

# Monthly Update

January 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

The enclosed “Monthly Update” contains news of our United Methodist Church and reports from many of the individual conferences; for a more complete report on your specific conference, contact us and we will send it, either electronically or by mail.

What a year it has been in 2020! As we are moving into the year 2021, we can only wonder what the future portends. Both our denomination and our country face pivotal moments of decision that will weigh heavily on the type of world in which we will live. Years ago while speaking to a group of people in the North Little Rock Conference in Arkansas, I said, “It may be that we are ‘called for such a time as this’ in our lives.” I did not see then that this might apply to the life of our country as well. It does.

We in Concerned Methodists are focused on using all that He provides us through our supporters to make the optimal impact for renewal in our church. For over 30 years we have fought some of the “tough” battles, and stood firm in the face of opposition from powerful forces in the church in bringing to light the truth of their actions and how tithes have been spent. We not only advocate for reform, but we also witness in both our church and our society to the transforming power of Jesus Christ to change lives.

Our church leaders and, indeed, other influential people will be affecting issues of crucial importance as to the future of our denomination and how we move out into the future as a church – or different churches. As we believe, to live in a Christian society facilitates our efforts at reform; a healthy nation will facilitate a healthy environment for Christianity. Both church and society are key as to how we live out our lives.

I thank you for your response to our appeal for support; it helps us as we move out into the future that is 2021. Both your financial participation and your prayerful support of our ministry are reassuring. The finances enable us to continue publishing our information to people, families, and congregations across the country in *The Christian Methodist Newsletter*; the “Monthly Update”; our website; publishing books; and participating in conferences important to our mission. Your prayers and investment in our work are of crucial importance to enabling our ministry to continue.

Can you partner with us by sending a generous gift – whatever you are called to give? Your help is an investment in the health of our church and of America. Thank you and God bless you!

In His service,

Allen O. Morris  
Executive Director

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## January 2021 Update

### **Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church**

If someone asks about your educational background, proclaim boldly that: Church is my college. Heaven is my university. Father God is my counselor. Jesus is my principal. Holy Spirit is my teacher. Angels are my classmates. Bible is my textbook. Temptations are my exams. Overcoming Satan is my hobby. Winning souls for God is my assignment. Receiving eternity is my degree. Praise and Worship are my slogan. If you are a child of God bless you! ~ Dr. Ben Carson, leading pediatric neurosurgeon in the world.

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#### **The Good Stuff**

##### **+ Church adds prayer wall.**

AUSTINTOWN, Ohio – Inspired by a pastor’s trip to the Western Wall in Jerusalem, members of West Austintown First United Methodist Church have constructed a prayer wall in their sanctuary. Members of the congregation wrote prayers on planks of wood stained in seven different colors for the project.

– Brett Hetherington, East Ohio Conference, as reported in the UMNS Weekly Digest; Nov. 20, 2020.

##### **+ Small church is big on giving blood.**

MESQUITE, Texas – A 150-person congregation has become a big donor of blood for the American Red Cross. In the past eight months, St. Stephen United Methodist Church has hosted 16 blood drives, yielding 461 units of blood. The Rev. Geoffrey Moore, senior pastor, writes about how the church came to have this ministry focus.

– As reported in the United Methodist News Service (UMNS) Weekly Digest; Dec 04, 2020.

##### **+ Pearl Harbor reflections. *A Reflection For Pearl Harbor Day:***

“FROM PEARL HARBOR TO CALVARY” He was born in obscurity for a day that would live in infamy. December 3, 1902, marked the birth in Nagao, Japan, of Mitsuo Fuchida. His story, told in his own words, reveals the mark he left on history – and the mark God left on him. “I must admit I was more excited than usual as I awoke that morning at 3:00 A.M. Hawaii time....As General Commander of the Air Squadron, I made last minute checks on the intelligence information reports in the Operations Room before going to warm up my single-engine three-seater plane....The sunrise in the east was magnificent above the white clouds as I led 360 planes towards Hawaii. I knew my objective: to surprise and cripple the American naval force in the Pacific....Like a hurricane out of nowhere, my torpedo planes, dive-bombers, and fighters struck suddenly with indescribable fury. ....It was the most thrilling exploit of my career....With the end of the war my military career was over....I became more and more unhappy, especially when the war crime trials opened in Tokyo. Though I was never accused, General Douglas MacArthur summoned me to testify on several occasions. As I got off the train one day in Tokyo’s Shibuya Station, I saw an American distributing literature. He handed me a pamphlet entitled ‘I Was a Prisoner of Japan.’ What I read....eventually changed my life. On that Sunday while I was in the air over Pearl Harbor, an American soldier named Jacob DeShazer had been on K.P. duty in an army camp in California. When the radio announced the sneak demolishing of Pearl Harbor, he shouted, ‘Jap, just wait and see what we’ll do to you!’ One month later he volunteered for a secret mission with the Jimmy Doolittle Squadron – a surprise raid on Tokyo....After the bombing raid, they flew on towards China but ran out of fuel and were forced to parachute into Japanese-held territory.... During the next 40 long months in confinement, DeShazer was cruelly treated....but after 25 months the U.S. prisoners were given a Bible to read....There in a Japanese P.O.W. camp, he read and read – and eventually came to understand that the book was more than a historical classic.”

After DeShazer was released, he returned to Japan as a missionary and in God’s providence gave Fuchida the tract he had written. Fuchida continued: “The peaceful motivation I had read about was exactly what I was seeking. Since the American had found it in the Bible, I decided to purchase one myself, despite my traditional Buddhist heritage. In the ensuing weeks I read this book eagerly. I came to the climactic drama – the

Crucifixion. I read in Luke 23:34 the prayer of Jesus Christ at His death: ‘Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.’ I was impressed that I was certainly one of those for whom He had prayed. The many men I had killed had been slaughtered in the name of patriotism, for I did not understand the love that Christ wishes to implant within every heart. Right at that moment I seemed to meet Jesus for the first time. I understood the meaning of His death as a substitute for my wickedness and so in prayer, I requested Him to forgive my sins and change me from a bitter, disillusioned ex-pilot into a well-balanced Christian with purpose in living. . . . I believe with all my heart that those who will direct Japan – and all other nations – in the decades to come must not ignore the message of Christ...He is the only hope for this troubled world.”

[Note: Think about what he said: “the importance of Christ to Japan”; I agree. That is of paramount importance.  
– AOM]

– As narrated by E. Michael Rusten.

## **Of Interest**

### **+ Event looks at Gospel in post-Christian times.**

[Note: Think about the term “Post-Christian Age” and its implications. We have not done what He called us to.  
– AOM]

GLEN ALLEN, Va. – Virginia Conference’s Bishop Sharma D. Lewis will join in “Being Formed by the Gospel in a Post-Christian Age,” a Dec. 4-5 online event organized by the ecumenical LARCUM Covenant in Virginia. LARCUM stands for Lutheran, Anglican, Roman Catholic and United Methodist. The scholar Phillip Cary will be the presenter.

– Virginia Conference, as reported in the UM News Weekly Digest; Nov. 20, 2020.

### **+ Protocol legislation heads top court agenda.**

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (UM News) – The United Methodist Judicial Council expects to decide whether it has the jurisdiction to consider the constitutionality of legislation for a proposed plan for separating the denomination. In ongoing virtual meetings, the denomination’s top court will conduct business for the first time since the pandemic began.

– Linda Bloom reports, as reported in the UM News Weekly Digest; Nov. 20, 2020.

### **+ Challenges of virtual General Conference.**

BROOKFIELD, Wis. – David W. Scott addresses the challenges of a virtual, or as he prefers to call it, a “distributed” General Conference. Those include lack of access to reliable, high-bandwidth internet, he writes in *UM & Global*, the blog he curates for United Methodist Professors of Mission. His latest post includes links to earlier essays in which he considers the consequences if the denomination’s lawmaking assembly is again postponed.

– UMNS, reported in the UM News Weekly Digest; Nov. 20, 2020.

### **+ Paul Harvey’s “If I were the devil” Transcript – 1965...**

[Note: Even though this was written 55 years ago, think about how applicable it is today. – AOM]

“If I were the Devil. If I were the Prince of Darkness, I’d want to engulf the whole world in darkness. And I’d have a third of its real estate, and four-fifths of its population, but I wouldn’t be happy until I had seized the ripest apple on the tree – Thee.

So I’d set about however necessary to take over the United States. I’d subvert the churches first – I’d begin with a campaign of whispers. With the wisdom of a serpent, I would whisper to you as I whispered to Eve: ‘Do as you please.

To the young, I would whisper that ‘The Bible is a myth.’ I would convince them that man created God instead of the other way around. I would confide that what’s bad is good, and what’s good is ‘square.’ And the old, I would teach to pray, after me, ‘Our Father, which art in Washington...

And then I'd get organized. I'd educate authors in how to make lurid literature exciting, so that anything else would appear dull and uninteresting. I'd threaten TV with dirtier movies and vice versa. I'd pedal narcotics to whom I could. I'd sell alcohol to ladies and gentlemen of distinction. I'd tranquilize the rest with pills.

If I were the devil I'd soon have families at war with themselves, churches at war with themselves, and nations at war with themselves; until each in its turn was consumed. And with promises of higher ratings I'd have mesmerizing media fanning the flames. If I were the devil I would encourage schools to refine young intellects, but neglect to discipline emotions – just let those run wild, until before you knew it, you'd have to have drug sniffing dogs and metal detectors at every schoolhouse door. Within a decade I'd have prisons overflowing, I'd have judges promoting pornography – soon I could evict God from the courthouse, then from the schoolhouse, and then from the houses of Congress. And in His own churches I would substitute psychology for religion, and deify science. I would lure priests and pastors into misusing boys and girls, and church money.

If I were the devil I'd make the symbols of Easter an egg and the symbol of Christmas a bottle. If I were the devil I'd take from those who have, and give to those who want until I had killed the incentive of the ambitious.

And what do you bet I could get whole states to promote gambling as the way to get rich? I would caution against extremes and hard work in Patriotism, in moral conduct. I would convince the young that marriage is old-fashioned, that swinging is more fun, that what you see on the TV is the way to be. And thus, I could undress you in public, and I could lure you into bed with diseases for which there is no cure.

In other words, if I were the devil I'd just keep right on doing what he's doing.”

– Paul Harvey, good day.

– Re-posted on November 22, 2020

### **A Way Forward/General Conference 2021 (GC2021).**

#### **+ New progressive Methodist denomination starts.**

[Note: This is an example of what can happen when you lose the truths of the Bible as your foundation. It is as if you are the navigator on a ship on the ocean and you throw your compass overboard. You will lose your way. – AOM]

A group of progressive United Methodists and other Christians launched a new denomination named the Liberation Methodist Connexion, or LMX. The new church aims to center on the voices of people of color as well as queer and transgender individuals – those the LMX organizers see as marginalized in The United Methodist Church. The new denomination's organizers, a number of whom are LGBTQ, said they feel called to act now. “The timeline of the Holy Spirit is driving our decision to launch the LMX at this moment, and we are following her call,” the Rev. Althea Spencer-Miller told UM News by email. Spencer-Miller, a New Testament professor at United Methodist Drew Theological School, is one of more than 40 collaborators who are helping to establish the new church. The new Connexion has no doctrinal litmus tests, said the Rev. Janet G. McKeithen, a member of the new denomination's working group. The LMX focuses more on actions than beliefs, Spencer-Miller later added. “We seek not answers that lead us to correct doctrines as to why we suffer. We seek correct actions, correct praxis where God sustains us during the unanswerable questions,” Spencer-Miller said during the online event. Such actions – the Connexion's website notes – include reparations, caring for the earth and freeing Methodist tradition of colonialism, white supremacy, economic injustice, sexism, ableism, ageism and heteronormativity. The new church draws its name from liberation theology, developed by Latin American Catholic theologians in the 1960s and soon augmented by Methodist theologians such as the Rev. James Cone. The theology emphasizes God's call to liberate the poor and oppressed. The new denomination emerges out of the work of UM Forward, which formed ahead of the 2019 special General Conference to advocate for the removal of all United Methodist restrictions against homosexuality. Since that special session, UM Forward has had held gatherings in Minneapolis, Denver and Dallas to discuss the church's future. The group also submitted its own separation plan to the coming General Conference that would dissolve The United Methodist Church and form four new denominations instead.

[Note: We are also very familiar with the “liberation theology” that comes from Latin America; it purports to put a veneer of “Christianity” over the reality of Marxist-Leninist doctrine. This is deeply flawed and is not “Christian” at all. – AOM]

– By Heather Hahn, as reported in UM News Daily Digest; Dec. 02, 2020.

+ **Delegates discuss mapping new church vision.** Christine Schneider describes her time at General Conference as some of the worst experiences in her life as a United Methodist. The United Methodist Church has reached a point where it is facing a potential split over its longtime debate over LGBTQ inclusion – much of the most heated disputes taking place at General Conference. Simultaneously, the international denomination faces the ravages of the global COVID-19 pandemic. In this chaotic time, Schneider is among an informal group of General Conference delegates who see an opportunity to map a new vision for the denomination’s future. The group, called “Out of Chaos ... Creation,” held its second set of webinars Dec. 1 to share some of the international feedback it already has received on what that vision might look like. The group, which includes delegates from all four continents where the church is present, held two nearly identical hourlong webinars at different times to reach more United Methodists around the globe.

Feedback sought. The “Out of Chaos ... Creation” group wants to hear from United Methodists around the globe about their vision for the church. The group is collecting survey results through Dec. 31. “This effort is really an opportunity to talk in a different setting without legislation, complicated rules, just an opportunity to meet as humans,” Schneider said during the first session. Schneider, living in Zurich, is a delegate from the Switzerland-France-North Africa Conference.

The group held its first set of webinars in July and invited United Methodists to use the delay to help cast a new vision. The group is not affiliated with any United Methodist advocacy organization, nor is it backing any particular piece of legislation. The group is not trying to set up a new denomination, as the Liberation Methodist Connexion and Wesleyan Covenant Association are doing. In fact, group members all spoke with love for The United Methodist Church and hope that, with God’s help, the church can become better. “I commit to be a church that invites and welcomes everybody at the Lord’s table with mutual respect, mutual love,” said the Rev. Betty Kazadi Musau during the first session. She is a delegate from the North Katanga Conference in Congo and an advocate for indigenous women. The “Out of Chaos” group plans to collect responses through Dec. 31 and use them in drafting a new vision statement. The group expects to complete the draft by the end of January and then present it for more public feedback. “This will not be the final word,” Schneider said. “This is an ongoing process that will continually invite feedback.”

The Rev. Kennetha Bigham-Tsai, delegate from the Michigan Conference, shared some of the responses the group already has received. So far, Out of Chaos has received responses from eight General Conference delegations around the globe and 57 individual survey responses. For example, a survey response from the Middle Philippines Conference aspires to “a more vital church, vital Christians, and the engagement in the community and the world for peace, justice and compassion.” Other responses struck similar tones. One from the Texas Conference called for the church to be “open, welcoming, forgiving.” A group of United Methodist youth in Tanzania and Tanganyika submitted a statement saying they want the church to be unifying, caring, capacity-building, sanctifying and one that “strengthens evangelism in the local church” and fosters “healthy interpersonal relationships.”

During the second session, one webinar participant asked if the effort is in any way related to the Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace Through Separation, a mediated proposal submitted to General Conference that has support from various United Methodist groups. The Rev. Jay Williams, a delegate from the New England Conference, advised that the world looks different from when the protocol was first developed in 2019. “We don’t know what the 2021 General Conference is going to look like if it happens in person or virtually,” he said. “So, it seems to me that in the moment of transition in the church, we need to continue the visioning process.”

Delegates discuss mapping new church vision

– By Heather Hahn, UM News; Dec. 3, 2020.

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Only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes. ~ Dietrich Bonhoeffer

## Global Outlook

The gospel is only Good News – if it gets there in time. ~ Reverend Greg Laurie

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### **Congo. Church marks end of measles, Ebola outbreaks.**

KINDU, Congo (UM News) – As Congo continues to battle COVID-19, The United Methodist Church is celebrating two wins: the end of both a second Ebola outbreak this year and a measles epidemic that killed more than 7,000 children.

– Chadrack Tambwe Londe, as reported in the UM News Weekly Digest; Nov. 20, 2020.

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### **Annual Conference Reports**

**Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference.** Bishop David Graves presided. Ms. Suzanne Krejcar, AWF Treasurer, reported that membership is 126,636. Attendance at worship is about 44.5%. Confirmation and black membership showed areas of slight increase over the past year. – As reported in UM News Weekly Digest - Dec 04, 2020

**Austria Annual Conference Annual Conference.** The Annual Conference meeting in Austria had to be postponed in May – as in all other countries of Central and Southern Europe. An online study day on Oct. 10, 2020, provided an opportunity for joint discussion. The question of how digital media make it possible to bridge distances suddenly came to the fore. How can digital media complement and expand the diverse ministry of the Church? Next year, the Annual Conference session is planned for May 13-16, 2021, probably in Vienna.

– Bishop Dr. Patrick Streiff, Zurich, as reported in UM News Weekly Digest - Dec 04, 2020

**Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference.** Conference statistics indicate some decline. Membership 144,831, down 6,985; worship attendance 48,339, down 3,044; church school attendance 13,574, down 1,148; and professions of faith 2,007, down 394. The proceedings: <https://www.bwcumc.org/events/2020-annual-conference/>. – Melissa Lauber, Director of Communications

**California-Nevada Annual Conference.** Bishop Minerva G. Carcaño presided. The session passed a conference budget of \$7,483,124 for 2021 tapping into funds designated for its mission and ministry. – JB Brayfindley

**California-Pacific Annual Conference.** The session officially began with a 8:46 long observance of silence in light of the death of George Floyd and the racism that persists in our society-at-large as well as within our own church. Bishop Grant J. Hagiya presided. [Note: I wonder if they remembered the many people killed as a result of the rioting, to include the retired police captain who was shot in the back of the head while he was guarding a store on behalf of a friend. – AOM] Finances: • 2019 Giving = \$9,521,767 (79.67% of budget) • 2021 Budget = \$10,658,105 (a 7.7% reduction from 2020) See proceedings: [calpacumc.org/ac2020](http://calpacumc.org/ac2020).

**Central Texas Annual Conference.** On Sunday, Sept. 20, five persons were commissioned as Provisional Elders & Deacons, four were ordained as Deacons in Full Connection and five Elders in Full Connection were also ordained by Bishop Lowry in full membership. – Vance Morton, communications director, Central Texas Conference

**Dakotas Annual Conference.** Members gathered in three sessions: a June 11 clergy session, a Sept. 18 session to celebrate and welcome clergy in ministry and an Oct. 10 session to conduct business. Bishop Bruce R. Ough, Dakotas-Minnesota Area presided. Membership 36,501, down 1%. In-person worship attendance decreased 4%

to 18,898, online attendance increased 21%; 837 new professions of faith, down 788.

– Doreen Gosmire, director of communications.

**Eastern Pennsylvania Annual Conference.** Officiating bishop: Bishop Peggy Johnson. Membership 89,483, down from 93,968 in 2018 (and 96,120 in 2017); Worship attendance 31,119 down from 31,960 in 2018 (and 34,324 in 2017); professions of faith for 2019: 1,097, down from 1362 in 2018.

– Submitted by John W. Coleman, Director of Communications, Statistician: Gordon Yocum; Nov. 4, 2020

**Greater New Jersey Annual Conference.** Bishop John Schol opened the 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Conference of United Methodists of Greater New Jersey. Commissioned and ordained 21 clergy, to include Sung Il Lee, who will serve as a missionary in Fiji. Bishop Schol said in his sermon Tuesday, “There can be no courage without fear” as he embraced resiliency and the powers of God within us.

– Heather Mistretta, editorial manager, Greater New Jersey Conference

**Holston Annual Conference.** Bishop Mary Virginia Taylor presided. “There are many who believe that the pandemic is not a real threat and are going about their lives as if there is no health crisis,” Taylor said. Quoting Bishop Kenneth Carder, she said refusing to wear a face mask is a “recklessly selfish act that endangers others, especially the most vulnerable. Wearing a mask in public spaces is a simple act of compassion.” [Note: “Science” differs on masks. It is healthier to breathe the fresh air when you are outside. – AOM]

In other actions, the annual conference: • Learned of a new initiative to dismantle racism in partnership with the denomination’s Council of Bishops initiative. The cabinet will participate in educational workshops. • Received a proposal for a 2021 budget of \$8.74 million. The budget included a \$204 salary increase for nine district superintendents and other cabinet members, for a total of \$106,484 each. Cabinet members elected to donate their salary increases to the dismantling racism initiative. • Received news that eight churches are closing, bringing the updated total of Holston Conference churches to 853. Closed churches include Creech’s Chapel, Whitesburg, Tenn.; St. Luke’s, Knox County, Tenn.; Chestua, Monroe County, Tenn.; Croft Chapel, Turtletown, Tenn.; Piney Grove, Athens, Tenn.; Lakeview, Russell County, Va.; Grassy Creek, Russell County, Va.; and Moore’s Gap, Heiskell, Tenn.

**Statistics:** Membership 157,199, down 1,662; worship attendance 54,370, down 2,247; professions of faith for 2019 numbered 1,376, down 80.

– Annette Spence, editor

**Kivu Annual Conference.** held Oct. 4-8 at Amani United Methodist Church in Goma, Congo. Bishop Gabriel Yemba Unda officiated. Bishop Unda appointed two delegates to represent him when needed in the two provinces:

1. North Kivu: the Rev. Henry Jean Robert Kasongo Numbize, 2. South Kivu: the Rev Clément Kingombe Lutala

Membership is at 26,003, an increase from 25,256. Worship is 19,464, an increase over the previous year. professions of faith for 2019: 512, up from 429 in 2018. To strengthen the four areas of focus, the Kivu Annual Conference made a commitment to: • The capacity building of pastors and evangelists and sending different commissions in the circles to evangelize such as Kalonge, Bunyakiri, Kalehe and Idjwi; • Construction in the future days of new health in Beni; • Fight against malaria, HIV and malnourishment in the Kivu Conference; • Elaborate on projects on the protection of the environment; • Send young people for studies at Methodist University in Kindu, as well as universities in Zimbabwe and overseas; • Continue to raise awareness to fight against COVID-19 in the region.

– Philippe Kituka Lolonga, communicator in the Kivu Conference, as reported in UM News Weekly Digest

- Dec 04, 2020

**Memphis Annual Conference.** Bishop William T. (Bill) McAlilly presided. Delegates approved a budget of \$4,209,431, a 17.84% decrease from the 2020 budget. Statistics: membership 73,237, down 4%; worship

23,749, down 5%; professions of faith 551, down 24% from 2018. – Compiled by Lane Gardner Camp, Director of Communications

**Missouri Annual Conference.** Bishop Robert Farr presided. Membership 144,485, down from 149,081; worship attendance 65,466, down from 69,167; Church school attendance 21,863, down from 22,440; professions of faith 1,108, down from 1,396. – Submitted by Fred Koenig, Missouri Conference editor

**New England Conference.** Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, New England Conference Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar asked if he thinks “we are in the end times.” Bishop Devadhar: “Only God knows such things”; a fear that he first heard voiced in India. – Submitted by Beth DiCocco, director of communications, as reported in UM News Weekly Digest - Dec 04, 2020

**New Mexico Annual Conference.** The 2020 Session of the New Mexico Annual Conference was held virtually on Saturday, Oct. 17. Bishop W. Earl Bledsoe presided. Statistics: Membership 25,456, down 2,247; worship attendance 9,809, down 850; church school attendance 4,380, down 272; Professions/reaffirmations of faith: 414, down 56.

– Submitted by Alli Newsom, Communications Director, as reported in UM News Weekly Digest - Dec 04, 2020

**North Katanga Annual Conference.** More than 500 people, both clergy and laity, met during the North Katanga Annual Conference and Tanganyika Annual Conference. Bishop Mande Muyombo, chaired. Bishop Mande presented the new version of the Book of Discipline for Congo Central Conference. Number of people ordained, commissioned or received into associate membership: In Tanganyika, two ordained as deacons and four as elders. In North Katanga, 29 ordained as elders. Number of clergy retired: In North Katanga, three; in Tanganyika, none. Membership 2,457,879; worship attendance is up by 102 from the previous year; professions or reaffirmations of faith for 2019 is 871, up by 13 from 2018; worshippers engaged in mission for 2019 is 3,346, up by 145 from 2018. – The Rev. Betty Kazadi Musau, director of communications, North Katanga Conference

**Northern Illinois Annual Conference.** The 181st Northern Illinois Annual Conference, Nov. 14. Bishop Sally Dyck presided. Statistics: membership 76,458, down from 77,496; worship attendance 24,430, down from 26,059; number of professions of faith 858, down from 979. Adults and young adults totaled 24,567, down from 26,812.

– Anne Marie Gerhardt, director of communications, as reported in UM News Weekly Digest - Dec 04, 2020.

**Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference.** Bishop Elaine Stanovsky presided over the conference gathering and guided us thru three

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themes: Do No Harm – Fighting COVID-19; Do Good – “Dismantle Racism”; Stay in Love with God – Reimagining Life Together. Membership 23,031, down 3%; professions of faith 373, down 47 from 2018.

– Kristen Caldwell, director of communications

**Pacific Northwest Annual Conference.** The 147th session of the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference was held remotely online on Sept. 17, 2020. Bishop Elaine JW Stanovsky presided. Membership 36,620, down 1,123; worship attendance 15,465 down 952; professions or reaffirmations of faith for 2019 at 621, down from 2018 by 68.

– Patrick Scriven, director of Communications and Young People’s Ministries, Pacific Northwest Conference Members

**Rio Texas Annual Conference.** Officiating bishop: Bishop Robert Schnase. Membership 112,809 down by 1.7%; worship attendance 40,672 down by 0.04%; professions of faith 2,860 up 32.6%. – Jozlin Parker, Conference director of technical ministries.

**South Carolina Annual Conference.** Some 1,000 lay and clergy members participated, Oct. 17. Bishop L. Jonathan Holston presided. Statistics: Membership 217,681, down from 220,318 in 2018 (and 222,813 in 2017); worship attendance 88,283 down from 89,525; professions of faith: 2,378, down from 2,514 in 2018.

– Submitted by Dan O’Mara, director of communications

**Susquehanna Annual Conference.** The conference began with a Time of Centering video produced by Jason Moore of Midnight Oil Productions. The video ends with words from Bishop Jeremiah Park, discussing the twists and turns of 2020; the pandemic, the anticipation of General Conference, to ongoing racial injustice, The approved 2021 budget was \$ 10,656,310, which decrease by \$1 million .

Submitted by Janelle L. Walker, director of communications

**Tennessee Annual Conference.** Bishop Bill McAlilly presided. District church closing resolutions were voted on individually and all were passed. Bishop McAlilly prayed for each district’s closed churches. Caney Fork River District Closing Resolutions: Wartrace UMC | Hickory Grove UMC | Hilham UMC | Pleasant Grove UMC | Martin’s Chapel UMC | Jacob’s Pillar UMC | Shipley UMC. Cumberland River District Closing Resolutions: Bigbee Chapel UMC | Payne Chapel UMC | Trinity UMC | Mt. Olive UMC. Harpeth River District Closing Resolutions: Mt. Nebo UMC | Shawnettee UMC. Red River District Closing Resolutions: Barth Vernon UMC | Cedar Valley UMC | Cumberland City UMC | Leatherwood Asbury UMC | Spring Hill UMC. Stones River District Closing Resolution: Lincoln UMC. Statistics: membership 109,504, down 4,483; worship attendance 41,271, down 65; church school attendance stands at 19,750, down 545.; professions of faith: 1,524, up 174. [Note: This report is especially sad, not only on a personal level, but also for the multitude of the church closings. Until he passed away, Dr. J. R. Crowe was the oldest member of Concerned Methodists; he served Wartrace UMC, now closed. – AOM]

– Amy Hurd, director of communications, Tennessee Conference

**Texas Annual Conference.** Bishop Scott J. Jones presided. The Resolution to End Harm was withdrawn by the Rev. Diane McGehee and the vote was not taken. McGehee, senior pastor at Bering UMC proposed the resolution, asking the Texas Annual Conference to remove the incompatibility clause, and all related paragraphs, from the Book of Discipline to protect LGBTQ individuals. In the pre-conference meetings, a straw poll resulted in a 67% vote against the proposed resolution.

[Note: The “Resolution to End Harm” is sadly misguided. It would do immeasurable harm spiritually. – AOM]

– Lindsay Peyton

**Virginia Annual Conference.** The 238<sup>th</sup> session of the Virginia Annual Conference; Bishop Sharma Lewis presided. The Conference membership stood at 314,000. AC2020 can be viewed at: <https://vaumc.org/AC2020>.

– Submitted by Madeline Pillow, director of communications, as reported in UM News Weekly Digest; Dec 04, 2020.

**West Ohio Annual Conference.** Bishop Gregory V. Palmer presided. Membership 140,309; attendance 84,629 with an additional 10,561 online worshippers; and 2,440 professions of faith. The 52nd session of the West Ohio Annual Conference is scheduled for June 6-10, 2021.

– Amy Graham and Kay Panovec

**Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference.**..An abbreviated 2020 session of the Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference was held virtually on Saturday, Oct. 3. Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi presided. Membership 150,210, down 3,291; worship attendance 43,620, down 2,155; professions of faith for 2019 were 1,239, down 41 from 2018. – Jackie Campbell, Communications Director

**Wisconsin Annual Conference.**.. A streamlined virtual annual conference session for the Wisconsin Conference was held Oct. 24. GNTV was the host provider. Bishop Hee Soo Jung presided Conference statistics: Membership: 54,093; Worship attendance: 26,301; Church school attendance: 7,325. – The Rev. Sue D’Alessio, as reported in UM News Weekly Digest - Dec 04, 2020

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The Law’s part in transformation is to make a person aware of his sin and of his need for divine forgiveness and redemption and to set the standard of acceptable morality. Until a person acknowledges his basic sinfulness and inability to perfectly fulfill the demands of God’s Law, he will not come repentantly to seek salvation. Until he despairs of himself and his own sinfulness, he will not come in humble faith to be filled with Christ’s righteousness. A person who says he wants salvation but refuses to recognize and repent of his sin deceives himself.

Grace means nothing to a person who does not know he is sinful and that such sinfulness means he is separated from God and damned. It is therefore pointless to preach grace until the impossible demands of the Law and the reality of guilt before God are preached.

~ John MacArthur