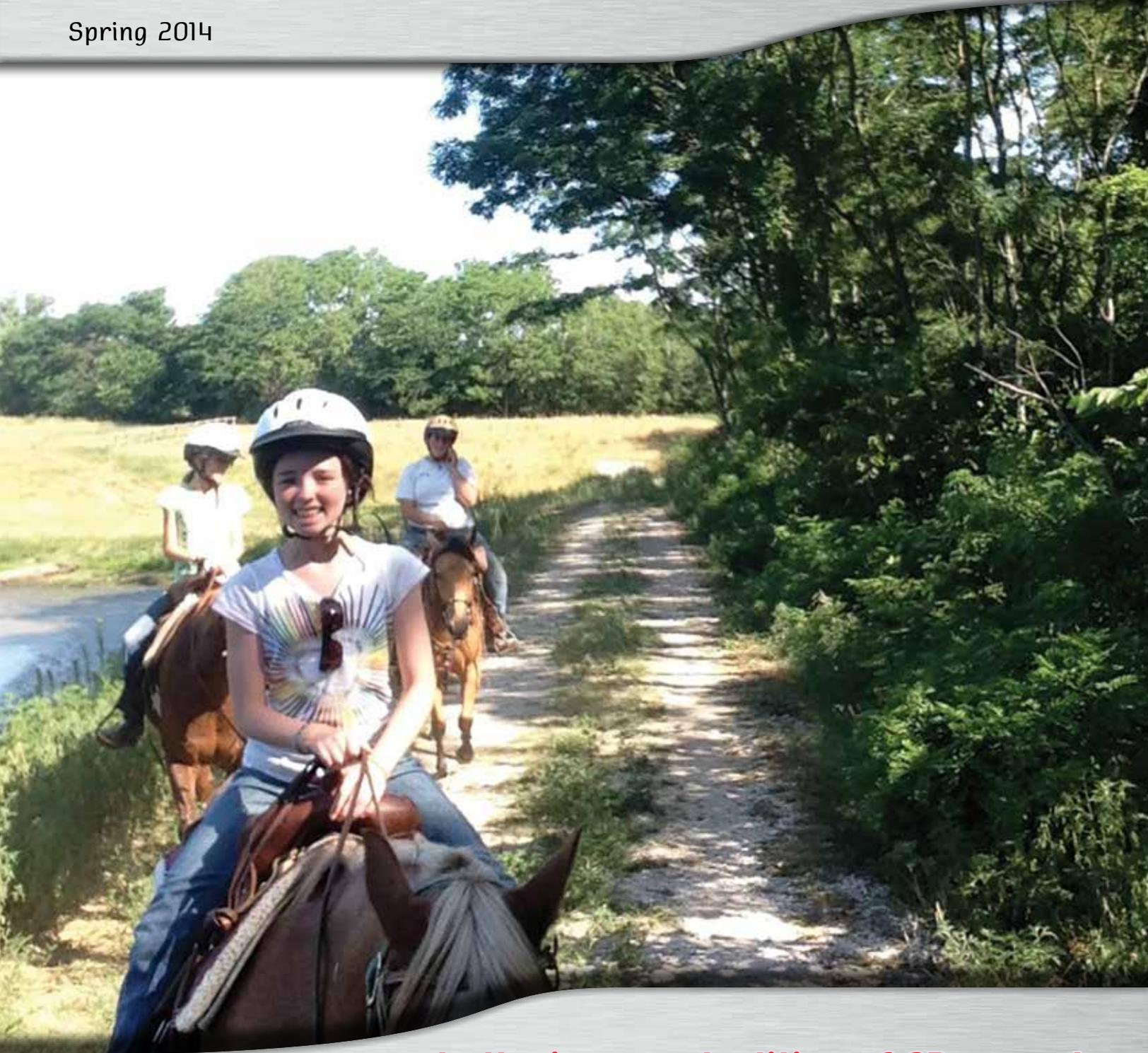


GPconnect

Connecting United Methodists across the Great Plains

Spring 2014



In the inaugural edition of GPconnect

**How you can support camps
UMMAM – serving families in need
What to expect at AC 2014**



Kathryn Witte

Editor

Rachel Moser

Communications coordinator

Cindy Kelly

Communications coordinator

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, Neb., 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: kwitte@greatplainsumc.org

fax: 402-464-6203

Circulation

Send any circulation changes to rdelisi@greatplainsumc.org. Include both old information and new changes. If you would like to stop receiving "GPconnect," please include complete address information.

Cover photo

Campers enjoy a horseback ride at Camp Chippewa in Ottawa, Kan. There is still time to sign up for camps at greatplainsumc.org/camps. See pages 10-11 for more on camps.



Bishop Scott J. Jones



Transforming the World

Part of my daily prayer time is to say, "God, help me be a part of what you are blessing."

Scripture teaches me that the God who created the world still loves the world and is working to save it. God is blessing creation in a variety of ways. God is seeking to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, heal the sick and bring non-believers into saving relationships with Christ. Even though the world is full of problems, God has not given up on us.

The amazing thing is that God has chosen to use human beings as part of the salvation process. The Holy Spirit formed us into a church on that Pentecost day 2,000 years ago, and God is continually using the church to accomplish the Lord's purposes.

What an incredible opportunity it is to be a disciple of Jesus Christ and to participate in what God is blessing. For me to worship the Lord on Sundays, to be involved in daily prayer, to participate in my small accountability group, to give my money by tithing, and to serve the poor through my actions is to feel God's grace in my life and to grow toward the goal of being a mature Christian. The means of grace feed my soul.

The United Methodist Church gives me great opportunities for making a difference. I believe that God is trying to end malaria in Africa, and we are part of that. I believe God wants us to help orphans in Nigeria, and we are part of that. I believe God is evangelizing people in Zimbabwe, and we are part of that. I believe God is strengthening the church in Haiti, and we are part of that.

The new Great Plains Conference has started well. We are aligning our resources, sharing ideas and sensing new opportunities for God to use us for God's purposes. It is different than it used to be, and we are nowhere near reaching our potential. As we learn more from each other, and as we realize how many resources (geographical, personnel, technological and financial) we have, we will dream bigger dreams and find even more fruitful ways to participate in God's saving activity in the world.

In Kansas and Nebraska, United Methodists are concerned about our public schools. Many of our congregations pray for their local schools, tutor children, offer backpack programs and do service projects for facility repairs. We are going to look for ways to give stronger support for public education, because we believe in educating all the children of all the people. A church focus on supporting our schools is only one way in which God is using our congregations to transform our part of the world.

The New Testament describes a world where there are no tears, death has been vanquished, all tongues confess Christ as Lord, and hunger and poverty have been eliminated. Every time a new person becomes a Christian, every time a baby Christian learns to tithe, every time a young Christian is sent to do hands-on mission with the poor, every time our worship ignites holy passion among the believers — our church is being used by God to transform the world.

What a privilege it is to be a United Methodist Christian in the Great Plains. What a privilege it is to be part of what God is blessing!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Scott J. Jones".

Bishop Scott J. Jones,

Resident Bishop

Great Plains United Methodist Conference

@Extreme_Center

AC lay member lunch offers opportunity to bond A message from your lay leader

Greetings, Great Plains Conference!

It's a great blessing to be able to serve as the conference lay leader for the new Great Plains Conference. As I think about the opportunities and challenges ahead, I am both humbled and excited about the future as we work together to discern God's plan for us. New beginnings, new opportunities and new friends seem like a great way to start our journey together.

Since Jan. 1, when we hit the ground running, we've been busy planning for the first Annual Conference Session. I'm looking forward to bringing together the great folks of Kansas and Nebraska. The session will take place June 11-14, in Lincoln, Neb., at the beautiful Lied Center on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus. I hope you will make plans to join us for the Laity Session and the Laity Luncheon at the Embassy Suites.

As someone who grew up in The United Methodist Church (my dad is clergy), it's important to me for my own two daughters to be part of a church that is committed to Christ, as well as to be part of the work of God's kingdom here on earth. From Sunday school to youth group, from confirmation class to vacation Bible school, from summer camp to Institute and from mission trips to study trips, they are able to see the church at its best and connect with other area youth who are doing the same thing. It's these experiences that I am grateful for as a lay person in the church and why I am committed to serving along with you in the new Great Plains Conference.

I look forward to meeting with many of you in the coming weeks and months. I will also be praying for you and our new conference for the journey ahead.

Courtney

Courtney Fowler
Conference Lay Leader



Courtney Fowler

Courtney Fowler lives in Manhattan, Kan., and attends College Avenue United Methodist Church. She is married to Mark Fowler and they have two daughters, Piper and Paige. Piper is a junior at Manhattan High School and Paige is in the sixth grade at Theodore Roosevelt Elementary. Courtney works as a media coordinator and also serves as a maternal health ambassador for Healthy Families, Healthy Planet with the Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church.

Conference events are posted at
www.greatplainsumc.org/events

Conference events

April 26-May 18

Hands on the Great Plains

May 3

Next Steps training

May 3

Early Response Training, Ogallala, Neb.

May 4

Native American Ministries Sunday

May 10

Early Response Training, Grand Island, Neb.

May 10

VIM team leader training, Grand Island, Neb.

May 15

Discover Ministry, Emporia, Kan.

May 12-13

Great Preaching for the Great Plains, Lincoln, Neb.

May 14-16

Global Partnership Summit, Leawood, Kan.

May 16-17

Aldersgate Covenant, Leawood, Kan.

May 24

UMMen Cowboy Trail Bike Ride/
Walk, Norfolk, Neb.

June 11

UMMen Scholarship Dinner and
Auction, Lincoln, Neb.

June 11-14

Great Plains Annual Conference
Session, Lincoln, Neb.

June 15

Peace with Justice Sunday

June 21

Bishop's Bicycle Challenge, starts and
ends in Andover, Kan.

June 26

VIM team leader training, Beatrice, Neb.

June 28

VIM team leader training, Dodge City
District, location TBD

June 29-July 2

NUMB (Nebraska UM Bike) Ride,
starts and ends in Holdrege, Neb.

July 13-20

UMMen Mission Impact Tour, Camp
Fontanelle and Omaha, Neb.

July 21-24

Weekday Mission u, Salina, Kan.

July 26

VIM team leader training, Beatrice, Neb.

From concept to start-up

Connecting Council embraces leadership role

Friday, March 21

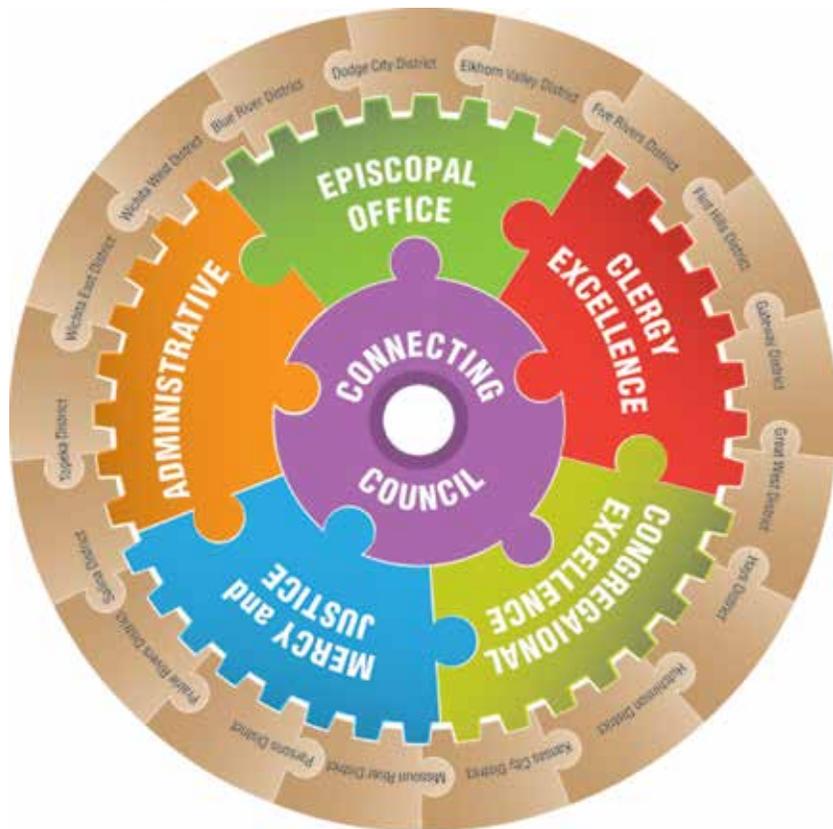
The Rev. Evelyn Fisher, congregational excellence director, retold the story of the Hebrews carrying the bones of their ancestor Joseph out of Egypt, and in Joshua 24:32, how the remains were finally laid to rest at Shechem in the promised land. As we move forward as the Great Plains Conference, Fisher reminded the group of how we too may have to leave our old bones (unhelpful traditions from the former three conferences) behind. Fisher's words emboldened the Connecting Council to continue the journey to be the Great Plains Conference.

Bishop Scott Jones followed with remarks about Missouri Conference Bishop Robert Schnase's new book, "7 Levers." The Connecting Council was asked to read the book in preparation for the meeting.

The book focuses less on particular solutions and more on questions to be asked. Jones asked, "How would we answer these questions (questions are posed at the end of each of the book's chapters) for the Great Plains?"

Jones also talked about how the group would be setting some traditions that might stand for years to come.

He said, "While scary, it's also a time of great opportunity to shape



By **KATHRYN WITTE**,
communications director

Editor's note: The Great Plains Connecting Council met for the first time as the Great Plains Conference, March 21-22, in Olathe, Kan.

The Connecting Council met in the spirit of growing the conference and living into the new structure and Great Plains missional priorities as set out in the Plan of Organization adopted at the Uniting Conference in August. It is sort of like going from a corporate concept to a corporate start-up when it comes to creating a new structure and leaving three former structures behind.

What is the Connecting Council?

The Connecting Council is the body that works on behalf of the annual conference between annual conference sessions. The Connecting Council held its spring meeting at Grace UMC, in Olathe, Kan. (the group meets quarterly).

The Plan of Organization says, "There shall be a Connecting Council

similar to Common Table, Leadership Team and Focus Team (the predecessor groups from the three former conferences) whose purpose shall be to review and evaluate the conference's



PHOTO BY KATHRYN WITTE

The Rev. Evelyn Fisher leads opening devotion during the Connecting Council meeting held March 21-22, in Olathe, Kan.

missional progress, to align major initiatives of the GPUMC, to enhance communication with all parts of the annual conference, and to take such actions between sessions of the annual conference as are permitted."

things for the future." The Connecting Council broke into small groups for a lively review and discussion of the book followed by a representative from each table reporting their responses.

Taking action

The two-day meeting was a combination of the Connecting Council taking action, on behalf of the Great Plains Conference, and reviewing material in preparation for the Annual Conference Session to be held June 11-14, in Lincoln.

Conference Lay Leader Courtney Fowler presented the format for electing delegates for the 2016 General Conference meeting. It was accepted and she was encouraged to offer candidate information on the conference website.

In preparation for voting for delegates at the 2015 Annual Conference Session, the body approved negotiating for electronic voting devices at a cost up to \$50,000. Questions were asked about funding the devices through registration fees in combination with a multi-year funding plan from Mission Shares. The devices make it possible to see real-time voting results and cut voting time down to a fraction of the time achieved by other methods.

Annual Conference Session decisions

The Denman, Francis Asbury and Angie Newman awards will be recognized on the floor of the Annual Conference Session. Other groups are encouraged to continue their awards and share winner information with the conference.

Offerings taken during the Annual Conference Session will benefit the mission partnerships of Haiti/Zimbabwe/Nigeria, Global HIV/AIDS, Youth Service Fund and the End Human Trafficking Advance.

Safe Gatherings Policy and the UMC Personal Conduct Policy

The Safe Gatherings Policy and the UMC Personal Conduct Policy, once reviewed, were referred to the authoring committee to refine the language. The group was in agreement that the Great Plains Conference should have a single Safe Gatherings certification for all levels of the church, however some of the language supporting its implementation was disputed. The authoring committee will revise the policies and bring a revision to the Council via email for further review. Safe Gatherings is the training program established to protect children, youth and vulnerable adults, while the Personal Conduct Policy covers both sexual ethics issues and harassment topics. Both policies will be brought before the members of the Annual Conference Session.

Saturday March 22

Steve Burnett, Disaster Response Team member, presented the Great Plains Disaster Response Plan and it was approved unanimously. The Connecting Council also approved TRI-Community UMC's request to use the proceeds from the sale of its property to reinvest in the ministry in the Omaha area it serves. In similar fashion the Connecting Council approved a request



PHOTO BY KATHRYN WITTE

Kathy Symes shares topics from her table's discussion of Bishop Schnase's book, "7 Levels."

approved a request

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from United Methodist Open Door in Wichita, to do a fund development campaign. Open Door focuses on offering food security and other economic support services to those in need.

In other action, the Connecting Council approved amendments to the clergy Moving Guidelines, accepted a finance report, learned about a public education resolution coming from the Mercy and Justice Team, accepted a report from the Mission Alignment Task Force on how well the conference structure and ministry is supporting the mission priorities, and approved increasing the hours for district administrative assistants to 40 hours per week.

The Connecting Council reviewed many items, offered amendments and will pass several to the Annual Conference Session for a vote. Items include recommendations for minimum clergy salaries, recommendations from Pensions and Health and Trustees, Annual Conference Standing Rules and the 2015 Funding Plan.

The names of the Episcopal Residence Committee were released and include: Maria Campbell, Kent Rogers, Brad Kirk, Marilyn Moore, Tom Watson, Marilyn Zehring, Jose Olivas and Jose Miranda. The group represents a balance of members from all three former conferences. This is the group that will evaluate and recommend the permanent location for the episcopal residence. The Committee will be affirmed during the Annual Conference Session.

The next Connecting Council meeting will be Oct. 3-4.

Future annual conference dates set

2015 — Wichita, June 10-13

2016 — Topeka, June 1-4 (tentative)

Spring 2014 **GPconnect**

Annual Conference Session June 11-14

The first Great Plains Annual Conference Session will be June 11-14, 2014, at the Lied Center for Performing Arts in downtown Lincoln, Neb.

This year's theme focuses on growing vital, dynamic congregations using the phrase, "Healthy ... inviting ... abundant ...," descriptive words derived from special guest speaker, the Rev. Jorge Acevedo. Acevedo is the lead pastor at Grace UMC — a multi-site congregation located in southwest Florida. He was ordained as a deacon in the Florida United Methodist Conference in 1986 and as an elder in 1990.

Drawing from his ministry experiences and book "Vital: Churches Changing Communities and the World," Acevedo will address growing both faithful and fruitful congregations.

Acevedo preaches Friday morning, Friday evening and Saturday morning. All worship services will be streamed live. Go to www.greatplainsumc.org/livestream to view the worship and plenary sessions. His teachings will be recorded, and made available for purchase and posted on the website.



AC DESIGN BY RACHEL MOSER

The conference session agenda includes clergy and laity meetings, a memorial service, a service of recognition for retiring clergy and an ordination service. Many conference related groups will have booths offering ministry information.

Early registration ends May 30, after which a late fee will be assessed and meals will no longer be available to purchase. Guests can register at www.greatplainsumc.org/registrationforms.

Donations needed

UMCOR to collect kits during Annual Conference



The Rev. Lyle Schoen organized the UMCOR kit collection effort for the 2012 Nebraska Annual Conference Session.

Start organizing your congregation's effort to gather or prepare donations to load in the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) truck headed to the Midwest Mission Distribution Center in Springfield, Ill. UMCOR Supply Kits help to care for the most vulnerable people during times of crisis. They also help to sustain everyday life by providing basic necessities to people who lack ready access to essential supplies.

Individual/bulk items currently needed include treadle sewing machines, cloth diapers, receiving blankets, hand towels and any UMCOR kits listed online — bedding kits, sewing kits, school kits, birthing kits, cleaning buckets, health kits and more. Please make donation checks payable to Midwest Mission Distribution Center.

Go to www.midwestmissiondc.org to

learn about the kits, item requirements and assembly.

The truck will be receiving items at the Great Plains Conference Lincoln office, located at 3333 Landmark Cir., during the Annual Conference Session on June 10, from 12-8 p.m.; June 11, from 7 a.m.-1 p.m. and 5-7 p.m.; and June 12, from 7-10 a.m.

Help is needed to record donations while the truck is open. Contact Pastor Alan Gager, conference secretary of Global Ministries, to sign up to volunteer (see below for contact information).

If you have questions, or need ways to motivate participation in this mission giving, contact Mary Ann Bede at stringbedes@windstream.net or 402-421-8264 or Gager, at agager@greatplainsumc.org.

Connect online
www.greatplainsumc.org



View the pre-conference video at greatplainsumc.org/preconferencevideo. See inside both the Lied Center and Embassy Suites.



Pre-conference materials are located at greatplainsumc.org/preconferenceinfo. Find Great Plains Annual Conference Session details at greatplainsumc.org/annualconference.

Fowler, Watson elected to AACLL committees

By FRED KOENIG, *Missouri Conference editor of publications*, edited by RACHEL MOSER, *communications coordinator*

Courtney Fowler, Great Plains Conference lay leader, was elected to the Association of Annual Conference Lay Leaders (AACLL) executive committee and Tom Watson, an associate lay leader, was elected to the nominating committee. The AACLL held its annual meeting, in Kansas City (Kan., and Mo.) on March 20 - 23, and hosted lay leaders from around the world. They were there to seek ways to help their conferences change for the better.

It was great to welcome conference lay leaders from around the country and outside of the U.S. to the Great Plains area," said Fowler. "They were able to spend time in fellowship with one another and we were able to provide them with a glimpse of our many diverse ministry areas. It was great to be with a group of people who care passionately about their churches and conferences."

The workshop sessions were led by Missouri Bishop Robert Schnase. The event was originally planned to be



PHOTO BY FRED KOENIG

Senior Pastor Adam Hamilton speaks to the Association of Annual Conference Lay Leaders about the history of the Church of the Resurrection (COR). This segment of the meeting was held in COR's downtown location.

based around Schnase's book "Remember the Future." However, Schnase's newest book, "7 Levers," was released about one week prior to the event, and Schnase used his teaching time to address the mechanism for change at the conference level that he wrote about in "7 Levers."

Schnase placed "great emphasis on the first lever — a strategy for starting new congregations," Watson said. Watson thought that Schnase "was excellent."

"Our timing was pretty dramatic and the teaching sessions ended up going very well," said Steve Furr, conference lay leader from the Alabama-West Florida Conference. Furr is also the president of the AACLL.

During a site visit to the main Church of the Resurrection (COR) campus in Leawood, Kan., the group was shown the mission area in the church basement. The basement houses ministries like the Buddy Backpack Program that provides school children with food assistance for weekends and Geeks for God, a program in which volunteers refurbish old computers for use by non-profit agencies and other churches.

"This basement is the heart of the church," said Jeff Vickers, COR member who was serving as tour guide.

The Rev. Adam Hamilton addressed the group just before the start of the Saturday evening worship service. He told a little about the history of the church, its present approach to ministry and what it has in store for the future.

"Anything we learn here, we want to give away," he said. "We want to be a living laboratory for churches. We try a bunch of stuff here and we see what sticks."

About 60 people participated in the event. Conference lay leaders made up the majority of the attendees, while associate lay leaders from the U.S., the lay leader from Zimbabwe and the lay leader from Hungary were also in attendance. The conference lay leaders from the South-Central Jurisdiction hosted the event. The next meeting will be Feb. 19-23, 2015, in Baltimore, Md.

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A changing constituency in a changing world UMMAM helps those in need



PHOTOS BY CINDY KELLY

Dr. Curtis Taylor, DDS, and Elaine Lopez, dental assistant, perform a dental procedure on a young patient while Karina Oviedo, a student of the dental assistant program at Flint Hills Technical College in Emporia, Kan., observes. Below, Sarah Trapp, enabling services manager, shows the food pantry of the UMMAM Care Center in Garden City, Kan.

By CINDY KELLY,
communications coordinator

United Methodist Mexican-American Ministries (UMMAM), whose home office is in Garden City, Kan., evolves to serve a changing constituency in a changing world.

Rachel needed help. After an incident of domestic violence, her estranged husband was taken to jail and her children were placed into state custody. Struggling to get back on her feet, Rachel sought help from a United Methodist Mexican-

American Ministries Care Center to transfer utility services from the name of her abusive husband to her own name. Exhausted and broke yet having secured a new job, Rachel was determined to provide a happy weekend visit for her kids. The care center team joyfully sent Rachel home with a box of food to share at her family table, as well as a box of diapers.

Every day, tens of thousands of our neighbors across the Great Plains Area live without the basic necessities that many of us take for granted.

Agencies such as UMMAM are working to rebuild these lives and communities for Christ. UMMAM provides medical, dental and social services and education to thousands of people in dozens of western Kansas and border state counties, a region full of ethnic and cultural diversity.

While the agency's name may imply

a focus on Mexican-Americans, UMMAM serves people of all races and ethnic backgrounds. About 79 percent of the people coming to UMMAM are Hispanic. African-American, Burmese, Somalian, Sudanese, and Low German communities in the area also benefit from UMMAM's services. Many moved to southwest Kansas to seek work at farms, feedlots or meat processing plants, while some are refugees.

Founded by United Methodists, funded by United Methodists

UMMAM is proud to celebrate 40 years of service and outreach since 1974 when a group of mission-minded United Methodists saw the struggles of their neighbors and decided to commit their time and gifts to helping those in need. At Kansas West Annual Conference Session in 2013, Penney Schwab, former executive director of UMMAM and a driving force in the creation of the agency, recognized UMMAM employees Jose Olivas and Dr. Karen Nonhof for their years of service (Olivas, 39; and Nonhof, 27) to the people of southwest Kansas. Olivas retired Jan. 31, 2014, as the community developer in Ulysses. Nonhof was also one of the founders of the ministry; she retired in 2013. The conference gave them a standing ovation.

The first UMMAM medical clinic was launched in Garden City and became a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) in 1997. Today, the ministry has six FQHC sites; a medical and dental clinic in Garden City; a medical and dental clinic in Dodge City; a medical clinic in Liberal; and a medical clinic in Ulysses. Collectively, UMMAM's FQHCs saw 5,841 individual patients in 2013, generating more than 19,000 medical encounters and almost 8,000 dental encounters. Services are provided on a sliding fee scale based on the Federal Poverty Guidelines established annually by the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, making the care affordable and attracting patients from dozens of surrounding counties in western Kansas, eastern Colorado, northwest Oklahoma and the Texas Panhandle.

The agency faces rising costs and steady increases of newly uninsured and chronically ill patients, constantly stretching its resources to care for so



many in need. Other charitable agencies in the area, such as the Salvation Army, commonly refer people to UMMAM when their own resources run thin. Sarah Trapp, enabling services manager for UMMAM, emphasized that the ministry is not just a health clinic, clothing bank or food pantry, but a diversified place where someone can be served as a whole. All of the sites integrate an array of outreach and ancillary services, including Lifetime Smiles, Early Detection Works, KU Cancer Prevention, Southwest Kansas Diabetes Prevention and Education, Farmworker Health, Parents as Teachers, and the Child and Adult Care Food Programs as well as citizenship/immigration, translation, financial planning and job application assistance.

“Our mission is to serve the social, spiritual, educational and medical needs of all in need,” said Trapp. “Our efforts to do Christ’s work in the world continue to be possible through the Great Plains Conference and generous Care Center donations from local churches, organizations and citizens.”

UMMAM’s Care Center network provided more than 23,500 units of service to nearly 8,000 families in 2013 through its food pantry, clothing bank, emergency, utility and other support resources. Those strapped with unaffordable utility bills were able

to seek Care Center assistance for up to \$50 in a single month. At present, the agency is able to help with roughly 20 percent of an individual or family’s actual financial need, though Trapp stressed the desire to do more.

Building stronger communities from the inside

As a Christian organization first and foremost, the heart and soul of each person working with UMMAM is visible in UMMAM’s mission to provide care to those in need.

“We are doing the work God has placed upon us,” said Julie Wright, chief operations officer. “Our employees have been equipped for this calling and are humble in their work.”

All UMMAM programs are designed to improve the lives and health status of individuals and families, thus building a stronger community. Mel Galvez, UMMAM’s community developer for Garden City, underscored that food and clothing needs bring people to his office, but are often secondary to the real need. Galvez described how most people who need social services are advised according to a six-month plan

that might involve helping them to find a job, find transportation, or develop skills in budgeting. Immigrants needing a path to legal status are encouraged to participate in citizenship classes taught by Galvez. UMMAM also provides resources for learning English.

Galvez is particularly sensitive to the people he serves. When he was a child, his family benefited from UMMAM. Executive secretary Dorothy Mesa, a UMMAM staff member for 14 years, shared how she was a single mother years ago and needed help from the agency. She expressed what an honor it is for her to now return as someone in a position to help others.

UMMAM is a Mission Agency Support group of the Great Plains Conference. Sixteen percent of the Care Centers network operating budget comes from the 1 percent conference asking. The conference support is combined with donations from local UM churches, United Methodist Men and Women, FEMA funds, individual donations, United Way Grants and foundation grants. United Methodists help fund many of the most-needed services provided by UMMAM.



PHOTOS BY CINDY KELLY

(Left) The UMMAM Community Health Center in Garden City, is one of the agency’s Federally Qualified Health Centers, which welcomes everyone, regardless of ability to pay or health insurance status, and offers comprehensive outpatient care to all ages, including treatment of illness and injuries, wellness and preventive care, prenatal/postnatal care, immunizations and health education. (Above) In 2013 UMMAM’s Care Center network helped nearly 8,000 families through its clothing bank, food pantry and other support resources. The ministry is not just a health clinic, but a diversified place where someone can be served as a whole.

Connect online
www.greatplainsumc.org



To view videos, photos and more stories about UMMAM, go to greatplainsumc.org/UMMAM. UMMAM receives Great Plains United Methodist funding through the 1 percent Mission Agency Support asking.

Great Plains

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Sara Shaw

Why camp?

Editor's note: Sara Shaw, coordinator for Great Plains United Methodist Camps, Inc., started Jan. 27. Shaw invites you into her personal story of "Why camp?"

Camp is a change agent unlike any other. Camp empowers youth with positive life skills, develops leaders for our churches, communities and schools, and fosters positive relationships with God and with peers.

When speaking to churches, individuals, colleagues and young people I am often asked, "Why camp?" My answer has remained the same since I began my camp career some 25-plus years ago. Let me tell you a story of change.

In June 1986, I wrote the following entries in my journal while away at camp for the first time. I was 13 years old. (Let me tell you — I was scared to go, I wasn't sure I would fit in and I sure didn't want to go sit and listen to someone talk about God all day.)

June 2, 1986

"Today I met God. He was at camp. That's right camp! Not in a church behind the pulpit or in some area of the church where common folk like me aren't allowed. He was here at camp standing right there with my cabin counselor and the other cabin counselors. They were singing, dancing and doing a skit about Love Never Fails. He was there outside on the rocks with them. I know I saw the light shining through the trees casting a fun dancing shadow of an angel. God was dancing. God is fun. All these years I thought God was some big scary guy that was super serious and that could anger easily (mostly at me since I am a strong willed young lady). No he is not! God is fun. God is love. God is the wind, the sun and the butterfly that just landed on me. Today I met God, he loves me and I love him. Today I met God. He is my best friend."

June 3, 1986

"Today I called home to ask to stay another week. I am learning so much. I am a great leader and love to help others. I didn't know I liked doing that. I feel like I have found my place in the world."

August 1, 1986

"Next week is the last week of camp. I can't believe I have been here all summer. I don't want to go back to the real world where I didn't fit in. My cabin counselor told me I could stay over this weekend and stay next week if it is OK with my parents. They said it was OK. YEAH! Ann (my cabin counselor) said that when going back to the real world, I will have to remember all I learned here at camp and remember God is always with me. He will never leave me alone. I hope she is right."

Fast forward several years and here I am today, still involved in camp and involved in youth ministry. Camp changed me.

My story is not unique. I witness change every time I am at camp — not just in campers, but in parents and camp leaders. Since joining the Great Plains Conference as the coordinator of camping ministry I have had the joy of hearing many testimonies and stories about this change that happens only at camp. Here are some samples:

"I think it's really important that the counselors of 'Man Camp' know the impact they made in my son's life that week. I'm always a firm believer that if you have changed one life, it was worth it. I hope they believe it, too. The life they changed means the world to me. Here's a recap of the conversation we had after camp on the drive home.

After my son showed me all the things he had done at camp, we headed back to the car and he reached for my hand and said, 'I've changed.' 'I won't ever complain about going to Church again, mom.' I asked him how he'd changed and he couldn't find the words to describe what happened to his heart. Earlier in the week I had said in an email to him that I'd prayed he would find God at camp like his older brother did.

I took a chance and asked him if he found God at camp and he replied, 'Yes.' 'I want to continue what I started and learned here at camp, Mom. God is important to me, he's in my heart.'

I have no idea what you all do to make transformations like his and his brother's, but please keep doing it. I had to hide the tears in the car, but

they are flowing again as I type this email. I am so incredibly thankful to all of you. You all are a wonderful group of men who answered God's call to influence young lives."

— Thanks and God bless, a grateful mother

"As a pastor, camp dean, and parent of a camper, I regularly see how camp experiences light up peoples' faith lives. Distracted and disconnected youth experience grace in camp's intentional Christian community. Rambunctious preschoolers get excited about God's creation and sharing it with friends and family. And young adults recognize God's callings in their lives. God lights up people of all ages through camp in ways that I wish I could replicate with as much success in the local church."

— From an involved and appreciative pastor

Don't have youth to send to camp? You can be an agent of change. Use camp as a ministry tool in your church.

Imagine this.

Your church sits in a small neighborhood with children all around or maybe just a house down the road with a single parent family living it. As a church, you decide to sponsor some youth to go to camp.

You pick a single parent family and approach the tired mother asking if you can send her son to camp for a week. Together you pick the perfect one for her son. He doesn't want to go by himself so you decide as a church he can take a friend and you will sponsor that child as well. The mother is unable to drive them to camp since her car won't make it out of town.

So you and another member decide to give the young family a ride to drop off the boys at camp. During drive-time you get to learn more about each other. The young mother becomes interested in the church or at the very least you've begun a new relationship.

The boys have a wonderful time and return with a relationship with God and maybe a new life skill.

Isn't camp an amazing gift?

It is not too late to sign up for summer camp or to give the gift of camp this year. For more information please contact me at sshaw@greatplainsumc.org or visit greatplainsumc.org/camps to learn more.



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PHOTO BY KATHRYN WITTE



PHOTO COURTESY OF CAMP HORIZON

Connect online
www.greatplainsumc.org



There is still time to sign up for summer camp. Go to greatplainsumc.org/camps to register today and read more testimonials.

(Photos from top) Camp counselors at Camp Comeca, near Cozad, Neb., take a break from the rock wall; Participants of Canoe Camp at Camp Horizon, near Arkansas City, Kan., prep for the July 2013, trip.

Get into your community April 26-May 18

Get hands on



Sign up at www.HandsOnTheGreatPlains.org.

Check out the planning resources & ideas.

HYLA to be held May 28-31

The Hispanic Youth Leadership Academy (HYLA) is a bilingual, multicultural, youth-led, mentoring initiative. It began at Perkins School of Theology and came to Nebraska in 2009, and is currently held at Nebraska Wesleyan University in Lincoln, Neb. This year, the event will be May 28-31. Registration ends May 2.

HYLA continues to teach youth and young adults, junior high through college age, about leadership and about The United Methodist Church. The summer academy enables participants to attend consecutive years, with each focusing on a different aspect of what it means to be a young leader at home, at the local church and in the community.

To learn more, email hylaneb@gmail.com or visit www.facebook.com/HYLANebraska.

Great Plains United Methodist Women

This is an exciting time to be a United Methodist Woman. Our new logo shows the sun rising over our Great Plains Conference. We greet a new day and reach for new heights in providing faith, hope and love in action. We have the privilege of creating our new conference, and it will take all of us working together to shape it into a dynamic organization that gets things done and helps make the world a better place for everyone. Our new conference will only be as strong and vibrant as we, the members, choose to make it.



We proudly continue the more than 140-year-old legacy of women organized for mission. With such a rich history, it's easy to sometimes think that what we do doesn't matter or assume someone else will do it. Many, many changes have occurred since that first group of six Boston women organized for mission in 1869. However, one thing has remained constant — United Methodist Women and their predecessors have had to show up, stand up and speak up for the needs of women, children and youth. We are called to continue a lifetime commitment to Christ's mission as we pray together, study together, raise funds for mission and as we work to improve the lives of those most vulnerable around the world. We are called to be the hands and feet that make God's love real.

This is a special moment in time — we stand in the unique position of both looking back on a rich history and looking forward to a new future full of possibilities. We stand solidly on the shoulders of women who also stood on the edge of change and chose to go forth and make a difference.

We are a sisterhood of grace with more than 27,000 members. We are the Great Plains Conference United Methodist Women. We are proud of our heritage, we are passionate about mission and we are women of action. It is a huge geography, it is true, but just as our foremothers faced the challenges of their day and chose to go forth and make a difference, so we now come to the place where we too need to choose to go forward and to expand our concepts of mission. Join me as together we continue our journey of faith as United Methodist Women, to do something new. Together we help transform the world.

Esther Hay, Great Plains United Methodist Women president

Opportunities 3 Sites Dates

Cooperative Mission u is all about the threes. Mission u is the new name for what people have known as the Cooperative School of Christian Mission, where the conference and United Methodist Women come together to offer opportunities to learn to work together to transform the world.

About the threes. There will be three learning opportunities available.

Weekday u: July 21-24, at Kansas Wesleyan University in Salina, Kan.

Weekend u: August 1-3, at the Holiday Inn in Kearney, Neb.

Mini u: November 7-8, at the Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kan.

The topics for this year are "The Roma of Europe," "How Is it with Your Soul?" and "The Church and People with Disabilities." An amazing line-up of study leaders from across the conference and denomination will be at all the sites to teach participants on the ways that our faith intersects with the world and the ways that we as the church can take action.

Mission u is open to all — men and women, clergy and laity. Youth and children

studies will be available at certain locations.

Check out the Great Plains UMW Web page at greatplainsumc.org/umw for more information on how to register and ways to promote Mission u in your local UMW organizations, congregations and communities.

You can view upcoming events at greatplainsumc.org/umwevents.

Paid for by Great Plains United Methodist Women. Contact Lisa Maupin at lisamumw@gmail.com.

Church finds lost piece of history

Bell was part of new church starts

By AMANDA WOITA, *communications intern*, edited by Great Plains communications staff members

Trinity United Methodist Church, Lincoln, Neb., recently displayed a bell that called four different congregations to worship during the early beginnings of Lincoln.

Trinity UMC hosted the bell's display on Sunday, March 30, as part of the celebration of its 135th anniversary. However, the bell was considered lost until March 17, when it was found by Bill Eddy, a member of the congregation who is a chair of the church council and Trinity's historian. "Our church has been a part of the UMC for 135 years," Eddy said. "It's very meaningful to me and I hope to others."

The bell first sat atop the Wood Street Chapel, which was built in the mid-1800s, and was also known as Warnes' Chapel, for its founder Edward Warnes. It was open for use by any congregation, with four churches getting their start there – including three United Methodist Churches: Trinity (Methodist) in 1879; Southminster (United Brethren) in 1885; and Calvary (Evangelical) in 1897.

According to Director/Curator of the Nebraska United Methodist Historical Center/Archives, Karrie Dvorak, the fact that the Wood St. Chapel was the starting point for three active churches is historically significant.

Warnes moved from England, where he was a licensed local preacher in the Primitive Methodist Church, to Illinois before becoming one of Lincoln's first homesteaders in 1862. Once the Calvary congregation moved to build their own church, Warnes' wife, Hannah, donated the bell to Riverside Park Camp, near Milford, Neb., when it opened in 1915 as a family camp of the Nebraska Evangelical Association Conference.

According to Clarke Mundhenke, a retired Nebraska UMC pastor, the bell called Riverside campers to the start and end of each day, and to worship and prayer. It was placed in a tower in 1938.

The Wood St. bell stayed at Riverside for an unknown period of time. In 1984, Calvary UMC historian, Steve Hutchinson, found the bell in Calvary UMC's garage in a box marked "of no historical significance," according to a "Lincoln Journal Star" article from May 6 of that year.



PHOTO BY RACHEL MOSER

Bill Eddy shows off the Wood Street Chapel bell at Trinity UMC. The bell called four congregations to service while they worshipped at the Woods Street Chapel.

The bell was displayed at Calvary for The United Methodist Church denomination's bicentennial in 1984. Afterward, the bell ended up back at Riverside Park, and was remounted without its clapper by 1994, according to Dvorak.

Why and exactly when the bell moved back and forth from Riverside and Calvary is not entirely clear. Riverside Park closed in 1999.

When Eddy decided to search for this historical bell, he emailed many people including the feedlot operator who bought the property from Riverside Park – but he never had the bell.

Then Eddy finally had a stroke of luck. The office manager of Calvary UMC connected Eddy with the building manager who knew exactly where it was.

Like Hutchinson, Eddy discovered the bell in Calvary's garage.

Trinity's anniversary display included photos of the Wood Street Chapel, Warnes and his family, the bell at Riverside Park, a poem and other mementoes from Trinity's history.

Because it was found at Calvary, Eddy said they get first priority on permanently displaying and preserving the bell. But if they decide to give it to Trinity, Eddy said the bell would be refurbished with a new clapper and displayed with a plaque that would include appropriate historical information. Money for this project would be granted from memorial funds donated by a woman who camped at Riverside and served on its board.

"The future is better understood if you know your past," Eddy said. Dvorak agrees.

"Reflecting on where we've been and the ups and downs of our history helps give us hope, determination and direction for today, and even more importantly, for the future growth of the church," she said.

Micah Corps 2014



Nine young adults from Nebraska and Kansas have been selected to be part of the 2014 Micah Corps Internship Program. Those selected are (top row from left) Mary Rachel Stanton, Woodlawn UMC, Derby, Kan.; Rachel Nyhart, Old Mission UMC, Fairway, Kan.; Hannah Bannister, Bision UMC, Bison, Kan.; Ella Sherman, Rockbrook UMC, Omaha, Neb.; and Emily DeVore, Wyandotte UMC, Kansas City, Kan. (Bottom row from left) Carter Oberheu, St. Paul UMC, Lenexa, Kan.; Kaitlyn (Kaity) Klein, Silver Creek UMC, Silver Creek, Neb.; Gloria Kimbulu, Saint Paul UMC, Lincoln, Neb.; and Navya Hopkins, First UMC, Leavenworth, Kan. Micah Corps is a 10-week summer internship that begins May 21. The internship is designed to strengthen each intern's spiritual walk with God, expand knowledge about social justice issues facing communities and the world, sharpen leadership skills and connect with United Methodists across the Great Plains Conference. Please pray for these young adults and look for news of the experiences throughout the summer at www.greatplainsumc.org/micahcorps.

Death notices

The Rev. Charles A. Bailey, 86, and Myron Juanita Bailey, 82, a retired clergy member and spouse, died Nov. 2, 2013. Survivors include children Chaplain Brigadier General Charles "Ray" Bailey and Beth Weatherly. Memorial contributions may be made to Bayou Land Missions in Ridge City, La.

Donald R. (Don) Barb, 79, a retired clergy member, died Nov. 24, 2013. He is survived by his wife, Golda Lucille Barb, and the couple's five children, Sandra Barb-Cochran, Cheryl Tollett, Lois Bradley, Larry Barb and Mark Barb. Memorial contributions may be made to the Olpe UMC, in Olpe, Kan., or Heifer International and may be sent to P.O. Box 126, Olpe, KS 66865.

Bethel K. Christensen, 78, the spouse of a retired clergy member, died Oct. 14, 2013. Survivors include her husband, the Rev. Don Christensen, and sons, Steven Christensen and David Christensen. Memorial contributions may be made to First UMC in Lincoln, Neb., or the Alzheimer's Foundation in New York, N.Y.

Delores Doran, 82, the spouse of a retired clergy member, died Dec. 31, 2013. Survivors include her husband, the Rev. William H. Doran, and children, Robert Doran and Linda Grant. Memorial contributions may be made to Nebraska Wesleyan University in Lincoln, Neb.

The Rev. Frank Lee Dorsey, 75, a retired clergy member, died Feb. 5, 2014. Dorsey also had been a district superintendent of the former Kansas East Conference as well as director of the General Board of Church and Society and the General Board of Global Ministries. Survivors include his wife, Nancy Dorsey, and their children, Tim Dorsey, Matt Dorsey, Chris Dorsey and Beth Politsch. He was preceded in death by his son, Mark Dorsey. Memorial contributions may be made to the Rural Chaplains Association with "Larisa Malyshko Ministry" in the memo line.

Virginia Rae Fleharty, 80, a retired clergy member, died Dec. 27, 2013. Survivors include her daughters, Jerri Bossie, Kristin Fleharty and Melanie Lauer. Memorial contributions may be made to Elwood Food Pantry in Elwood, Neb.; McCook Animal Shelter in McCook, Neb.; or Crossroads Mission in Kearney, Neb.

June Curry Froelich, 91, the spouse of a retired clergy member, died Dec. 24, 2013. Survivors include children, Jerry Curry, John Curry, Jane Curry Brooks and June Simon, and step-children, Suzanne Jordan, Paul Froelich and John Froelich. Memorial contributions may be made to Memory Bridge at memorybridge.org.

Clifford Fryda, 78, a retired clergy member, died Dec. 28, 2013. Survivors include children, Dean Fryda, Daniel Fryda, Paul Fryda, Darrel Fryda, David Fryda, Candice Fryda, Debra Fryda, Diane Fryda, Kim Fryda and Nadine Fricke. Memorial contributions may be made to the American Heart Association.

Norma Gates, 95, the spouse of a retired clergy member, died Jan. 21, 2014. Survivors include her husband, the Rev. Charles Gates, and daughter, Leora Platte. Memorial contributions may be made to Trinity UMC in Lincoln, Neb or A.R.M.S., c/o 1610 N. 87th St., Lincoln, NE 68505.

Beverly Ann Goering, 76, spouse of a retired clergy member, died March 10, 2014. She is survived by her husband, the Rev. John J. Goering. Memorial contributions may be made to Newton East Side UMC in Newton, Kan.

The Rev. Dr. Robert C. Harder, 84, a retired clergy member, died April 12, 2014. Hugh is survived by wife, Dorothy (Dottie) Harder, and children, Anne Harder Marley and James David Harder. Memorial contributions may be made to Baker University in Baldwin City, Kan., First UMC in Topeka, Kan., or to the Topeka Shawnee County Public Library in Topeka, Kan.

Billy Clyde Hughes, 84, a retired clergy member, died April 15, 2014. Hugh is survived by wife, Alice Hughes, and children, Richard Kester, Deann Hotman Alice Jean Peden, Sharon Sue Walker, Caroline Rose Rodriguez, Beverly Baker, Lindsey Taylor, Hillary Dillard, Laura Lee Hughes and Debbie Ayala. Memorial contributions may be made to Scared Heart Hospice in Kansas City, Kan., or to Easton UMC in Easton, Kan.

The Rev. Dr. Hugh A. Maddry Jr., 73, a retired clergy member, died Jan. 11, 2014. Hugh is survived by wife, Janet T. Maddry; and children, Paul Maddry, Mark Maddry, Rebekah Baker and Sarai Austin. Memorial contributions may be made to the American Heart Association or the food bank of the donor's choice.

The Rev. Donald F. Marsh, 88, a retired clergy member, died Nov. 13, 2013. Survivors include his wife, Helen Marsh, and sons, the Rev. Steven Marsh and David Marsh. Memorial contributions may be made to Christ UMC, in Lincoln, Neb., UMCOR for Philippines Relief Fund or the family.

The Rev. Ralph A. Rosenblad, 92, a retired clergy member died March 8, 2014. Survivors include his wife, Helen Rosenblad, and their children, Signe Rogers, Eric Rosenblad, Kirstin Zielke and Lars Rosenblad. Memorial contributions may be made to Interfaith Housing Services, Inc., or First UMC in Hutchinson, Kan.

Sharon Vaughan, 64, the spouse of a clergy member, died March 3, 2014. Survivors include her sons John Vaughan and Ryan Vaughan. Memorial contributions may be made to Morris County Care and Share, in Council Grove, Kan.

Dennis Lee Tompsett-Welch, 60, the spouse of a clergy member, died Dec. 22, 2013. Survivors include his wife, the Rev. Debra Tompsett-Welch, and son John Henry. Memorial contributions may be made to the family; Olive Crest UMC, in Omaha, Neb.; St. Francis House, also in Omaha; or Habitat for Humanity.

The Rev. Thomas H. Walsch, 97, a retired clergy member from Wilson, Kan., died Feb. 13, 2014. He was preceded in death by his wife, Doris. Memorial contributions may be made to Wilson UMC, in Wilson, Kan.

The Rev. Charles Earl Wretling, 86, retired clergy member, died Dec. 7, 2013. He is survived by his wife, Orpha Wretling, children, Chuck Wretling, Mark Wretling, Mike LeRoy Wretling, Delayna Danenberg, Kathy Hinde, Kristy Moore and Karen Westhusin. Memorial contributions may be made to the Alzheimer's Association-Rocky Mountain Chapter or First UMC in St. John, Kan.

Bishop's Confirmation rallies

Youth jump into faith

By SAID VELAZQUEZ,
Nebraska Wesleyan University
student

On Saturday, March 29, 2014, the Bishop's Confirmation Rallies kicked off. The first rally was held at Nebraska Wesleyan University's (NWU) campus in Lincoln, Neb.

More than 150 youth and their adult leaders from 21 churches across Nebraska and Kansas, started the day by having brunch in the campus cafeteria. Confirmation rallies are a collaboration with the Conference Council on Youth Ministries (CCYM), Shane Hinderliter, Great Plains youth ministry coordinator and Eduardo Busson, NWU campus minister.

After a quick brunch, the attendees began a day-long spiritual journey starting with a symbolic baptism. Youth were then asked to reflect on the question, "What does it mean to be a Christian?" Workshops followed the topics of "Scripture and Tradition," "Reason and Experience" and the discovery of the other elements that are important in living a Christian life. The rotating workshops also included a question and answer session with Bishop Scott Jones. Questions such as "How did you become a bishop?" and "What is your favorite ice cream flavor? (mint chocolate chip)" were answered by Jones. Jones taught about the mission of The United Methodist Church locally and at-large.

"The informal question and answer with Bishop Jones was a highlight for many of the students," said Hinderliter.

"I felt the calling of service from God, and I want to become a strong Christian leader!" said an enthusiastic

CCYM member. She registered attendees as they arrived and shared her experiences with the younger people around her.

The event closed with communion and a message from Jones on what it means to be a United Methodist. Jones' message expanded on the importance of grace, service and diversity by using John Wesley's phrase, "The New Testament knows nothing of solitary Christianity."



PHOTO BY SAID VELAZQUEZ

The youth group from the Grant, UMC in Grant, Neb., pose with the cross and flame on Nebraska Wesleyan University's campus during a break at the rally. (Top row from left) Andrea Winkel-Vargas, Austin Seiler and Werner Winkel-Vargas. (Bottom row from left) parent Carrie Wykert, Katie Patrick, Peyton Woodmancy, Kyla Wykert, Aryn Seiler and Pastor Nora Mendyk.

The second confirmation rally took place on Saturday, April 12, at First UMC in El Dorado, Kan. More than 60 youth and sponsors attended. At the time of press, the final rally was being held on Saturday, April 26, at Memorial UMC in McCook, Neb. More than 100 youth and sponsors were registered.

Visit greatplainsyouth.org to learn more about youth ministry and upcoming activities.

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the first edition of "GPconnect." In the tradition of the "Nebraska Messenger" and the "Kansas West Connection," it will offer Great Plains United Methodists news and information useful to equipping the local church for ministry.



"GPconnect" print will also be made available on our website and will be emailed to those who request it. Please pass around your copy to those in your congregation you think might be interested.

"GPconnect" print complements our weekly "GPconnect" email blast. The weekly email blast focuses on announcements, events, news, information and resources in a timely fashion. You can sign up for the weekly "GPconnect" email blast at www.greatplainsumc.org/subscribe. We will also do our best to help our readers stay informed about the larger United Methodist connection.

And yes, the next two paragraphs are from "The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church" — please read with me.

In ¶601: "The purpose of the annual conference is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world by equipping its local churches for ministry and by providing a connection for ministry beyond the local church; all to the glory of God."

And from ¶120 "The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation for the world. Local churches proved the most significant arena through which disciple-making occurs."

The Great Plains communication office takes these two paragraphs to heart. They remind us in stark fashion, of our respective ministry roles.

The "GPconnect" editorial staff will do its best to keep those paragraphs as guideposts for content. We hope you enjoy the colorful format and welcome your feedback and story ideas — together we are Great Plains United Methodists.

Peace,
Kathryn Witte, ABC, RCC
Communications Director

GPconnect, news and information for Great Plains United Methodist.



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PHOTO BY KATHRYN WITTE

More than 50 pastors attended the fifth session of Great Preaching for the Great Plains held at Lincoln's St. Mark's UMC, on April 7-8. (Photo) Dr. John Holbert, Professor Emeritus of Homiletics, Perkins School of Theology, focuses on honing the skills of clergy as communicators through the effective use of face, voice and gesture during his Friday morning presentation. The Rev. Robert Walters, Monticello UMC, said, "The sessions have been a true blessing and have added new life and rejuvenation to the joy and struggle of sermon writing. By offering this to pastors the conference has taken the next bold step toward vitality for the denomination and a generation of new preachers." A second series will begin in September 2014. Request more information at info@greatplainsumc.org.