

GPconnect

Connecting United Methodists across the Great Plains

Spring 2015



In this edition of GPconnect:

Summer Internship program

Orders and Fellowship 2015 recap

Congregational success stories



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Circulation

“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

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Lincoln, NE 68504

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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 Rev. Jacob Cloud prepares to serve the sacrament of communion at New Church Lawrence in Lawrence, Kansas. See story on page 8 for more information. Photo provided by New Church Lawrence.

Healthy Congregations



Bishop Scott J. Jones

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

Some books are classics that deserve multiple readings. Adam Hamilton’s “Leading Beyond the Walls” is one such book because it provides important answers to problems facing congregations today. Too many local churches are dying because they have lost their focus. They have become clubs that exist for the benefit of members. Such an approach worked in the 1950s but is no longer effective.

Healthy congregations are mission stations that are always asking how God can use their people — with time, talent, money, prayer and vision — to accomplish God’s purposes in their communities. Such churches can provide clear answers to the three questions Adam Hamilton poses in his book:

1. Why do people need Christ?
2. Why do people need the church?
3. Why do people need this particular church?

The first question — the one about Christ — is fundamental. There are lots of different religions competing for people’s attention. The group that is increasing most rapidly are the “nones” — people

who say that their religious preference is “none.” In the 21st century, we have to give people a good reason to worship God and follow Jesus.

1 Peter 3:15-16 says, “Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence.” A healthy congregation empowers its members to tell non-Christians why following Jesus is the best way of life. A healthy congregation finds ways of sharing that message through electronic media and other communication.

The second question is to help people know why they need the church. There is a mistaken notion very popular today that people can be Christian without participating in organized religion. When John Wesley talked about social holiness, he meant the Christian life was always lived in community. The church is God’s primary means of grace. It is in church that we learn the truth of the gospel, that we worship with other believers, that we receive the sacraments and that we experience the grace of God most fully. God has promised to be present wherever two or more are gathered. I believe that every Christian should be in worship every week and should belong to at least one small group where they are spiritually fed and they help to feed others. Healthy congregations have high expectations of their members and teach them the Wesleyan way of salvation through the means of God’s grace.

The third question is why someone needs a particular church. Healthy congregations know their particular strengths and communicate them to outsiders. Healthy congregations have a strong children’s and youth ministry. They are committed to supporting public education. They are involved in feeding the hungry and addressing social justice concerns. Healthy congregations have worship styles that help the people in their community experience the presence of the Holy Spirit through appropriate music and preaching. Healthy congregations are interested in evangelistic conversations and invite outsiders to experience the love of Christ.

Our goal as the Great Plains Conference is to equip each one of our congregations, whether small or large, to be the healthiest congregation it can possibly be. Let’s be focused on that mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ so God can use us to transform the world.



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

@Extreme_Center

From your lay leader

Changes of springtime

Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.
Philippians 3:12—14

As I write this in early March, it is a sunny, beautiful day outside my window — a welcome friend and change after some particularly cold stretches of winter. It has helped me be mindful, during this Lenten season of waiting and preparation, to look ahead to the change that is coming, new things which will be happening and the spiritual preparation that helps ready us.



Courtney Fowler

My family is looking forward to some changes of our own as our oldest daughter prepares to graduate from high school and enter college next fall. I am so grateful and thankful for our church's participation in her life, in helping form the faith that she will carry forward in the future. From Sunday school, youth group, confirmation, mission trips and a strong emphasis on outreach — our church family has been a significant part of her faith journey thus far. As she looks ahead to college days, I am so excited that campus ministry will be there for her as the next step, to continue supporting her throughout her school life.

That is the church that my family experiences, and I pray that you and your family share similar sentiments about your own church. If not, then we have some work ahead of us.

The theme of our upcoming Annual Conference Session in Wichita, Kansas, this June fits well with this aspect of our church community. Our 2015 theme is *Though Many, One* and speaks to the impact the church can have in the world. I hope you are making plans to attend our second annual conference gathering as the Great Plains.

Spring is an incredibly busy season for families and churches, filled with warm-weather activities and opportunities for ministry. The above scripture, taken from Paul's letter to the Philippians, invites us to pause during our busyness, offer gratitude and look ahead with hope-filled expectations. I'm so excited to do that!

Courtney

Courtney Fowler
Conference Lay Leader

Conference events are posted at greatplainsumc.org/events

Conference events

April 12-17

Five Day Academy, Schuyler, Nebraska

April 17-18

Spring Training for Adult Youth Workers, Salina, Kansas

April 18-19

Spring Training for Adult Youth Workers, Kearney, Nebraska

April 18

Healthy Families, Healthy Planet, Derby, Kansas

April 19

Native American Ministries Sunday

April 26

Connecting Neighbors Class, Belleville, Kansas

April 27-28

Ready to Retire Seminar, Salina, Kansas

May 1-2

Leading Size Transitions in Hispanic Churches, Wichita, Kansas

May 9

Next Steps Phase One training webcast

May 23

Cowboy Trail Bike Ride/Walk for UMMen Missions, Norfolk, Nebraska

May 23

UMMen Family Night at the ball park, Kansas City, Kansas

May 25

Memorial Day

May 29-June 7

Mission Education Tour (METour), Southeast United States

May 31

Peace with Justice Sunday

June 1-5

Licensing School, Concordia, Kansas

June 10-13

Great Plains Annual Conference Session, Wichita, Kansas

June 19

UMMen Four-person Golf Scramble, Bonner Springs, Kansas

June 20

Bishop's Bicycle Challenge, Wichita, Kansas

June 26-27

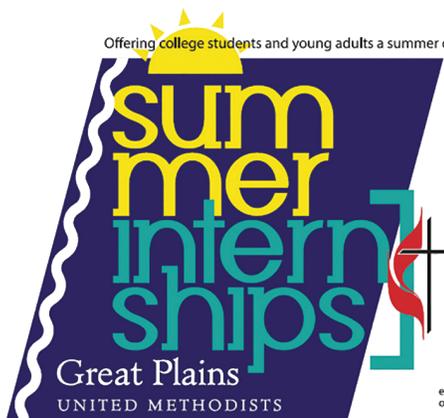
Candidacy Summit, Lincoln, Nebraska

June 27-July 1

NUMB (Nebraska UM Bike) Ride, starts and ends in Ogallala, Nebraska

Summer Internship program offered for first time

Offering college students and young adults a summer of service by working together in ministries of the United Methodist Church



social justice ministries  micah corps

road trips for teaching kids  vbs leader

fun work at five GP camps  camp counselor

youth pastor apprenticeships  youth intern

experience HYL A academy  hispanic ministry

exploring a call to ordained ministry  pastoral leadership

www.greatplainsumc.org/internships

By **RACHEL MOSER**,
communications coordinator

Young adults interested in growing their faith and leadership skills now have a one-stop shop when it comes to finding the right fit.

The Summer Internship Program of the Great Plains Conference gives young adults a chance to explore hands-on ministry and leadership in a variety of fields. While combining the previously offered summer offerings (Micah Corps, vacation Bible school and camp counselors) into a clear leadership development system, four new internships — pastoral leadership, Hispanic ministry, youth ministry and youth planter — have emerged.

“The internship program is a way for young adults to use their gifts to learn and serve during the summer,” said the Rev. Nicole Conard, coordinator of young leadership for the Great Plains Conference.

Interns will work full-time for 10 weeks over the summer. “Interns can expect to learn more about their gifts, how they work in a team and how they are developing as a leader,” said Conard. “They can learn about how to communicate effectively with others, work together for a common goal and see how God is calling them to the next faithful step in their lives.

In addition to the seven internships offered through the conference, some local churches in the Great Plains Conference also offer their own internships. “We are grateful that this is happening, and we encourage more internships throughout our conference,” said Conard.

The Summer Internship program helps identify key young adult leaders in the Great Plains Conference. It can help highlight their gifts and graces and assists in a growth of faith and service long after the internship. At the beginning of each internship, participants receive initial training followed by a closing training at the end of the 10 weeks.

“The closing training can help provide logical next steps so that their journey in leadership and faith can continue,” said Conard. Relationships built during the internships can last long after the summer months have passed and can inspire

See **INTERNS** on page 6

The internships

Micah Corps interns learn about connecting their faith with social justice and practice leadership skills by visiting, researching and presenting key social justice topics throughout the conference.

Vacation Bible school (VBS) interns, from small church development, lead VBS, paint a house and visit the elderly in a new community each week — all while experiencing life-changing, faith-developing opportunities.

Camp counselors guide students in an intentional community and throughout camp creation at one of six camps located in the conference. Students range from first grade to high school seniors.

Pastoral leadership provides an opportunity to be an apprentice to a pastor. Interns explore their gifts in ministry through serving a local church full-time, are mentored by a pastor and share in various aspects of pastoral leadership

Youth ministry interns serve alongside youth ministers and will explore youth ministry in a local church by being mentored and assisting leadership of a youth ministry throughout the summer.

Hispanic ministry interns study and learn how to develop young leaders in Hispanic/Latino communities and work in conjunction with Hispanic Young Leadership Academy (HYLA). Interns work with local churches who are bridging cultural, linguistic and generational gaps.

Church planter interns learn and serve beside a church planter pastor and are on an invitational basis.

Connect online
www.greatplainsumc.org



To view more information about the Summer Internship program go to greatplainsumc.org/internships.

Clergy challenged to develop leaders



Orders and Fellowship recap

By **CINDY KELLY**,
communications coordinator

Clergy members from across the Great Plains Conference on Jan. 21 and 22 learned from the successes of a church in Georgia that has developed a discipling and leadership program that begins intentionally with children in the fourth grade.

The opportunity came during the Orders and Fellowship gathering at St. Mark's United Methodist Church in Lincoln, Nebraska. The featured speakers shared how they developed the program and implemented it congregation-wide to inspire clergy for developing spirit-led leaders in churches in Kansas and Nebraska.

The Rev. Jay Hanson, senior pastor, and Anne Bosarge, director of discipleship, from The Chapel, a United Methodist congregation in Brunswick, Georgia, led three sessions on leadership development as a means for creating vital congregations. The speaking session required pastors to engage in self-reflection, gauge their own strengths and weaknesses as

leaders, and look at the importance of leaders at all age levels for building the kingdom.

To cultivate leaders, The Chapel needed a leadership development system that flipped the way they viewed leadership. In an exercise on setting God-sized goals, Great Plains clergy were asked to note where they want to be in their spiritual journey, in their family life and their personal emotional growth in one year, then identify the steps needed to get there. Then they did the same with professional goals in leading volunteers, programming, church culture and local outreach.

Leaders also invest in others. A good leader is always working to raise up someone to take his or her place. An adequate replacement has the right attitude, is dependable and respected, is willing to take risks and is humble.

"They might not 'fit the mold' or 'look the part,' but if they have those characteristics, then you come alongside of them and you start pouring in," said Hanson.

The Chapel's Leadership Development System has programs

that target five environments: personal, congregational, systems, family ministry and staff/key leaders. Chapel Program resources are available at thechapelbrunswick.com.

"Trust and Become" is the name of their discipleship program, a process that allows people to experience a welcoming space in which they learn to trust and begin the journey to become the people God created them to be. At The Chapel, church membership requires people to work alongside God and partner in the work God is doing in the community through the church.

"At The Chapel, we call our members 'partners,'" said Hanson. In American culture, membership is expected to have privileges.

PHOTOS BY CINDY KELLY

Orders and Fellowship speakers, the Rev. Jay Hanson and Anne Bosarge, from The Chapel in Brunswick, Georgia, spoke to clergy about growing church leaders Jan. 21-22 at St. Mark's UMC in Lincoln, Nebraska. Bishop Scott Jones (insert) shares in worship.

Connect online
www.greatplainsumc.org



To view more from the 2015 Orders and Fellowship meeting go to greatplainsumc.org/OF2015.

Kansas Health Foundation gets good news on IRS status

The Kansas Health Foundation, which traces its roots to the 1985 sale of Wesley Medical Center in Wichita, Kansas, recently announced it has been given permission from the Internal Revenue Service to change its status from a private foundation to a public charity, which is expected to further strengthen its financial position and allow it to expand the grants it provides each year.

The former Wesley Medical Center was founded as an acute care hospital by the United Methodist Church in 1912. At the time of the sale, the Kansas Health Foundation received a \$200 million endowment and a mission to improve the health of all Kansans. Since that time, the foundation has awarded more than \$500 million in grants while still growing the endowment to \$500 million in assets.

This year, the foundation will celebrate its 30th anniversary. As part of that milestone, it requested a change in its IRS status as of Jan. 1 to a public charity. The change means the foundation will be able to:

- Give an average of \$350,000 more in grants a year due to public charities not paying excise taxes on investment earnings.
- Expand its pool of grantees.
- More openly share opinions on policies that have the potential to impact the health of Kansans.

Foundation CEO and President Steve Coen said none of the enhancements would have been possible without

the support of the Great Plains Conference of the United Methodist Church.

“In early 2014, we approached Bishop Scott Jones to see if the church would be open to allowing the foundation to change its IRS tax code designation to a public charity by becoming a supporting organization to the Great Plains Conference,” Coen wrote in a letter to the conference. “Bishop Jones wholeheartedly endorsed the concept. Once endorsed by the UMC Connecting Council, the documents were submitted to the IRS, who notified us of its approval late last year.”

Coen wrote in his letter that the foundation is proud of its relationship and history with the United Methodist Church and with faith-based communities across the state. He cited the Leadership and Faith program, the Kansas Public Education Initiative and the Clergy Wellness Program as initiatives in which the foundation has partnered with the United Methodist Church on important initiatives aimed at making Kansas a better place to live.

Coen cited a recent report by the United Health Foundation found that Kansas has slipped from the eighth healthiest state in the nation in 1991 to the 27th healthiest state as of today.

“A closer examination of the data reveals growing rates of childhood poverty, high rates of adult smoking, low rates of immunization and other related factors have contributed to this decline,” Coen wrote.

Learn more about the foundation, including grants and its areas of focus, on its website at www.kansashealth.org.

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one another to continue to build upon one’s faith and leadership.

This first year saw a great response in applications. “The number of young adults that applied exceeded the number of positions available,” said the Rev. Evelyn Fisher, congregational excellence director. “We are prayerfully considering applications to make the best matches possible.”

Conard looks to continue to grow the program and discover where other opportunities are that young adults can learn and serve in the conference and local churches within the conference.

“We’re excited about this program’s future,” said Fisher.

The Summer Internship program is a collaborative effort across the Great Plains Conference with mercy and justice, small church membership, clergy excellence, Board of Ordained Ministry, youth ministry, Hispanic ministry, camping and young adult leadership development. To learn more about the program, go to greatplainsumc.org/internships. You can also contact Conard at nconard@greatplainsumc.org.

“Investing in young people and providing ways for them to lead is one of the best things we can do as disciples of Christ,” said Conard.

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Youth learn to defeat fear

By CINDY KELLY,
communications coordinator

Once again The OneEvent was a memorable weekend of celebration, worship, learning and fellowship for Great Plains youth and youth leaders. More than 1,200 people braved harsh winter weather to gather at the Heartland Events Center in Grand Island, Nebraska, Jan. 3-4.

Eihusen Arena was rocking to the head-banging sounds of Colton Dixon and worship led by The Digital Age, a four-piece band

Kansas, brought The OneEvent theme to life with her insight on dealing with fear. "I know that God is going to move in an exciting way," said Garnes.

Smiling, sweaty faces filled the exhibit hall from one end to the other in between sessions. Youth engaged in creating art, bouncing on inflatables, challenging one another in games, snapping pictures in the photo booth and decorating themselves with body art.

They could

poverty and health. "The world has a lot of problems in it. God is interested in loving the world, which means God is interested in fixing the problems and has a strategy," said Jones.

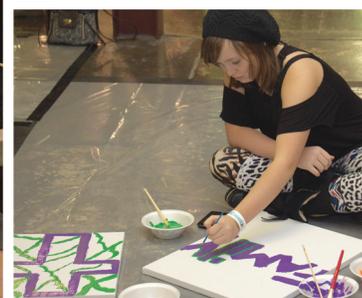
Cindy Laluk and her daughter came up from the Kansas City District with 16 other youth and at least three other adults. The group from Kansas represented Aldersgate UMC in Olathe, Shawnee UMC and Bonner Springs UMC.

"We're having a great time," Laluk said at the Saturday night mixer at the Holiday Inn. Kerry Stumbough from Bonner Springs agreed with Laluk that the weather presented challenges, but the event was worth the drive. "We're blessed with a lot of musical kids," Laluk noted as someone pulled out a small banjo and began to play. "They are loving the music at The OneEvent."

Laluk said she was particularly entertained by Danny Ray who never ceased to amaze her.

The OneEvent will be at the same location next year. "Now that we are familiar with the location, the vendors and all that entails, it will be so much easier to organize the event next year," said

Shane Hinderliter, Great Plains youth coordinator. However the event will be the last weekend of January rather than the first. "Hopefully this change



from Waco, Texas. Ground Zero Master's Commission kept the attention of youth and adults with their innovative skits and stomp routines. Illusionist Danny Ray took the stage with his own cameraman to capture the mysterious sleight of hand he fits between jokes and bit of Christian teaching that kept everyone on their toes. "How did he do that?" was a common question about his mind-blowing illusions.

Keynote speaker, the Rev. Kirstie Garnes of Saint Mark UMC in Wichita,

learn about several different campus ministries, CCYM, Youth Service Fund, Great Plains camps, campus ministries and leadership development opportunities.

Breakout sessions Saturday afternoon gave OneEvent participants the chance to attend two workshops out of six options. Bishop Scott Jones chose the title "Change the World the Wesleyan Way" for his session on how United Methodists transform the world through love of God and love of neighbor, addressing topics like climate change, racism, public education,

learn about several different campus ministries, CCYM, Youth Service Fund, Great Plains camps, campus ministries and leadership development opportunities.

View more stories and photos from The 2015 OneEvent at greatplainsyouth.org

in date will allow more people to attend and more people to volunteer," said Hinderliter. When details are available, they will be posted at www.greatplainsyouth.org.

Multiple generati

By Todd Seifert, *communications director*

The Rev. Jacob Cloud dreamed and prayed about coming home to Lawrence to serve in ministry. In fact, as soon as he found out he was selected to be a church planter, he started asking about the possibility of doing so in the city where he grew up.

Would the church be catered toward students at the University of Kansas (KU)? Would it be catered to the estimated 75,000 people in the surrounding area who had no church affiliation?

Turns out, the answer was not either/or but both.

“What was a real surprise was that it would be a mixture of locals and university students,” Cloud said. “Eight months into it, I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

The new church has a name that depicts just that — New Church Lawrence. You will find a sermon, music and prayer — all staples of services often sought out by the 40 and older crowd. You’ll also find plenty of service opportunities and a praise band comprised mostly of college students — elements often sought by younger parishioners.

But you won’t find this worship service in a sanctuary in a standard church building. You won’t find a steeple.

Instead, you’ll find a large movie screen, stadium seating and a congregation formed almost equally of college students and adults already well ingrained in the business world and the community.

Some skeptics may say such an arrangement won’t work. After all, how can tech-savvy students who don’t remember



New Church Lawrence’s worship band is a great way for church members in colle



PHOTO PROVIDED BY NEW CHURCH LAWRENCE

New Church Lawrence in Lawrence, Kansas, is comprised of about half college students and half members of the community. This group of students is volunteering in the community.

a world before MP3 players and cell phones be happy hanging out and worshipping with people who date back to records and rotary dial phones?

At New Church Lawrence, the focus isn’t on how different the generations are but on how much they can accomplish together to grow disciples and help their community.

“I’ve had a fire in my heart for a long time on a matter of creating something in Lawrence that addressed something that was missing,” said Susan Mercer, a worship leader and one of the original three people who helped make New Church Lawrence a reality. About three years ago, she was thinking about the spiritual gap in Lawrence between high school students and young adults and parents. She felt something new had to be tried to reach college-age adults.

“It brought to light the challenge that we as a denomination and Christianity as a whole has: meeting people where they are,” Mercer said.

To bridge that gap, Cloud knew the new church had to reach out to two distinct groups. The common denominator? A deep desire to follow Jesus’ examples of service and showing love. And by doing that, people can change the world.

“We had to find students who shared this vision,” Cloud said.

One of those early students was Monique Brigham, a KU

ons, one purpose



PHOTO PROVIDED BY NEW CHURCH LAWRENCE

to participate in the worship and help share the Gospel.

student from Chicago who had taken part in Wesley KU, a campus ministry. As a student who struggled at first to fit in

at the university and to grasp her faith, Brigham welcomed the opportunity to try something entirely new.

“Sometimes people can struggle to buy into a new entity like this,” she said. “In New Church, a lot of the base is college students. I think it’s great that we have a mixture of ages because I feel like I know more now.”

Before the first worship service — with 113 people in attendance — the church already had conducted a food drive and brought in more than 1,000 pounds of food. It already had picked corn in a field prior to a farmer plowing it under to provide food for the local pantry. It had painted a home for Lawrence Indian UMC. And it had sponsored activities such as bowling and bubble soccer.

“It really makes me feel like I’m part of a community,” Brigham said. “The people here really want to help the community. What we say we do, we actually do.”

One of the things they do is worship. For New Church, that weekly gathering takes place at Hollywood Theaters. The service involves a band and a concerted effort to transform what was an homage to Hollywood fiction the night before to a place for Christian truths the next morning.

While many people may focus on worship, Cloud, Brigham and Mercer all stressed the key to New Church’s early success is really about the relationships being built across generations.

“These people really want to change the world,” Cloud said. “And that’s not an abstract thing. For young people, they want very real change. They want to know their life matters. Here, they’re joined by people who either have lived here all their life or who moved to Lawrence and care about it because they love it.”

Building a New Church

Creating a new church doesn’t happen overnight. And it doesn’t succeed just because of hopes and dreams. In fact, much preparation goes into planting a new church — from identifying the planter to setting up leadership to planning worship and missions.

The Rev. Jacob Cloud participates in the United Methodist Church’s Path 1 program, which aims to provide collaborative leadership with an eye toward opening more churches to evangelize across the country.

Path 1 is an effort that provides collaborative leadership to re-evangelize the country so the church

can reach more people, especially young people and diverse populations. The goal is to cultivate leaders and implement strategies to regain the denomination’s strength for opening new churches in our nation’s communities.

As part of the program, Cloud traveled to see church starts in northern Virginia, the Washington, D.C. area and Los Angeles.

Even with what he learned, Cloud said many surprises awaited him as he guided the New Church team toward launch.

“There are a lot of things you don’t fully anticipate,” he said. “We had a

couple of events that fell flat. But you buckle down, and the next time it’s better, and sometimes you have a really cool mix.”

And a church plant doesn’t end when the first worship song is sung. While more work has to be done, Cloud is pleased with how far the effort has come so far.

And he’s quick to recall his thoughts when asked about his reaction when he found out he would be planting a church in Lawrence.

“I just said ‘Thank you God!’ I had prayed for this for a year or two,” Cloud said. “I asked that He either get me ready or change my mind.”

Nebraskans, Kansans learn about advocating for change

The 2012 edition of The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church challenges members to do more than just observe society. It states, “The church helps us think and act out a faith perspective, not just responding to all the other ‘mind-makers-up’ that exist in society.”

More than 300 people attended legislative briefing day events in Kansas and Nebraska to learn more about issues being considered by their respective lawmakers and to gain insight into how more effectively advocate for stances on issues ranging from the death penalty to immigration to climate change to human trafficking.

Kansas’ meeting took place Feb. 9 at Topeka First United Methodist Church, and Nebraska’s was conducted Feb. 14 at Lincoln Christ United Methodist Church. United Methodist Women and ecumenical groups sponsored the events.

“We’re gathered here in the name of our God, in the name of our faith, and in that call that our faith gives us to be a voice for the values that Jesus taught, which are the values of the Kingdom and the values that are in the Gospel,” said Sister Therese Bangert of Kansas City.



PHOTO BY TODD SEIFERT

The Rev. Carol Windrum (right) and Tori Osler, a junior at Nebraska Wesleyan University, lead opening worship at Nebraska’s legislative briefing day on Feb. 14.

Did you know ...

‘Next Steps’ helps congregations reach their goals

The Great Plains Conference provides specialized training aimed at helping local congregations overcome obstacles that hinder them from achieving goals or projects that could help them make and encourage more disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Known as “Next Steps,” this program helps congregations navigate through multiple phases toward achieving vitality in a number of different ways.

The first phase involves developing spiritual leadership through a series of five monthly training sessions focused on explaining why spiritual leadership matters, learning how to become a welcoming congregation, growing spiritual leaders, developing systems for discipleship and engaging the community.

In phase two, churches are assigned a coach with expertise within the topic of those churches’ stated goals.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY ZIMBABWE EAST CONFERENCE

Bishop Eben K. Nhiwatiwa breaks ground for the new Zimbabwe East Conference head office.

Zimbabwe East breaks ground on office building

More than 500 members gathered March 8 to celebrate in a ground-breaking ceremony for the Zimbabwe East Conference’s new head office in Mutare.

The link between Zimbabwe East and the Great Plains conferences goes back beyond the 2010 Kansas West Annual Conference Session, which established a “Chabadza Covenant” between the two conferences. Chabadza is a Shona word that roughly translates to people in a relationship working alongside each other for mutual benefit.

United Methodists in Kansas had a relationship with people in Zimbabwe prior to the creation of what was the Kansas West Conference and even the creation of the United Methodist Church in 1968.

The construction project reflects the surge in the United Methodist Church in Africa, which continues to be one of the fastest growing areas in the world for church membership and affiliation growth. According to the Zimbabwe Episcopal Area’s website, the Zimbabwe East Annual Conference has 112,962 members and participants, 175 members of the clergy and 431 total congregations.



PHOTO BY RACHEL MOSER

Les Coates (middle), director of First Connections at First UMC in Wichita, Kansas, and the Rev. Nathan Stanton (far right), Great Plains new church development coordinator, discuss spiritual leadership with tablemates from Peabody UMC at the Jan 10 Next Steps session at Trinity Heights UMC in Newton, Kansas.

Grow spiritually with academies lasting 5 days, 2 years

By **TODD SEIFERT**,
communications director

Sometimes amid the hustle and bustle of modern life, we forget to take time to grow spiritually and to connect with others who are following Christ.

The Five Day and Two Year academies, sponsored by Upper Room Ministries, provide opportunities for participants to do both amid the tranquility of retreat centers across the United States, including the Saint Benedict Center in Schuyler, Nebraska.

Each academy features days that start and end with prayer, presentations by trained guest faculty members, worship that includes communion, discussion groups and time for reflection.

And, of course, there is the tranquility that comes with a beautiful setting and times of silence spread throughout the day.

“I liked, in particular, that Five Day Academy is in a silent environment,” said Fred Wilson, a member of the laity at First UMC in Omaha, Nebraska. “You have no access to TV or to radio, which I found very refreshing.”

Wilson attended the academy in 2013 but had to leave prior to the completion because of a speaking

engagement. The peaceful nature of the three days he did spend at the academy on the grounds of the Saint Benedict Center moved him. As Wilson drove back into Omaha, he found the lights and sounds of the city to be jarring.

“You have a wonderful opportunity to find yourself,” Wilson said. “You have a wonderful opportunity to experience nature, which we don’t take to do on a regular basis.”

He returned in 2014 so he could have the full five-day experience. The choice to attend more than once is far from unique, said the Rev. Carol Roettmer Brewer, chair of the Academy Council. She has served as a retreat leader in the past. Her previous posts included associate director of clergy excellence, as well as director of connectational ministry and assistant to the bishop, in the former Nebraska Conference.

Roettmer Brewer explained that each day is scheduled to ensure participants have time for inspired learning and internal reflection. Each day begins with prayer, followed by a presentation by one of two guest instructors. For the April 12-17 session, the presenters are to be the Rev. Grace Imathi — a United Methodist pastor who has served in Kenya, Washington,

Ohio, Tennessee and Wisconsin speaking about “My Story in God’s Story” — and Dr. Wendy Wright, who teaches graduate-level ministerial programs and specializes in the history of spirituality and spiritual direction in the Catholic devotional tradition. Wright will speak on the topic “What is there about Mary?”

After the first presentation, the group enters into an hour of silence for prayer and reflection on the lesson. They then gather for about 30 minutes of discussion. After lunch, the second presenter shares his or her lesson, followed again by the time of silence and then discussion.

Worship each day includes communion, and then the participants break into groups of six to seven people in what are known as talking circles or covenant groups.

“It is not talking shop,” Roettmer Brewer said of the talking circles. “It’s not about trying to fix somebody. It’s really for sharing your experiences with others.”

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PHOTO BY JAMIE STECKELBERG/JAMESANN PHOTOGRAPHY
Attendees worship together as part of the daily routine at the Five Day Academy located at the Saint Benedict Center in Schuyler, Nebraska.



Church rebounds after tornado with more community outreach

By **TODD SEIFERT**,
communications director

The evening of Feb. 28, 2012, started off like any other Tuesday night in Harveyville, Kansas.

The small community about 35 miles southwest of Topeka was enduring an evening of rain, and a Bible study was taking place at the home of a Harveyville United Methodist Church member. But the storm that night would turn out to be far more than a simple rain shower.

According to a story in the *Wichita Eagle* published days after the storm, a thunderstorm over the area appeared to be weakening. But just as it entered Harveyville — too late to alert anyone — radar indicated rotation. It turned out to be an EF-2 tornado, with maximum winds of about 130 mph.

As tornados go, it wasn't very large — just about 150 yards wide — but was on the ground for about five miles. It wiped out about 40 percent of the town of about 250 people. It killed one person and injured about a dozen.

The church at 371 Wabaunsee St. was blown away.

"One of the women at our study left, and when she got home she called to tell us that her trees had been blown down,"

the Rev. Dennis Irwin, pastor of the church, said.

He and his wife got into their truck and headed toward the church. They started surveying the damage to the homes around the church building.

"My wife looked around," Irwin recalled, "and said, 'Where's the church?'"

All that was left above ground was a pile of lumber atop the concrete slab, under which was the basement. Three years later, the visions of that night and the days that came immediately afterward remain vivid.

The lone fatality was related to a Harveyville UMC congregant.

It became clearer in the daylight that the town would never be the same. Amid the destruction, some things sat inexplicably unscathed. The church computer was left in working order. Prayer shawls wrapped in plastic were in fine shape.

With widespread damage, there would be plenty of people in need — even though the church building now was a pile of debris. A food pantry in the church's basement remained intact thanks to that concrete slab.

Dick Orton, who chaired the building committee to reconstruct

the church, said once the debris was cleared away, the church had to decide whether to move to a new location or rebuild in the same location.

"We had a really good building committee," Orton said. "They worked their butts off, and we didn't have a lot of bickering."

The community came together to help. The local Church of Christ allowed for joint worship services. In the early days after the tornado, the Church of Christ helped ensure the food pantry kept operating. Charles Kuntz, owner of Harveyville Seed Company, brought his forklift to move the food from the destroyed church's basement to the Church of Christ's annex.

The rebuilt church opened in September 2013 with a renewed focus, and with positive results.

Harveyville didn't have a youth group prior to the tornado. Now it has a dedicated group of seven to eight kids. And the food pantry that had been an important supplement for some families now has a more organized work space. When the church was rebuilt, the pantry — with two freezers and two refrigerators, along with lots of shelving.

Linda Orton, who works with the food pantry ministry, said the number



of families served each week now is about half of what it was prior to the tornado, but not because of a lack of need.

“So many houses were destroyed that people just moved away,” she said.

Linda Orton said during the reconstruction, the church met in a local public school. One classroom provided space for the food pantry, meetings and Sunday school classes. Another provided worship space.

All the while, the building committee worked to set up the new facility so the church could fulfill its mission.

“Once we got the steeple up, the new environment we had made everyone happy,” Dick Orton said. “We had a lot of tradition, but the new building opened us up to get some new people and do what we needed to do.”

One of the things the church needed to do was involve the community more than it had in the past.

“In a way, the tornado revitalized us,” said Orton. “Now we have a planning group that plans activities. We try to do two to three things a month that brings our neighbors in.”

Sometimes, those events include games or community dinners. One such dinner recently included a commemoration on the three-year anniversary of the night the tornado hit.

Approximately 90 people — or roughly 40 percent of the town’s remaining residents — showed up for a time of food, fellowship and recollection.

Now, people in Harveyville realize how important the Harveyville UMC is in their community.

“We’ve succeeded at things that we’d tried before,” Irwin said. “Losing the church building, it got the people’s attention.”



PHOTO PROVIDED BY SAINT BENEDICT CENTER

The Saint Benedict Center in Schuyler, Nebraska, offers a tranquil environment that participants in Five Day Academy find beneficial.

GROW continued from page 11

An evening prayer time is then followed by more silence until the next morning.

While the structure, high level of learning and silence may not be for everyone, Roettmer Brewer said she believes more people would appreciate and benefit from such an experience if they were to give it a try. That’s particularly true for young people.

“First, it’s about wanting to share the experience,” she said. “In my own journey, I think it would have been more helpful if I’d caught on earlier to more spiritual formation. With a greater variety of people, it certainly is a richer experience. You hear from people with more perspectives.”

The program is celebrating its 25th year, a milestone that shows this kind of intense training and reflection is still in demand, Roettmer Brewer said.

This year, Roettmer Brewer said she started participating in an even more time-intensive program, the Two Year Academy. As a program also affiliated with Upper Room Ministries, she chose to take part not in Nebraska, but in San Antonio, Texas.

“I’m enjoying doing this with a different group of people in another part of the country,” she said.

The Two Year Academy provides opportunities for participants to get together eight times over two years for five days each session. In between, participants have 32 books to read and reflect upon. Two of the Two Year Academy programs are accepting applications — one in Gallant, Alabama that runs Aug. 3, 2015 to May 13, 2017, and another in Schuyler, Nebraska, from Aug. 9, 2016 to April 16, 2018.

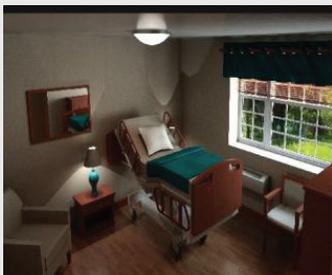
“I’m learning things that I’ve never even thought of before,” Roettmer Brewer said. One example she provided is a lesson on the Greek Orthodox Church and its approach to prayer.

The cost for a Two Year Academy is about \$6,000, plus books. So the Academy Council is studying ways to provide scholarships to make the financial commitment less of a burden for people who are considering such a commitment.

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Death notices

Dixie Alsobrooks, 105, widow of a clergy member, died December 18, 2014. She was preceded in death by her husband, the Rev. G.R. Alsobrooks. Survivors include daughter, Bessie Faye Fedlam. Memorial contributions may be made to Tennessee Ridge UMC, 131 Church Street, Tennessee Ridge, TN 37178; Bethesda Community Mission, 405 W Front St., Erin, TN 37061; or Urban Ministry.

The Rev. Thomas Alvin Bandy, 89, a retired clergy member died Dec. 23, 2014. Survivors include his wife, Jane Bandy and children, Philip Bandy, Bruce Bandy, Brad Bandy and Kirk Bandy. Memorial contributions may be made to Colby UMC, in care of Baalman Mortuary, PO Box 391, Colby, KS 67701.

Erlene Marcella Dillon, 94, widow of a clergy member, died Dec. 25, 2014. She was preceded in death by her husband, the Rev. Vernon Dillon and daughter, Barbara Jean Ridenour. Survivors include children, Gregory Lynn Dillon and Patricia "Trish" Moore.

The Rev. Dr. Warren John August Hartman, 92, a retired clergy member, died March 14, 2015. He was preceded in death by his wife, Mary Jane Hartman. Survivors include daughter, Amy Stone. Memorial contributions may be made to the Memorial Fund at Kirby Pines, 3535 Kirby Road Memphis, TN 38115; the Eldercare at Germantown UMC, 2331 South Germantown Rd. Germantown, TN 38138; or to the Robert I. Moore Class at Brentwood UMC, 309 Franklin Road Brentwood, Tennessee 37027.

The Rev. Beth Hodgson, 77, and Willis Hodgson, 78, a retired clergy member and spouse, died Feb. 22, 2015. Survivors include children, Jada Hodgson and Wayne Hodgson. Memorial contributions may be made to Plum Creek UMC, 31025 W. 403rd St., Parker, KS 66072.

Lorena Wygle Hunt, 92, a retired clergy member died Jan. 22, 2015. She was preceded in death by her husband, Robert Gordon Hunt. Survivors include sons, Robert Allen Hunt and Dr. Randall Hunt. Memorial contributions may be made to Grace UMC, 2 Neosho St., Emporia, KS 66801.

The Rev. James Mote, 95, a retired clergy member, died Feb. 9, 2015. He was preceded in death by his wife, Dorothy Mote. Survivors include sister, Lura Stoakes and sister-in-law, Maxine Aspegren. Memorial contributions may be made to Wilcox UMC, 4009 6th Ave. Ste. 13, Kearney, NE 68847.

The Rev. Raymond E. Nuetzman, 92, a retired clergy member died Dec. 30, 2014. Survivors include his wife, JoAnn Nuetzman; and daughters, Deborah Rae Soneson and Suzanne Jo Mayo. Memorial contributions may be made to the donor's choice.

The Rev. Lynda Parson, 65, a clergy member died Dec. 31, 2014. Survivors include children, Erin Miller and Ryan Parsons and mother, Betty Parson. Memorial contributions may be made to the Cancer Treatment Centers of America Cancer Fighters, 1138 Basswood Rd., Schaumburg, IL 60173; or to Heifer International, PO Box 8058, Little Rock, AR 72203.

Clara Pauline Phillips, 85, widow of a clergy member, died Dec. 12, 2014. She was preceded in death by her husband the Rev. Grover C. Phillips, Jr.

Isabelle Ricker, 93, a widow of a clergy member died Feb. 28, 2015. She was preceded in death by her husband the Rev. Richard Ricker. Survivors include children, Karen Ricker and Richard Ricker. Memorial contributions may be made to Nebraska Brass, 315 S. 9th St., Suite 110, Lincoln, NE 68508.

Leona May Ricord Rogers, 82, a widow of a clergy member died Dec. 16, 2014. She was preceded in death by her husband the Rev. Wiley Rogers. Survivors include children, Ross Allen Rogers, David Michael Rogers, Janine Rogers Pleasant and Christina Rogers. Memorial contributions may be made to Live Care of Gray, 791 Old Gray Station Rd., Gray, TN 37615.

Alvina Shaw, 89, widow of a clergy member died Feb. 8, 2015. She was preceded in death by her husband the Rev. Elmer Shaw. Survivors include children, Howard Shaw and Ramona Shaw. Memorial contributions may be made to Aldersgate UMW, 8320 South St., Lincoln, NE 68506.

Blanche Irene Simmer, 92, widow of a clergy member, died Dec. 28, 2014. She was preceded in death by her husband the Rev. William C. Simmer. Survivors include children, Judith Simmer-Brown, Steve Simmer, W. Scott Simmer, David Simmer and Mark Simmer.

The Rev. Kurt A. Stecker, 60, a clergy member died Feb. 10, 2015. Survivors include his wife, Debbie Stecker and children, Lucas Stecker and Rachel Couch. Memorial contributions may be made to the Kurt A. Stecker Memorial Fund, Wells Fargo Bank.

The Rev. Nelson Lavert "Fuzzy" Thompson, 70, a retired clergy member died Jan. 11, 2015. Survivors include wife, Cheryl Thompson. Memorial contributions may be made to St. Mark Child and Family Development Center, 2008 East 12 St., Kansas City, MO 64127; or Friends of Yates, 1418 Garfield Ave., Kansas City, KS 66104.

The Rev. M. Max Wright, 94, a retired clergy member died Jan. 25, 2015. Survivors include children, Dr. Kendall M. Wright, Dr. Keith A. Wright and Kathleen M. Brittenham. Memorial contributions may be made to Aldersgate Village, 7220 SW Asbury Dr. Topeka, KS 66614; Holiday Resort, 2700 W. 30th, Emporia, KS 66801; or Crestview UMC, 2245 SW Eveningside Dr., Topeka, KS 66603.



Though many, **One.**

2015 Annual Conference
June 10-13 • Wichita, KS • Century II

 Great Plains UNITED METHODISTS

Though Many, One at annual conference session

Witness another piece of history for the young Great Plains Conference when the annual conference session convenes June 10-13 in the Century II Convention Center in Wichita, Kansas.

With the General Conference and South Central Jurisdictional Conference coming up in 2016, this June's event will mark the first time the Great Plains — which started in January 2014 as the former Kansas East, Kansas West and Nebraska conferences joined — will send delegates to these events.

“One of the things that is unique about this year is that it will be the first time we elect delegates to those

two conferences,” said the Rev. Nancy Lambert, director of clergy excellence and assistant to the bishop. “And the number of delegates was determined before we became a conference so we will have a larger delegation in 2016 than is likely in future years.”

That means this year, the Great Plains will elect six delegates each to the General and Jurisdictional conferences. Three alternates also will be chosen for the jurisdictional conference, which will elect new bishops in July 2016. The number of delegates is determined by the number of clergy members of the annual conference and the number of

members of local churches in the annual conference.

During the session in June, petitions and resolutions also will be considered, with resolutions serving to ask the Great Plains Conference to take a stand on an issue or take a particular action. Petitions, if adopted during the session, will be submitted by the conference secretary for consideration during the 2016 General Conference. The General Conference, conducted every four years, considers changes to the Book of Discipline, the governing document of the church.

“General Conference is the body that determines the official policies and polity and processes for all we do as United Methodist churches,” Lambert said.

Guest speakers this year for the Great Plains Annual Conference include Bishop

Bruce Ough of the Dakotas-Minnesota Area of the United Methodist Church. He will be the guest preacher for the memorial and ordination worship services. Ough is the chair of the 59-member Connectional Table, which coordinates The United Methodist Church's missions and ministry resources. Stephanie Hixon also will speak. She is director of JustPeace Center for Meditation and Conflict Transformation, a United Methodist center that seeks to prepare leaders and faith communities to engage conflict constructively while striving for justice, reconciliation and restoration of community. She is the co-author of “The Journey: Forgiveness, Restorative Justice and Reconciliation.”

The annual conference session will be broadcasted live at greatplainsumc.org/livestream.

Connect online
www.greatplainsumc.org



You can find more information about the 2015 Great Plains Annual Conference Session, including schedule, at greatplainsumc.org/annualconference.

A new leg of the journey begins

Please allow me to make an introduction. I'm Todd Seifert, the new communications director for the Great Plains Conference. And I'm not sure I can convey just how excited I am to be back in the Midwest and to be part of this conference.

In just a little more than a month, as of this writing, I've seen our communications team in Lincoln, Nebraska, and Wichita, Kansas, do some fairly incredible things to help get the word out about the happenings of our conference and to provide resources to local churches. We livestream events on our website — www.greatplainsumc.org. We update pages on the website. We write stories that share some best practices from our local churches. We design marketing materials. We talk via phone with churches that have questions about showing videos during events or about ways to use audio and visual equipment to spice up worship services.

And that's just a partial list of what happened on one recent day in the life of our department since I arrived here in early February. Did I mention how excited I am to be part of the team and in working with you to further the ministries of The United Methodist Church?

Just so you know a little more about me: I grew up in Leavenworth, Kansas. We lived in town, but many of my family members lived on farms, so I've painted fences, herded and milked cattle, bailed hay, constructed decks and made repairs to barns.



in, The Vine.

As a result, Amy and I have spent many nights and weekends in basketball gyms, at baseball fields and in concert halls and church sanctuaries of all sizes. And we've loved every minute of it.

But a new leg of our life journey begins. I appreciate all of the welcome emails and phone calls over the past month. I look forward to working with you to make disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Blessings to you all,

Todd Seifert

GPconnect, news and information for Great Plains United Methodist.



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