

GPconnect

Connecting United Methodists across the Great Plains

Summer 2015



In this edition of GPconnect:
Annual conference session recap
Haiti trip fosters relationship
Tips on how to brand your church

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Cover photo

Bishop Scott Jones baptizes Evelyn Gayley Cannon, daughter of Emily Cannon, pastor at Auburn (Nebraska) UMC, at the 2015 Great Plains Annual Conference Session in Wichita, Kansas. See more about the conference on pages 6-11.

Camping as faith development



Bishop Scott J. Jones

View the bishop's blog at greatplainsumc.org/bishopsblog

A recent devotion published in The Upper Room (www.upperroom.org) talked about slowing down one's life to make time for God. A few days after reading that as part of my daily prayer time, I read the manuscript of "Meet the Goodpeople," a book by Roger Ross which will be published by Abingdon Press this October. He talks about the power of prayer and the importance of setting aside time to be with God.

While neither of these authors mentioned camping ministry, they both reinforced the long-standing commitment of the Great Plains Conference and its predecessors to supporting our camps. We have just committed ourselves to raising \$994,000 for Camp Comeca near Cozad, Nebraska. We have poured large sums of money into our camps in Kansas during the past eight years. Yet, it is possible that many of our people

do not understand the connection between intentional faith development and camping ministry.

Faith is a gift from God that comes as we open ourselves to God's grace. The most basic lesson is that progress in the Christian life comes through participation in the means of grace. Christians grow in their faith by weekly worship, daily Bible study, daily prayer, regular participation in holy communion, mission work with the needy and participation in a small group. The believers who make the most progress are the ones who build these practices into their regular routines.

The reality, though, is that life becomes busy and we are easily distracted. Even our spiritual practices can become dry and lifeless. More likely, we break the routines and skip worship or don't serve the needy or fail to pray. All of us can point to times when our spiritual progress seemed to stall.

Getting away from our homes for time at camp provides an opportunity for a spiritual re-booting. We break open our routines at home and make time for God. We find new Christian friends. We reconnect with God's creation by being close to nature. A week at camp, even if you are an adult counselor working with youth, can be a life-transforming experience that will strengthen your faith and confirm your hope.

As a Great Plains Conference, we are stewards of wonderful places where the Holy Spirit touches the lives of children, youth and adults regularly. Supporting our camps with your money or your time or your prayers is a way of enabling people to deepen their faith.



Bishop Scott J. Jones,
Resident Bishop

Great Plains United Methodist Conference

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From your lay leader

Annual conference session reflections

In spite of deep exhaustion, the week after the annual conference session always leaves me re-energized by what took place at our annual gathering. Seeing old friends, meeting new friends, hearing about transforming ministries across Kansas and Nebraska and discovering new ways to connect our busy lives to God's grace are just a few of the takeaways from this year's event. We are working very hard out there to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world and it couldn't be more exciting.

Our newly elected General and Jurisdictional Conference delegation will soon begin a long process of sorting through large amounts of petitions and legislation to be presented at the 2016 General Conference next year in Portland, Oregon. Please keep this team in your prayers as they start out on this journey. For some, it is a brand-new experience and opportunity to see the United Methodist Church in action. For others, it is a beloved experience that reminds us the church lies outside our doors to the other side of the world.



Courtney Fowler

On another note, I hope your churches will take time to learn about and support our new mission outreach focus: The Lydia Patterson Institute, Zimbabwe East partnership and the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference. These three groups are doing great work that God is blessing in their geographical areas and we can be a large part of these efforts. And just as we are seeing with our education partnerships, there are many opportunities for creativity and new ways to support these ministries with our gifts and outreach. I'm looking forward to hearing about the fun, exciting ideas you may have for making a difference.

I hope you enjoy the rest of your summer, whether you are traveling or staying close by — take time to savor God's creation and all the blessings we enjoy — and offer a prayer of thanks. Grace abounds!

Blessings,



Courtney Fowler
Conference Lay Leader

Conference events are posted
at greatplainsumc.org/events

Conference events

July 16-17

Young Preachers Festival and Conference
Leawood, Kansas

July 25

Healthy Families, Healthy Planet 2015,
Lincoln, Nebraska

July 27-31

Licensing School, Great Bend, Kansas

Aug. 1

Volunteers in Mission (VIM) training,
Beatrice, Nebraska

Aug. 29

ABIDE Preview,
Lincoln, Nebraska and Wichita, Kansas

Sept. 7

Labor Day

Sept. 12

Camp Norwesca Barbecue,
Chadron, Nebraska

Sept. 12

Volunteers in Mission (VIM) team
leader training, Norfolk, Nebraska

Sept. 19

Wichita Men's Rally, Wichita, Kansas

Sept. 20

Camp Fontanelle Barbecue,
Fontanelle, Nebraska

Sept. 25-27

South Central Jurisdiction Mission
Academy, Midlothian, Texas

Sept. 30-Oct. 2

Leadership Institute, Leawood, Kansas

Oct. 2-3

Small Wonders, Holdrege, Nebraska

Oct. 4

World Communion Sunday

Oct. 15-18

Bread of Life Men's Walk to Emmaus,
Wichita, Kansas

Oct. 16

Great Plains United Methodist Women
Annual Meeting, Wichita, Kansas

Oct. 17

Volunteers in Mission (VIM) team
leader training, Fairway, Kansas

Oct. 22-25

Bread of Life Women's Walk to Emmaus,
Wichita, Kansas

Long-standing relationship yields new friends, fresh hope

By CINDY KELLY,
communications coordinator

Relationships are tricky. When people are in sync, relationships provide stability. However over time people can grow apart, becoming unaware of each other's dreams and needs. When cultural and language differences make the situation more complex, relationships can shift out of balance. The Great Plains United Methodist's Mercy and Justice Ministry – tasked with developing the relationship between the conference and Haiti – sent a team to La Gonave to check our assumptions on how we can help each other thrive.

Prior to establishing a formal partnership with the Haiti District of the Methodist Church of the

Shirley and Joe Edgerton's service as Volunteers In Mission on the island of La Gonave encouraged churches to look beyond themselves and connect with a global mission project. United Methodists in Kansas and Nebraska helped Haitians recover from the earthquake, provided scholarships for Haitian students, traveled to Haiti with work teams to build schools and churches and more. In 2014, however, the Great Plains Haiti Partnership Task Force wondered if the relationship currently meets the needs of all involved. Conversations from 2010 about helping the La Gonave Circuit become self-supporting had not progressed.

"La Gonave is a very difficult place," said the Rev. Jacki Sincere, the circuit

life for the 80,000 people who live there. The roads are in poor condition, and although there are six springs on the island, water is not fit to drink. Made mostly of limestone, the hilly island is barren due to deforestation, overgrazing and drought. Ravaged by a hurricane in 1976, La Gonave drew the attention of missionaries who have built clinics, schools and churches, bringing hope and health to the poorest part of the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. Since he was born and educated on La Gonave, Sincere considers his life to be a testimony to this work.

The team sent to Haiti in March 2015 consisted of campus ministers, conference staff, the chair of the Great Plains-EMH partnership task force and three college students. Some had been to Haiti before. Some spoke French. All struggled with the adaptive challenges of the intentions of the trip. If the goal had been to build something, then it would be simple to know if the trip was successful. However a goal as vague as "relationship building" left everyone questioning the strategy at various points in the trip. If the Haitians also wondered about our purpose, their gracious hospitality never slipped. They accepted our clumsy efforts to extend friendship.

Flying into Port-au-Prince on March 12, the team took a ferry to La Gonave the next day. In spite of their difficult environment, the people of this dusty island are generous, kind and hard-working. They are concerned about educating and caring for their children. In Anse-à-Galets, the largest city on the island, the women of the Methodist church meet weekly to pray, visit the hospitals and make handicrafts they sell to raise money to share when they visit the sick. This kind of initiative was also evident in the church which serves the community through its school and feeding hundreds at least once a month. While the school has nine teachers with a high school education and 210 students, they struggle to cover their expenses. Many parents are not able to pay tuition, and teachers often go for months without being paid.



PHOTO BY CINDY KELLY

The Rev. Kevin Hopkins, Baker University chaplain, takes photos with Haitian children while on a relationship-building mission trip to the country in March 2015.

Caribbean and the Americas (MCCA) in 2010, the former Kansas East Conference had enjoyed a close and caring relationship for many years with various ministries in Haiti. Pastor

superintendent appointed to the island by the Haiti District president, the Rev. Paul Gesner. While the island is beautiful, covering an area of 287 square miles, it offers a very difficult



While in Haiti, the Rev. Eduardo Bousson, left, is prepared to preach during a Sunday worship service at l'Eglise Méthodiste d'Haiti in Anse à Galets, while the church's music leader, Lonise Therard, sings. On the right is Pastor Jacki Sincère, superintendent of La Gonâve and Jérémie circuits. He is one of 15 ordained superintendents in the Methodist Church in Haiti. Since the visit, a new superintendent has been appointed to the circuit of La Gonâve who also oversees churches in the Petit-Goâve circuit. Note that the two circuits are separated by more than 30 miles of the Caribbean Sea, so travel for the superintendent to La Gonâve is difficult.

The youth at the Methodist church in Anse-à-Galets meet each Saturday. In the only city with a secondary school, there are more youth here than elsewhere on the island. When meeting with the team, the youth expressed their desire for training or education that would allow them to stay and develop La Gonâve through working on income-generating projects.

In 2010, the Haiti District pursued construction of a manse (parsonage) on the island, which would allow the minister for the La Gonâve Circuit to live on the island rather than commute from another island which can take half a day. Evangelism and leadership development were expected to improve, since a resident superintendent could do more to grow lay and clergy leaders. The United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) provides humanitarian aid and disaster-recovery assistance, but it does not build or repair churches or parsonages. Their assistance has been a tremendous help to the people of La Gonâve, but for the circuit to prosper, economic development is needed. The manse project has yet to be funded.

In the early morning on March 17, the team left Anse-à-Galets by ferry, headed back to Port-au-Prince. We took a few hours to enjoy the beach, then stopped in the mountains to visit

the memorial at Titanyen where more than 100,000 earthquake and cholera victims lay buried in the mass graves.

For our final day in Haiti, we visited the national museum MUPANAH (Musée du Panthéon National Haïtien). This cultural center created in 1983 helped the team develop a deeper understanding of the war-torn history of Haiti, the only nation in the world established as a result of a successful slave revolt. The team also visited Rebuild Globally, a nonprofit organization founded in 2010, as a long-term solution to end poverty through an innovative social business model. Repurposing old discarded tires into sandals improves the city by reducing effects on the environment and providing jobs. The team also toured the Apparent Project, a similar organization which makes beads for jewelry, using discarded materials such as cereal and cracker boxes, oil drums and other

trash. In addition to cleaning up the Haitian landscape, these efforts bring hope to Haitian families who benefit from employment.

Returning to homes, churches and universities in Kansas and Nebraska, the team is sharing what they learned. We continue to discuss with the Haiti Task Force and the Mercy and Justice Ministry, looking at options for moving forward with our new friends with the view of long-term development and sustainability on La Gonâve.



PHOTO BY CINDY KELLY

The Haiti trip team members. Front row, from left: the Rev. Kalaba Chali, Mercy and Justice coordinator; the Rev. Justin Jamis, Kansas State; the Rev. Eduardo Bousson, Nebraska Wesleyan; and the Rev. Kevin Hopkins, Baker University. Back row, from left: Madison Wendt, Baker University student; translator, Napoleon Lemer; the Rev. Patrick McLaughlin, First UMC in Manhattan, Kansas; the Rev. Nicole Conard, young leadership coordinator; Erica Hernly, University of Kansas student; Joey Hentzler, University of Kansas student; and Sheryl Crooks, EMH Partnership chair. Not pictured: Cindy Kelly, communications coordinator.

Connect online
www.greatplainsumc.org



View more information about the Haiti trip, including photos and videos at greatplainsumc.org/haiti.

AC happenings

Conference celebrates retirees



PHOTO BY TODD SEIFERT

Of the 42 retirees celebrated at the 2015 Great Plains Annual Conference Session, 30 participated in a group picture. Front row, from left: Joyce Allen, the Rev. Patrick Buss, the Rev. Jenny Buss, the Rev. Janet Hernandez, the Rev. Deb Hanes-Nelson, the Rev. Nita Hinds-Park, the Rev. James Miller, the Rev. R. Glenn Patterson, the Rev. David Ragland, the Rev. Martha Sanchez and the Rev. Lewis Van Der Wege. Middle row, from left: the Rev. Stephen Griffith, the Rev. Michael Chamberlain, Martha Claycomb (spouse), the Rev. Charles Claycomb, the Rev. Laura Arnett Fricker, the Rev. Dan Ferguson, the Rev. Lawrence Fry, the Rev. John Thompson, the Rev. John Wright, the Rev. Norma Jean Miller and the Rev. Phoebe Pittney. Back row, from left: the Rev. James Hopwood, the Rev. Lucinda Holmes, the Rev. Kelvin Heitmann, the Rev. Wayne Handle, the Rev. Daniel Lord, the Rev. William "Frank" Morgan, the Rev. Charles Spence III, the Rev. Gene McIntosh and the Rev. Dennis Wallace.

Internship program gains 33 interns



PHOTO BY TODD SEIFERT

Thirty-three interns gathered in Salina, Kansas, May 27-29, 2015, for the first annual Great Plains Summer Internship Orientation Retreat. While at the retreat, interns introduced one another, reflected on their spiritual journey and began a weekly reflection time of looking for God throughout the summer. They learned more about themselves, worked with a team and developed tools for working with others through the Process Communication Model training, and they learned about multi-cultural dimensions and communication, as well as being open to the world around them and what it means to be a United Methodist. The interns were then commissioned by Bishop Jones. All interns will work full-time for 10 weeks throughout the Great Plains in one of six types of internships: Church planter, Hispanic ministry, Micah Corps, pastoral leadership, VBS and youth ministry. To read more about the internship program, visit greatplainsumc.org/internships. You can get to know each intern at greatplainsumc.org/meettheinterns.

The conference gave thanks for the ministries of 42 clergy members retiring after their years of service in Nebraska, Kansas and beyond.

Oliver Green, associate lay leader, and the Rev. Amy Lippoldt, the 2015/2016 chair of the Board of Ordained Ministry, offered a prayer and shared words of gratitude, respectively, before Bishop Scott J. Jones presided over a service that featured a litany led by the Rev. Kent Little celebrating the many tasks the clergy members performed over the years and a special performance of "God's Supernatural Grace," by the Wichita West All-District Children's Choir.

Retirees include Joyce Allen, Thomas Bailey, Jenny and Patrick Buss, Michael Chamberlain, Charles Claycomb, Harry Cross, Carl Ellis, Dan Ferguson, Bonnie Forney, Roger Frederick, Laura Arnett Fricker, Lawrence Fry, Stephen Griffith, Wayne Handle, Deborah Hanes-Nelson, Kelvin Heitmann, Janet Hernandez, Nita Hinds-Park, Larry Hollon, Lucinda Holmes, James Hopwood, Daniel Lord, Dennis Matthews, Gene McIntosh, James Miller, Norma Miller, William Frank Morgan, Judy Long O'Neal, R. Glenn Patterson, Christine Peterson, Lucy Pierre, Phoebe Pitney, David Ragland, Martha Sanchez, Charles Spence III, John Thompson, Lewis Van Der Wege, Faye Wagner, Dennis Wallace, Roger Walls and John Wright.

Toward the end of the program, four children from the choir shared how they had witnessed God's presence and how they could share God's love with others throughout their lives. Some retirees then were asked the same questions, with an emphasis placed on the fact that although they are retiring, their ministry is not really over. In unison, the kids said, "Thank you for your ministry and sharing God's love!"



PHOTO BY RACHEL MOSER

The Wichita West All-District Children's Choir sings a special song to the retirees of the Great Plains Conference during the retirement service held Thursday, June 11, at the Great Plains Annual Conference Session in Wichita, Kansas.

Elected delegates

The Great Plains Annual Conference elected the following delegates for the May 2016 General Conference in Portland, Oregon, and the July 2016 Jurisdictional Conference in Wichita, Kansas.

Clergy elected to General Conference:

- Rev. Adam Hamilton, Church of the Resurrection, Leawood, Kansas
- Rev. Amy Lippoldt, Basehor UMC, Basehor, Kansas
- Rev. Mark Holland, Trinity Community Church, Kansas City, Kansas
- Rev. Zach Anderson, Hanscom Park UMC, Omaha, Nebraska
- Rev. Cheryl Jefferson Bell, Church of the Resurrection, Leawood, Kansas
- Rev. David Livingston, St. Paul's UMC, Lenexa, Kansas

Clergy elected to Jurisdictional Conference:

- Rev. Junius Dotson, Saint Mark UMC, Wichita, Kansas
- Rev. Eduardo Boussan, Nebraska Wesleyan University, Lincoln, Nebraska
- Rev. Stephanie Ahlschwede, South Gate UMC, Lincoln, Nebraska
- Rev. Nathan Stanton, GP new church development coordinator, Wichita, Kansas
- Rev. Ashley Prescott Barlow-Thompson, First UMC, Wichita, Kansas
- Rev. Kibum Kim, Parsons District superintendent

Clergy voted to serve as alternates:

- Rev. Rebecca Hjelle, First UMC, Blair, Nebraska
- Rev. Anne Gatobu, New Hope UMC, Lincoln, Nebraska
- Rev. Rick Just, Asbury UMC, Wichita, Kansas

Lay elected to General Conference:

- Courtney Fowler, College Avenue UMC, Manhattan, Kansas
- Oliver Green, Asbury Mt. Olive UMC, Topeka, Kansas
- Shayla Jordan, Aldersgate UMC, Wichita, Kansas
- Dixie Brewster, Milton UMC, Milton, Kansas
- Lisa Maupin, Saint Paul UMC, Lincoln, Nebraska
- Wesley Gately, First UMC, Wamego, Kansas

Lay elected to Jurisdictional Conference:

- Keith Olsen, of Grant UMC in Grant, Nebraska
- Randall Hodgkinson, First UMC, Topeka, Kansas
- Esther Hay, First UMC, Waverly, Nebraska
- Karelle Leeper, Clair Memorial UMC, Omaha, Nebraska
- Bob Aderholt, Kenesaw UMC, Kenesaw, Nebraska
- Sandy Simmons, First UMC, Leavenworth, Kansas

Lay voted to serve as alternates:

- Carl Nord, Mulvane UMC, Mulvane, Kansas
- Steve Baccus, First UMC, Minneapolis, Kansas
- Shane Hinderliter, At the Well UMC, Wichita, Kansas

Great Plains celebrates 7 new elders at ordination service

By **TODD SEIFERT**, *communications director*

The Great Plains Conference ordained seven elders and commissioned 12 provisional elders, one provisional deacon and one associate member during its annual ordination service June 12, during the annual conference session in Wichita, Kansas.

Bishop Scott Jones led the litany in which he posed the traditional questions about whether the ordinands believed they were called into ministry, confessed Jesus as their Lord and Savior, if they were persuaded that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments contain all things necessary for salvation, that they will be faithful in prayer and if they would pattern their lives in accordance with the teachings of Christ.

Attendees were treated to the dynamic vocals of the Saint Mark Choir and a dance routine by the Royal Women of Praise, the Dellrose UMC dance group, both of which are based in Wichita, Kansas.

Bishop Bruce Ough, of the Dakotas-Minnesota Episcopal Area, presented the ordination message that we need to remember a key foundational truth: The lamb of God takes away the sin of the world.

Bishop Ough cited Pope Francis' push for unity. Bishop Ough said he believed the division over same-sex marriage and other issues redirects the emphasis that we should have on that top priority.

"Our spiritual resources become trapped and thwarted by disunity," Bishop Ough said.

He pointed out that genuine unity is difficult, pointing to scripture from Ephesians about gifts. He cautioned that while doctrinal standards should be upheld, we can't rely on doctrine to maintain unity of the church.

"This unity stuff is difficult, in part, because authentic unity is a spiritual gift," Bishop Ough said, continuing to emphasize that Paul understood that we do not create unity because it is a gift. Rather, we should be working to maintain unity.

Authentic unity is born because of Christ's death on the cross, he said. Gentiles and Jews agreed that two key components were present: A leader or leaders filled with the Holy Spirit spoke of Jesus' unconditional love, and the community of believers agreed that the marginalized would never be forgotten or left behind.

"Is this not at the heart of our Methodist revival as well?" Bishop Ough asked.

The bishop said he is filled with hope for the United Methodist revival because of the candidates who were later ordained.

"What I'm witnessing is a greater understanding that we do not have a corner on God's grace," Bishop Ough said. "The revival lives. We have a future with hope because the revival lives!"



PHOTOS BY BRETT SCHAUFF/T&J STUDIOS

From the top, those ordained as elders with Bishop Scott Jones. Front row from left: Rev. Kathy Williams, Rev. Emily Meckley, Bishop Jones and Rev. William Gepford; middle row from left: Rev. Jo Mead and Rev. Timothy Bever; back row from left: Rev. Robert Walters and Rev. Cathryn Love. Members of the Saint Mark Choir raise hands in blessing as Bishop Jones lays his hands on a candidate. Rev. Kathy Williams receives a hug from Rev. Cheryl Jefferson-Bell



Candidates ordained as full elders:

- Timothy W. Bever
- William Gepford
- Cathryn Jo Love
- Jo Mead
- Emily R. Meckley
- Robert M. Walters
- Kathy Lynn Williams

Provisional elders commissioned:

- Chad Alan Boling
- Doug Gahn
- Christine Leah Jorgensen
- Molly Just
- Tyler Jack Kaufmann
- Mari Idell King
- Brenda Jane Kostner
- Lucas Frederick McConnell
- Kyle Nelson
- Kyle Edwin Reynolds
- Andrew James Scott
- Kim Serio

Provisional deacon commissioned:

- Hyemi Lee Jones

Associate member recognized:

- Kathleen Symes

Mediator teaches attendees about resolving conflicts, seeing Jesus

By **TODD SEIFERT**,
communications director

Stephanie Hixon, executive director of JustPeace Center for Mediation and Conflict Transformation (pictured at right), provided teaching moments during the Thursday and Friday morning worship services that provided insight into resolving conflicts and an opportunity to look inward to see how individuals can help bring about peace.

The act of communion and the reconciliation it represents serves as a metaphor for how we should relate to others during times of conflict, she said Thursday, June 11, in Wichita, Kansas.

Hixon said it is important for United Methodists to handle conflicts constructively so we preserve our resources around the world to fulfill our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ, bring reconciliation in conflicted areas and so justice can be realized by all.

Hixon said we fulfill that goal by drawing on the best practices that we learn worldwide. And it is important for United Methodists – indeed, all people – to treat others with respect because we are the visible example of Christianity to others.

“You are the message, the Gospel, embodied,” Hixon said. “How we show up matters.”

Hixon continued to talk about how we often gather around a number of tables – in kitchens, in boardrooms, around campfires and on porches – for a variety of reasons. She also talked about how conflicts are resolved in other nations and cultures.

But there is a unifying concept among Christians.

“Our faith, friends, is the cross,” Hixon said. Though it is a symbol of violence, it is not the end of our collective story.

During the teaching moment on Friday, June 12, Hixon encouraged annual conference attendees not to be afraid and to trust that they would see Jesus.

Hixon recounted a story of when she boarded a plane. She was ready to rest and was joyful to find the seat next to hers to be empty. But then, flight attendants re-opened the door to allow in a man who looked unkempt. Hixon said after the man was seated next to her, she stayed focused on her book inside the “bubble” she had created for herself.

As the plane traveled toward its destination, the man ordered wine and whiskey multiple times, and later, as she was reading, Hixon’s new neighbor, with alcohol clearly on his breath, commented on the title of the chapter she was reading and remarked how his wife would have enjoyed that content.

The man’s wife had died at the age of 42 of a heart attack. He asked Hixon if she knew how to organize a funeral.

In that moment, for that man, Hixon was providing Jesus’ presence to a man during a deep time of grief.



Offertory totals during AC

Wednesday, June 10

Mission Partnerships -
Haiti, Nigeria and Zimbabwe: \$11,413.07

Thursday, June 11

Global AIDS, Advance #982345: \$7,981.66

Friday, June 12

OIMC/Lydia Patterson/Zimbabwe: \$6,550.66

Saturday, June 13

Youth Service Fund: \$6,539.79

“So, we spent the plane ride planning a funeral and making sure someone was meeting him at the plane when he arrived,” Hixon said.

Hixon said United Methodists often are aware of deep circumstances of grief within their communities and that it is important to participate actively in breaking the cycle of grief and conflict.

“What happens is without giving adequate care to those suffering, those who have been harmed become those who harm others,” she said.

Hixon said even if we have never experienced trauma, we may at some point, and we may encounter people who have endured pain but we don’t know it.

She reiterated the importance of holding to faith in such circumstances.

“Don’t be afraid,” she said. “You will see Jesus.”

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View more information about the annual conference session including recap stories, photos and videos at greatplainsumc.org/ac2015.

AC Business

PHOTO BY RACHEL MOSER

On June 11, Esther and DeLynn Hay from First UMC in Waverly, Nebraska, cast their votes by using the electronic devices at the 2015 Great Plains Annual Conference Session held at Century II in Wichita, Kansas.



Petitions

Acknowledgement of Diverse Beliefs Regarding Homosexuality

The annual conference voted 496-363 to approve a petition offered by the Rev. David Livingston, St. Paul's UMC, Lenexa, Kansas, that would strike references of homosexuality as being incompatible with Christian teachings and would eliminate restrictions against practicing homosexuals being certified as candidates, ordained as ministers or appointed to serve in the church. It also would lift restrictions on United Methodist pastors conducting same-sex marriages and would lift restrictions on annual conferences and United Methodist agencies from providing funding to homosexual-related caucus groups and similar agencies. The petition would eliminate the performance of same-sex marriages from the list of offenses that would initiate a church trial.

Geographic Consideration for Election of Bishops

A petition was approved that would add geography and cultural values to the list of traits to be considered by Jurisdictional and General conference delegates while electing bishops. The petition would make this a consideration and not a mandate.

Holy Conferencing for the Election of Bishops

The conference passed a petition that would require the presiding bishops at Jurisdictional conferences to provide instructions worded as: "In the Wesleyan tradition of Holy Conferencing, please do not intentionally vote for non-candidates for strategic purposes." The petition serves to try to eliminate one strategy during Jurisdictional conferences that elevates some candidates and eliminates others.

Limit the Number of Bishops from Individual Annual Conferences

The annual conference voted 517-217 to pass a petition that no more than two active bishops be elected from any single annual conference serving at any given time. According to the petition, all 10 active bishops in the South Central Jurisdictional are from Texas annual conferences.

Resolutions

Reinstating Group Health Insurance

The conference voted to refer a proposal to reinstate group health insurance to the Board of Pensions and Health Benefits due to the complexity of the issue. After debate, the matter was referred to the Board of Pensions and Health Benefits.

Lay Equalization Plan Refinements

General and Jurisdictional Delegates – The conference voted to approve a language change to include "provided they remain laypersons in good standing in a church or campus ministry in the Great Plains Conference." This would eliminate the possibility of a person being elected while a member of the conference and then leaving for another role in another conference or denomination.

Campus Ministries – The conference voted to approve a language change to include "For each lay campus minister, chaplain, and Wesley Foundation director, there shall be a lay board member or student elected from the ministry." The change brings campus ministries into line like local churches in providing representation for both the pastor of a church and a member of the laity.

Board of Ordained Ministry – The conference voted to add language that five lay members of the Conference Board of Ordained Ministry will be selected by laity.

District Superintendent Representation

District superintendent representation on some boards also was discussed during the session. The positions are ex-officio for superintendents because they may have conflicts of interest at times on some matters.

Conference Board of Trustees – The conference voted to allow the cabinet to select one member to serve as an ex-officio non-voting member on the conference board of trustees.

New Church Development Committee – The conference voted to allow the cabinet to select one member as an ex-officio non-voting member on the New Church Development Committee.

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Is the Lord there or not?



PHOTO BY TODD SEIFERT

Bishop Bruce Ough, Dakotas-Minnesota Episcopal Area and president-elect of the Council of Bishops provided the sermon for the memorial service during the annual conference session. Ough asked those attending if the Lord is with us or not?

Memorial service at annual conference session

By RACHEL MOSER,
communications coordinator

Bishop Bruce Ough, Dakotas-Minnesota Episcopal Area and president-elect of the Council of Bishops, provided a message emphasizing God's presence among us through times of joy and sorrow during the memorial service on June 11, at the Great Plains Annual Conference Session in Wichita, Kansas.

Bishop Ough delivered a powerful message asking the question "Is the Lord among us, or not?"

The service, which honored the lives and ministries of 50 departed Great Plains Conference clergy and spouses, provided a time of reflection and anticipation. Bishop Ough reflected back to Exodus when the people began to quarrel and complain to Moses. The people came to question "is the Lord with us or not?" Bishop Ough shared that even now, when the force of weather causes destruction, when the economy is struggling, when children die, when lines of homeless and hungry are lengthy, when racism is strong, when we thirst for living water, we all ask the same question they asked Moses: "Is the Lord with us or not?"

Bishop Ough emphasized to pay attention to questions asked of you.

"The questions always mean God is seeking you," said Bishop Ough.

Bishop Ough stated that he was sure when the three conferences became one, many hard, soul-searching

questions were asked, especially, "How can we become one?" He then mentioned the movie "Ray," and played a clip from the movie during which a young, blind Ray Charles was calling out to his mom to help him. She stood there silently, not helping him. She knew that not helping him immediately would help him develop the necessary tools to become more independent. It would allow him to utilize his other senses to compensate for his lack of sight. After the struggle, and after young Ray starts to hear many other sounds he says "I hear you, too, momma, you're right there."

"We hear you God; you're right here," said Bishop Ough.

When he then asked all if the Lord was among us or not, a loud and affirmative "YES" was heard.

"God can hear you (too)," said Bishop Ough.

Each of the 50 remembered had their names read by Bishop Scott Jones, followed by a bell chime and a short moment of silence.

Clergy remembered

The Rev. Thomas Alvin Brandy, the Rev. Donald E. Carper, the Rev. Donald G. Christiansen, the Rev. Donna D. Dudley, the Rev. Dale Lee Ellenberger, the Rev. Ardith O. "Art" Ernst, the Rev. Herman John Heise, the Rev. Beth E. Hodgson, the Rev. Delbert L. Honn, the Rev. Robert L. Hopkins, the Rev. Naomi Kaye Hull, the Rev. Lorena Hunt, the Rev. J. Karl Jones, the Rev. Larry Keller, the Rev. Hiram W. Lilley, the Rev. Lee Roy Louderback, the Rev. James L. Moores, the Rev. James Mote, the Rev. Raymond E. Neutzman, the Rev. Ross Andrew Olson, the Rev. Lynda J. Parson, the Rev. Jack E. Sample, Kurt A. Stecker, the Rev. Maria "Riet" Stronger, the Rev. Nelson "Fuzzy" Thompson, the Rev. William Henry Winter and the Rev. M. Max Wright.

Spouses remembered

Dixie Alsobrooks, Kathryn "Katy" Baker, Jerrald "Jerry" Boden, Deborah J. Burgess, Erlene M. Dillon, Willis Hodgson, Arlene T. Jensen, Violet S. Jones, Kathleen K. Karlowski, Jane Sawyer Kersenbrock, Shirley W. Lathan, Sally Mae Loomis, Melva Metzger, Maria C. Munoz, Barbara E. Nunnally, Clara P. Phillips, William H. "Bill" Post, Isabelle K. Ricker, Leona Rogers, Alvina Shaw, Blanche I. Simmer, Betty Whitsitt and Merrietta Jo Wolfe.



PHOTO BY RACHEL MOSER

Todd Seifert, Great Plains communications director, and the Rev. Dee Williamston, Salina District superintendent, hand out communion during the memorial service at the 2015 Great Plains Annual Conference Session held June 10-13, in Wichita, Kansas.

Bridges to the future

Leadership in the former Kansas East and Kansas West conferences had a vision for what they wanted to become in the middle of the last decade. It was 2005 when Bishop Scott Jones encouraged the development of strategic plans that called for new church starts, improved camping facilities, campus ministry and a greater emphasis on multicultural ministries.

But the vision couldn't come into focus without better funding. So the two conferences voted to build the Bridges to the Future program. The two conferences combined to collect about \$10.5 million in pledges and, despite the Great Recession, individual United Methodists and churches faithfully contributed more than \$8.7 million of the pledged total.

"Bridges to the Future focused the energy and resources of the Kansas East and West conferences on the most crucial issues we faced at that time," Jones said. "It provided money and gathered interest in our camps, campus ministries, new church development and Hispanic ministry. The money was crucial for all of these, but it also brought people together to give of their time and expertise in these areas."

The capital fundraising effort helped fund the beginnings of New Church Lawrence, the rekindling of Living Water UMC in Kansas City, Kansas, and other new UMC congregations — some more successful than others. The Bridges to the Future program also helped fund improvements at camps Chippewa, Horizon and Lakeside.

"When we talked about the importance of camping, people began to send more youth to summer camp and to volunteer as counselors and leaders," Jones said. "But all three camps needed significant improvements in facilities as well."

Campus ministries also benefited, with the purchase of buildings at Kansas State and Washburn universities, as well as renovations at Emporia State, Pittsburg State and Fort Hays State.

Some of the Bridges to the Future

money helped secure pastoral leadership via salary support for Hispanic ministries, said Corey Godbey, Hispanic ministry coordinator. The funds helped the young, mission congregations grow.



Godbey said each congregation has made significant strides in discipleship, community outreach and evangelism, stewardship and worship experiences they offer in locations such as Garden City, Wichita, Dodge City and Liberal, among others.

Many of the pledges for Bridges to the Future have been fulfilled. The program started with pledges made late in 2007 and early into 2008. Individuals' pledges lasted for three years, with churches' pledges lasting five years. Things started off well, but then the recession hit the Midwest.

"When the Great Recession hit so soon after pledges were made there was significant concern about how the campaign would go," said the Rev. Gary Beach, Great Plains Conference treasurer and director of administrative services. He served in similar roles in the former Kansas East Conference. "However, it was surprising how few requests were made to reduce or cancel pledges. But early on the bishop went on record in both conferences encouraging folk to have faith and see how the economy would do. And rather than reduce or cancel pledges to extend a year if needed."

Leadership in the two former conferences encouraged donors not to cancel their pledges because of the economic difficulties but instead stretch payments over an additional year,

meaning most of the payments should have concluded in 2014.

One reason for the success of Bridges to the Future was the relatively low expense associated with raising the funds, meaning the vast majority of the money raised went to fund ministries and not administration of a campaign. In fact, the two conferences combined to spend less than \$480,000 total while raising the more than \$8.7 million.

The success of the Bridges to the Future campaign in Kansas, despite extremely difficult economic times, has created optimism for a similar fundraising effort for Camp Comeca, located near Cozad, Nebraska. The

camp boasts amenities such as a lake, a hotel, indoor swimming pool, dining hall, gymnasium, climbing wall and more. But parts of the camp have fallen into disrepair and require significant investment to ensure its future success. During the annual conference session, the Great Plains Conference approved a fundraising plan for Camp Comeca.

"When a conference decides that something is important and when



we organize a campaign properly, we can accomplish amazing things," Bishop Jones said. "It always must be connected to our missional purpose of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY COREY GODBEY AND TODD SEIFERT

Hispanic ministries, like the one pictured at top, benefited from the Bridges to the Future Program. Camp Comeca (above) hopes to boast the same success as in a new fundraising campaign.

Branding your church



Marketing expert, pastor provide tips for reaching out to the community

Churches are used to preaching the Gospel, but far too many churches do too little to preach to the community about why people should visit for Sunday morning worship or myriad other activities throughout the week.

That was the lesson provided by the Rev. Junius Dotson of Wichita's Saint Mark UMC and Toska Medlock Lee, of The Myriad Group, which is based in Texas. The two presenters shared tips for marketing local churches to their communities during a meeting of the Great Plains Conference's New Church Development team May 26, in Salina, Kansas.

"We cannot disciple empty seats," said Dotson, who shared how his church markets everything from annual events to Sunday worship services. "We have to ask how we are adding value to their lives. It's not a money problem. It's an idea problem."

Medlock Lee and Dotson focused on principles for effective marketing and communication. While the seminar was provided for church planters, Medlock Lee stressed the importance of using the principles for new and established churches. Medlock Lee said following these key points is a good way for churches to reach out into the community and to start helping make disciples for Jesus Christ.

"It's not necessarily a 'build it and they will come' kind of situation," Medlock Lee said.



PHOTOS BY TODD SEIFERT

Toska Medlock Lee (left) and the Rev. Junius Dotson provide marketing tips at the Great Plains New Church Development team meeting May 26. Attendees discuss the information in the photo at the top.

1 Determine your target audience

Dotson said marketing is a form of evangelism, and he pointed to Mark 4:4-9 — the parable of the sower of seeds.

"Are we trying to reach everyone? Yes," Dotson said. "But to best use our marketing dollars, we try to reach out to those with an affinity for what we're doing — our preaching, our worship style and our church."

2 Develop a marketing budget

"Everyone wants to know what will it cost?" said Medlock Lee. "Every church is different, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach."

Medlock Lee said it is important for churches to recognize marketing is an investment in missions, not just an expense. And she reminded the audience that you usually only get what you pay for.

"The marketing budget should be a priority, not an afterthought," Medlock Lee said.

In general, Medlock Lee said, churches should plan to use 10 to 15 percent of their budgets on marketing.

Dotson put it bluntly: "If people aren't visiting your church, it really doesn't matter what you have going on."

3 Use 21st Century tools

Dotson said Saint Mark uses social media such as Facebook and Twitter, radio, some television and print advertising to showcase special events at his church. That doesn't mean Wichita residents hear radio ads about Saint Mark every day, but rather in bursts, such as when the church has a special event coming up on the calendar. In that case, the church purchases advertising in the weeks and days leading up to the event and then may not have other ads in that medium until the next event, such as Easter or community events, come up again.

See **BRANDING** on page 14

Death notices

Harold Dean Baldwin, 83, a retired clergy member, died May 6, 2015. Survivors include his wife, Betty Baldwin; and children, Leisa Baldwin, Leslie Baldwin and Clifford Baldwin. Memorial contributions may be made to Midland Hospice, 200 SW Frazier Circle, Topeka, KS 66606-2800 or the Oakland UMC General Fund, 801 NE Chester, Topeka, KS 66616.

Philip D. Brownlee, 67, a retired clergy member, died May 11, 2015. Survivors include daughter, Kaye Brownlee-France. Memorial contributions may be made to the Parsons Pet Hospital in Parsons, Kansas, and sent to Potts Chapel, 502 S. Liberty St., Cherryvale, KS. 67335.

The Rev. Donna D. Dudley, 83, a retired clergy member, passed away April 2, 2015. She was preceded in death by her husband, Merle Dudley. Survivors include her children, David Dudley, Steve Dudley, Paul Dudley, Roger Dudley and Tricia Grafelman. Memorial contributions may be made to the Donna Dudley Memorial Scholarship Fund, via the family.

The Rev. Ardith O. "Art" Ernst, 87, a retired clergy member, passed away April 22, 2015. Survivors include his wife, Jane Ernst; and children, Richard Ernst, Dr. Randal Ernst and Heather David. Memorial contributions may be made to Nebraska-Iowa Kiwanis Foundation, 1207 Poplar Lane, Storm Lake, IA or St. Marks UMC, 8550 Pioneers Blvd. Lincoln, NE 58520.

Violet S. Jones, 92, the spouse of a clergy member, passed away March 27, 2015. She was preceded in death by her husband, the Rev. Ralph J. Jones. She is survived by children, Sharon Jones, Ronald Jones, Wesley Jones and Mary Jones. Memorial contributions may be made to Concordia UMC or Jamestown UMC in care of Chaput-Buoy Funeral Home, 325 W 6th St., Concordia, KS 66901.

Correction in spring issue: Warren Hartman's daughter is Susan Hartman-Knight.

Kathleen K. Karlowksi, 92, the spouse of a clergy member, died April 16, 2015. She was preceded in death by her husbands, Rex Mann Moody and the Rev. Wayne E. Karlowksi. Survivors include her step-daughter, Martha Knudsen. Memorial contributions may be made to College Hill UMC, 2930 E 1st St. N, Wichita, KS 67214.

Sally Mae Loomis, 83, the spouse of a clergy member, died April 20, 2015. She is survived by her husband, the Rev. Robert Loomis; and children, Monty Loomis, Terri Wells and Mary Kemper. Memorial contributions may be sent to Midian Shrine Plane of Mercy, 130 N. Topeka, Wichita, KS 67202.

The Rev. Marvin D. Neubauer, 57, a clergy member and Elkhorn Valley District superintendent, died May 14, 2015. Survivors include his wife, Sue Neubauer; and children Willie Neubauer, Jenny Lewis and Katie Smith. Memorial contributions may be made to Nickels for Nigeria, make checks payable to Great Plains Conference and mail to Nickels for Nigeria, c/o Marvin's Memorial, P.O. Box 4187, Topeka, KS 66604.

Barbara E. Nunnally, 80, the spouse of a clergy member, died April 1, 2015. Survivors include her husband, the Rev. Donald Nunnally; and children, Janet Williamson, Douglas Nunnally, Bruce Nunnally, Carol Countryman Nunnally and Gary Nunnally. Memorial contributions may be made to Brain Injury Association of Nebraska, 2424 Ridge Point Circle, Lincoln, NE 68512 or Alzheimer's Association Nebraska Chapter, 1500 South 70th Street, Suite #201, Lincoln, NE 68506.

Maria "Riet" Stonger, 77, a clergy member, died April 13, 2015. She was preceded in death by her husbands, Roelof Bos and Ray Stonger. Survivors include her children, Marsha Bos and Roger Bos.

4 Be consistent

Medlock Lee said it's important to treat the church as though it were a franchise.

"You don't want to damage the perception," she said. "It's a reflection on what people think about your church. It's important to be consistent."

That means designing a logo and sticking with it, using color schemes that match and sticking to a style sheet for fonts, graphics and slogans or vision statements, which can be helpful as the conclusion to radio or TV advertisements.

5 Forge relationships with the local media

Reporters are busy people. Editors have many pieces of information coming into them on a daily basis. So it's important to develop strong relationships so they are more likely to either cover your event or your topic of choice, or they will publish press releases the local church provides.

Provide photos whenever possible, and make the church's leadership available to talk to reporters so the information can be as accurate as possible.

6 Develop a marketing plan

Medlock Lee said a church's marketing plan should have a timeline and should have as much effort put into it as a plan for ministry. Set goals. Determine how to put thoughts into action to meet those goals. And set deadlines for each phase of the plan.

This is where budgeting is important and where it's crucial to get the right church leaders on board to help execute the plan.

And remember to be patient. "It's a plan," Dotson said. "It's not going to happen overnight."



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District unexpectedly loses superintendent



PHOTOS BY GREAT PLAINS CONFERENCE STAFF

Above, the Rev. Marvin Neubauer, in yellow, joins a demonstration of follow the leader during Orders and Fellowship in January, 2015. Neubauer, former Elkhorn Valley District superintendent, passed away suddenly May 2015. The Rev. Eldon Davis (insert) will take over for Neubauer as the superintendent of the district.

GPconnect, news and information for Great Plains United Methodists.



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The Rev. Marvin Neubauer is remembered by friends for his infectious sense of humor, his caring for people, desire to help with missions and love for his family.

Neubauer, 57, was serving as Elkhorn Valley District superintendent when he passed away unexpectedly May 14. As the news settled in, loved ones reflected on the many qualities that made Neubauer an effective pastor and administrator for more than 27 years of full-time ministry.

“He was a leader, a friend, a storyteller and a bit of a goofball – someone you wanted to sit next to at long meetings,” said the Rev. Stephanie Ahlschwede of South Gate UMC in Lincoln and one of Neubauer’s friends. “His laugh was one of the best, a chuckle that widened and grew until his whole body shook. I always looked forward to Marvin stories because of that laugh.”

Neubauer served Admire-Allen-Millers in Kansas, but much of his ministry was in Nebraska, with appointments in Alliance-Lakeside, Hastings First, Bushnell-Kimball-Potter, Wahoo-Ithaca, Falls City First-Rulo and Springfield. He also served

as director of Camping and Youth Ministries in the Dakotas Conference.

“Marvin had a deep interest and calling for youth ministry and camping,” said the Rev. Bill Ritter, Blue River District superintendent. “He served many years on the Nebraska Conference Youth Ministry Council and several different camp boards.”

Neubauer became superintendent of the Elkhorn Valley District in 2014, and had nearly completed his first year. The Rev. Dan Flanagan, Missouri River District superintendent, said Neubauer had embraced his new role away from the local church.

“As in everything he did, I found him a quick study, with a deep desire to learn and to become effective,” Flanagan said. “He was also very creative. Serving churches in the Elkhorn Valley District, those that are miles apart, is a unique challenge. Marvin was always trying to find the best way to serve them. He loved the church. He loved his family. He loved his Lord.”

Neubauer is survived by his wife, Sue, in Norfolk, Nebraska, and his children, Willie, Jenny and Katie.

A funeral service was held May 21, at First UMC in Norfolk, Nebraska. The service was live streamed, and can be found on the conference website at greatplainsumc.org/videos.

The Rev. Eldon Davis, who was serving as pastor at Ainsworth and Johnstown UMCs in Nebraska, was appointed as the new superintendent of the Elkhorn Valley District, beginning July 1.

Davis was ordained as an elder in 2007 after serving 20 years as a social worker in rural mental health centers and as a student pastor at Dawson and Barada UMCs in Nebraska. After graduating seminary, he was appointed to Paxton, Sutherland and Hershey UMCs in Nebraska, followed by an appointment in Springfield, Nebraska.

Davis served as chair of the clergy boundaries committee from 2008 to 2013 in the former Nebraska Annual Conference, and he has served on the Board of Ordained Ministry since 2008. He has served at Ainsworth and Johnstown since 2010.

Davis and his wife, Nancy, have two children and six grandchildren.