

GPconnect

Connecting United Methodists across the Great Plains

Spring 2016



In this edition of GPconnect:

***Orders and Fellowship 2016 features LEaD talks
Youth come together to live faith at The OneEvent
Mission series: Zimbabwe and LPI***



Todd Seifert

Editor

Rachel Moser

Communications coordinator

David Burke

Communications coordinator

Eugenio Hernandez

Media producer

RoxAnn Delisi

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

3333 Landmark Circle

Lincoln, NE 68504

email: info@greatplainsumc.org

fax: 402-464-6203

Circulation

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

Cover photo

Snippets from the 2016 Orders and Fellowship meeting showcase some of the ways the meeting was structured differently this year. You can read more about Orders and Fellowship on pages 12-15.

Serving the least of these: at-risk children

For those of us who take the Bible seriously (and I hope we all do) the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31-46 is haunting. How do we fulfill Christ's commandment to serve the least of these by feeding, clothing and caring for them?

In particular, I am very concerned about the numbers of at-risk children in our society today. There are increasing numbers of children in our child welfare system. Increasing numbers of young people are victims of human trafficking. At the same time, our state budgets in Nebraska and Kansas are being squeezed and funding for child welfare programs is decreasing.

EmberHope's Youthville division is currently helping a 17-year-old girl who suffers from seizures. The seizures come from her self-harming behaviors, which were triggered by severe sexual abuse. The abuser was her father. The seizures sometimes last for up to three days. She needs a safe and secure environment, caring adults who treat her with love and respect, and the kind of therapy that can only be provided by trained professionals.

Other children and young adults were sold into prostitution by family members. Many groups, including United Methodist Women, are working hard to end human trafficking. But one key question is how to care for the young people (most of them girls) who were forced into sexual slavery. More attention needs to be paid to this area.

And then there are the children who get removed from their homes because of family dysfunction that puts them in danger. The need for more foster homes in Kansas and Nebraska is great.

I am very proud that the United Methodist Church has Epworth Village in York, Nebraska, and EmberHope in Newton, Wichita and Dodge City, Kansas, to care for the least of these. Both agencies receive funds from our Mission Agency Support budget (the one percent over and above our mission shares) and many of us give money directly to them. Other United Methodists have volunteered to be foster-care families, which is a very important ministry.

I am not able to care for the least of these directly, but my support of our mission agencies extends my reach and helps me be obedient to God's commandment to care for them.



Bishop Scott J. Jones

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



Bishop Scott J. Jones,

Resident Bishop

Great Plains United Methodist Conference

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

From your lay leader **It's all so simple, really**

As conference lay leader, one of my favorite tasks is visiting local churches throughout the Great Plains, and experiencing the warmth, welcome and belonging offered to my family and I as we worship in new places. It's always inviting, personal and relational. Throughout our denomination, this is known as our "connection" as United Methodists. This amazing connection enriches our mission to make disciples and transform the world. At the very heart, its beauty is the simplicity — small acts of love and kindness towards one another as Christ has called us.

As I prepare my heart and mind for our upcoming General Conference, I do so, reminded of the Great Plains hospitality — this wonderful attribute we share and one reason I'm so proud to be from the Great Plains.

In my spiritual preparation, I found myself returning to one of my favorite books, "The Long Walk to Freedom," an autobiography by the late Nelson Mandela, former president of South Africa and a Nobel Peace Prize recipient. I spent several years living in post-apartheid South Africa and my experiences there were formative to my faith development and my work today in advocacy. Long before his 27 years of imprisonment and his inspiring legacy of reconciliation, Mandela's early formal education took place in a Methodist school run by missionaries. I'm always struck by this specific connection to our Wesleyan heritage as well as to similarities in my own family history as Native Americans. Connections, indeed!

So I'll be on the lookout at General Conference for similar connections and I'm already looking forward to sharing those with you when we gather in June at the annual conference session. Even through our differences — and yes, I'm well aware we have many of those — I know we are ultimately strengthened by our connections with one another. Our connection in Jesus Christ. I invite you to be in prayer over this in the coming days. For now, I leave you with my favorite quote from Mandela's autobiography and I hope you'll spend time pondering it as well.



Courtney Fowler

"I always knew that deep down in every human heart, there is mercy and generosity. No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite." — Nelson Mandela, *The Long Walk to Freedom*

Courtney

Courtney Fowler
Conference Lay Leader

[facebook.com/greatplainslaity](https://www.facebook.com/greatplainslaity)
[@c24fowler](https://twitter.com/c24fowler)

P.S. Please continue to support our three mission relationship campaigns — every gift helps!

Conference events are posted
at greatplainsumc.org/events

April 15-16

Spring Training, Wichita, Kansas

April 18

SCJ Disaster Response/conference VIM coordinators meeting, Wichita, Kansas

April 22-23

Spring Training, Lincoln, Nebraska

April 23

Work Weekend, Camp Norwesca

April 23

Work Weekend, Camp Fontanelle

April 25-26

Ready to Retire Seminar, Salina, Kansas

May 10-20

2016 General Conference, Portland, Oregon

May 14

Work Weekend, Camp Fontanelle

May 22

Peace with Justice Sunday

May 24-27

Summer internship opening retreat, Salina, Kansas



Annual Conference Session 2016

June 1-4, Topeka, Kansas

greatplainsumc.org/annualconference

June 6-10

Licensing School, Aurora, Nebraska

June 11

Spring into Summer, Camp Norwesca

June 18

Bishop's Bicycle Challenge, Wichita, Kansas

June 24-25

Candidcy Summit, Lincoln, Nebraska

June 25-29

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

July 13-16

South Central Jurisdictional Conference, Wichita, Kansas

July 21-22

Young Preachers Festival, Leawood, Kansas

Conference events

YOUTH ON FIRE FOR CHRIST

By **RACHEL MOSER**,
communications coordinator

More than 1,200 young people from throughout the conference came together Jan. 30-31 for *the* youth event of the year, The OneEvent.

The 2016 OneEvent, Pyromaniac, was — for the second year in a row — hosted at the Heartland Event Center in Grand Island, Nebraska. The OneEvent featured seminars, musical comedy, worship and a concert.

“This is the one time of the year that Great Plains youth in grades six through 12 can come together and worship together,” said Shane Hinderliter, Great Plains Conference youth ministry coordinator. “I’ve seen a lot of excitement.”

The youth who attended came from all across Kansas and Nebraska, with each of the 17 districts being represented. Out of the registered

churches, those who came the farthest include the Kansas churches of Hugoton, Frontenac and Thayer UMCs. Youth from those churches traveled about six hours to join in worship, fellowship, mission and just hang out with youth they wouldn’t get the chance to meet otherwise.

On Saturday, Jan. 30, before the first general session kicked off, youth were greeted with vendors, games and activities. Campus ministries and camps were some of the most popular booths. Eian Lewis, a freshman from Shawnee Heights UMC in Topeka, Kansas, said his favorite part of The OneEvent was the college booths. Freddy Ford, also from Shawnee Heights UMC, said his favorite part was the environment in general.

“It’s a good way to feel comfortable and have no stress in a Christian atmosphere,” Ford said.

The Rev. Nicole Conard, Great Plains Conference coordinator of young leadership, said the event gives high school students a chance to think about college and how to continue to have faith opportunities when they leave home.

“It’s also a chance to connect with the youth directors as they’ve invested in the lives of the youth,” Conard said. “Then, when they send

them off on graduation, they have a chance to connect them with a United Methodist-based community.”

Youth were also came together during worship, general sessions and broke out into five different seminars throughout the weekend.

Julia Strnad, a youth leader from Corbin UMC in Kansas, came with another leader and 11 youth. “I didn’t know what to expect – this is my first time,” said Strnad. “This (youth leader seminar) has been very helpful, and the worship was great!”

In addition to the youth leader seminar, there were five other seminars for the youth to hear a specific message.

Emma Malzacher, Lexis Grinle and McKinley Brineger from First UMC in Kearney, Nebraska, said their favorite part of The OneEvent was Dave and Brian (entertainers), especially the “Hot Pocket” song, or the inflatable activity called “the Meltdown.”

Amanda Drury, PhD, assistant professor of practical theology at Indiana Wesleyan University, led the Saturday afternoon session with talks on how God doesn’t give tough love. He doesn’t give just love. He gives crazy, unnecessary love. Saturday night, Drury shared that there are two types of people: those who throw bricks and those who catch the bricks to build a wall to protect themselves. She challenged the youth to be a third kind of person – one who uses bricks thrown at them to build a path back to the brick thrower.



PHOTO BY RACHEL MOSER



PHOTO BY RACHEL MOSER

The Rev. Hollie Tapley, Great Plains Conference disaster response coordinator, along with the Rev. Brian Diggs, director at UMCOR West Office and Depot in Salt Lake City, Utah, take a moment to celebrate the 500 health kits assembled by youth at The OneEvent. You can read more at greatplainsumc.org/theoneevent.

Youth pose with fun props for a photo booth shot at the Great Plains camps booth on the OPPOSITE PAGE. BELOW, Ground Zero Master's Commission got the youth up and moving with some fast-pace music. During The OneEvent, youth were able to put their own mark on the word "pyromanic" which also happened to be the theme of The OneEvent. At the very BOTTOM, Amanda Drury, PhD., leads the youth in a moment of prayer and reflection.



PHOTO BY RACHEL MOSER

"Work on forgiveness and forgive people as you feel safe and comfortable with," Drury said.

On Saturday and Sunday, the youth enjoyed music by Zealand Worship who led worship, musical comedy by Dave and Brian, and on Saturday night they celebrated with a concert by The City Harmonic.

The Rev. Lynn Lamberty, from Highland Park UMC in Topeka, Kansas, came with 11 youth and a youth leader.

"This is a good place (for the youth) to be with other Christians and others of the faith," said Lamberty.

Read more about The OneEvent and photos and video at greatplainsumc.org/theoneevent.



PHOTOS BY EVAN REEDER



What to expect from General Conference 2016

More than 800 delegates from around the world will gather May 10-20 in Portland, Oregon, to conduct the business of the United Methodist Church during General Conference. And while issues surrounding human sexuality are expected to capture headlines nationwide and, perhaps, globally, this once-every-four-years meeting has many more points of interest.

This is a brief look at some of the issues explored during a pre-General Conference briefing.



Human Sexuality

Perhaps the most anticipated session during the briefing came from a panel comprised of the Rev. Dr. Bill Arnold, a North Kentucky Conference delegate and professor at Asbury Theological Seminary; Dr. Dorothee Benz, a New York Conference delegate and national representative of Methodists in New Directions; the Rev. Kennetha Bigham-Tsai, a member of the Connectional Table and a district superintendent in the Lansing, Michigan, area; and Stanislas

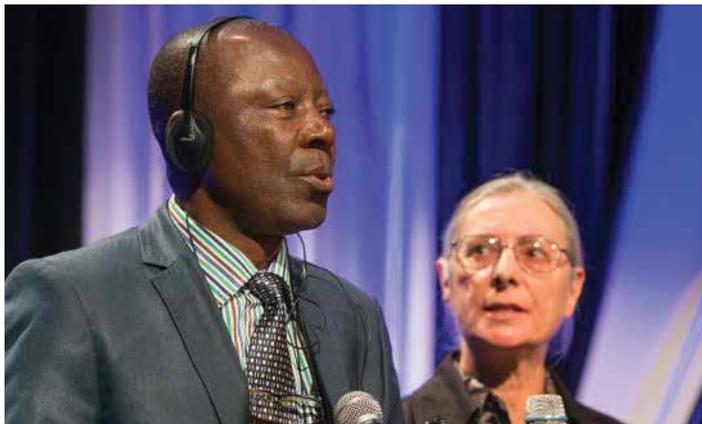


PHOTO BY MIKE DUBOSE, UMNS

Stanislas Kassongo (left) takes part in a panel discussion during the pre-General Conference briefing. Kassongo is a delegate to General Conference from the Central Congo Episcopal Area. Isabelle Berger (right) is a French interpreter from the Board of Global Ministries.

Kassongo, a delegate from the Central Congo Episcopal Area and a member of the Commission on General Conference.

Arnold said he respects all people but that he tends to take a stance against ordination of homosexuals and the practice in general. He said he believes there is room in a worldwide denomination to agree to disagree on the issue.

Benz countered by saying the debate is about “whether and how The United Methodist Church will continue to discriminate.”

Since 1972, The Book of Discipline has proclaimed that all people are of sacred worth but the practice of homosexuality is “incompatible with Christian teaching.” The denomination bans the performance of same-sex unions and “self-avowed practicing” gay clergy.

Kassongo’s statement, through an interpreter for English, provided an explanation of why delegates from many African nations are either not interested in the mostly U.S.-based debate or shy away from discussion.

“In my tradition, the subject of sexuality is taboo,” he said.

Proposed changes for bishops, clergy

Bishops would no longer be elected for life, ordination of United Methodist elders and deacons would be faster, and the first step would be taken to allow doing away with guaranteed appointment under legislation being proposed to the 2016 General Conference.

However, term limits and guaranteed appointment would require changes to the denomination’s constitution.

Lonnie Brooks, chair of the legislative committee of the Association of Annual Conference Lay leaders, gave the highlights of the association’s 15 pieces of legislation. The lay leaders proposed seven points of reform for bishops, including term limits. A bishop would be elected for eight years and could run again for another eight-year term.

The legislation on guaranteed appointment would remove the constitutional barrier identified by the Judicial Council after the 2012 General Conference approved legislation that would have allowed bishops to give elders less than full-time appointment and added steps for discontinuing elders and associate members from receiving an appointment.

Church Budget

Moses Kumar, the top executive of the General Council on Finance and Administration, reported that GCFA’s board and the Connectional Table are proposing a budget of \$611.4 million for general church funds in 2017-2020. That’s about a 1.4 percent increase above the \$603.1 million general church budget approved at the 2012 General Conference. With projected inflation, that budget actually represents a 7.2 percent spending decrease in real dollars, he said.

The finance agency’s board also is proposing that for the first time United Methodist churches in Africa, Asia and Europe would have a set formula to support the denomination’s global ministries.

A U.S. central conference

One of the most frequent complaints about General Conference is that delegates spend much of the 10-day global meeting on issues that focus on the United States.

Participants at the briefing heard about two plans to address this concern by creating a central conference or similar body to encompass the entire United States. Currently, the denomination has seven central conferences in Africa, Europe and the Philippines. Each has the authority under the denomination's constitution to make "such changes and adaptations" to the Book of Discipline as missional needs and differing legal contexts require.

Members of the Central Texas and North Texas conferences are bringing legislation to create a U.S. Central Conference that would meet in conjunction with General Conference. A task force appointed by the Northeastern Jurisdiction is bringing "A Global Connection Plan," that is more complicated but also, according to its proponents, more comprehensive.

The plan would rename General Conference as the Global Connectional Conference, restrict its work to church matters that are global in nature and add continent-wide bodies called connections. The plan also would replace U.S. jurisdictions and central conferences with bodies called regions.

Restructuring proposals

One proposal is "Plan UMC Revised." The Rev. Clayton Oliphant explained that this plan removes provisions ruled unconstitutional by the Judicial Council after the 2012



PHOTO PHOTO BY MIKE DUBOSE, UMNS

Bishop Grant Hagiya discusses changes proposed by the Ministry Student Commission during at the pre-General Conference briefing.

General Conference adopted "Plan UMC," a compromise proposal. Many involved in the restructuring work were frustrated by the top court's last-minute ruling, he said.

Under Plan UMC Revised, the current Commission on Religion and Race and Commission on the Status and Role of Women would be merged into a committee on inclusiveness. The plans also folds the United Methodist Commission on Archives and History into the denomination's finance agency. Erin Hawkins, top executive for Religion and Race, expressed concern that the vital programs of her agency would be lost.

Contributors: Heather Hahn, Kathy Gilbert, Linda Bloom, Vicki Brown and Joey Butler from United Methodist News Service and Todd Seifert of the Great Plains Conference.

The 2016 South Central Jurisdictional Conference Presents:

an evening of

CELEBRATION, WORSHIP & PRAISE

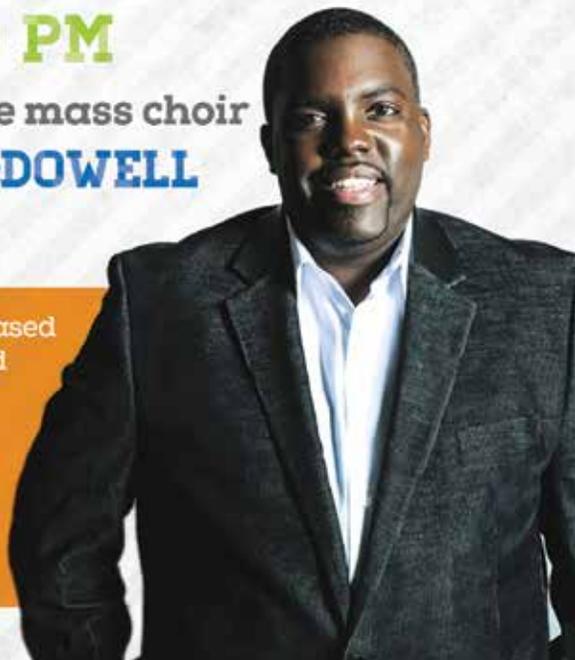
CENTURY II CONVENTION HALL

JULY 15 • 6:30 PM

It's a Gospel Celebration with an area wide mass choir
and special guest artist **WILLIAM McDOWELL**



tickets may be purchased
at wichitatix.com and
for more information
on purchasing
t-shirts & tickets
from your local
church go to
greatplainsumc.org



Pastors explore their culture of call

By DAVID BURKE, *communications coordinator*

Pastors who attended the annual Orders and Fellowship clergy meeting explored how to develop, maintain and grow a culture of call throughout the Great Plains Conference.

The two-day event, Feb. 17-18 at St. Mark's United Methodist Church in Lincoln, Nebraska, featured leadership, education and discipleship (LEaD) talks from seven pastors and one lay person from throughout Kansas and Nebraska, lively worship settings and two teaching moments and one sermon by Bishop Janice Riggle Huie of the Texas Conference.

"Our stories of call are unique, intimate, special to each of us," Bishop Huie told the approximately 650 clergy in attendance. "It's a major source of joy our whole ministry long — remembering our story."

Huie said her own call story came from her hometown in the coastal bend of Texas. She was one of the few female students in her seminary and hadn't met another woman in the ministry until Huie's final year — "and she was unemployed."

The Texas bishop asked those in the St. Mark's sanctuary to share their call stories with those seated next to them. Videos shown throughout the gathering included a variety of pastors in the Great Plains Conference telling their call stories, from those who knew they wanted to go into the ministry when they were in school to those who made it their second, third or even fourth careers.

Nurturing the next generation of clergy in the United Methodist Church, Huie said, is one of the denomination's biggest challenges. Fewer than seven percent of Methodist clergy are younger than 35, she said, compared to 15 percent in the 1980s.

"There's some soul searching to be done among us," Huie said. "The church will always need its next generation of clergy leaders."

In the second of her three addresses to the clergy, Huie said clergy leadership should develop an "Ecosystem of Excellence," organic and relational in context, rather than an organizational flow chart.

"It's a complex set of relationships ... among living resources," Huie said.

Ecology, she said, can be healthy or unhealthy, fruitful or unfruitful, sustainable or unsustainable.

Young clergy in her conference a few years ago, Huie said, were so rare that they were referred to as spotted owls — with a mascot in a giant owl costume even roaming the floor of the annual conference meeting.

Like scientists studying an ecosystem, Huie said, clergy and churches can keep young ministerial prospects

from becoming extinct by observing, questioning and experimenting.

"We have had experiments that have worked, and we have had experiments that have been abysmal failures," Huie said.

One detriment in attracting young clergy, she said, has become the debt load that they take on during their seminary training. She encouraged churches and established clergy to think of ways to alleviate the financial burden, from fundraisers to a program where pastors "paid it forward" to a new generation after already receiving financial assistance.

Orders & Fellowship began with a worship service that included a sermon by the Rev. Wendy Mohler-Seib from Fellowship at the Well in Wichita. Mohler-Seib said her call story was full of "buts" — talking herself out of a possible path to the ministry because she was a woman, too young or not raised as a United Methodist.

"Your 'buts' may be bigger, your 'buts' may be smaller," she told fellow pastors. "We come from a long line of people who could have sat on their 'buts.'"

A panel on campus ministry told what was being done at some of the 15 campuses in the Great Plains Conference.

"Campus ministry is really a ripe culture," said the Rev. Justin Jamis of the Kansas State-Wesley campus ministry program.

Mentoring was the subject of a discussion led by the Rev. Ashlee Alley, clergy recruitment and development coordinator for the conference, and the Rev. Mitch Todd, from the Mulvane United Methodist Church, near Wichita.

"We think that mentoring is an essential feature in cultivating a culture of call," Alley said.

Todd said the ideal relationship between a "mentee" and mentor is 80/20, with the majority of the learning, asking and seeking done by the initiate, and the remainder by the established pastor. In the Great Plains Conference, 299 local pastors are in the training phases of a mentorship — 175 established pastors and 124 going through ordination — with 54 clergy serving as mentors.

Bishop Scott J. Jones said that all of the more than 1,000 churches in the Great Plains Conference all have pastors, while other denominations struggle for months and sometimes years to fill pulpits.

"When we do it well, it's an incredible system," Bishop Jones said. "We need to nurture a new generation of Christian leaders. "Help us rekindle that passion and that fire."



PHOTOS BY TODD SEIFERT

At the top left, district supintendents, the Rev. Jim Akins (Hays) and Dan Flanagan (Missouri River) serve communion to attendees during the closing worship of Orders and Fellowship. At top right, the Rev. Wendy Mohler-Seib, from Fellowship at the Well in Wichita Kansas, provided the sermon duiring opening worship. At center left, Nick Smith offered both a poetry slam and “messy prayer.” At center right, Tony Hillhouse, director of AV and member of St. Mark’s praise band, provide worship music duiring a worship. At bottom, Bishop Scott J. Jones offers words of praise during communion at closing worship.

Connect online
www.greatplainsumc.org



View more information about Orders and Fellowship, including photos and videos, at greatplainsumc.org/OF2016.

O&F features LEaD Talks

By DAVID BURKE, *communications coordinator*

While corporate America has its TED Talks, or Technology, Entertainment and Design, the Great Plains Conference introduced LEaD Talks, or Leadership, Education and Discipleship, at the Orders & Fellowship clergy meeting Feb. 17-18 at St. Mark's United Methodist Church in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Seven pastors and one lay person from churches and colleges large and small in Kansas and Nebraska delivered the 10-15 minute talks to their fellow clergy, interjecting their own call stories, humor and life experiences.

PHOTOS BY TODD SEIFERT



Rev. Ashlee Alley

The Rev. Ashlee Alley, clergy recruitment and development coordinator for the conference, told of her career plans to become a physical therapist before transitioning into a ministry track while at Southwestern College in Winfield, Kansas.

"I knew all about how the heart beat," she said, "but I didn't know why my heart was beating." Alley used anatomy to illustrate the essential qualities of a pastor: Eyes (always open), hand (to be a mentor), heart (unique gifts and skills), bicep (spiritual nurturing) and smile (confirmation by the community).



Dr. Cheryl Rude

Cheryl Rude, the lone layperson to deliver a LEaD talk, spoke of her friends, husband and colleagues at Southwestern College who use their gifts and talents without being ordained nor licensed ministers.

"All of these people have an understanding of calling, and that's what they're living out," Rude said.

Rude emphasized that calling is not limited to clergy members and that everyone is called into service of some kind by God, with their various talents all being put to use.



Rev. Stephanie Ahlschwede

Rev. Stephanie Ahlschwede, pastor of South Gate UMC in Lincoln, combined sports metaphors and her love of Nancy Drew books as she went scouting in the church basement. She shared how both a dormant church league sports team and a disdain for small groups have turned into gatherings of volleyball and softball team members.

"They are not small groups," she said. "They are merely people who get together to do stuff," which propelled many of them into new and expanded roles in the church.



Rev. Craig Finnestad

Rev. Craig Finnestad of Water's Edge UMC in Omaha spoke of the benefits of mentoring, where two of his charges have had a part in growing 50 groups meeting throughout the city.

"Healthy Christians reproduce healthy Christians. Healthy small groups reproduce healthy small groups," he said. "Healthy churches reproduce healthy churches."

Among the successes Finnestad shared was the way the young adult interns had helped start small groups that grew in popularity among people in their 20s and had helped invigorate worship.



Rev. Aaron Duell

Mentoring also was the topic by the Rev. Aaron Duell of the First UMC in Columbus, Nebraska. He credits his mentor with his advancement.

"Most of our relationship was living life side by side," Duell said.

Duell talked about how having a mentor and lifelong friend provided him with the nurturing he needed to discern his call into ministry. He used a humorous clip from the movie "Nacho Libre" to craft his talk about how people can use a mentor's help to focus their calling into ministry.

Creation Care Team

works on faithful stewardship with sense of urgency

In God's hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all humankind. Job 12:10

With prayer and a sense of urgency, the Great Plains Conference has a newly formed Creation Care Team under the auspices of the Mercy and Justice Team. Lay and clergy from Nebraska and Kansas are bringing their faith, life experiences and passion to the mission of the team which is "to provide resources to congregations, to encourage actions to care for God's creation and to advocate for policies which reduce the negative effects of human activity on creation."

The opening sentence of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's document, *Understanding and Assessing Climate Change: Implications for Nebraska* reads, "Globally, we face significant economic, social, and environmental risks as we confront the challenges associated with climate change."

Dr. James Hansen, a former NASA scientist who is widely credited with being one of the first to raise concerns about human-caused global warming, is a co-author of a new report in the journal *Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics*, predicting that the world will undergo devastating sea level rise within mere decades — not centuries, as previously thought.

Faithful United Methodists from Kansas and Nebraska have been linking to their faith with action to care for God's creation for decades and the new Creation Care Team is building on those actions. Two of many examples are solar panels on the roof of the University UMC in Wichita and a 80 family composting project at First UMC in Omaha.

For more details and prayer, study and action resources go to greatplainsumc.org/creationcare and stay tuned for more information in the GPconnect email.



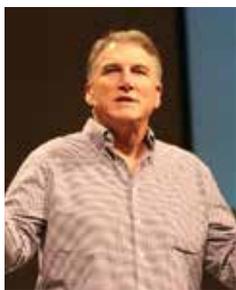
Rev. Jeff Clinger

The Rev. Jeff Clinger of First UMC in Topeka talked about his quick rise in the church and redemption after an extramarital affair nearly cost him his marriage and his ministry.

Clinger's appointment to Church of the Resurrection and praise from the congregation fueled his desire for recognition. It took nearly losing his family to help him realize the importance of returning to his calling.

"I can cling to my baptism and search for my call more than I ever did," Clinger said.

Clinger cautioned not to let arrogance prevent hearing God's ongoing call into ministry.



Rev. Shane Britt

"Super Doppler Radar," Shane Britt pastor of the Emmanuel UMC in Abilene, Kansas, said, is so advanced that it can detect the intensity of a storm.

"We need to develop that kind of sensitivity," said Britt, who recalls being ignored by his pastor after he spoke at a youth Sunday and wanted to learn more about going into the ministry. Decades later, after careers in insurance and farming, he finally followed through on his call to be a pastor.

"Always have your Super Doppler Radar on," Britt added



Rev. Amy Lippoldt

The Rev. Amy Lippoldt of the Basehor UMC in Kansas, said pastors and improvisational comedians both operate under the same philosophy of saying, "Yes, and ..." when dealing with various situations.

"We say it because we hate to say the word 'no,'" Lippoldt said. "We hate the conflict, and we hate the anxiety and we hate the miscommunication."

Unlike improv, Lippoldt said, decisions made about ministry have long-lasting effects, and God sometimes helps people discern a call of "no."

LPI

‘This place is about changing lives’

By **DAVID BURKE**, *communications coordinator*

A chapel filled beyond capacity with high-schoolers greeted Raquel Resendiz like she was a rock star when she returned to the Lydia Patterson Institute in late January in El Paso, Texas.

Resendiz, who graduated from the United Methodist Church-funded private academy last spring and is a freshman at Southwestern College in Winfield, Kansas, came back to the school with a delegation of about a dozen clergy and parishioners from the Great Plains Conference, led by Bishop Scott J. Jones.

She sees students who are like she was — some from the impoverished neighborhoods of El Paso, others from the even more desolate area of Juarez, Mexico, which is connected to America by a 400 yard-long bridge. Some walked into the doors of Lydia Patterson as Christians. Others had a relationship with Christ that was tentative at best. But all of whom eventually have career dreams of becoming engineers, doctors and United Methodist pastors.

“The thing I like most about this school is that we can think of it as a safe haven to get away from the problems we have at home,” Resendiz, who read the Scripture during the daily chapel service, said the night before. “I think it’s a privilege to be here because not everyone can be here.”

On the surface, it’s far from an ideal setting.

Nestled in the Segundo Barrio of El Paso, Texas — not many years ago, the second-poorest zip code in the country — Lydia Patterson has given an education, a spiritual foundation and hope to students on both sides of the border for 103 years.

“This is one of the beacons of hope for both American citizens and Mexican citizens,” said Richard Hearne, Lydia Patterson’s director of development.

Mission goals

Along with the Zimbabwe East Conference and the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference, Lydia Patterson is one of three multicultural mission partnerships for the conference that is part of a challenge to the Great Plains churches for a fundraising goal of \$100,000 each by the time

of the end of the annual conference on June 4 in Topeka.

One-third of the funding for the Lydia Patterson Institute already comes from the South Central Jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church, an eight-state region that includes the Great Plains Conference.



The drive for funds comes as Lydia Patterson is in the first stages of a four-phase, \$15 million renovation project that includes a larger athletic center that also houses the music and fine arts departments, a larger chapel and improvements to the lunchroom, kitchen, high school classrooms and library.

Work already completed has come in the seventh- and eighth-grade classrooms, where state-of-the-art smart boards illustrate the lessons, and students use computer tablets to send their homework to “the cloud” rather than traditional textbooks. It’s an advancement the El Paso public schools are far from making, Hearne said.

Lydia Patterson students have the results to back up the need. Its graduation rate is 98 percent in the past decade, and 100 percent over the past three years. Ninety-five percent of those graduates go on to post-secondary education at a variety of public and private colleges and universities, including several United Methodist-based schools in the Great Plains.

Graduates are offered scholarships through churches as well as the colleges and universities.

“It’s a win-win situation,” said Dr. Socorro de Anda, in her 21st year as president of Lydia Patterson. “The church gets resources for Hispanic ministry, the college gets to connect with the local church, and the student gets to go to college.”

Earning education

Scholarships are also how many of the Lydia Patterson students are able to attend school. But thoughts of “scholarship students” as those coasting by with a little money on the side are dashed once the institute’s students are in view. Students on a full scholarship must work for two hours a day at the school, an hour for a half-scholarship. There are also “scholarship-plus” students, who receive not only a paid education but the cost of their student visas and funding that covers the bus ride from Juarez to the Stanton Street Bridge, which goes over the Rio Grande River.

Seventy percent of the 435 students at Lydia Patterson cross the border to get to the school.

When Ernesto Morales came to Lydia Patterson three years ago for a job interview as the principal, he said he assumed that the students he passed by scraping gum off the sidewalks were in some sort of trouble.

Instead, he was told, they were scholarship students.

“They’re learning to value their education,” said Morales, a former public school teacher and administrator.

Students crossing the border are leaving Juarez, which was once called the “murder capital of the world.” Decades ago, students told of hearing



PHOTOS BY DAVID BURKE

ABOVE, students serve on lunch duty. Many students attend Lydia Patterson Institute (LPI) in El Paso, Texas, on scholarship. Those on full or half scholarship must work for two or one hours a day, respectively, at the school. **BELOW,** students walk to class and share a laugh at LPI. On **OPPOSITE PAGE,** Raquel Resendiz, a 2015 LPI graduate, visited the school with a delegation from the Great Plains Confernece. Resendiz is now a freshman at Southwestern College in Winfield, Kansas.

gunshots on the sidewalks in front of them, prompting them to just cross the street rather than get caught in the crossfire.

“I drive to work every day as if I was going to a mission field,” Morales said. “This is a safe haven.”

‘Give them the best’

The building that currently houses the Lydia Patterson Institute was built in the mid-1960s, and while the brick exterior is structurally sound, its age is showing inside, where ceilings are ready to buckle and where technology and enrollment are growing at a pace faster than can currently be handled.

Six new classrooms are part of the renovation plan, including a chemistry lab that has neither running water nor gas for Bunsen burners — experiments are done by observing video monitors. The computer system was part of the first renovation, where Hearne said technology was “laughable” three to four years ago.

“It’s not a matter of ‘It would be nice to do this,’” de Anda said. “We don’t have any choice.”

The improvements, de Anda said, would give an even greater launching pad for Lydia Patterson students to go on to careers that improve lives both in the United States and Mexico.

“We don’t just want to give them an education. We want to give them the best,” she said. “This place is all about changing lives.”

Read more about the Mission Partnership Campaigns online at greatplainsumc.org/missionpartnershipcapitalcampaigns.



Death notices

The Rev. Donald Bakely, 87, a retired clergy member, died Jan. 16, 2016. Survivors include his wife, Jeanne; children, Bethany, Paul, Peter, the Rev. Claudia Bakely (Flint Hills district superintendent) and Lois Ferguson; and daughter-in-law, Diane Howell. Memorial contributions may be made to Cross-Lines Community Outreach or Bristol Hill UMC.

The Rev. Jerry Bever, 75, a retired clergy member, died Feb. 24, 2016. He was preceded in death by his wife, Barbara Ann Bever. Survivors include children, Becky Butts, Christy Dunham and John Bever. Memorial contributions may be made to the Sycamore UMC, P O Box 113, Sycamore, KS 67363 or they may be left in care of the Dickens Family Funeral Home, 209 N. Douglas, Sedan, Kansas 67361.

Willa Borger, 92, a surviving spouse of a clergy member, died Feb. 4, 2016. She was preceded in death by her husband, the Rev. Clarence Borger. Survivors include sons, William Joseph and James Thomas. Memorial contributions may be made to the Clarence and Willa Mae Borger Scholarship Fund at Southwestern College, 100 College Ave., Winfield, KS 67156 or to The National Audubon Society at www.audubon.org.

Valda Embree, 85, a spouse of a retired clergy member, died March 22, 2016. Survivors include husband, the Rev. Robert Embree, and sons, Dr. Marlowe Embree and Dr. Rodney Embree. Memorial contributions may be made to The United Methodist Church of Le Mars' FIF Fund, 901 3rd Ave. S.E., Le Mars, IA 51031.

James Fleagle, 69, a part-time local pastor, died Dec. 8, 2015. Survivors include wife, Heather, and son, Phillip Fleagle. Memorial contributions may be mailed to Martin-Becker-Carlson Funeral Home, 414 NW Third Street Abilene, KS 67410.

The Rev. John Goering II, 80, a retired clergy member, died Feb. 19, 2016. He was preceded in death by his wife Beverly Ann Benson. Survivors include his wife, Joan; children, Anneliese Homan, Jay Goering, Kyla Gosset and Schuyler Goering; and step-daughter, Brenda Barger. Memorial contributions may be made to Eastside UMC in Care of Petersen Funeral Home, 215 N. Main, Newton, Kansas 67114.

The Rev. Donald Hines, 90, a retired clergy member, died March 20, 2016. He was preceded in death by wife, Thelma Hines, and daughter, Sandra Rekstad. Survivors include son, Gary Hines. Memorial contributions may be made to Lowman UMC, 4000 SW Drury Ln, Topeka, KS 66604.

The Rev. Dennis Matthews, 66, a retired clergy member died Jan. 6, 2016. He was preceded in death by son, Scott Matthews. Survivors include daughters, Kimberly Adams and Keri Brotherton. Memorial contributions may be made to DeSoto UMC, PO Box 400, DeSoto, KS 66018.

Fern Mead, 93, a surviving spouse of a clergy member, died March 25, 2016. She was preceded in death by her husband, the Rev. J. Russell Mead. Survivors include daughters, Linda Ryan and Jolene Bantam. Memorials contributions may be made to the donor's choice.

Cleo Noah, 96, a surviving spouse of a clergy member, died Feb. 17, 2016. She was preceded in death by her husband, Raymond Eaton Noah. Survivors include sons, Melvin Noah, Jerry Noah, Michael Noah and Richard Noah.

Leon Pejsach, a spouse a clergy member, died Feb. 21, 2016. Survivors include wife, the Rev. Jayne Duncan. Memorial contributions may be made to "Old German Baptist Church Brethren," and mailed to Terry Kellerman, 29189 NW Spruce, Garnett, Kansas 66032.

The Rev. David Rowe, 73, a retired clergy member, died Dec. 30, 2015. He is survived by his wife, Linda Irene, and five daughters. Memorial contributions may be sent in care of the family to: Julia Rowe, 6050 Carter Lane, Franklin, TN 37064-6206.

Phyllis Tudor, 91, a spouse of a retired clergy member, died Aug. 14, 2015. Survivors include her husband, the Rev. Bill Tudor; and children, Bill Tudor, Steve Tudor, Phyllis Daniels and Imozelle McVeigh. Memorial contributions may be made to the Forest Park Foundation or the church of your choice, sent in care of Greenwood-Roberts Funeral Home, PO Box 268, Overbrook, KS 66524.

The Rev. George Wattenbarger, 99, a retired clergy member, died Dec. 29, 2015. He was preceded in death by his wife, Ruth (Sheppard). Survivors include daughter, Marilyn Means. Memorials contributions may be made to Aldersgate UMC, 7901 W. 21st St. N., Wichita, KS 67205.

Julia Wilke, 83, a spouse of a clergy member, died Feb. 25, 2016. Survivors include her husband, Bishop Richard (Dick) Wilke; and children, Steve Wilke, Paul Wilke, Susan Fuquay and Sarah Wilke. Memorial contributions may be made to the Richard and Julia Wilke Institute for Discipleship at Southwestern College, 100 College Ave., Winfield, Kansas 67156-2499.



At right, Mutasa-Nyanga District Superintendent Daniel Mutidzawanda, Dambanda UMC pastor Ruth Mguta and Wichita West District Superintendent, Linda Louderback during a mission trip in 2014. Below, the Zimbabwe East Annual Conference's new head office is under construction during the month of December.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY KATHRYN WITTE

Zimbabwe and our Chabadza partnership

By TODD SEIFERT, *communications director*

Zimbabwe, a nation in the southeastern portion of the African continent, struggles in many aspects of life in the 21st century. Less than 50 years removed from independence from the United Kingdom, the Zimbabwe government is widely believed by the United States CIA to have run improper elections at least twice since 2002. And unemployment is estimated by some authorities to be as high as 70 percent in some regions.

Yet, the spirit of the people of Zimbabwe is strong. And their faith in Christ has helped sustain them through difficult times.

Zimbabwe, as with other parts of Africa, is among the fastest-growing areas of the United Methodist Church. With that growth comes a need for structure and a better means of synchronizing the efforts of churches and the leadership needed to help the local congregations succeed. And that is why the Great Plains Conference wants to raise \$100,000 for the Zimbabwe Episcopal Area. Specifically, money from the cross-cultural capital campaign would go toward the construction of the new Zimbabwe East Annual Conference's building, which is meant to serve, among other duties, as a communications hub to coordinate the many ministries taking place there.

As of February, the Zimbabwe Episcopal Area had 222,208 members served by 397 pastors. Congregations totaled 970, with 431 of those located in the Zimbabwe East Annual Conference. The growth has led to discussion of Zimbabwe receiving a second bishop after the 2016 General Conference. While that is no guarantee, it is certain that funds to build the new conference center will help with

PHOTO PROVIDED BY ZIMBABWE EAST CONFERENCE



ministerial efforts in the Zimbabwe East Annual Conference and beyond.

Parts of the Great Plains Conference have played a role in helping make disciples thousands of miles away in Zimbabwe. In 2010, the former Kansas West Conference established a "Chabadza" covenant with the Zimbabwe East Annual Conference. The Shona word roughly translates to people in relationship working alongside each other for mutual benefit. In other words, people get to know each other and then help in such a way that both parties find satisfaction and benefit from that relationship.

Chabadza is a covenant appreciated deeply by the Rev. Dr. Linda Louderback, Wichita West superintendent who helped partner churches in Kansas with churches in Zimbabwe.

"First and foremost for me is the joy and faithfulness that exudes from the very being of my Zimbabwe United Methodist friends," Louderback said.

Louderback said the exuberance shared by United Methodists from Zimbabwe helps people Christians in the Great Plains remember the joy that comes with fulfilling the worldwide church's mission: To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

"It appears that the church in Zimbabwe must be like the U.S. churches were in (church founder John) Wesley's time — a movement built around class meetings, worship, singing and praying," Louderback said.

The enthusiasm and faith in Christ shown by United Methodists in Zimbabwe ignited a passion for the people by the Rev. Mark Conard, a retired pastor who attended a concert by a group known as the Ambassadors Quartet in 1959 or 1960 when he was 12 years old.

"I was astonished by their presentation," Conard said. "I didn't know you could do that in a church!"



A big year for United Methodist Ministries

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

The Big Garden in Omaha finally has a place to call “home.” United Methodist Ministries, which operates The Big Garden, was to celebrate a ribbon-cutting and ceremonial planting of the first seeds for April 8 at its new location at 5602 Read St. in Omaha, Nebraska. Now, the ministry that aims to help people make healthy food choices finally has office space, places to store equipment and a place from which to base its educational opportunities for the public.

Oh yeah, and it finally will have a garden of its own. And it comes just in time to celebrate 50 years of service for Christ in the Omaha area.

“Our vision is, most of all, that nobody should go hungry in our city,” said Nathan Morgan, executive director of United Methodist Ministries. “Hunger is something that deeply offends those of us who are Christians.”

That vision has come into focus over the past 50 years.

Jaimee Trobough, UM Ministries director of marketing and communications, said the organization was founded in 1966, when the former Nebraska Conference tried to respond in a positive way to the race riots that rocked Omaha.

One incident involving a crowd of people on July 4 may have set the stage for a bigger confrontation Aug. 1, when a white, off-duty police officer reportedly shot and killed a 19-year-old man. According to the Omaha World-Herald, three buildings were firebombed, and 180 riot police were required to restore order. Socio-economic disparities and their related effects were largely blamed for both uprisings.

Trobough said the 1970s led to expanded programs for UM Ministries, including assistance for unwed mothers, teenagers facing crisis, a youth theater group and Together Incorporated, an agency UM Ministries co-founded with other faith communities to help coordinate the charitable response to the 1975 tornado that killed three people and caused millions of dollars in damage in Omaha alone.

UM Ministries evolved into a social justice ministry in the 1980s and began to distribute grants. Then, in 2005, when the Rev. Stephanie Ahlschwede was executive director, she sought funding from U.S. Department of Agriculture Community Food Project grants. The effort brought in \$500,000 for community gardens in the Omaha area. A formal goal was set to start 12 community gardens in a three-year period. But the results turned out even better. Eleven years later, United Methodist Ministries helps with more than 140 gardens in Nebraska, Kansas and Iowa.

Known as The Big Garden, the food-security ministry that has evolved via United Methodist Ministries now provides education and entertainment for youth in the summer months, as well as year-round skill-building opportunities in partnerships with schools and civic organizations.

The new property comes with a cost of about \$450,000 – a far lower cost than would have been needed had the structures not already been in place. So far, UM Ministries has collected about \$200,000. To help, go to The Big Garden website, biggarden.org.

GPconnect, news and information for Great Plains United Methodists.

Nonprofit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID



Great Plains United Methodist Conference
3333 Landmark Circle
Lincoln, NE 68504

800-435-6107
www.greatplainsumc.org

Dated material
Please do not delay



PHOTOS PROVIDED BY UNITED METHODIST MINISTRIES