that she started in 2014 and “Project Transformation.” An elementary public school teacher for 20 years, she continues to challenge Memphis Conference churches and small groups to form partnerships with local schools, classrooms and teachers. “Education and literacy are at the core of the best interest of children,” said Mrs. McAlilly, who reminded churches they must minister to their communities and not just their churches.

PartnerToday.org and projecttransformation.org are websites with more information. McCracken reported on the redistricting of the Memphis Conference that was approved in 2014 – to go from seven to four districts by the beginning of the next quadrennium.

Resolutions: for district dialogue on the inclusion of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people in the life of the church; church participation in public school reading programs; production of the Memphis Conference Journal; review of the conference’s standing rules to simplify, update, organize and align them with the conference’s mission statement, core values and focus areas

The annual conference approved a budget of \$8,655,761 for 2016, down \$269,161 (3.02 percent) from 2015.

More than 40 organizations with ties to the Memphis Conference and The United Methodist Church had displays and exhibits throughout the Civic Center. 2015 marked the third time the

Memphis Annual Conference was streamed, allowing non-attendees to watch live from their homes, churches and offices.

Membership is 81,139, down 812 (est.); worship attendance at the end of 2014 was 28,624, down 1%; weekly church school attendance was 14,315, down 6%; professions of faith at the end of 2014 were 914, down 6%.

Delegation to 2016 General/Jurisdictional Conferences. General Conference: Lay Delegates – David R. Reed, Elyse Bell; Clergy Delegates – Sky McCracken, and Eddie Bromley. Southeastern Jurisdiction. Lay Delegates Sandra Burnett, Isabelle Dillard, Delores Smith, alternate lay delegate, Deborah Watlington, Lambuth, alternate lay delegate. Clergy Delegates – Autura Eason-Williams, Jonathan L. Jeffords, and Cynthia D. Davis, alternate clergy delegate, Steven Louis Douglas.

– Lane Gardner Camp, Director of Communications, Memphis Conference; www.memphis-umc.org

Mississippi. June 4-6, 2015, Jackson Convention Complex, Jackson, Mississippi, with Bishop James E. Swanson Sr. officiating.

Bishop Young Jin Cho - One Thing Lacking: “I think our fundamental issue is more than a lack of programs or initiatives. It is more than the restructuring of our boards and agencies. It is a faith issue. It is a spiritual issue. This is one thing we lack today. If we do not address this fundamental issue, all our efforts to turn around our churches will be like building a house on sand.”

Bishop James E. Swanson, Sr. – God is Expecting You to Produce Fruit - “This problem why our churches are not growing in worship attendance is not a challenge you can quickly fix.” “We need to sit down and get on our knees as Bishop Cho told us and petition heaven to help us...I don’t care how bad the numbers are, because my hope is not in numbers, my hope is in the Lord.”

Main actions enacted and resolutions adopted by the conference. Resolutions adopted include: an annual call to prayer, retiree housing allowances and the annual conference archives, addressing the needs and equitable treatment of those with disabilities, and changes in the Discipline. One resolution to be forwarded to all active bishops encouraging all General Conference delegates to uphold the disciplinary language with regards to violations of the human sexuality standards.

Delegation to 2016 General/Jurisdictional Conferences. General Conference: Lay: Timothy Crisler, Turner Arant, Ann LaSalle, Ann Harrington, David Beckley and Lauren Sledge; Clergy: The Revs. Mattie Gipson, Stephen Sparks, Fred Britton, Zach Beasley, Mitchell Hedgepeth and Mike Childs. Jurisdictional Conference: Lay: David Stotts, Bo Gabbert, Connie Walters, Kay Barksdale, Bill Scott and Steve McAlilly; Clergy: The Revs. Bob Rambo, Bill Beavers, Leanne Burriss, Jim Genesse, Bryan Collier and Tim Prather.

Reserve delegates: lay – Yolander Jones, Martin Butler and Brian Jones; clergy – The Rev. Connie Shelton, Joe May, Barry Male.

Clergy statistics: Ordained one deacon and one elder, commissioned one provisional deacon and 10 provisional elders. Received three into associate membership. Twenty-two local pastors received their licenses. Retired: One deacon, 15 Elders, two associate members. 9 local pastors recognized. Remembered at memorial service: 30 clergy, 24 clergy spouses, one clergy dependent, and 11 Laity.

2014 Conference statistics: membership is 176,555, down 1,893; worship attendance is 67,466, down 1,240; church school attendance is 29,643, down 1,189; professions of faith stand at 1,877, up three from the previous year; baptisms stand at 1,707, down 123.

– Tamica Smith-Jeuitt, senior communications specialist

Missouri. The Missouri Conference met June 5-8 in Springfield, Mo., with Bishop Robert Schnase officiating. The Missouri Conference voted to sell all four of its Camping and Retreat Ministry properties.

Delegation to 2016 General/Jurisdictional Conferences. General Conference. Brian Hammons, Lynn Dyke, Cody Collier, Bob Farr, Emanuel Cleaver III, Margie Briggs, Larry Fagan, Jill Wondel, Matt Miofsky, Randy Biggerstaff, Ivan James, Karen Hayden. Jurisdictional Conference: Yvette Richards, Shannon Meister, Andy Bryan, Ken Willard, Kay Kotan, Megan Sinn, Kendall Waller, Trista Soendker Nicholson, Jeremy Vickers, Steve Breon, Andrew Ponder Williams, Jim Downing, Charity Goodwin Rosario. Alternates are Amy Thompson, Tammy Calcote, Charity Goodwin-Rosario, and Ron Watts.

10 people were ordained, and 13 were commissioned; 28 new retirees were recognized. Membership is 161,047, down 1,171; worship attendance stands at 77,284, down 926; church school attendance stands at 24,572, down 669.

– Fred Koenig, publications director, Missouri Conference

New England. The 2015 gathering of the New England Conference occurred June 17-20 at the Radisson Hotel Downtown in Manchester, New Hampshire, with Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar officiating and offering the Episcopal Address. Ohio West Area Bishop Gregory Palmer led Bible study and at the Service of Commissioning and Ordination. The Rev. Thom White Wolf Fassett, of the Upper New York Conference, preached at the Act of Repentance Service.

Resolutions adopted by the conference:

* RS-15-302 – Nonproliferation. The resolution calls on President Obama to live up to the Nonproliferation Treaty binding commitment to engage in international negotiations for the elimination of all nuclear weapons ... that each Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church condemns the new Nuclear Complex program, calls upon Congress to stop it and to devote the resulting \$1 trillion in savings over 30 years to pressing human needs, including the environment, affordable housing, public transit, healthcare and education; and that each Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church urges President Obama to take the U.S. nuclear weapons off hair-trigger alert, and to adopt an unconditional “No-First-Use” policy ...”

* RS-15-301 on divestment. Resolution calls on the General Boards and Agencies of The UMC and all 38 United Methodist investment managers to remove from their portfolios companies producing goods or services in illegal settlements on occupied land.

* RS-15-203 War on Drugs, which states “That the New England Annual Conference supports seeking means other than prohibition to address the problem of substance abuse; and is further resolved to support the mission of the international educational organization Law Enforcement Against Prohibition (LEAP) to reduce the multitude of unintended harmful consequences resulting from fighting the war on drugs and to lessen the incidence of death, disease, crime, and addiction by ending drug prohibition.”

* Criminalization of Communities of Color, which calls on churches to offer safe spaces for town meetings for discussion of and mutual planning to address issue of community-police relations and the broader context of the criminalization of communities of color and disenfranchisement from the justice system.

Delegation to 2016 General/Jurisdictional Conferences. General Conference. Laity – Bonnie Marden, Ralph R.R. Oduor, Rene Wilbur

Clergy, We Chang, William (Scott) Campbell, and LaTrelle Easterling. Clergy – Leigh Goodrich, Rene Perez, and David Abbott. Jurisdictional Conferences. Laity – Steve Dry, Oscar W. Harrell,

and Rebecca Hewett. Alternates – Christy Wright, Roberta Bragan, and Sean Delmore; Clergy – Becca Girrell, David Nicol, and Jung Sun Oh.

Statistics: 11 people commissioned and two ordained, membership: 86,393, down 3,066; worship attendance: 29,445, down 883.

Cabinet members committed as individuals to: learn all we can about the history of Native and indigenous peoples in our area and beyond; continue to explore our own privilege, prejudices and assumptions about Native peoples; build relationships with Native peoples based on equality within the conference and beyond by listening and learning rather than teaching and leading; build trust by respecting Native expressions of Spirituality by involving Native Americans in planning and/or leading activities such as Native American Sunday for our local church worship services, Native American Camp experiences at our camp and retreat ministries, and educational opportunities; help keep Native culture alive by providing opportunities for children and youth to experience and explore the indigenous culture; and support General Church initiatives related to land and treaty rights, support for tribal sovereignty, et. al.

– Beth DiCocco, communications director, New England Conference

New York The 216th session of the New York Annual Conference June 10-13 opened with a joint worship service for clergy and laity at Hofstra University, with [interim] Bishop Jane Allen Middleton officiating. the theme for the gathering, “Dancing With the Spirit: Conference as a Means of Grace.” She began her service as bishop for the New York Area on Jan. 1. The conference is still grieving the unexpected passing of Bishop Martin D. McLee, and the following six months, with four different episcopal leaders filling in. Middleton also expressed the need to put in place structures to empower the ministry of the churches and allow transformation of the world for Jesus Christ. “We cannot wait for the next bishop,” she said. “We must live as if Jesus has come again and is in our midst.” The bishop noted that diversity and generosity are two of the conferences greatest assets. “We are the most diverse conference in the Northeast Jurisdiction by a mile,” she said. “We are colorful, we are God’s rainbow. How rich it is to be able to learn from each other . . . All means all, including the LGBTI community. We need to honor diversity in all ways and have respect for all persons.”

Middleton said that preparations already are being made for the next bishop, with a focus group exploring the gifts and graces needed in an episcopal leader. The gathering participated in a poignant service of repentance with Native American representatives on Friday morning. The sound of a drum and the call of a lone voice prepared the body to hear words of welcome from Shinnecock Nation representative, the Rev. Holly Haile Davis. Speaker Cynthia Kent, chair of the Northeast Jurisdiction Native American Ministries Committee and a member of the Southern Ute Indian Tribe, asked, “What kind of Methodists are you going to be? Will you sit back and let the Native Americans fix this themselves? Or will you stand together as children of God?”

In legislative action, all but three of the petitions and reports considered in the legislative sections were placed on the consent calendar. The three petitions – support for the Walk to Emmaus, fossil fuel divestment, and changes to the Discipline paragraph 161.F on human sexuality – were all passed in plenary. Sixteen of the approved petitions will be submitted to the 2016 General Conference for consideration. Those petitions deal with issues of accessibility, discrimination of those with disabilities, eliminating the effects of racism, regulation of E-cigarettes, gender identity, religious liberty and codified discrimination in the Book of Discipline. In other action, the conference: approved a budget of \$8,143,308 for 2016, a 1.9 percent increase over 2015; and voted on the discontinuation of two churches, and learned of the mergers of six others, and possible mergers of four others.

Conference statistics: membership is 103,253, down 4,318; weekly attendance was 30,382, a decrease of 1,914; church school was down by 810 to 7,176; professions/reaffirmations of faith were 2,254, up 335 over last year; missional giving (UM causes, non-UM causes, and Special Sundays) was \$1,946,966, a decrease of 3.9 percent over 2014.

– Rev. Joanne S. Utley, Communications coordinator for the New York Conference

North Alabama. The North Alabama Conference gathered on the campus of Birmingham-Southern College on May 31- June 2, 2015. During the conference, presiding Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett led conference members and guests in a time of remembering their baptism and in Holy Communion. At the close of Conference she led a time of identifying a next steps commitment for ministry as participants were sent forth to their church and community. Each morning, the Rev. Paul W. Chilcote, academic dean, professor of historical theology and Wesleyan studies, and director of United Methodist Studies at Ashland Theological Seminary in Ohio, led sessions titled “Leadership in the Wesleyan Tradition.” He focused the Monday teaching time on foundations focusing on what he called holistic spirituality of the Wesleyan tradition that includes both works of piety and works of mercy. He noted spiritual practices – such as prayer, silence, biblical engagement and Eucharist – and why they are important to United Methodist leaders. On Tuesday he focused on character asking and answering the question: “What is the character of the leader that is shaped by Wesleyan heritage?”

On Monday evening, the at the Service of Ordination, Commissioning and Licensing, five elders were ordained; 10 provisional elders and one provisional deacon were commissioned; and 11 local pastors received their license.

The annual conference adopted four Resolutions: calling for Prison Reform in Alabama; Concerning Healthcare for the Poor in Alabama; to Ban Capital Punishment; and Harm Reduction for LGBTQ Teens [???

In other business the Conference: approved a recommendation of the Conference Budget Task Force to change the conference apportionment formula from a top-down asking of the conference to an upward flowing spiritual giving model from local churches with a goal of each church to modeling for their members the discipline of the tithe; passed the 2016 Conference budget of \$10,155,717, a 0% increase over the 2015 budget, noting that 33% of the conference budget was comprised of general church apportionments, which by the Book of Discipline must fully be a part of the conference budget; celebrated the North Alabama Conference reaching its goal to raise \$1 million for Imagine No Malaria; •adopted the Board of Pension and Health Benefits proposal to move to the HealthFlex Exchange; thanked the 23 clergy who are retiring this annual conference; the Laity Report was presented by Conference Lay Leader Steve Lyles who encouraged churches to be in ministry outside their walls and received the Statistician Report: membership was 133,695 (down 313); average worship attendance was 66,007 (down 269); Sunday school attendance was 30,835 (down 356); amount given to mission was \$9,879,218 (up \$784,754); 2533 people were received on profession of faith (up 477); 2087 people were baptized (up 151); 115 people were restored to membership by affirmation (up 3); the number of people engaged in mission was 33,329 (up 7,185).

– Danette Clifton, Director of Communication for the North Alabama Conference

North Carolina. The Conference met at the convention center in Wilmington, NC from June 11-13 with Bishop Hope Morgan Ward officiating. Rev. George Speake, the Conference Statistician, shared encouraging news Wednesday afternoon about positive increases in the North Carolina Conference’s statistical numbers: church membership increased by 409, reflecting 2806

professions of faith and a total membership of nearly 230,000; average worship attendance showed a decline by 1,785 with an average worship attendance of 76,896. Other news is as follows:

- Participation in UMVIM (United Methodists Volunteers in Mission) increased by 69. There were a total of 1,479 participants in UMVIM short-term mission trips.
- We set a record for local benevolent giving which included our churches' efforts to help the needy, provide support with utilities and rent, and other ministries in our communities. We spent \$14,160,276 this year which was an increase of over a million dollars!
- Programming expenses and building improvements increased, as we continued to grow in ministry and mission.
- All together, we spent \$175,960,582 in ministry and mission, an increase of more than \$3.6 million over 2013.

Resolutions: on Love Your Neighbor: Passed; against Slavery and Human Trafficking: Passed with minor amendments; on Caring for the Most Vulnerable in North Carolina: Passed; concerning Discriminatory Language in the Book of Discipline [i.e., homosexual practice]: Defeated; Declare Trinity UMC a Methodist Historic Site: Passed; Amend the Book of Discipline's Paragraph on Abortion(161J): Passed with minor amendments; Withdraw the United Methodist Church from the Religious Coalition for Religious Choice: Passed.

Delegation to 2016 General/Jurisdictional Conferences. General Conference. Clergy – Gray Southern, Elizabeth Hood, Timothy Russell, Leonard Fairley, Lisa Yebuah, Robert Bergland, Patricia Archer, and Timothy Reaves; laity – Gary Locklear, Emily Innes, Duncan McMillan, Christine Dodson, Mack Parker, Steve Taylor, Eston Brinkley, and LaNella Smith. Jurisdictional Conference: Clergy – Laura Ledford, Edgardo Colon-Emeric, Herbert Lowry, Ben Williams, Bruce Stanley, Gil Wise, Laurie Hays Coffman, and Elizabeth Roberts; laity – Jacob Beasley, Ellen Beasley, Tom Walden, Richard Morrison, Lynn Shuffler, Johanna Berg, Ann Davis, Claire Cox-Woodlief. Jurisdictional Conference Alternates. Clergy – Powell Osteen, Ismael Ruiz-Millan, Branson Sheets, Connie Stutts, and Kevin Baker; laity – Mary Hunt, Phil Isaacs, Sam Isley, Jacob Blount, and Fred M. Hight III.

North Georgia. Bishop B. Michael Watson called to order the 149th North Georgia Conference session on June 16. With the theme of "We Are God's People Connected: A Focus on Global Health," worship and reports celebrated what can be accomplished because of the connectional nature of our United Methodist Church. Highlighting one of the denomination's four areas of focus, Improving Global Health, the conference began and ended each of its eight sessions with a message about Imagine No Malaria. The conference special offering went toward Imagine No Malaria, adding to a year-long fundraising effort by the conference. The annual 5K run/walk also benefitted Imagine No Malaria. By week's end, \$241,228.43 had been collected, plus \$2,200 raised at the 5K run/walk. More than \$440,000 had been previously collected, bringing total giving to Imagine No Malaria so far this year to \$688,057.43. The Conference United Methodist Women collected health kits & other emergency response kits (a total of 4,806 kits of which 4,629 were health kits).

The conference commissioned 13 provisional members (one as a courtesy commissioning for the Texas Conference), four full connection deacons, and 20 full connection elders. The conference also recognized 26 retirees in a Passing the Mantle Liturgy. Coy Hinton, led a Service of Remembrance inviting the conference to "Look beyond our loss" as 18 clergy, 22 clergy spouses. In a special service, Cheryl LaValley and Francine Ilunga Mpanga Mufuk were commissioned as Global Ministries missionaries to Cote d'Ivoire.

The Denman Evangelism Award was presented to youth Jordan Kelecheck; laity Gene Tibbs; and clergy Gregory Williams. The conference celebrated eight churches that had completed all requirements for Churches of Excellence in Outreach. Members of the conference were somber in the final two days of session, following the tragic shooting at Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal church in Charleston. Bishop Watson addressed the tragedy, saying that his heart was aching, prayed:

“Oh, Lord, we pray for all of those whose hearts are so deeply wounded this morning because of the terrible tragedy that happened so close to us here, just over the border line of another state. And in a sister church, a part of our Wesleyan family. ...

And we pray for our world. For what we’ve seen happen last night is happening all over our world all the time. Save us, Lord. Hurry to save us. Break into our world with the power of your Holy Spirit. Help us be your instruments and let it start right here. ...”

A prayer vigil was held at noon outside the Classic Center and a spontaneous offering for the families of the victims was collected of more than \$6,500. A group met just after adjournment to make plans for both an immediate show of support for Emanuel AME, and to thoughtfully explore how to respond long-term.

The conference passed two resolutions, one in support of “Coordinated Action on Behalf of Undocumented Neighbors” and one calling the conference to petition the General Conference to adopt as a missional priority the eradication of violence in communities as a quadrennial focus. Three resolutions recommending the conference petition the General Conference to change language in the Book of Discipline regarding same sex marriage and homosexual persons failed to pass.

Delegation to 2016 General/Jurisdictional Conferences. Conference lay leader, Mathew A. Pinson, was elected to lead the North Georgia delegation. General Conference. Lay – Mathew A. Pinson, Jane Finley, Keith Cox, Jeff Jernigan, Bill Stikes, Randy Brown, Lathem Postell, Rachel Fullerton, Joe Wesley Kilpatrick, Tonya Murphy and Gary Fuller; clergy – The Revs. Sharma Denise Lewis, Philip Daniel Schroeder, Jane Newman Brooks, Patricia Alice Rogers, James Carlton Cantrell III, Steven Wood Sr., Richard Don Winn Sr., Charles Walter Savage II, Kyle Edward Tomlinson, Herzen De Vega and Byron Eric Thomas. Jurisdictional Conference. Lay – Jasper J. Russell Sr., Leon Jourolmon III, Tom Cook, Lee D. Highsmith, Bill Martin, Elizabeth Corrie, Sue Raymond, Janet Sligar, Dianne Andrews Spencer, Linda Culpepper and Lily del C. Berrios; clergy – The Revs. Nora Elizabeth Colmenares, Bridgette Denise Young-Ross, Dalton Troy Rushing, David Cochran Walters, Bernice Williams Kirkland, Olujimi Wesley Brown, Rodrigo Cruz, Elizabeth Camak LaRocca-Pitts, Michael Lee Cash, Juan A. Quintanilla and Howard Davidson Allen Grady. Alternate Delegates. Lay – Deloris F. Carhee, Kathryn Schroeder, Bob Fincher, Richard L. Williamson and Debby Stikes; clergy – Leon Edward Matthews Jr., James Hughes Lowry Jr., Kate Hurst Floyd, John Arthur Beyers and Hugh Bentley Cathey.

Conference statistics: membership is 361,329, down 2,054; professions of faith were at 5,398, down 204; multi-racial members is 4,431, up 2,733; number of persons served by community ministries of outreach, justice and mercy was 1,857,890, up 16,101.

The 2016 session of the North Georgia Conference will be held June 7-9 at the Classic Center in Athens, Georgia.

– Sybil Davidson, conference communications, North Georgia Conference of The United Methodist Church.

North Texas. Bishop Michael McKee announced the launch of an exciting new initiative for the North Texas Conference: One + One. The bishop is asking churches across the conference to commit to developing partnerships with public schools. These partnerships will go beyond financial support, since One + One asks United Methodists to create long lasting relationships with children in order to create change in neighborhoods. One + One was inspired by the early Methodists, who taught children to read in Sunday school. Today, the conference plans to go into schools to support the teachers, principals, parents and most importantly the children of our communities. The goal is for 5 percent of active members to be in public schools this coming school year. This means more than 5,000 people creating meaningful relationships with children. One child, one mentor, one hour, each week.

Conference statistics: worship attendance 2014: 56,808, down from 57,896; professions/reaffirmations of faith: 3,227, up from 3,110; adults and young adults in small groups 47,310, up from 46,621; worshippers engaged in mission: 49,980 for 2014, up from 44,019.

– Sheron C. Patterson, conference communications officer.

Northern Illinois. With imagery of water from baptismal fonts to beautiful artwork throughout the three days, heavy downpours outside and a worship theme of “Replenish,” Bishop Sally Dyck called those gathered at the 2015 Northern Illinois Annual Conference to “restore, renew, refresh and fill up again.” About 1,000 clergy and lay representatives attended the 176th session held June 14-16 in St. Charles, Illinois, which also continued the quadrennial theme, “Who is My Neighbor?” She encouraged daily prayer, worship, small groups as well as greater outreach to children, younger, more diverse people and LGBTQ individuals and families.

Imagine No Malaria was celebrated, too, including reaching the goal of \$1 million in pledges for Imagine No Malaria. Wafts of smoke from burning sage reminded us of the sacredness of traditional Native American beliefs during a smudging ceremony at the opening worship service. Over the past year, the conference began its journey of Acts of Repentance with Indigenous Peoples by engaging in six listening sessions to hear and find ways to bring healing from the painful past and build relationships with our Native American neighbors. The service sought to recognize and celebrate the rich history of Native American tribes in northern Illinois. The Rev. Carol Lakota Eastin, a district superintendent in the Illinois Great Rivers Conference and former director of the United Methodist Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns, was the guest speaker. She said there’s a line between the church and indigenous people, and we must continue to tell the story for future generations. “This isn’t a process of reconciliation. We’re here to do something that’s a distinctive Christian act. It’s called repentance and to repent is to confess our part in the past,” she said.

The conference also celebrated Hispanic/Latino ministries within the conference. Work has already started with leaders from the National Hispanic/Latino Plan to help us grow and continue to find new ways to reach out to our neighbors. During the celebration, the bishop lifted up the new United Methodist church, La Luz De Cristo, which was chartered on Feb. 22, 2015 in Elgin.

Seventeen lay missionaries were commissioned including a family of four whose children are just 11 and 15 years old.

Bishop Dyck also called on more churches to participate in Spanish as a Second Language classes to learn a few words to show hospitality to our Spanish-speaking neighbors. The curriculum, “Who is my Neighbor,” was written by three women in our conference – Joyce Carrasco, Ruth Hoffman and Ngoc-Diep Nguyen. Cokesbury recently published the curriculum.

The Rev. James A. Forbes Jr., senior minister emeritus at The Riverside Church and president of the Healing of the Nations Foundation, led this year's Bible study. He challenged everyone to study Matthew chapters 5-7.

As he reflected on the Rev. Martin Luther King's speech against the Vietnam War, "A Time to Break Silence," given at The Riverside Church, and the current racially charged events from Ferguson and across the country, he proclaimed a sense of urgency. "We are in need of another spiritual awakening," he said. "There's a crying of God's children. We need a radical revolution of values." Forbes referenced Matthew 6:33. "You can't understand racism/greed/violence unless you understand anxiety," he said. "Don't be anxious. Seek first the Kingdom of God." [Note: Yet there was no talk about challenging authority and acting irresponsibly. – AOM]

Conference Actions. The annual conference approved 23 petitions to send to General Conference including; a much-debated resolution on Fossil Fuel Divestment, recommendations to change the global structure of the church by renaming General Conference to Global Connectional Conference and reorganizing jurisdictions into regions, as well as deleting language in the denomination's Book of Discipline stating the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching and restrictive language regarding marriage.

Legislation and petitions that were defeated included 700.04; 702.01; 900.01; 900.02 and 900.06, which covered the topics of free speech, how delegates for General and Jurisdictional conferences and bishops are selected, and a standard for communicating with non-United Methodist organizations.

Budget. The Conference Council on Finance and Administration held off on presenting a budget at the June annual conference for further discussion on the conference's current fiscal environment. In light of apportionment receipts dipping below \$6 million in 2014 (the lowest in 15 years and lower than the recent recession year), the council worked on a reduced spending plan and requested that the bishop, program council and cabinet cut 7 percent from the budget. The council will spend time over the summer exploring whether these apportionment dollar amounts are a new reality or trend and find ways to be the best stewards of the resources we are given. The

work of this group will be summarized and shared to the entire conference during a special session on November 7 when the annual conference will discuss and vote on the 2016 budget.

The third annual Bishop's Appeal raised more than \$42,450 for Northern Illinois Justice for Our Neighbors and the offering during the Ordination Service towards the Ministerial Education Fund totaled \$2,983.94. More than 250 churches participated in the mission bucket challenge and delivered more than 700 emergency cleanup buckets for Church World Service to help those in times of disaster.

Conference Statistics: membership is 88,073, down from 93,090; worship attendance is 33,380, down from 35,044; church school attendance was reported as 8,723, down from 11,674; professions of faith was 1,644, compared to 1,952; baptisms performed was 1,060, down from 1,220; the number of adults and young adults in Christian formation groups and other small group ministries was 16,319, compared to 16,837 the previous year; the number of people engaged in missions was 16,609, up from 14,378 in 2013; the amount given to United Methodist and non-United Methodist benevolent causes was \$3,149,239, down from \$3,668,476.

– By Anne Marie Gerhardt, director of communications

Northwest Texas. June 11-13, 2015, Lubbock, Texas

Officiating Bishop: Bishop W. Earl Bledsoe

Guest Speakers: The Rev. J. Kabamba Kiboko and Rev. Jeremy Basset

Memorable Quotes: "If you are not a missionary, you are a mission field." - Rev. Jeremy Basset;
"There is no such thing as biblical scholarship without faith." - Rev. Dr. Kabamba Kiboko
Resolutions Adopted by the Conference: - Closing of two local churches, End Support for Anti-Israel Coalition

Delegation to 2016 General/Jurisdictional Conferences. General Conference: Clergy – The Revs. Jimmy Nunn and Stan Cosby. Jurisdictional clergy delegates: The Revs. Richard Jones and Burt Palmer (both also alternates for General Conference. Jurisdictional alternates: The Revs. Amy Wilson Feltz and Richard Edwards. Lay delegates for General Conference: Ron Enns and Matt Murphy.

Jurisdictional lay delegates: Leia Williams and Jeff Fisher, also General Conference alternates. Jurisdictional alternates: Randy Stutes and Mark Pitman. One provisional elder was commissioned and one elder was ordained.

The greatest commitment to the Four Areas of Focus came with renewed investment in the partnership we have with the South Congo Annual Conference to assist with education, nutrition, water, and medical projects.

Conference Statistics:

We increased baptisms by 7.3 percent, worship attendance by 1.6 percent, and professions of faith by 12 percent.

Current membership: 59,121, down from 61,333 the previous year.

Current worship attendance: 18,186, up from 17,897

Current church school attendance: 9,122, down from 9,235

Professions/reaffirmations of faith 2014: 861, up from 770 in 2013.

Adults and young adults in small groups 2014: 16,299, down from 16,474

Worshippers engaged in mission 2014: 9,964, up from 5,509

Total given directly to UM causes not sent to the AC treasurer in 2014: \$846,692

Total given directly to UM causes not sent to the AC treasurer in 2013: \$1,676, 640

– Leia Williams, Northwest Texas Conference

Oklahoma. Oklahoma Conference met at St. Luke's United Methodist Church and Oklahoma City University, Oklahoma City.

Dates of conference: May 25-28, 2015. Officiating bishop: Robert E. Hayes Jr.

Guest speakers: Rev. Jorge Acevedo, lead pastor of Grace UMC in Florida

Bishop Hayes' episcopal address: "I am so enthusiastic about our future. In each of these eight new districts ... laity and clergy at the district level and among churches grouped by affinity as Missional Areas can brainstorm, design, and implement ministries and partnerships that best fit their particular region. Our rationale is to get as many people as possible involved in disciple-making. We want more laity and clergy blazing new paths for people to encounter Christ! After 11 years, I find myself entering my final year as your bishop. Hear me: I am determined to make this last year the best one, as we serve together ... Even though I'm going into the last lap of this race, my pledge to you is to finish strong, running THROUGH the tape and not TO the tape! I owe this to you, Oklahoma United Methodists who keep the fire burning for Christ ... More importantly, I pledge this to God."

The Oklahoma Conference structure formally changed from 12 to eight districts.

Resolutions adopted: Ten churches were officially closed.

Delegation to 2016 General/Jurisdictional Conferences. Election of General Conference delegates: Clergy: Linda Harker, Joseph Harris, Bob Long, Jessica Seay, Sam Powers, Tom Harrison, Brian Bakeman.

Laity: Don Kim, Bill Junk, Herschel Beard, Chuck Stewart, Janey Wilson, Cara Nicklas, Aly Shahan.

Jurisdictional Conference delegates (the previous 14 plus):

Clergy: Aaron Tiger, Wade Paschal, Matt Judkins, Jeff Jaynes, D.A. Bennett, Valerie Steele, Fuxia Wang. (Clergy reserves: Ray Crawford, Tish Malloy, Lesly Broadbent.)

Laity: Sarah Nichols, Tom Junk, Barbara Perry, Kent Fulton, Cindy Hull, Briana Tobey, Earl Mitchell. (Laity reserves: Debra Davis, Reece Player, Ahnawake Dawson.)

Conference Statistics:

Number of clergy ordained, commissioned, received: 26

Current membership: 233,037

Last year's membership: 233,350

Current worship attendance: 50,679

Last year's worship attendance: 52,180

Current church school attendance: 6,385 small groups

Last year's church school attendance: 6,327 small groups

– Holly McCray, director of Communications, Oklahoma Conference

Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference. The theme for the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference annual conference was “For Such a Time as This.” Bishop Robert E. Hayes Jr. preached at all worship services with sermon titles of “The Sin of Silence,” “Unfaded Memories,” and “Don’t Keep God Waiting.” One candidate for ministry was received, one elder ordained and one retiree recognized during the June 4-7 conference. A new church start, North Oklahoma City Fellowship, was celebrated and Murray Crookes, ministerial candidate, was appointed to the church.

Delegation to 2016 General/Jurisdictional Conferences. Elected as delegates to General Conference were the Rev. David Wilson, clergy, and Josephine Deere, laity. Jurisdictional delegates elected were the Rev. Margaret Johnson, clergy and Pearl Thomas, laity. Alternates elected were the Rev. Anita Phillips, clergy, and Sue Burgess, laity.

The conference unanimously voted to proclaim the Rev. David Wilson as a candidate for bishop. Wilson, a member of the Choctaw Nation, is the conference superintendent. He is also a Biblical professor at Oklahoma City University and teaches at Perkins Course of Study.

Saturday afternoon was dedicated to round table discussions in looking to the future of the conference, what do conference members want to accomplish and what can we do to see that the conference continues for another 174 years.

A budget of \$1,102,885 was approved and we celebrated one of the largest donations of kits for United Methodist Committee on Relief. Churches and organizations were given a “75 Kit Challenge” in celebrating UMCOR’s 75th birthday. We had one church to go over and above the 75!

Conference Statistics:

•Membership for 2014 was 6125 and 2013 was 6102 – up 23

•Worship attendance for 2014 was 2045 and 2013 was 2066 – down 21

•Sunday School attendance for 2014 was 1856 and 2013 was 937 – up 919

•Professions of Faith for 2014 was 158 and 2013 was 81 – up 77

•Adults & Young Adults in Small Groups for 2014 was 1809 and 2013 was 906 – up 903

•Number engaged in Mission for 2014 was 240 and 2013 was 271 – down 31

•Amount given to Mission for 2014 was \$7,700 and 2013 was \$7,633 – up \$67

– Josephine Deere, director of Interpretation and Programs/Connectional Ministries

Oregon-Idaho. The Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference session theme, “Restoring the Sacred Circle,” was visible throughout the conference. Rather than just holding an Act of Repentance as a one-time event during the conference, the planning committee invited members of the Committee on Native American Ministry to participate in developing the theme and planning how it could weave through activities and worship of the three-day conference held June 11-13. To help raise understanding, each conference member was given a copy of “On the Spirit Walk” by Henrietta Mann and the Rev. Anita Phillips. Phillips was guest speaker at the conference.

Bishop Grant J. Hagiya presided over the 47th session of the Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference in Salem, Oregon; a city founded by Methodist missionaries in 1834. In his opening sermon, Hagiya recounted the devastating history between Native Americans and white settlers, concluding with the statement, “As I read the church’s history against Native Peoples, and as a current church official, the only response that I have, the only thing that is appropriate is for me literally – in the biblical sense – to bow down in sack cloth and ashes and repent. No words can make this right. All that is left for me – and all of us – is to bow down before our Native brothers and sisters, ask for forgiveness, repent, and try to make a difference in the future.” Native blessings each day connected with the conference theme and led up to the Act of Repentance service on Friday. In addition to Phillips, the Rev. Glen Chebon Kernell Jr., Executive Secretary of Native American & Indigenous Ministries, joined the conference to help provide an understanding of the historical and cultural significance of holding an Act of Repentance and building new relationships with Native Americans.

The annual conference passed seven action requests and updated or added 11 standing resolutions to its conference journal. Six petitions were sent to General Conference. Three of the items dealt with occupied Palestine. An action request calls the conference and its foundation to, “Divest all Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference funds from stock held in Caterpillar, Motorola Solutions, and Hewlett-Packard, and continue to exclude these companies from the Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference investments until these companies end their involvement with the illegal Israeli occupation of Palestine.” Two petitions sent to the General Conference also deal with divestment and illegal settlements.

Some of the other legislation passed by the conference included items dealing with investments in fossil fuels, voting rights, Native American relations, human trafficking, immigration and encouraging pulpit exchanges.

Delegation to 2016 General/Jurisdictional Conferences. Jan Nelson was elected as the lay delegate and will serve as the head of the delegation. The Rev. Donna Pritchard was elected as the clergy delegate. Nelson was a delegate in 2012 and Pritchard in 2008. Jurisdictional delegates (and General Conference reserves) are Josh Hauser, a young adult, and the Rev. Clay Andrew. Additional jurisdictional delegates are Mark Bateman, David Armstrong, the Rev. Jeremy Smith, and the Rev. Duane Anders. Jurisdictional reserve delegates are Emilie Kroen, Norm Dyer, the Rev. Wendy Woodworth and the Rev. John (Joung Youl) Go.

Conference Statistics:

The conference commissioned one new deacon and ordained one deacon. There were 13 in the retiring class and 17 saints of the church were remembered at the memorial service. Conference membership is 26,024, down 937; worship attendance is 12,897, down 304; professions and reaffirmations of faith stand at 2,902, down 233. Worshipers engaged in mission increased by 2,239 to 5,424.

– Greg Nelson, director of communication for the Oregon-Idaho Conference

Pacific Northwest. The 142nd session of the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference took place at the TRAC Center in Pasco, Washington, June 24-27, 2015. Bishop Grant J. Hagiya was the presiding bishop. Retired Bishop Melvin G. Talbert was also on hand to offer support as an honored guest at the plenary table. The theme of this year's conference was "Restoring the Sacred Circle." Throughout conference members took time to welcome and learn from those who are descendants of the First People to inhabit the Northwest. Corporate worship, particularly an Acts of Repentance service which was dedicated to raising awareness and provoking spiritual discernment, gave the body space to imagine what restoration to each other might mean for both Native and non-Native people, and to consider ways to build a living relationship in the future. The Rev. Glen Chebon Kernell Jr., executive secretary, Native American & Indigenous Ministries for the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries, was a special guest throughout much of the conference. He added wisdom to the Acts of Repentance service and preached profoundly on ancestors during the Memorial Communion. That service provided an opportunity to remember, and with joy honor, 32 saints who have gone on before us and five churches whose ministries will end, but whose legacies live on.

The Supreme Court's ruling on same-gender marriage was released on the second day on conference that led to a request from Bishop Hagiya for a moment of personal privilege. In a thoughtful, pastoral and personal statement, Hagiya reflected on 1 Corinthians 12 sharing that he celebrated with those who found joy in the court's decision and joined in lament with those who disagreed with it. Members approved a smaller conference budget than they did in 2014, continuing a trend of fiscal responsibility. They approved a new clergy HealthFlex Exchange, voted to support a petition to General Conference to add fossil fuel investment screens to ¶717 of the Book of Discipline, and supported a renegotiation of a treaty to restore rights to First Nations representatives, and ecological balance, in the management of the Columbia River in Washington State and Canada. They approved petitions to direct the United Methodist Board of Pensions and Health Benefits to divest of Caterpillar stock because of its actions related to human rights, Palestine and Israel.

Members also approved a number of petitions related to the inclusion of people with disability, petitioning the General Conference to amend ¶324.8 to require that a person with disability be a part of the committee determining clergy medical leave and that provisional candidates not be disqualified by a disability. They also forwarded legislation to revise ¶610 of the Book of Discipline so that every effort shall be made to ensure all meetings schedule by the annual conference and its districts, boards and agencies will be held in places that are accessible to all.

Delegation to 2016 General/Jurisdictional Conferences. The conference elected the following individuals to the 2016 General and Western Jurisdictional Conferences. Clergy: Mary Huycke, General Conference delegate; DJ del Rosario, General Conference alternate; David Nieda, Gloria Kymn, Sharon Moe, Kay Barckley, Monica Corsaro, Western Jurisdictional Conference delegates; Austin Adkinson, Elizabeth Ingram Schindler, Shane C. Moore, Western Jurisdictional Conference reserve delegates. Laity: Marie Kuch-Stanovsky, General Conference delegate; David Reinholz, General Conference alternate; Joan Holms, Tom Robinson, Megan Kilpatrick, Brant Henshaw, Barbara Dadd Shaffer, WJC delegates; Amanda Tobey, Noriko Lao, Karyn Kuan, Western Jurisdictional Conference reserve delegates.

The Rev. John Brewer offered an update on the Pacific Northwest Conference's Ministry Fund Drive's efforts to raise funds to support the revitalization of existing and the starting of new faith communities across the region. The body learned that the drive had garnered commitments nearing \$1.7 million, as members were encouraged to double down as they approached the

homestretch. Positive fruit was celebrated including examples of churches strengthened by training, coaching and new leadership models.

The conference received an exciting update on its final day from Julia Frisbie, the area coordinator for Imagine No Malaria. The conference had raised \$328,825 toward a pledge of \$500,000, including \$25,852 during the 2015 session. A Bug Off 5k was held earlier that morning complemented by a silent auction and a matching gift from the Pacific Northwest Conference Board of Pensions.

On Saturday afternoon conference members concluded with celebration attending a Service of Ordination and Commissioning with Bishop Talbert as the guest preacher. Three individuals were ordained as elders and admitted to full connection, with an average age is 34 1/3. One individual was commissioned in preparation for the order of elder, aged 25.

Conference Statistics:

Membership stands at 42,876, down 1,852 from the previous year.

Worship attendance stands at 18,846, down 720.

Church school attendance stands at 4,178, down 365.

Professions of faith stand at 712, down 3.

Reaffirmations of faith stand at 68, down 7.

Baptisms stand at 476, down 26.

– Submitted by Patrick Scriven, director of communications, and the Rev. Shirley DeLarme,
conference secretary

* * * * *

Silence in the face of evil is itself evil. – Dietrich Bonhoeffer