



GPconnect

Connecting United Methodists across the Great Plains

Fall 2015



In this edition of GPconnect:
The many roles of lay servants
Three missions who need our help
Start a successful community garden

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“GPconnect” (ISSN 0194-7761 USPS #376-540) is published four times a year (Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter) by the Great Plains United Methodist Conference, 3333 Landmark Circle, Lincoln, NE 68504; phone 402-464-5994 or 800-435-6107; fax 402-464-6203. Periodicals postage paid at Lincoln, Nebraska, and at additional mailing offices.

Postmaster: Send address changes to GPconnect, 3333 Landmark Circle, Lincoln, NE 68504.



Letters to the editor

“GPconnect” welcomes letters from its readers. All letters should be limited to 200 words, signed and include the author’s name, address and church affiliation. Letters should address the mission and ministry of the church. Editing and publication of letters are at the discretion of the editor and as space allows. Editorial opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the Great Plains United Methodist Conference. Columns and letters to the editor are the views of that writer and not necessarily of “GPconnect” or the Great Plains Conference. Letters to the editor may be posted in the weekly “GPconnect” email blast. Please send letters to:

GPconnect - Print

3333 Landmark Circle

Lincoln, NE 68504

email: info@greatplainsumc.org

fax: 402-464-6203

Circulation

Send any print circulation changes to rdelisi@greatplainsumc.org. Include both old information and new. If you would like to stop receiving “GPconnect” - print, please include complete address information. If you would like to receive the PDF version via email, go to greatplainsumc.org/subscription.

Cover photo

The 2015 summer interns and their mentors take a selfie in May at their introductory training at Kansas Wesleyan University. See more about the internship program on page 13. Photo by Todd Seifert.

Ask. Go ahead – Jesus won’t mind



Bishop Scott J. Jones

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

My son Arthur and I have just published an eight-week study called “Ask: Faith Questions in a Skeptical Age.” In it we discuss eight significant questions we think young people (and many older ones, too) are asking about God, religion and the Christian life. The Ask DVD shows Arthur and four other young clergy talking about these issues from their distinctive points of view. While all are United Methodists, they have different perspectives on how to answer these important questions.

This approach highlights an essential aspect of our United Methodist approach to being Christian. On the one hand, we have our deep faith commitments, expressed in our doctrinal standards and creeds. We are committed to the truth as it is in Jesus. We believe in the authority of Scripture. We are disciples of the risen Christ whose Holy Spirit

is alive and present in the church’s preaching, worship and ministry. We know who we are and whose we are.

At the same time we are characterized by open hearts, open minds and open doors. We are willing to ask questions and seek for new answers. We are open to change. We know that Scripture needs to be interpreted and we look to tradition, reason and experience for insight into what the Bible really means. We know that different cultures bring different perspectives that enrich our understanding. Our identity as a global church helps us avoid the mistakes that only one cultural perspective can bring.

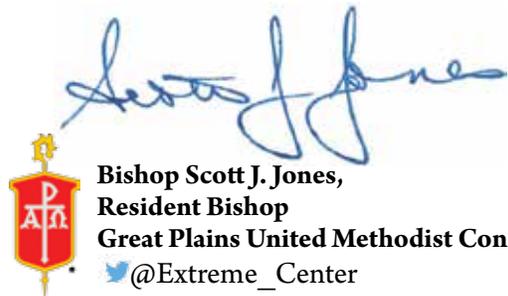
We are also committed to education, trusting that the pursuit of truth will ultimately vindicate the gospel. Charles Wesley wrote,

*Unite the pair so long disjoined,
Knowledge and vital piety:
Learning and holiness combined,
And truth and love, let all men see.*

There are Christians who want only the simple answer or the extreme answer. We United Methodists are a both/and people. This allows us to both affirm the strong beliefs of our faith, but also to ask questions. Similarly, this approach allows us to adapt our most important practices to new situations.

One of the most important questions we can ask is where is the Holy Spirit leading us now? The truths of Scripture are essential. Lessons from Christian history are important guidelines in how God has led us up to this point. Careful study of our culture today and the realities of our mission field is necessary.

The phrase “Ask. Go Ahead — Jesus Won’t Mind” is the banner at our website, www.askfaithquestions.com. It is inviting to those who think religion is close-minded and that Christians won’t tolerate serious inquiry. But for church leaders it could be reworded — “Ask. Go Ahead. Jesus needs you to seek the right answers.”



Bishop Scott J. Jones,
Resident Bishop
Great Plains United Methodist Conference
[@Extreme_Center](https://twitter.com/Extreme_Center)

From your lay leader

Universal missions

As your conference lay leader for the past two years — time has really flown — it has been a blessing for me to continue to learn about the ministries within the United Methodist Church denomination and how we can be part of that work. For example, a small fraction of the gifts we offer each Sunday, when combined together, make a big impact on the lives of so many people. I realize that God is really at work in the world through our United Methodist connection and I'm thankful to be part of the work that God is blessing.

I'm very excited as we kick off our mission relationship campaign* focusing on three worthy missions: The Lydia Patterson Institute, the Zimbabwe East Conference and the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference (OIMC). All three ministries are doing great work to improve the lives of neighbors near and far. I'm honored to be part of the team focused on raising resources for this important work. I'm also excited to share my experiences with them, however limited, which have made a meaningful impact on me personally.



Courtney Fowler

Years ago, I had the opportunity to visit the beautiful country of Zimbabwe and was struck by the wonderful, gracious spirit of the people there, who in spite of widespread and acute economic hardship, carried a deep and passionate faith which I found to be spiritually inspiring. So it's not surprising to me that for nearly the past decade, the United Methodist Church has been a growing movement in Zimbabwe and I'm proud our denomination is making a difference there.

In 2012, I had the great privilege while attending a conference of being serenaded by a student musical group from the Lydia Patterson Institute. The students were amazing — musically talented all, everyone adeptly playing the violin to songs from their Latin culture. It was extremely humbling to realize how much their education at Lydia Patterson meant to them and their future.

And finally, my own family connection to the OIMC extends to its very beginning as a mission to Native Americans and one of the original Methodist ministries. My earliest memories of family gatherings and Muscogee-Creek traditions are intertwined among experiences at many Native American churches, camps and ministries. And it's these experiences that make up who I am today as a Christian. I'm also proud to call them my family.

My hope is that as you learn about these important mission relationship ministries, you will find something that you can relate to in your faith, something deep within that connects us all as brothers and sisters in Christ. I pray you will feel called to support them and the work they are doing and I give thanks for our wonderful UMC connection, knowing our generosity in the Great Plains is also part of who we are as well.



Courtney Fowler
Conference Lay Leader

*Read more about the campaign on page 11.

Conference events are posted at greatplainsumc.org/events

Conference events

Sept. 30-Oct. 2

Leadership Institute, Leawood, Kansas

Oct. 2-3

Small Wonders, Holdrege, Nebraska

Oct. 3

Boundary 101 training, Iola, Kansas

Oct. 4

World Communion Sunday

Oct. 15-18

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

Oct. 16

Great Plains UMW Annual Meeting, Wichita, Kansas

Oct. 17

Boundary 101 training, Ogallala, Nebraska

Oct. 17

ERT training, Wichita Kansas

Oct. 17

VIM team leader training, Fairway, Kansas

Oct. 18

Basic Disaster Response training, Wamego, Kansas

Oct. 22-25

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

Oct. 23-24

ABIDE Retreat #1, Lincoln, Nebraska

Oct. 24

ERT training, Baldwin City, Kansas

Oct. 24

ERT training (recertification), COR - Leawood, Kansas

Oct. 24

ERT training, Kismet, Kansas

Oct. 28

Boundary 201 training, Beatrice, Nebraska

Oct. 29

Boundary 201 training, Scott, Kansas

Oct. 29

Boundary 201 training, Parsons, Kansas

Nov. 2

Boundary 201 training, Topeka, Kansas

Nov. 3

Boundary 201 training, Gering, Nebraska

Nov. 7

VIM team leader training, Great West District

Nov. 21

ABIDE Retreat #2, Location, TBD

Lay servants help make 3-church charge ^a possibility

By **TODD SEIFERT**,
communications director

The Rev. Dr. Lee Wigert serves the three-church charge of Juniata-Kenesaw-Holstein United Methodist Churches in south-central Nebraska. From his home in Hastings, the circuit to all three churches extends approximately 50 miles. With worship starting at 9 a.m. in Juniata, 10 a.m. in Holstein and 11 a.m. in Kenesaw, it would be virtually impossible for Wigert to lead worship in all three places without a little help.

That assistance comes from Lay Servant Ministry participants who sometimes start the service prior to Wigert's arrival, sometimes wrap up after he leaves to tend to the next congregation and sometimes to lead the service from start to finish.

As one of more than 55 charges in the Great Plains Conference with three or more churches grouped into parishes, the logistics of helping lead worship for the small congregations can take some effort.

"These are churches that could not afford to pay for a full-time pastor," said Wigert, who is a half-time pastor and a full-time professor of psychology at nearby Hastings College. Wigert has research published on such topics as religious orientation, healing and wholeness, and personality factors. He's a licensed mental health practitioner as well.

It was clear from the beginning that laity would play a key role in the preaching and teaching about Jesus Christ. The result was a rotation that has Wigert overseeing worship at all

three churches the first Sunday of the month so an elder can bless the communion elements. Then, so he can leave and arrive to help with all of the services, Kathy Uldrich in Juniata, Michelle Loeffelholz in Holstein and Bob Aderholt in Kenesaw, among others, pitch in to lead worship.

"When we first got this parish put together and were devising the rotation, we asked 'How are we going to keep our one ordained clergy from being completely burned out?'" Uldrich said.

The solution was to take one church out of the rotation each week except for the week of communion. Loeffelholz leads the entire worship service in Holstein the second Sunday of the month. Uldrich does likewise in Juniata the third Sunday, followed by Aderholt doing the same the fourth Sunday in Kenesaw.

As a result, Wigert preaches at two churches each Sunday except

for communion week and any fifth Sundays.

The churches try to streamline as best they can. Uldrich, for example, prepares the bulletins for all three churches each week. And the three congregations come together as a parish for special occasions. This year, the churches will conduct a faith fair together in Holstein, complete with hay rides, a Christian carnival with Bible games and an ice cream social. They also worked together on a single Vacation Bible school, which drew about 50 children.

To make a three-church charge work, strong lay servants are needed to provide the message from the pulpit.

The Rev. Lance Clay, Prairie Rivers District superintendent in Nebraska, said lay servants have become essential to the United Methodist Church, particularly in rural areas where distance and financial realities make the appointive process difficult.

"Churches in these settings may be too far apart for a pastor to effectively cover," Clay said. "Elders and even local pastors may present an expense that cannot be covered where a lay servant may be the more effective person to use."

Uldrich, Loeffelholz and Aderholt all said they embraced the challenge and the opportunity to share God's word from the pulpit.

"I really enjoy when I can bring a message to people and look out at the congregation and see an 'aha' on their faces," Uldrich said. "It's satisfying to see them recognize a new way to have a stronger relationship with Jesus Christ."



PHOTO PROVIDED BY KATHY ULDRICH

Kathy Uldrich preaches as part of her role as a lay servant. She assists with a three-church charge, helping primarily at Juniata UMC in the Prairie Rivers District

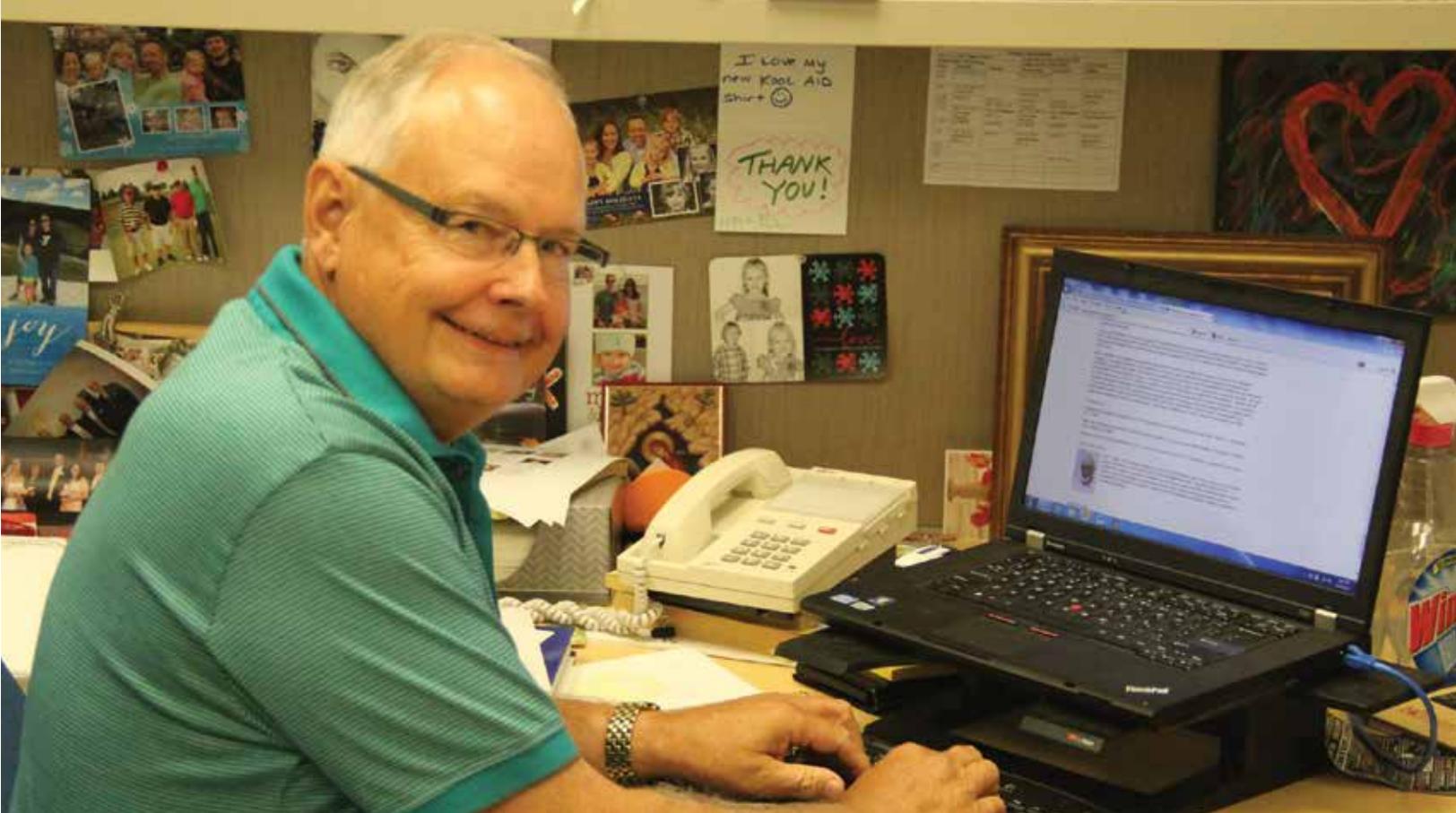


PHOTO BY TODD SEIFERT

The Rev. Lee Wigert works from his desk at Hastings College in Hastings, Nebraska. Wigert, a psychology professor and mental health practitioner, serves the three-church of Juniata-Kenesaw-Holstein UMCs on a half-time basis with the help of lay servants.

Aderholt, who has been a lay speaker and then lay servant for about 17 years, said he tries to use the tools at his disposal to study the lectionary readings, find definitions and even pronunciations for difficult words in scripture to help him prepare a clear, understandable sermon. The study provides benefits to him as well.

“I get the opportunity to share God’s word,” Aderholt said. “And doing so helps deepen my faith.”

Lay servants may be helping with the delivering of sermons to the congregations, but their impact goes far beyond the pulpit. For example, Aderholt helps with services at a rest home in the area as well as other tasks typically completed by the pastor.

“It’s difficult sometimes because people think the pastor should be doing visitation and a number of other things on top of preparing for Sunday morning,” Aderholt said. “Why can’t I do the visitations? Why can’t others fill in and help out?”

That sense of helping out where needed in ministry is a major component of the Lay Servant Ministry program. They all take a basic course that prepares them for expanded

service in the local church, followed by what are known as “advanced” courses that prepare them to lead worship. The Book of Discipline lays out a series of requirements that, once completed, allows for people with enough training to be assigned to serve a local church as a Certified Lay Minister.

Uldrich said the right mixture of lay servants can strengthen ministries within a church or a parish of multiple churches.

“Equipping lay servants in different capacities for ministry makes the whole church stronger,” Uldrich said.

One way lay servants make churches stronger is that it bolsters the numbers of people who are better prepared for a variety of ministries.

“Many of us have other roles we fill,” Loeffelholz said. “I teach Sunday school and work with the youth and VBS. I’m also the janitor. In a lot of larger churches, people may have only one thing they need to do.”

Clay said having a talented pool of lay servants can provide district superintendents and the bishop with more options

when it comes time to appoint pastors to churches.

“It may help put together church-parish alignments that provide great ministry which may not have been possible otherwise,” Clay said.

Wigert said the three churches he served are stronger because of the lay servants who help make ministry a reality.

“With a part-time pastor, they’re getting full-time service —not from me, but from laity and me working together.”

Community gardens:



Tips for community garden success

- 🍊 Recruit at least one other **community partner**
- 🍊 Plan ahead to include neighborhood **children**
- 🍊 Set at least two standard drop-in weekly volunteer times
- 🍊 Insist on gloves and closed toe shoes for volunteers
- 🍊 Plan monthly **weeding parties**
- 🍊 Add flowering perennials to corners and/or sides
- 🍊 Create a **message kiosk** for both gardeners and passers-by
- 🍊 **Put up a sign**
- 🍊 Decide before the season starts how to measure the harvest
- 🍊 Plant tall things on the north side
- 🍊 **Share recipes**
- 🍊 July can be harsh – plan group activities to make things fun
- 🍊 Plan a **clean-up party** after the first frost
- 🍊 Review the garden season and take notes for next year
- 🍊 **No:** tiny tomatoes if only adults will pick them; melons growing in high visibility areas; small patches of sweet corn in the city
- 🍊 **Yes:** low-acid yellow tomatoes; heirloom vegetables; eggplant; compost; mulch; soil testing; water barrels

hunger ministry and outreach

By **REV. STEPHANIE AHLSCHEWEDE**,

Looking for a program with the potential to bring new life to your congregation? Community gardens address food insecurity while building relationships in your neighborhood and providing members with volunteer opportunities close to home.

While each community garden is unique to its location, a common theme is that gardeners choose what they grow, the food is nutritious and, in most growing seasons, plentiful.

A general definition of food security is the availability of plentiful, culturally appropriate, nutritious food of one's own choosing, so community gardens are clearly responsive to the goal of food security.

While addressing local hunger is a compelling reason to host a community garden, the opportunity to interact with neighbors is equally rich for congregations. I remember the first season of the community garden at a small church I served in Omaha. Two homeless people joined that summer, and when I asked one of them how he had decided to come to worship he responded, "I was walking down the alley and someone hollered to ask if I could help them. I started helping whenever people were around, and they told me about the church. I figured if they were nice enough to let me help they'd be nice enough to let me come to church."

One of my other favorite stories comes from a UCC church. The pastor told me, with some distress, "We have a garden problem! We don't have neighbors gardening with us any more!" I was alarmed, and asked him what had happened. His answer? "They all joined the church, so now they are members. I guess we just have to expand the garden to make room for more neighbors."

Those who have been following recent conversations about best practices for volunteers will find in community gardens the opportunity to build lasting relationships in the church's neighborhood, another strong benefit of community gardens. At South Gate UMC in Lincoln, we've chosen to adopt a plot at one of Lincoln's oldest community gardens, just 10 blocks down the street from the church. In our second year, we now have a role helping coordinate volunteer days and communications between gardeners and the non-profit that manages the site. After two seasons, we have a much better understanding of the diversity of our neighborhood, and have met neighbors we had no idea were living in our midst until we found each other in the garden.

There are a number of organizations with excellent resources for beginning community gardeners. Closest to home is the Big Garden, www.gardenbig.org celebrating its 10th year in ministry. Nationally, the American Community Garden Association hosts a comprehensive website that includes a resources page at communitygarden.org.

Fall is the time to begin conversations for community garden success; planning takes time and includes not just the obvious conversations about site selection and water, but the recruitment of community partners and conversations with congregation members and neighbors to determine who



PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE REV. AHLSCHEWEDE

The Rev. Stephanie Ahlschwede, pastor of South Gate UMC in Lincoln, Nebraska, shares some words during a dedication ceremony for a shed at a local community garden. On opposite page, (photo by Todd Seifert) church members of South Gate UMC planted a variety of crops and flowers in their community garden a few blocks away from the church.

has which skills and resources to bring together. The sites listed earlier offer helpful resources, while the tips to the left are a list of some of the basics that are often overlooked in first-year gardens.

The Rev. Stephanie Ahlschwede is pastor of South Gate UMC in Lincoln, Nebraska, and founder of the Big Garden, operated by United Methodist Ministries in Omaha.

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LAY SERVANT MINISTRIES:

HELPING AT THE

PULPIT

and much, much more

By **TODD SEIFERT**,
communications director

Lay servants fill the pulpits of many Great Plains Conference churches each week, sharing their thoughts on the scriptures and attempting to link the Word of God to the issues people face in today's world.

Lay servants do preach as one of their primary roles, but they also take on many more tasks in their local churches – from leading youth groups to assisting with school programs to leading Bible studies and more. Indeed, the area of service once known as lay speaking has evolved, with the current Book of Discipline laying out training and providing for a broad range of activities in which people can serve God in ¶266-268.

While all laity are encouraged to serve their local churches and their communities, Lay Servant Ministries requires a higher level of commitment. To receive the classification as a local church lay servant, participants must take what is known as the “basic” course and receive approval from their pastors, church councils or charge conferences. They then must submit a report and reapply annually, as well as complete a refresher course every three years.

Further coursework is required to receive the designations of certified lay servant, which equips participants to serve the local congregation and beyond. And even more is required to receive the designation as a lay speaker, including the completion of what are known as “advanced” courses.

Kathy Uldrich, a lay servant from Juniata United Methodist Church in the Prairie Rivers District, said the

educational opportunities involved with the lay servant program are invaluable.

“Let’s say you are serving on a committee,” she said. “If you have a more informed committee person, you will have a more informed committee. And if you have a more informed committee, you have a more informed congregation.”

Uldrich said she has taken classes focused on leading worship and prayer, speaking and aspects of the church’s history and polity. Some of the courses were available online, and they involved chat functions that allowed her to discuss what she was learning with people in small, rural churches as well as large churches in metropolitan areas.

“I really like the online courses because you can do those at any time of the day,” she said. “I’m on the go a lot, but I could take those courses whenever I had the time I met people throughout the U.S., including Hawaii.”

Uldrich said she enjoys preaching as part of her lay servant duties. Her home church is part of a three-church charge that includes Kenesaw and Holstein United Methodist churches. Under the direction of the Rev. Lee Wigert, she and a lay servant in each of the other churches assist with the logistics of conducting worship. In Uldrich’s case, she helps close the service some weeks so Wigert can travel to another of his churches. In other weeks she assists with worship. The third Sunday of each month, Uldrich leads the entire service and delivers the message.

“(This model) has probably kept the two smaller churches from closing their doors,” Uldrich said.

Larry Jess, a lay servant from First United Methodist Church in Kearney, Nebraska, in the Gateway District,

urged people interested in serving their churches not to be intimidated by the classes and instead to be excited about the opportunity to serve others.

“At first I thought, ‘Man, what am I getting myself into?’ Then I realized there was a lot more that I needed to know about the church,” he said. “It was so enjoyable.”

Jess’ activities as a lay servant have focused on preaching. As a former superintendent of David City Public Schools, talking in front of a crowd was not a challenge for him, but he said the courses helped prepare him for service in the church. He has spoken at community Lenten services, and after a pastor in his area passed away unexpectedly, he served three Nebraska churches for about six months. It was during that latter scenario that he crossed paths with some of his former students.

“I think they saw a different side of me,” he said with a chuckle.

Not all lay servants focus primarily on speaking from the pulpit. Cheryl Anderson, a lay servant from the Prairie Rivers District, has helped with a number of things involving the ministry of her husband, the Rev. Mike Anderson, whom she married seven years ago.

“We totally believe God brought us together,” she said. “And if I believe that, then I have to believe that God chose me to help with his ministry.”

That ministry includes assisting in many ways at Davenport and Bruning United Methodist churches. That help at times comes in the persona of “Aunt Edna,” who hails from the fictional hamlet of Muskrat Crossing in Nebraska. As Aunt Edna, Anderson shares humorous stories about the fictional small town. Each of her more than 35 skits involves clean humor, a spiritual message, scripture and prayer.

It all started with a Bible study.

“We would have potluck dinners and then sat around,” she said. “I tried to think of something we could do.”

Aunt Edna has made appearances at United Methodist Women events, churches of various denominations and even community-wide events. Anderson said not every lay servant is comfortable speaking from the pulpit.

“People don’t realize how many ways they can serve,” she said. “They could read to children. They can help a single mom buy some groceries. There are a million degrees



PHOTO BY TODD SEIFERT

Michelle Loeffelholz (left), a lay servant, helps teach an “advanced course” on prayer in the Lay Servant Ministries program during a training session in August at Juniata United Methodist Church. Loeffelholz often preaches at Holstein UMC.

between that and filling a pulpit. It’s exciting to see how God can use you.”

Dave Wasserfallen, a lay servant from Wellsville United Methodist Church in the Five Rivers District, said one of his goals is to motivate the laity to get more involved in their churches and in their communities. His journey as a lay servant started in 1990, when his former pastor, the Rev. Dennis Ackerman, urged him to attend a training session in Ottawa, Kansas. Wasserfallen said he thought he could handle that kind of educational opportunity and, in fact, has enjoyed it so much that he has even taken courses for certified lay minister.

“As far as I’m concerned, if you aren’t reaching beyond the local church, you don’t have the scope or effect you need to have,” he said. “The training triggered me to thinking about what the local church needed to do.”

Wasserfallen said the opportunities are nearly endless — helping at a homeless shelter, stocking shelves at a food pantry, donating materials or labor to fix up properties. All of those examples and more can be ministries that help others via lay servants.

“You have to be doing something,” he said. “We’ve gone too far in the direction of intellectualizing our faith. We need action.”



PHOTO COURTESY CHERYL ANDERSON

Cheryl Anderson entertains as she educates in her role as a lay servant. She performs comical skits as “Aunt Edna,” a woman who talks about life in small communities from the fictional town of Muskrat Crossing, Nebraska.



PHOTO BY TODD SEIFERT

Kathy Uldrich, a lay servant, and Pastor Travis King take part in discussion during a “basic course” for new Lay Servant Ministries participants conducted in August at Juniata United Methodist Church in the Prairie Rivers District.

Bullish on renewal of Camp Comeca

By **CINDY KELLY**, *communications coordinator*,
and **JANELLE WILKE**, *Camp Comeca Capital Campaign director*

As pledge cards for Renewal of Camp Comeca Capital Campaign have rolled in, Janelle Wilke, the director of the campaign was astonished to learn a wonderful couple with a farm had an extraordinary gift to share. They are donating one bull each year to the campaign for three years.

The renewal of Camp Comeca has exploded with a great start. Great Plains United Methodists have demonstrated much commitment to the future of their camp. Over the summer, Wilke joined Bishop Scott Jones in meeting with laypersons and pastors across Nebraska who shared incredible stories of what a difference Camp Comeca had made in their spiritual journeys. Camp Comeca has touched many lives.

This fall the Renewal of Camp Comeca Capital Campaign has 28 talented volunteers visiting local churches throughout the southwestern part of Nebraska to present an update on camp needs. In December, Bishop Jones will continue to meet in small group coffees with interested supporters of Camp Comeca to receive donations.

“The highlight of the campaign has been meeting the wonderful people throughout Nebraska,” Bishop Jones said. “They are committed to addressing the needs of the camp and have been generously supportive in donating our beginning pledges.”

Camp Comeca’s goal is to raise \$994,000 in gifts and pledges by Aug. 31, 2016. Of that, about half will pay for cabin renovation and debt repayment, swimming pool repairs, sewer improvement and campaign costs. The \$500,000 balance will build the endowment to strengthen the camp’s financial base. The Lloyd Wilson Foundation challenged the Great Plains Conference to match a \$250,000 grant toward the endowment, and as of the first of September that generous grant opportunity has been realized. The total pledged as of Sept. 11 was \$507,245.

If you are interested in joining in this effort with a donation to a wonderful camp with incredible potential, send your gift by mail or online at www.campcomeca.org/renewal. If your donation involves livestock, special arrangements will need to be made.

While God is quoted in Psalm 50:9 as saying, “I will accept no bull from your house,” Camp Comeca is prepared to accept bulls for God’s purposes in making disciples of Jesus Christ.

To give by check:

1. Include “Camp Comeca Capital Campaign” in the memo of your check.
2. Make check payable to: Great Plains Camps.
3. Mail check to: Great Plains Conference, P.O. Box 4837, Topeka, KS 66604-0837

PHOTO PROVIDED BY JANELLE WILKE
Bishop Scott Jones stands by the first bull out of three to be donated to Camp Comeca. The Camp Comeca Capital Campaign looks to raise \$994,000. Half will go towards debt payment and camp maintenance; the other half go towards an endowment.



Great Plains hopes to support 3 cross-cultural capital campaigns

United Methodists are connected Christians.

In the Great Plains Conference, that means we have relationships across Kansas and Nebraska. And it also means we have connections elsewhere in the United States and around the world.

By the time the Great Plains convenes for its annual conference June 1-4 in Topeka, Kansas, the conference hopes to raise \$100,000 each for three of our multicultural mission relationships. All three provide important missionary work and, in their own ways, seek to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Lydia Patterson Institute



For more than 100 years, the Lydia Patterson Institute in El Paso, Texas, has served students both in its city and from across the border in Juarez, Mexico.

Through education and a safe environment for learning, the Lydia Patterson Institute provides hope for a brighter future for its more than 400 students in grades 9 through 12.

The Lydia Patterson Institute is a true success story, with approximately 95 percent of its students moving on to college after high school. And their learning takes place in an environment that promotes Christian and United Methodist values.

Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference

This conference may trace its origins to what has become known as the “Trail of Tears,” but the work done with and for the Native American people of Oklahoma and parts of Kansas, Missouri and Texas provides a picture of hope through Jesus Christ.

But the OIMC needs assistance to help continue this blending of Wesleyan theology with Native American culture. The OIMC struggles to support pastors who help deliver these messages. The churches,



much like many in the Great Plains Conference, are small and sometimes separated by large distances. Many serve low-income areas. As a result, the OIMC has the lowest-paid pastors in the South Central Jurisdiction, of which the Great Plains is a part. The minimum salary in the OIMC is only about \$29,000, about \$5,000 below the threshold for a local licensed pastor in the Great Plains and nearly \$12,000 below the minimum for a full elder in Kansas and Nebraska.

Zimbabwe Episcopal Area



While much talk in the secular media has focused on the decline of membership in mainline Christian churches, comparatively little has been said about the tremendous surge in Christianity in Africa. In fact, Africa is among the fastest-growing portions of the United Methodist Church.

With that growth comes a need for structure and a better means of synchronizing the efforts of churches and the leadership needed to help the local congregations succeed.

As of February, the Zimbabwe Episcopal Area had 222,208 members served by 397 pastors. Congregations totaled 970, with 431 of those located in the Zimbabwe East Annual Conference.

Small church sets big example

Think small churches can't make a difference? Then check out Copeland United Methodist Church in the Dodge City District.

This church, with attendance of approximately 24 per week, have made a donation of \$10,000 to the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference fund-raising drive to help an endowment that helps pay for pastors' salaries. Penney Schwab, a member of the church, said a special gift to the church helped make the size of the donation possible. Because some of the church's members are Chickasaw and because the Copeland UMC members understand the difficulties that small churches often face, the church's Missions Committee voted to make what is meant to be a “kick-off” gift for the fund-raising campaign.

“We doubt that many small churches can make a large gift,” Schwab said, “but we hope that our gift will encourage every church to contribute something!”

PHOTOS BY UNITED METHODIST NEWS SERVICE AND KATHRYN WITTE

The Great Plains Conference hopes to raise 100,000 each for three multicultural mission relationships (Lydia Patterson Institute, Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference and the Zimbabwe East Conference) by the annual conference session in 2016.

Record sum raised for NUMB

20-year total nears \$800,000 to fight hunger



food pantries, approximately 49 million Americans live in households that struggle to have food on the table on a daily basis. Almost 16 million of those people are children.

“I rode Sunday for the hungry people in Nebraska who depend on the Food Banks,” Route Director Greg Bakewell said. “On Monday I rode to help give a pair of farm animals to people in South America, on Tuesday I rode to help Bread for the World advocate on behalf of those who do not have a voice, and on Wednesday I rode so that Africa University might have a strong program to help farmers.”

There were 38 first-time riders this year adding new camaraderie to the ride. The NUMB Ride honored Larry Lienemann and John Leibman, both long-time riders who passed away this year.

Other highlights included:

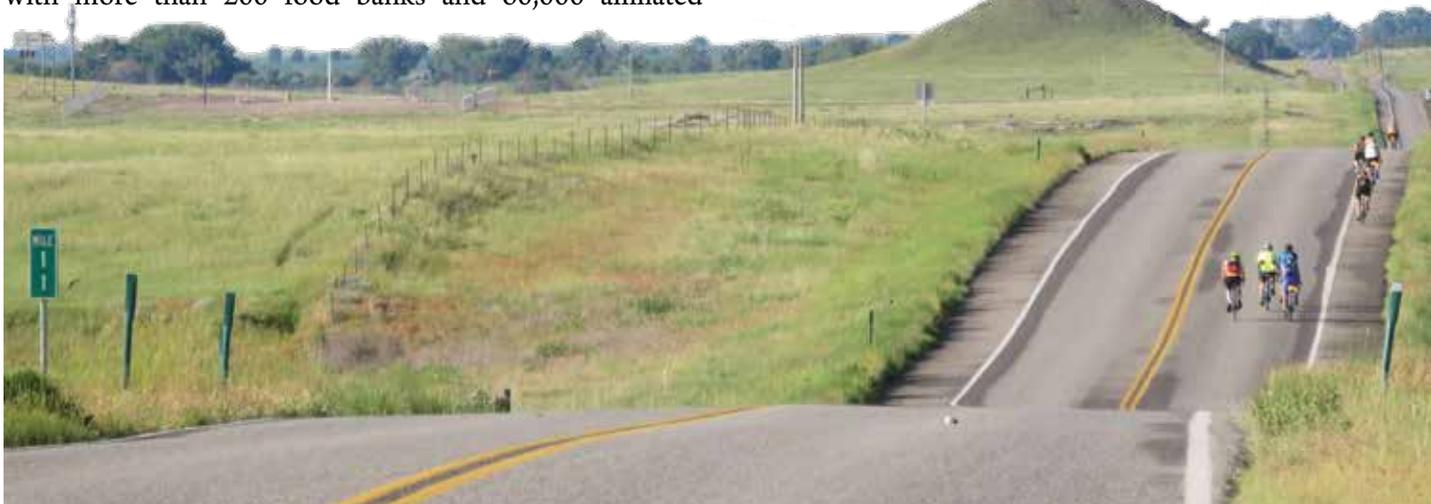
- Two days ridden in Colorado, included the “best day” from Haxtun, Colorado, to Imperial, Nebraska — downhill, wind to the back, smooth roads and no hills.
- The ride from Sidney to Haxtun was deemed the “worst day,” with 6,938 expansion joints on the roads, although some riders considered Imperial to Ogallala — with wind and heat in the face — to be the worst day.
- Host towns of Ogallala, Sidney, Haxtun and Imperial extended radical hospitality.

NUMB would not be complete without its nightly talent shows. This year’s ride included a fireworks display in Sidney, a puppet show in Haxtun, juggling in Imperial and great music throughout.

Kathryn Witte is an 11-year participant of NUMB.

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY KATHRYN WITTE

At top, riders huddled together in the Ogallala sanctuary for the annual group photo Saturday night. Below, many great scenes of the tall grass prairies and wheat fields of Western Nebraska and Eastern Colorado. Raising money by riding in the bread basket of the country was notable.



By **KATHRYN WITTE**

The Nebraska United Methodist Bike Ride for Hunger (NUMB Ride) celebrated its 20th anniversary with a loop ride starting June 27 and ending July 1 in Ogallala. A single-year record total of \$75,000 was raised by 148 registered riders.

This year boasted more than a dozen riders raising more than \$1,000 each, also qualifying them for a free registration for next year’s ride scheduled for south-central Nebraska. The 20-year total raised by the ride is \$791,000.

“I know that within the next few years we will break the \$1 million mark in support of hunger projects in Nebraska and around the world,” said Ride Director and Blue River District Superintendent Bill Ritter.

This year’s ride supported Heartland Food Banks, Heifer International, Bread for the World and the Agriculture program at Africa University in Zimbabwe.

Hunger is still a significant issue in Nebraska, Kansas and beyond. According to Feeding America, an organization known as the nation’s largest hunger-relief organization with more than 200 food banks and 60,000 affiliated

Learning while serving

Interns make big impact during summer of 2015



PHOTO BY TODD SEIFERT

The 2015 summer interns and their mentors take a selfie in May at their introductory training at Kansas Wesleyan University.

By REV. NICOLE CONARD

From promoting social justice to leading Vacation Bible School to learning what it truly means to lead youth groups, congregations and even new church starts, a new internship program in the Great Plains Conference helped build young adult leaders who, in turn, helped provide vital ministries during the summer of 2015.

In all, 33 interns completed 10 weeks of service during the summer. In this inaugural program, six types of internships offered leadership development opportunities for 18- to 24-year-olds. Through these

internships, the goal for each intern was to identify the gifts that God has given them and to grow in their faith and leadership.

The Micah Corps consisted of 10 interns who learned about connecting faith with social justice. The group visited, researched and presented key social justice topics throughout the Great Plains. The interns focused on five social issues: immigration, environment, food security, poverty, and peace and non-violence. The interns visited Washington, D.C., to learn how to serve as advocates with the United Methodist Board of Church and Society and visited with Nebraska and Kansas senators and

representatives. The interns presented lawmakers with letters in support of various issues.

Ten of our interns served as Vacation Bible School (VBS) leaders. Divided into two teams, the young adults led VBS in more than 20 churches throughout the Great Plains. After leading VBS, the interns partnered with the churches in painting, visiting the elderly or connecting with the community. Each church provided helpers and advertised to the community. This year's VBS curriculum was created by the Great Plains Conference titled "The Road Trip" that followed the journeys of Paul and emphasized the Great Plains United Methodist partnerships in Zimbabwe, Haiti and Nigeria.

Seven church planting interns visited five new start churches – all started within the past five years – to create ministries in there. Each intern was supervised by the church planting pastor and provided leadership throughout the week in arenas in which they could learn and serve. The interns participated with the first session of the Planter Crucible and attended the Young Preacher's Festival.

Regarding pastoral leadership, three interns visited three churches to serve as apprentices to the senior pastor and explore pastoral leadership in a church setting. They spent 10 weeks learning and serving in four areas: word, order, service and sacrament.

Two interns traveled throughout Great Plains helping in Hispanic Ministries by researching the dynamic landscape of youth. They worked with local churches that are bridging cultural, linguistic and generational gaps. They camped alongside other

See **INTERNS** on page 14

Connect online
www.greatplainsumc.org



View more information about the summer internship program at greatplainsumc.org/internships.

Death notices

Lynda J. Brazil, 72, the spouse of a retired clergy member, died Aug. 29, 2015. She is survived by her husband, the Rev. Bill Brazil, and children, David Brazil and Brian Brazil. Memorial contributions may be made to Tisdale UMC Building Fund, Camps Horizon and Lakeside, and the Alzheimer's Association. Contributions may be made through Miles Funeral Services of Winfield, Kansas.

The Rev. T. J. Fraser, 82, a retired clergy member, died Aug. 10, 2015. He is survived by his wife, Virginia Fraser, and children, Thomas Fraser, Theodore "Ted" Fraser and Laurel Asness. Memorial contributions may be made to Seward (Nebraska) UMC, Friends of Seward Public Library, Seward Memorial Hospital or the donor's choice.

The Rev. Charles Stanley LaRue, 77, died Aug. 7, 2015. He is survived by his wife, Sharon LaRue, and children, Deborah Brooks, Carol Cobb, Charles LaRue and Lonnie LaRue. Memorial contributions may be given in his name to an organization that will be designated by the family at a later date.

The Rev. Lillian Delorse Moore, 82, a retired clergy member, died June 12, 2015. She is survived by her husband, the Rev. Lloyd Moore; son, Alan Moore, and step-daughters, Gere Augusto and Carolyn Jordan. Memorial contributions may be made to Germantown United Methodist Church, 2331 S. Germantown Rd., Germantown, TN 38138.

Helen Barber Norman, 98, the spouse of a clergy member, died Aug. 5, 2015. She was preceded in death by her husband, the Rev. Merlin Norman. Survivors include children, Merlin Norman Jr., Charles Norman, Helen Dobbs and Zoa Norman. Memorial contributions may be made to Camp Lakeside.

Nita Wyatt Sundbye Sewell, 83, the spouse of a clergy member, died Aug. 4, 2015. She was preceded in death by her husbands, the Rev. Ronald Sundbye and Ed Sewell. Survivors include step-children, Kevin Sundbye, Kris Sundbye, Eric Sundbye and Erin Snodgrass. Memorial contributions may be made to the Kansas University Endowment Association, for the Nita Sundbye Scholarship.

INTERNS continued from page 13

VBS interns led Vacation Bible School in more than 20 churches throughout the Great Plains. After leading VBS, the interns partnered with the churches in painting, visiting the elderly or connecting with the community. The VBS curriculum titled "The Road Trip" followed the journeys of Paul.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY MICKI MCCORKLE

Some of the 2015 Micah Corps interns at Kansas Senator Jerry Moran's office. The Micah Corps interns traveled to Washington, D.C., to learn how to serve as advocates with the United Methodist Board of Church and Society. The interns presented lawmakers with letters in support of various issues.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY CAROL WINDRUM

young leaders through Hispanic Youth Leadership Academy. Their research can be found at gpjovenes.tumblr.com.

One intern provided administrative oversight for youth ministry throughout the Great Plains Conference and interned with a local church to see behind the scenes of youth ministry. The intern worked with camps and attended Youth 2015 in Orlando, Florida.

All interns began the summer with an opening retreat at Kansas Wesleyan University in Salina, Kansas, learning the Process Communication Model and orienting to the internship community and responsibilities. The interns closed the summer with a closing retreat at Centenary United Methodist Church in Beatrice, Nebraska, with a celebration of the summer and looking forward to how they will use their leadership in the church in the future.

The Rev. Nicole Conard is coordinator of young leadership for the Great Plains Conference.



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Website

Have you checked out the conference's website – www.greatplainsumc.org — lately? If you haven't, we encourage you to do so. You may have missed something.

You'll find a lot to read there, including stories about good things going on within the conference and announcements from our affiliated colleges, ministry ideas and a new technology. We also have information myriad topics related to ministry in our Local Church Toolbox.

Our Media area has a link to videos. Watch for success story videos. Our first success story talks about how Trinity UMC in Grand Island, Nebraska, incorporated a Sudanese congregation into the Trinity family.

And if you're looking for Bible study materials, including videos, you won't want to miss the Resource Center, which allows churches to check out curriculum for a fraction of the cost it would be to purchase it.

Facebook - general



While our website is the best place to look for information, sometimes it's faster to post details on Facebook. We encourage you to "like" our Facebook page — facebook.com/greatplainsumc — so you can get a heads up when we've posted new stories or when there is important information that you need to know. Plus, it's an easy way to get into the conversation about topics facing our church and society today.

Facebook - Disaster Response



Just like the conference's Facebook page, this one, dedicated to disaster response efforts, provides a venue for sharing important information. In times of emergency, check here to see where the help is needed, what kind of help is needed and when. During other times, this is where you'll find information about training opportunities, stories from people who have helped others and updates on how longer-term projects are going across Kansas and Nebraska. Please "like" this page at facebook.com/nebraskatornadorelief.

Facebook - Small Membership Church Ministry



We have a lot of small churches in the Great Plains, and that allows us to spread the word of God across two states with lots of wide-open spaces. This Facebook page — facebook.com/smallmembershipchurches — provides links to resources and provides a forum for sharing ideas on how best to serve our small churches to make a big impact in our communities.

GPconnect, news and information for Great Plains United Methodists.



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Twitter



Looking for more immediate news from around the conference? Then follow us on Twitter — [@GPUMC](https://twitter.com/GPUMC). From our Twitter page, you'll find links to stories and new resources we've posted to our website, and we'll share both informational and inspirational Tweets from the United Methodist Church and other people and organizations that we follow. And be sure to use #GPUMC in all your tweets.

Instagram



We're brand new to Instagram! We need your help to get us going. By Nov. 10, please post photos via Instagram of your church's Halloween or fall festival celebrations. Be sure to tag us or send your photo to us. We can be found at instagram.com/greatplainsumc. And like on Twitter, make sure you use #GPUMC.

Pinterest



Like Instagram, we are just joining Pinterest. Boards will offer tips on Sunday school and VBS activities, fundraising ideas and ways to engage members. Follow us and our ever growing boards at pinterest.com/greatplainsumc.