

# GPconnect

Connecting United Methodists across the Great Plains

Fall 2014



***In this edition of GPconnect:***  
**Chabadza in Zimbabwe**  
**Unity of the Church**  
**Health benefits update**



# GPconnect

Vol. 1, No. 3 Fall 2014

Connecting United Methodists across the Great Plains

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## Cover photo

Bishop Scott Jones shares a light moment with Zimbabwe East Conference Lay Leader Simon Mafunda. Mafunda introduced Jones on Friday evening of the Ebenezer Convention, held in Harare, Zimbabwe's national sports stadium with a crowd of 40,000+. Jones' message was titled, "The Fruits of the Spirit." Mafunda spent time in several Kansas West congregations in the summer of 2012 and 2013. See story on pages 8 and 9.



**Bishop Scott J. Jones**

View the bishop's blog at  
[greatplainsumc.org/bishopsblog](http://greatplainsumc.org/bishopsblog)

## A new generation of clergy

There is no better job and way of life than being a United Methodist minister. I frequently quote Babe Ruth who, when offered a contract to play professionally, said "You mean, you are going to pay me to play baseball?" I feel that way about ordained ministry — it is a great privilege to be able to do this work as a full-time job.

Clergy have the privilege of leading congregations in their ministry. They are paid to study Scripture and to prayerfully discern how it connects with the lives of people. They are privileged to share in the best and worst times of people's lives — birth, confirmation, conversion, illness, marriage and death.

Yet ministry has changed. The spread of television and the Internet mean that people have higher expectations for preaching. Population changes mean that our traditional United Methodist communities are shrinking and we need to reach new and different kinds of people. Changing music tastes mean different worship styles are called for. Doing church is different than it used to be. It is no longer 1955, and leadership in the church is more challenging than ever.

Yet, America needs exactly what United Methodism offers when we are at our best. We need a holistic, biblical gospel that stresses the way of salvation. We need the means of grace conveyed through sacraments, worship, prayer and Scripture. We need the community of small groups. We need a centrist vision of social justice.

The three most important factors in meeting this opportunity are leadership, leadership and leadership. Part of that is strong lay leadership in all of our congregations. We need laity who are spiritually mature, tithing, activist servants of Christ. Our church camps, our campus ministries, United Methodist Women, United Methodist Men and our many programs like Next Steps are aimed at strengthening lay leadership.

At the same time, we need a new generation of clergy. At annual conference session this year, more clergy retired than were ordained. We need to help more people, more young people and more diverse people, hear God's call for them to preach the gospel and lead the church. That process starts in your local church as you work with young people. When you see someone that God is calling into ministry, your encouragement might well be the way the Holy Spirit communicates that message to her or him. It continues in our support of young adult ministries and the church's active engagement in their lives. Every part of our connectional system should convey the joys of ministry and the opportunities that people have to make the United Methodist movement as fruitful as it can possibly be. Let's raise up a new generation of clergy leaders for Christ!



**Bishop Scott J. Jones,**  
Resident Bishop  
Great Plains United Methodist Conference

[@Extreme\\_Center](https://twitter.com/Extreme_Center)

**From your lay leader**

## **Autumn grace**

Like many of you, I look forward to the transition to fall, the change of seasons, the burst of autumn color and the uptick in activity at home and at church. My summer flew by in the midst of family vacations, VBS and this year's marathon of ice bucket challenges. (Thanks to Randall Hodgkinson, Topeka District lay leader, for nominating me.) I'm looking forward to the seasonal activities that come with fall and the many outreach opportunities it provides for our churches to be in ministry in their community.

One such outreach program that I am very excited about is our conference's education partnership, Big Hairy Audacious Education Caravan, and the opportunity for our churches to partner with local schools. As a parent of school-aged kids, it's so important for children to know that their local church cares and supports them in their education journey. It still "takes a village" and I'm glad so many of our churches and laity are responding to this challenge.



Courtney Fowler

In a few months we will be celebrating our one-year anniversary as the Great Plains Conference. We have done so much in this short amount of time. And yet, we have so much more to do to show Christ's love to others and to be part of the work that God is blessing. We see this clearly with the many news events and headlines locally and around the world that tell us many of our neighbors are suffering and in pain, in need of God's healing grace. I'm thankful because I know that you and our churches across the conference will be part of this important and sensitive work. I'm also grateful to my family and friends, as well as my own church family for being with me on this same journey of loving and caring for others. I'm thankful to be with all of you on this path. May God's grace be with you.



Courtney Fowler  
Conference Lay Leader

Like the laity's Facebook page at [facebook.com/greatplainslaity](https://www.facebook.com/greatplainslaity) and follow Courtney on Twitter at [twitter.com/c24fowler](https://twitter.com/c24fowler)

## **Conference events**

**Oct. 4**

Camp Norwesca Barbecue,  
Chadron, Nebraska

**Oct. 5**

World Communion Sunday

**Oct. 9**

Health Benefits webcast

**Oct. 10-11**

Small Wonders Conference,  
Salina, Kansas

**Oct. 15**

Difficult Conversations webcast

Kansas City, Kansas

(See page 6 for additional dates)

**Oct. 17-18**

Great Plains UMW Annual Meeting,  
Lincoln, Nebraska

**Oct. 18**

Leading Beyond the Walls Seminar,  
Benton, Kansas

**Oct. 25**

ABIDE preview, Lincoln, Nebraska

**Nov. 7-8**

Mini Mission u, Leawood, Kansas

**Nov. 15**

Bishop's Round-up Against Hunger,  
Lawrence, Kansas

**Nov. 17-18**

Great Preaching for the Great Plains,  
Wichita, Kansas

**Nov. 30**

United Methodist Student Day

**Jan. 3-4**

The OneEvent, Grand Island, Nebraska

**Jan. 9-10**

Candidacy Summit, Emporia, Kansas

**Jan. 10**

Next Steps Phase One Training webcast

**Jan. 20-22**

New Church Planter Incubator,  
Lincoln, Nebraska

**Jan. 21-22**

Orders and Fellowship,  
Lincoln, Nebraska

**Jan. 28-Feb. 7**

Holy Land tour with Bishop Jones

**Feb. 16-17**

Great Preaching for the Great Plains,  
Wichita, Kansas

**Feb. 21**

Next Steps Phase One Training webcast

Conference events are posted at  
[greatplainsumc.org/events](https://greatplainsumc.org/events)

# Health insurance and our pastors

By BISHOP SCOTT JONES,  
Great Plains Conference bishop

It has long been a tradition for the annual conference to insist that pastors be provided with health insurance. The church's view is that all persons deserve quality health care, and we know that in America that is usually tied to employment. Thus, persons serving full-time and three-fourths time are provided with health insurance. We have also bought the insurance as a group, seeking to get the best possible terms to keep the cost as low as possible. We have used a blended rate with family coverage because in our appointment system a church should not be penalized if the next pastor has a spouse and children. While this has led many to ask, "Can't we get this cheaper for our current pastor?" it has worked well for many years in providing an important benefit.



MEDICAL CADUCEUS SYMBOL PROVIDED BY WIKIMEDIA

Missionally and spiritually, this means that clergy can focus on their leadership of the congregation while not worrying about their health care coverage.

We all know that health care costs have been rising in all sectors of the American economy and the passage of the Affordable Care Act (sometimes called Obamacare) has brought all of these issues front and center. It is a controversial issue and many different viewpoints are represented within our denomination.

The recent estimates show that our group of clergy is older than the general population and they have more health issues than the general population, partly due to the stress of ministry. To date in 2014, Great Plains Conference claims are running significantly higher each month than the claims of the three separate conferences last year.

Thus, there will be increases in the insurance premiums for 2015. Our Connecting Council will consider recommendations from the Pensions and Health Benefits Team in October and seek to provide the best possible care for our clergy at the best possible price. None of the options will be ideal. The Team has also instituted a study group to look at many different options for the annual conference session to consider for 2016.

Don't miss the health benefit webcast on Oct. 9, at 7 p.m. CST, at [greatplainsumc.org/livestream](http://greatplainsumc.org/livestream).

## MISSION continued from back cover

the income of the church. The Great Plains Conference Mission Share formula, asks churches for 10 percent of their local church's annual income for this budget support.

An additional way we are asked to show our love for God and neighbor is by supporting our mission agencies across the Great Plains Conference.

There are 21 mission agencies in our conference that are separately incorporated institutions with a connection to the GPUMC. They encompass colleges/universities, health and welfare institutions, ministries with the poor, ecumenical/interchurch organizations and a retreat center. At the Uniting Conference, we made the commitment to support 21 agencies through Mission Agency Support giving set at 1 percent of a local church's annual income.

These mission agencies serve a vital role; they help us extend the outreach of our local churches, connect us to our communities and the needs of our brothers and sisters, offer opportunities to address both immediate and systemic needs, and develop leaders. They help us break outside the church building walls to go into the world and be His hands and



PHOTO PROVIDED BY KANSAS WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY

The Hall of the Pioneers stands at the center of the beautiful campus at Kansas Wesleyan University (KWU) in Salina, Kansas. KWU is home to more than 40 academic majors, including its M.B.A. program. Find out more at [www.kwu.edu](http://www.kwu.edu).

feet, and to ultimately make disciples of Jesus Christ.

Each mission agency relies on different funding sources and amounts. The 1 percent asked of Great Plains churches is an integral part of each agency's total funding plan. The mission agencies we support as the conference are aligned with our missional priorities and collectively represent legacies of support from the three former conferences. The Plan of Organization calls for an aggregate

request that is divided among them all.

We believe that just as the hearts of individuals are warmed by the support they give to their local church, the hearts of each of these bodies of believers we call the church, will be warmed by the support they are able to offer to the equipping ministries of their conference.

To learn more about each agency go to [greatplainsumc.org/missionagencysupport](http://greatplainsumc.org/missionagencysupport).

# Communities come together to build boxes of hope



PHOTO BY SAID VELAZQUEZ

This toy box, whose first item is a stuffed bunny, will be sent to a center for troubled youth as part of the Elm Creek, Overton and Williamsburg UMCs' (in Nebraska) toy box ministry.

By SAID VELAZQUEZ,  
*communications intern*

In a 15-minute drive from Kearney, Nebraska, you will find a small town called Elm Creek with a population of 929 (2012 census information). On the town's main street are a grocery store, a diner and an antiques store. However, there is an array of surprises at the end of the street. Elm Creek UMC sits on the right side of the street next to a foreign conflicts veterans memorial commemorating the heroes of the town's past, but there is something more special to the charm of this town.

The "toy box" project/network is a remarkable activity the Elm Creek congregation began, and then included Overton and Williamsburg. The toy box project/network is an idea that was born from Pastor Dennis Wheeler's call to ministry, as a response to his grandson's survival at birth. "I felt I had to honor my grandson's survival, as he almost did not make it. But it was a blessing we all had received and I felt I had to give a payback to God," said Wheeler.

Wheeler, with previous carpentry experience, built the first toy box for his grandson as a sign of honor and

hope. Later, after finding it spiritually rewarding, he started attending licensing school and continued making more boxes for families in his local community. "In small towns everyone is your family," he said.

"One of the boxes was for a family that had adopted children. Unfortunately their adoptive mother was dying of cancer and she used the box as a gift for the children after her passing," said Wheeler. She filled the



PHOTO BY SAID VELAZQUEZ

Members of Elm Creek UMC and Overton UMC, from left: Dave Muirhead, Bernita Meads, Joyce Klintworth, along with Pastor Dennis Wheeler. Elm Creek, Overton and Williamsburg UMCs collect goods and help distribute toy boxes.

box with personal belongings and letters for their children to be opened on the occasions of their 17th and 19th birthdays, graduation ceremonies and

even for their wedding day. This was indeed heartbreaking, but we were glad we were part of it, explained Wheeler.

Later on, the idea of the toy boxes made their way to Omaha, where the first communal box was hosted. "Hosting" a toy box entails mobilizing the box through several churches to collect toys, goods or clothing for children and teenagers from families in need or to give to orphanages. Many of the boxes continue to rotate from participating church to participating church; others remain stationary in designated congregations with the goods dropped off to fill the box.

Over three-and-a-half years, 40 toy boxes have been distributed across the state of Nebraska and to churches in Florida, Arizona, Kansas, Iowa, Missouri and South Dakota.

"We usually try to deliver the boxes as a congregation. We take a van, load it up, deliver the boxes and be part of their service," said Dave Mierhead, Overton UMC and board of trustees member. Members of the Elm Creek, Overton and Williamsburg UMCs have joined forces and collected many goods for the content of the boxes.

Every single toy box has a specific story and each is unique in nature due to the materials, collaborators and destiny of each. Watch the video about the destinies of three different boxes at [greatplainsumc.org/toybox](http://greatplainsumc.org/toybox).

"As a single drop of rain falls, the drops gather and form a puddle, the puddle of understanding. The puddle grows and flows unto a small creek, the creek of kindness. The creek combines with a river — the river of God's love," is Wheeler's analogy of the ministry. Every box that has been distributed has an engraved plate on the inner lid to encourage other churches to host one of the boxes and distribute the goods collected. The idea is to follow the path of the rain drops into the creek to combine with others' gifts and become the river of God's love of giving, concluded Wheeler.

Connect online  
[www.greatplainsumc.org](http://www.greatplainsumc.org)



To view more photos and a video about the toy box project go to [greatplainsumc.org/toybox](http://greatplainsumc.org/toybox)

## Addressing difficult topics

# Unity of the Church

United Methodist church constituents hold many opinions across an array of social issues that face our world and our church. Immigration and human sexuality are a couple of examples of the church wrestling with controversy and difficult topics. The Great Plains Conference offers several resources that will help individuals, small groups and congregations navigate the challenging gatherings and conversations that are sure to be part of our journey together for the next two years as we prepare for the 2016 General Conference and beyond.

## Bishop Jones' Unity of the Church webcast

From his Wichita office, Bishop Scott J. Jones hosted a webcast titled "On the Unity of the Church." Jones believes a primary contribution he can make to the Great Plains Conference is to help model what it is like to be in holy conversation around diverse, difficult and controversial topics. His goal is to help various groups within the church who are offering up resolutions and options sharpen their thought processes. The webcast was an opportunity to "unpack" or explain the nuances to some of the current public proposals and dialogue happening within the denomination's leadership. The recorded webcast is available online at [greatplainsumc.org/unityofthechurch](http://greatplainsumc.org/unityofthechurch).

## Difficult conversations workshops

Director of Congregational Excellence Evelyn Fisher is conducting district workshops intended to offer how-to information for creating constructive conversations around divisive issues. The workshop will be webcast Oct. 15, from 9 a.m. to noon, in the Kansas City District. The workshops are intended for clergy, however anyone would benefit from the subject matter.

Dates and locations:

- **Wichita East and Wichita West Districts**  
Oct. 14, Aldersgate UMC, Wichita, Kansas, at 9:30 a.m.
- **Kansas City District (webcast)**  
Oct. 15, Asbury UMC, Kansas City, Kansas, at 9 a.m.
- **Five Rivers District**  
Oct. 16, First UMC, Ottawa, Kansas, at 9 a.m.
- **Prairie Rivers District**  
Oct. 21, First UMC, York, Nebraska, at 9 a.m.
- **Salina and Hutchinson Districts**  
Nov. 5, First UMC, McPherson, Kansas, at 9 a.m.
- **Elkhorn Valley District**  
Nov. 6, Location and time, TBA



The 2016 United Methodist Church General Conference will be held in Portland, Oregon. The United Methodist Church's top legislative body will meet at the Oregon Convention Center, on May 10-20, 2016.

Topics include:

- How to normalize conflict — giving permission for healthy disagreement
- Being clear about your purpose and desired outcome
- Providing structure to lower anxiety and give a sense of safety
- The role of facilitator — who is the best person?
- Setting ground rules
- Dealing with difficult people

Questions may be directed to your district superintendent or to Evelyn Fisher at [efisher@greatplainsumc.org](mailto:efisher@greatplainsumc.org) or 316-684-0266. Find the live webcast Oct. 15, at [greatplainsumc.org/livestream](http://greatplainsumc.org/livestream).

## Annual Conference Session 2015

The Great Plains Annual Conference Session 2015 (June 10-13, in Wichita, Kansas) will feature Texas Conference Bishop Janice Riggle Huie and Ms. Stephanie Hixon, executive director of Just Peace. Preaching and teaching will focus on unity in the midst of discourse and change. The 2015 conference session agenda includes voting for delegates to the 2016 General Conference, as well as the usual business. Guests will play a role in teaching us the Wesleyan way of being Christians in holy conversations.

Preconference resources will offer resolutions, candidates for consideration and additional ways in which we can work together — even when we don't always agree with the opinions of our United Methodist friends and colleagues.

**Connect online**  
[www.greatplainsumc.org](http://www.greatplainsumc.org)



Watch Bishop Jones' recorded webcast at [greatplainsumc.org/unityofthechurch](http://greatplainsumc.org/unityofthechurch)



Learn more about General Conference at [www.umc.org/who-we-are/general-conference-2016](http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/general-conference-2016)

# Game Changers Summit

By **KATHRYN WITTE**,  
*communications director*

United Methodist Communications offered three days of learning in Nashville, Tennessee, on how to use current and emerging technologies and applications to help United Methodist mission groups (and others) be better global partners.

From a solar suitcase intended to help offer light in operating rooms in dark, remote, health clinics across Africa, to Frontline SMS, a texting service that reaches the masses through cellular phones, the session was rich with both practical and strategic content applicable to nearly every context where there is a cross-continent and cross cultural relationship.

“We can apply what was taught at this conference to our three Global Mission Partnerships (Zimbabwe, Nigeria and Haiti) and it will made us stronger, better, more effective partners,” said Great Plains Communication Director Kathryn Witte.



PHOTO BY VICTORIA REBECK

**Communications Director Kathryn Witte with Davidson Adams a communicator from the Nigeria Area. Adams participated and will be briefing Nigerian Bishop John Wesley Johanna on the conference content.**

Called ICT4d (Information and Communications Technology for Development), the conference spoke to the need to listen to those who need help in order for partnerships to best access appropriate allocation of resources. ICT4d specifically targets the fields of socioeconomic development, international development and human rights. The theory behind this is that more and better information and communication furthers the



PHOTO BY KATHRYN WITTE

**Cayce Stapp, pastor of domestic and international missions at the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection (COR), in Leawood, Kansas (COR was also a sponsor for the event), preached, presented and prayed as part of the conference. Several of the COR missions team members also attended the conference.**

development of a society.

Start with the end in mind as projects begin. The mission project’s purpose must be identified with detail and clarity in order to position itself best for support, sustainability and for monitoring/evaluation success. And most importantly, the purpose must be established in partnership, alongside the mission partner. Ownership is key in order to deploy the best solutions within a project.

Attendees were overwhelmed with an assortment of new “gadgets” and devices intended to provide solar power, solar recharging and solar light. Low-powered devices were also showcased so that smaller energy draws can be made in areas where power generation is intermittent and/or comes at a premium price.



New external storage devices, mini-sized projection equipment and access to book libraries are just a few of the other innovative offerings of the trade fair held alongside the conference.

Experts from across the globe and across industries provided new thinking and applications for both new and old technology. Chris Locke, founder of Caribou Digital said, “Technology is only about 10 percent of the equation. The rest is strategy, implementation and evaluation ... all with the goal of helping local communities save lives and improve their circumstances.”

United Methodist Communications provided full coverage of the event. Search “UMCOM Game Changers Summit Coverage” in your favorite browser and read stories from the meeting, including how technology is helping Africa fight the Ebola virus.

View the  
summit Twitter  
exchange using  
#ict4dsummit14

PHOTO BY KATHRYN WITTE

**At left, a solar suitcase full of devices designed to provide solar power, for medical devices, recharging and light.**

*(Working alongside)*

# Chabadza

By **KATHRYN WITTE**, *communications director*

Mission trippers to the Zimbabwe Episcopal Area, August 11-24, found their partner churches making progress. Evangelism and new church starts, parsonage and church constructions are obvious signs of a vital and growing church. Great Plains United Methodist Conference churches can be proud of the contributions made in working alongside their Zimbabwe partner congregations. Participants on the trip learned what an energetic, spiritually imbued, Wesleyan way of doing ministry is taking place in Zimbabwe.

“One of the things that pleased me most about the trip was that so many people were able to spend time with their partner congregations. Unlike other conferences with a partnership with Zimbabwe, our people went and stayed with their partner churches. It was also significant that we had so many younger people take part,” said the Rev. Mark Conard, retired pastor and interim Chabadza Mission Partnership coordinator.

Those who made the trip included Dave Brant, Chris Cochran, Miranda Giessel, the Rev. Bryce and Keather Hansen, the Rev. Richard Lewis, the Rev. Kim Martin, Lance Patterson, the Rev. Kip Ryherd and Charles (Luke) Stephens. In addition to Conard, Conference staff and partnership representatives included Wichita West District Superintendent Linda Louderback; Mercy and Justice Coordinator, the Rev. Kalaba Chali and Conference Communications Director Kathryn Witte.

Louderback said, “Having the opportunity to actually meet congregation members, stay in their homes and work and worship alongside them added a wonderful dimension to this mission opportunity. We became family.”

Bishop Scott Jones also traveled to Zimbabwe to be a featured preacher at a first-of-its-kind, area-wide Ebenezer Convention, Aug. 15-17 (see story page 9). The mission team

also attended the three-day event held in Harare before making their way to Mutare and disbursing to host families in partner church locations.

The all-day, all-night Ebenezer Convention ended at 8 a.m. Sunday morning. The remainder of Sunday was a day of rest. On Monday (Aug. 18), the group set out for Mutare and partner churches. Mutare is located in highlands east of Harare and close to the Mozambique border. The landscape in some areas is rather Rocky Mountain-like, only with valleys of palm trees, banana plantations, avocado trees, tea fields and more tropical climate plants. It is winter there and temperatures were mild, ranging highs of 75-85 daily and lows between 50-60.

Developing congregations tended to have a parsonage or a church building — and if it had one, the congregation was working on the other. In Honde North, the parsonage was nearly complete, but because the worship space was also not complete, the congregation was worshipping and meeting in the parsonage. A motorbike purchased with Pratt UMC donations enabled Local Pastor John Mwaita to visit the members of the Honde North circuit (charge) in ways he previously could not afford (see link to video message below).

In Dambanda, the church is complete but the pastor was living in too-small, too rudimentary living quarters, with the new parsonage in the initial phases of construction. While there, Conard presented Pastor Ruth Maguta with school supplies, net balls and money for school tuition from the Pleasant Valley UMC (see link to video message below).

Chris Cochran and Lance Patterson are men of stature and put their muscle to work doing hands-on construction helping the Penhalonga UMC.

Louderback renewed her friendship with Mutasa/Nyanga District Superintendent Daniel Mutidzawanda. Mutidzawanda

See **CHABADZA** on page 10

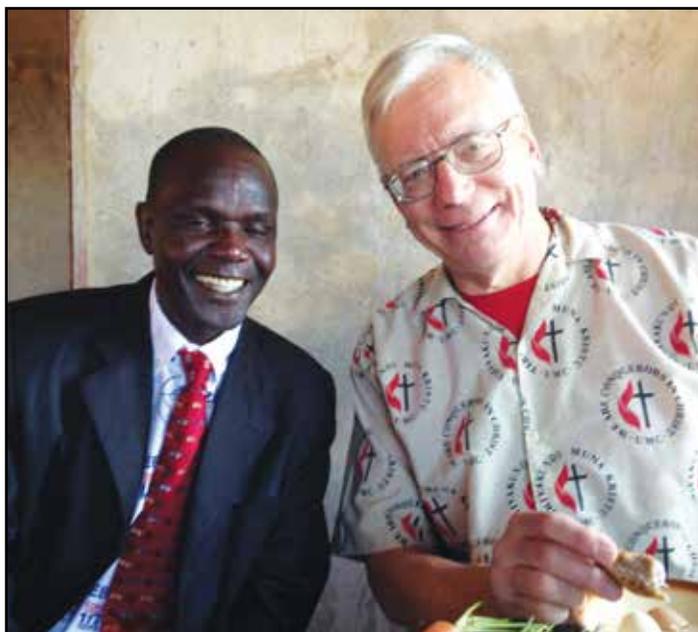


PHOTO BY KATHRYN WITTE

The Rev. Mark Conard with Honde North Local Pastor John Mwaita inside the nearly completed parsonage.

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To view videos and photos from the 2014 Zimbabwe mission trip go to [greatplainsumc.org/14missiontrip](http://greatplainsumc.org/14missiontrip)

# Celebration of 117 years of Methodism in Zimbabwe

By LLOYD CHAUKURA,  
edited by KATHRYN WITTE,  
communications director

“This is the day of the Lord’s victory; let us be happy, let us celebrate!” (Psalms 118:24). The way a ceaseless stream of congregants flocked into the arena was beyond anyone’s comprehension. The procession started on a high note at 9 a.m., on Aug. 15, with all 13 Zimbabwe districts — Marange, Chimanimani-Chipinga, Mutasa-Nyanga, Mutare, Chitungwiza-Marondera, Murehwa-UMP, Mutoko-Mudzi, Makoni-Buhera, Bulawayo-Midlands, Harare East, Harare West, Harare Central and Masvingo, raising their banners as a symbol of belonging. By mid-day on Friday, the crowd had swelled to 30,000+ people. The congregants were meticulously dressed in RRW (women’s group), MUMC (men’s group), UMYF



PHOTO BY ZIMBABWE AREA PRESS CORPS

Above is a wide angle view of the Ebenezer Convention held at the National Sports Stadium in Harare, Zimbabwe. Photos below from left: Zimbabwe Area Bishop Eben Nhwatiwa, Mutasa-Nyanga District Communicator Lloyd Chaukura, Conway Springs UMC, Kansas, Pastor Bryce Hansen and wife Keather with Pastor Gandhi and Nyamaropa UMC members, and Miranda Giessel from Minneola, Kansas.

(youth) and Ebenezer (attendees) regalia. Delegates from the U.S., U.K./Australia/New Zealand and Malawi were present.

See EBENEZER on page 10

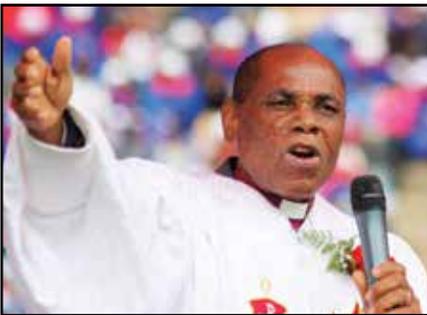


PHOTO PROVIDED BY ZIMBABWE AREA PRESS CORPS



PHOTO BY KATHRYN WITTE



PHOTO PROVIDED BY KEATHER HANSEN



PHOTO BY KATHRYN WITTE

## GP representatives attend Zimbabwe Area cabinet meeting

*Editor’s note: Excerpts from a letter to Great Plains Conference partnership district superintendents from Chabadza Partnership Interim Coordinator, the Rev. Mark Conard.*

Calvary greetings from your counterparts in Zimbabwe. It was a privilege to see and work with all of the superintendents of the Zimbabwe East Annual Conference on Friday afternoon, August 22. They were part of a leadership

team meeting with Great Plains leaders and others from throughout the entire Zimbabwe Episcopal Area. Those of us representing the Great Plains Conference were Kalaba Chali, Linda Louderback, Kathryn Witte and me.

We discussed a variety of possibilities for the growth of the Chabadza partnership. All of us hope that we can build stronger relationships between the existing partner churches or circuits, and we want to expand the partnerships

in districts that have only a few such relationships or none at all. In fact, one of the possibilities under consideration is to move toward partnering the entire episcopal area in Zimbabwe with the Great Plains Conference as a whole. There is not a specific proposal for doing so, but it was lifted up as a possibility.

We hope to develop a way that congregations in either Zimbabwe or the Great Plains Conference can initiate

See CABINET on page 10

From a bird's eye view high in the stadium the ground was a hive of activity. No one could be deterred with what the other person was doing. It was a time of personal communication with the Lord. Sermon after sermon delivered from different preachers based their messages on 1 Samuel, 7:12. The main theme was centered on Ebenezer — the stone of help at Mizpah. On this day, for the Zimbabwe Area members, Mizpah was the National Sports Stadium, in Harare.

In Zimbabwe Area Bishop Eben Kanukai Nhiwatiwa's opening remarks, he said that God is good all the time for blessing this successful event. He took the opportunity to thank his cabinet for the noble idea of bringing the Area together under one roof in this way to celebrate 117 years of the Methodist church in Zimbabwe. He gave the proceeding an episcopal blessing, "In the name of the Father the Son and Holy Spirit."

He noted that when he was preparing the sermon, he exerted all the effort possible considering its importance and realized God's guidance in preparing for this historic landmark event. He mentioned that he went through the sermon many times. He got tired to the point of abandoning it, but God insisted. He told the story of Samuel, where the birth of Samuel leads to the bringing of the stone which was named Ebenezer.

Two verses were used as themes for the Ebenezer Convention (1 Samuel 7:12 and Matthew 28:19-20). Samuel

was used to encourage attendees to continue to work to overcome and to persevere all challenges. Matthew was used to remind attendees of their role in evangelism and spreading the good news of Jesus Christ.

"During this Ebenezer (convention) get something," said Nhiwatiwa. He urged attendees to use this event as time to get past our pride and the feeling of being victimized by God, that God is always with them. He used the story of Samuel and the Ebenezer stone to communicate the need for overcoming challenges. He said that just as the Ebenezer stone communicated that God had been with them "thus far," God is also with us thus far and will continue to embolden and strengthen the ministry.

Throughout his sermon he inserted short vignettes as he told the Samuel story to bring the point closer to home by relating it to something local. "When you are tired of praying do not condemn the church. Do not behave like a knife which can cut using both sides," he said.

Nhiwatiwa's closing prayer, "Ebenezer, Ebenezer. God is encouraging us to walk with strength and to be on the rightful position during this convention. We know how weak we are — get strengthened through the Ebenezer Convention. Let us move forward, Ebenezer, Ebenezer. The late Bob Marley sang, 'No woman, no woman no cry, everything's gonna be all right.' Amen."

drove Louderback, Conard and Witte to various locations and served as the primary on-location host for the group.

Other notable United Methodist ministries visited by most while in Mutare included Africa University, an HIV/AIDS hospital called Project Tariro and the Fairfield Children's Home.

**The Chabadza Covenant is named for the Shona word "Chabadza," roughly meaning to work alongside each other for mutual benefit. When one succeeds, so does the other.**

Witte began training with a Mutasa/Nyanga District volunteer Lloyd Chaukura on providing partnership updates for his district and the Great Plains website. The goal is to get fresh news and information from partner churches for posting on the conferences' respective websites.

The youngest mission team member Miranda Giessel, age 16, was encouraged to join the trip by her pastor Kim Ryherd. Giessel was amazed by the people and places she experienced.

*The need for engaged churches continues. To find out the possibilities for a match with your congregation contact your district superintendent.*



PHOTO BY KATHRYN WITTE

Photo from left: Minelloa Pastor Kip Ryherd, Chipinge UMC Lay Leader Christina Mulamba and Miranda Giessel, Minneola youth member. Chipinge UMC and Minneola UMC are Chabadza partners.

a Chabadza covenant. We want to move toward mutuality in as many things as possible.

I encourage you (those with existing partnerships) to be in regular communication with your counterpart in the Zimbabwe East Conference. Email is probably the best way to do so, although Zimbabwe district superintendents are adept in the use of text messaging.

Zimbabwe Area district conferences are usually a day-long meeting (typically 10-12 hours in length). An extensive booklet is produced, and it would be worthwhile for you to ask your corresponding district superintendent to provide you an electronic copy of the proceedings. I think you will find the reports fascinating to read (you are encouraged to share them with your congregations).

Please let me know ways in which I can be of assistance, including attendance at any district clergy meetings you may have scheduled.

Thank you for your commitment to this international mission partnership. I look forward to working with you and others in helping to "claim higher ground." Mukomborerwe (Be blessed).

For information contact the Rev. Mark Conard on his cell at 620-727-1716 or [mark.conard@gmail.com](mailto:mark.conard@gmail.com).

# Closing the cultural divide in our churches



PHOTO PROVIDED BY ANDREA PARET

The Rev. Rodgers Chishiba shares how he approaches cultural differences and helps develop mutual understanding. Chishiba invites congregation members into his home because that is what they do in his culture.

**By the REV. THRESEA MASON,**  
*Trinity UMC in Grand Island, Nebraska*

On Sept. 5-6, clergy and laity from the Great Plains United Methodist Conference met for the Cross-Racial/Cross Cultural Workshop at Trinity United Methodist Church, in Grand Island, Nebraska. The Rev. Sun Hee Kim and the Rev. Dr. Dale Weatherspoon led an intercultural competency workshop that helped more than 60 participants to develop skills to relate across racial, ethnic and cultural differences. Erin Hawkins, general secretary of The United Methodist Church General Commission on Religion and Race (GCORR) sent staff member, the Rev. Giovanni Arroya, to represent GCORR.

The workshop included an engaging mix of thoughtful presentations, activities, videos, case studies plus small and large group activities that gave the participants insights into their own cultural/racial backgrounds. Skill building tools and activities were offered for interacting with people from different backgrounds.

Workshop leader Kim used the analogy that we wear different “glasses”

to see the world. These differences are not right or wrong, good or bad, but they affect how we see the world and encounter different situations. She gave an example of when she first went into a huge Chinese restaurant she thought everyone was eating rice the wrong way. Diners lifted the bowl and put the chopsticks close to their mouth. Kim, who is from Korea, had been taught that it was proper to eat rice with a spoon keeping the bowl on the table. When she asked her friend who was Chinese about the way people were eating rice, the friend said, “That’s the proper way to eat rice.”

We develop a more intercultural mindset when we can begin to understand how our own ways of seeing the world are shaped by our cultural backgrounds. Some of the skill-building addressed the confusion and conflict that can erupt in intercultural interaction through what Weatherspoon and Kim described as “culture as an iceberg.”

Only about one-tenth of an iceberg can be seen — such as cultural dress, arts and food. The other nine-tenths of the iceberg includes beliefs and values about social relations, worship, leadership, responsibility and other

values that come from our cultural context. Misunderstandings are often a clash of different perceptions of the world that we may not recognize about ourselves or our neighbor. We can begin to build bridges and connections with one another through “bridge people” who help interpret differences and by getting to know more about another culture. The more we share stories and listen to multiple stories, the more we can build bridges.

Both workshop leaders gave examples of different expectations for a pastor that may exist in different cultural traditions. For example, in one cross-cultural appointment, Weatherspoon was expected to be present throughout a wake, even though he wasn’t expected to speak until after he had been there for at least five hours. Workshop participants considered case studies of conflicts between pastors and congregations that developed because of different cultural expectations and beliefs. Participants began to prepare “next steps” for building and strengthening hospitality and inclusion within the church in their own contexts.

See **CULTURAL DIVIDE** on page 14

# Hope and a pathway to get there

By KATHRYN WITTE,  
communications director

Africa University is a United Methodist supported college located in Mutare, in the highlands of Zimbabwe, and serves about 1,400 students in a beautiful campus setting on the edge of the city. AU benefits from United Methodist general agency apportioned funds that all churches contribute to as part of their Mission Shares. Members of a recent Great Plains Conference mission team recently visited the campus. The Rev. Kalaba Chali, coordinator of the Great Plains Mercy and Justice Team, is an AU alum and led the mission team.

Here are stories from two students.

## Itai Machanzi

"If it wasn't for United Methodist support, I'd probably be working in a field or something," said Africa University (AU) student Itai Machanzi from Zimbabwe.

Machanzi's statement sums up the sentiment of most of the students attending AU.

She is a senior enrolled in the Faculty (College) of Humanities and Social Sciences majoring in psychology. She hopes to one day get a master's degree in developmental psychology and work with disadvantaged children.

"I want to help people in Africa who are impoverished," she said. She sees herself opening a psycho-social support clinic offering orphans emotional support. "Underneath, so many emotions have not been cared for."



Itai Machanzi



She appreciates that AU is a Christian environment with a Pan-African culture. "I love that Christians are here and that you don't have to look at your lecturers and deans as authority figures so you can have friendships with instructors," she said.

Faculty and staff often act as mentors giving pointers and asking important questions of students. "For me it's something that is valuable and available to all, but not all students take advantage of it," she said.

For Machanzi, AU Pan-Africanism means globalization on a smaller scale. She sees it as an expression of the world in one, global village. "AU offers the opportunity to understand people from different countries; when you come from AU it becomes easier to relate to people in other places," she said.

After she arrived on campus, she went through an application process for a scholarship. AU now pays 100 percent of her tuition.

Machanzi said she looks at AU and the number of people that are there and thanks United Methodist support for enabling young people who previously could not afford to go to college, to have a dream.

"I can dream about getting a Ph.D., and what I want to do by what age," she said.

## Kabala Mbuya Jonathan

Kabala Mbuya Jonathan prefers to just go by "Jonathan." He is in the Faculty of Management and Administration majoring in computer science. He is from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

"I wanted to learn computer science at an English university. This is the only one I had a chance to come to because it is a United Methodist institution and I am a United Methodist member," said Jonathan.

He arrived at AU without a scholarship, but with the help of a friend's mother he was able to qualify for financial aid, noting that students from other countries cannot hold jobs in Zimbabwe.

As a second-year student, he appreciates the diversity of the student body. "People only think about how a person from another country might be. At AU I actually see people from other countries, make friends and might have the opportunity to visit another African country," he said. He also participates in the AU choirs.



Kabala Mbuya Jonathan

Africa University fosters diversity, bringing people from different countries together, interacting with each other without national boundaries between people. AU offers socializing and opportunities to help each other.

Jonathan understands and appreciates United Methodist support, "We always appreciate support; this institution needs people who can help so that the vision continues to grow to accommodate all students around Africa."

He said, "We understand AU is investing in Africa's future so that we go back to our own countries to help unify Africa and to help build Christianity."

Connect online  
[www.greatplainsumc.org](http://www.greatplainsumc.org)



To view videos, and more photos from Africa University go to [greatplainsumc.org/africau](http://greatplainsumc.org/africau)

# Micah Corps internship reflections

By GLORIA KIMBULU, *Micah Corps intern*

“Do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God.” Micah 6:8, is what the Micah Corps is all about. The Micah Corps began in 2009, in the former Nebraska Conference, and is now a part of the Great Plains Conference Mercy and Justice Team. It is a unique model of young adult leadership development within our denomination.

This summer, the Micah Corps was made up of nine young adults from Nebraska and Kansas who connected faith with four social justice issues: immigration, peace and nonviolence, children in poverty and the environment. “This summer has helped me form more definitive and informed opinions about a variety of issues, where before I simply had the makings of opinions without a solid foundation to stand on,” said Hannah Bannister, Micah Corps intern.

As a team we practiced different ways of praying such as Lectio Divina and the Centering prayer. “Before this summer, I had never really given much thought to different ways of praying other than the typical fold your hands and bow your head type,” said Carter Oberheu, Micah Corps intern. “Having the room to explore different prayer practices was a good thing and an eye opener for me.”

In July, we went to the District of Columbia to learn about our issues at the General Board of Church and Society. We were all so amazed at the fact that it was the only non-governmental building on Capitol Hill. While in D.C., we delivered more than 200 handwritten letters urging more funding to eradicate malaria, tuberculosis and AIDS to our senators’ offices. These letters were written at the Annual Conference Session in Lincoln, Nebraska, by Great Plains United Methodists.

Throughout the summer we also worked with organizations such as United Methodist Ministries, Nebraska Appleseed, Justice for our Neighbors and The Land Institute.

We practiced leadership skills when making presentations at many churches and enjoyed connecting and learning from “experts in the pew” about some of our issues. We also led classes at Institute and Mission u.

On behalf of myself and the rest of the Micah Corps, I would like to thank everyone in the Great Plains Conference for supporting us in our endeavors this summer.

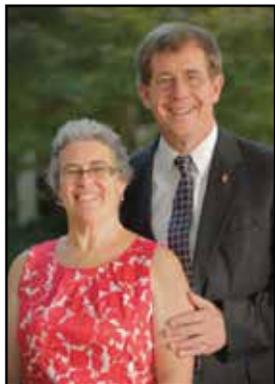
I encourage you to check out the Micah Corps’ Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/micahcorps](http://www.facebook.com/micahcorps) and the Micah Corps’ Twitter feed at [twitter.com/micahcorps](http://twitter.com/micahcorps).

Although the internship is over, I will remain as a part-time intern, and will update social media. Thanks again for your support!



PHOTO PROVIDED BY MICAH CORPS

Micah Corps interns work in the fields at The Land Institute in Salina, Kansas. Front row from left: Carter Oberheu, Navya Hopkins and Mary Rachael Stanton. Back row from left: the Rev. Carol Windrum, Micah Corps director, Katie Klein, Andrea Paret, Peace with Justice coordinator, Hannah Bannister, Gloria Kimbulu, Ella Sherman, Emily DeVore and Rachel Nyhart.



## *Journey through the Bible with Bishop Scott Jones and Mary Lou Reece*

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# Death notices

**Deborah Burgess, 55**, spouse of a clergy member, died June 19, 2014. Survivors include her husband, the Rev. Michael Burgess, and daughters Precyus Jalbert, Janay Merriweather and Adana Merriweather. Memorial Contributions may be made to St. Paul UMC in Elmwood, Nebraska, or a care and support fund for her daughters' future.

**The Rev. Dale Lee Ellenberger, 79**, a retired clergy member, died April 28, 2014. He was preceded in death by his wife, Loretta, and son Andrew. Survivors include children Mark Ellenberger and Melody Ellenberger. Memorial donations may be made to the 50/50 Sunday school class of Acton UMC, 3433 Fall Creek Highway, Granbury, Texas 76049.

**The Rev. Larry Keller, 63**, a clergy member, died July 29, 2014. Survivors include his wife, Irene, and son Mathew. Memorial contributions may be made to the Immigrant Justice Advocacy Movement (IJAM) at [www.ijamkc.org](http://www.ijamkc.org) or the Topeka Center for Peace and Justice.

**Jane Sawyer Kersenbrock, 76**, a spouse of a retired clergy member, died June 26, 2014. She was preceded in death by son, Keith. Survivors include her husband, the Rev. Jack Kersenbrock, and children Dwayne Kersenbrock, Luann Horchem and Kris Schulte. Memorial contributions may be made to Friends of Prairie Dog State Park, 13037 State Highway 261, Norton, KS 67654, or the United Methodist Committee on Relief.

**Melva Metzger, 96**, the spouse of a retired clergy member, died June 18, 2014. She was preceded in death by her husband, Ernest. Survivors include daughters Christine Bledsoe and Kathleen Metzger. Memorial contributions may be made to Velda Rose UMC, 5540 E. Main St., Mesa, AZ, 85205 or Eagle UMC in Eagle, Nebraska.

**Jack E. Sample, 77**, a retired clergy member, died May 30, 2014. He was preceded in death by his son. Survivors include his wife, Linda, and children Terry Sample and Tobin Sample. Memorial contributions may be made to the Department of American Legion Baseball or the education unit of the First UMC in Wood River, Nebraska.

## CULTURAL DIVIDE, continued from page 11



PHOTO PROVIDED BY ANDREA PARET

The Rev. Dale Witherspoon and the Rev. Theresa Mason in conversation at the end of the seminar.

On Saturday, Bishop Scott Jones spoke to the group stressing the importance of this workshop given the realities of numerous cross-racial appointments in this conference and our goals of becoming a more diverse and inclusive people. He said, "Together we have the common mission of sharing Jesus Christ for the world."

Workshop presenter, the Rev. Sun Hee Kim, is a United Methodist clergy woman currently serving as the pastor for discipleship and leadership development at St. Paul UMC, in Fremont, California. As an Asian-American immigrant from Korea, she has served mostly Anglo churches and has worked in various cross-cultural/cross-racial settings. She is passionate about helping people to connect and to build relationship beyond cultural and racial differences.

Workshop presenter, the Rev. Dale M. Weatherspoon, has served four churches in the California-Nevada

Annual conference — all cross-racial and cross-cultural appointments. He sees himself as a cultural bridge person. He believes that "only in community and in service together can we grow in love for one another and deepen our trust in God through the teachings of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit."

### Additional resources:

- Lucia Ann McSpadden, "Meeting God at the Boundaries: Cross-Cultural-Cross-Racial Clergy Appointments," General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, Nashville, 2003
- Lucia Ann McSpadden, "Meeting God at the Boundaries: Cross-Cultural-Cross-Racial Clergy Appointments: A Manual for Church Leaders," General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, Nashville, 2003



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# Churches work together to build a home



PHOTO PROVIDED BY MARVÉ RALSTON

Members of Blue Mound and Kincaid-Selma UMCs, along with the Rev. Bill Nelson, build a new house for a family belonging to the Kincaid-Selma UMC.

By **MARVÉ RALSTON**, *Five Rivers District administrative assistant*

For many years the prospect of having an ongoing housing emergency has been a given for one family that attends Kincaid-Selma UMC, in Kincaid, Kansas. Several people in the church were frequently going over to help and there seemed to be no end to the issues.

Randal Beckmon is often the first called. Randal and his wife Marsha, began praying about what to do about this situation. He had been on call for the family, and the emergency calls had gotten more frequent over the years. They became convinced that the next step was to build the family a new home, as the one they currently lived in was becoming increasingly uninhabitable.

The Beckmon's son and daughter-in-law, Nathan and Krissy Beckmon, attend the Blue Mound UMC, in Kansas. As the plans became more complete, Nathan and Krissy volunteered and brought members of their church to help as well. An alliance was formed between the two churches to make this project what Nathan called, "A mission in the local community."

The surrounding communities, businesses, organizations and private individuals donated materials. Those who could not contribute labor, often prepared meals for the workers.

Since the middle of July, when the building project began in earnest, Kincaid/Selma and Blue Mound UMCs' attendees and members were often found at the building site. Both church pastors, the Rev. Bill Nelson and the Rev. Walter Marsella have been on the job site, encouraging and providing much needed help.

The 45 foot by 22 foot home was built with ongoing input from the family involved. They have been consulted about all the details and even know where their current furniture will be placed when their new home is complete.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY MARVÉ RALSTON

Pictured from left: Nathan and Krissy Beckmon and Randal Beckmon. Randal spearheaded building a home for fellow congregants and directed the construction.

The home is handicapped accessible, with carefully placed room placement. Even the family pets were given consideration. An accessible door was strategically placed to make it easier for the daughter that cares for the family pets to get them inside and out.

Members of these two congregations did not wish to be recognized for what they have done, but the scripture below come to mind.

*This is how we've come to understand and experience love: Christ sacrificed his life for us. This is why we ought to live sacrificially for our fellow believers, and not just be out for ourselves. If you see some brother or sister in need and have the means to do something about it but turn a cold shoulder and do nothing, what happens to God's love? It disappears. And you made it disappear. My dear children, let's not just talk about love; let's practice real love. This is the only way we'll know we're truly, living in God's reality. It's also the way to shut down debilitating self-criticism, even when there is something to it. For God is greater than our worried hearts and knows more about us than we do ourselves. — 1 John 3:16-20*

One family at a time, we can do what we are called to do as the church — meeting needs at the margin.

# Mission Agency Support



PHOTO PROVIDED BY EPWORTH VILLAGE

Photo from left: Glenda Boesiger, Epworth Village President/CEO Harrietta Reynolds, Bishop Ann Sherer-Simpson, Emogene Johnson and Lucille Lenz. The visitors were part of a group from Trinity UMC in Lincoln, Nebraska who recently toured Epworth Village, a Mission Agency, in York, Nebraska. Find out more at [www.epworthvillage.org](http://www.epworthvillage.org).

By **TRISHA JOHNSON**, *freelance writer*

John Wesley wrote in his journal, "I look upon all the world as my parish." His profound words remind us that discipleship and mission cannot be separated. God loves us unconditionally and invites us to be His hands and feet in the world to bring about His kingdom here on earth.

The calling of the Great Plains United Methodist Conference (GPUMC) is to equip and connect congregations to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Our missional priorities are to enhance the ministry of local churches to produce Christ-centered excellence in youth ministry, preaching and worship, engaging the community, and transforming service to the world. Using an income-based formula for Mission Shares enables the conference to be responsive to the accomplishment of these goals.

Each of us, as members of a local church, supports our local church by giving our tithes (10 percent) and offerings. These gifts come from the income that we have received. As Christians, we believe that our income is a blessing from God. We also believe that tithing has a sound Scriptural foundation as an act of worship and discipleship.

The same motivation used to support the local church is applied to the GPUMC's mission and ministry. Each local church is therefore called to support the GPUMC based on

See **MISSION** on page 4

GPconnect, news and information for Great Plains United Methodist.



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PHOTO BY KATHRYN WITTE

Mutasa-Nyanga District Superintendent Daniel Mutidzawanda thumb wrestles Wichita West District Superintendent Linda Louderback in front of the Dambanda UMC parsonage foundation while Dambanda UMC Pastor Ruth Mguta looks on. Louderback joined 13 others from the Great Plains Conference on a mission trip to Zimbabwe. Trip activities included attending the Ebenezer Convention, meeting with partnership congregations and visiting Africa University. See stories on pages 8 and 9.

Dated material  
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