

GPconnect

Connecting United Methodists across the Great Plains

Last issue

Summer 2017

Annual conference members vote for single office location.

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Recap of 2017 annual conference session



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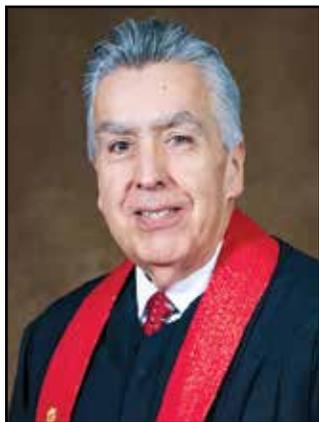
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Path to a hopeful future begins with children



Bishop Ruben Saenz Jr.

Robert Fulgrim, in his poem "All I Really Need to Know I Learned In Kindergarten," says that wisdom for living, doing and being was not found at the top of a graduate school mountain, but rather in a sandpile at Sunday School.

In kindergarten, Fulgrim learned to share, play fair, not to hit people, put things back, not to steal, ask for forgiveness, be creative, find time for rest, be aware of his surroundings, stick together and to be aware of wonder. Children that learn and internalize the lessons of justice, respect for others, care for their environment, reconciliation, self-care, collaboration and wonder grow

to see and act in the world with trust, hope and goodness.

Erik Erikson, a developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst famous for coining the phrase "identity crisis," believed that children learn how to trust or distrust the world in the first 18 months of their lives based on the environmental conditions in which they are nurtured. If a child is nurtured in a loving and secure environment, they learn to trust the world. Children that start off in life with a trusting view of the world develop a secure sense of self. By the age of 6, they develop a sense of purpose and the confidence to take initiative. By age 12, they form industry and a growing sense of self-confidence that motivates their learning and performance. By age 20, they are fully secure in their sense of self and ready to enter into lasting relationships with people, causes, institutions and creative efforts. On the other hand, if children are nurtured in an environment of violence and instability, they learn to mistrust the world. The distrust turns into shame and self-doubt by the age of just 3.

Research shows that 80 percent of the people in our churches today made a commitment to follow Jesus by age 18. Fifty percent of them decided to follow Jesus before the age of 12. It becomes rarer and more difficult for a person to make a decision to follow Christ after the age of 18. That is why we must continue to focus our energies and resources on reaching and teaching the children in every place.

When we reach the children, we connect with their relational networks. The business world knows that children are relationally tethered to other siblings, to parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles. If you do not believe it, just ask to see the marketing strategy of amusement theme parks, fun-oriented cruise companies, youth sporting leagues, or the marketing plan for the fast-food, gaming-software and movie industries. Businesses know that if they can reach and get the children, they get the interested participants from the child's network of relationships.

Reaching and spiritually forming children with the gospel and seeking their whole welfare in our communities is a key strategic missional initiative for the Great Plains Conference. Intentional ministry with the children in our congregations and in our communities gets to the core of our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ that trust God so that the next generation will know and tell about the wonders of God grace and love to their children's children (Psalm 78:6-7).

Each context within our Great Plains mission field varies in opportunities to reach and disciple children. However, with prayerful discernment and congregational support, we can all find ways that fit our context to intervene early in the lives of children in our

See **PATH** on page 3

Conference events

Conference events are posted at greatplainsumc.org/events

July 23-29

Summit Youth Academy, Winfield, Kansas

July 31 to Aug. 4

Licensing School, Lincoln

Sept. 8

UM Family Night at Kaufmann Stadium, Kansas City, Missouri

Sept. 16

Camp Norwesca Barbecue Fundraiser and Trail Ride, Chadron, Nebraska

Sept. 27-29

Leadership Institute, Leawood, Kansas

Sept. 29-30

Great Plains UMW Annual Meeting, York, Nebraska

From your lay leader

Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?— Genesis 18:14

These past few months, we have seen some challenging times. Mother Nature has provided us with one example in particular. Powerful storms and wildfires remind us of the parts of our lives outside our human control. As we watched the volunteer response pour in across our two states of Kansas and Nebraska, I'm grateful of the many instances that we saw neighborly love extended among us, without need of thanks, and yet greatly appreciated just the same.



Courtney Fowler

During events like we've experienced these past few months, I'm reminded of these reassuring words from Genesis, where Abraham and Sarah are given a glimpse of an amazing gift in their future, all dependent on a variable that Sarah believes to be impossible — that she will give birth to a son.

How many times have we surveyed our current circumstances, our messy lives, and the troubled times we see around us and then laughed at the impossibility of anything changing? Too many, if I'm being honest!

I plan to keep these words close in the coming days, weeks and months. We know we have many potential difficulties on the horizon. Some days it feels easier to laugh (rather than cry!) at the impossibility of anything changing. However, we know that nothing — is too wonderful for the Lord. Nothing.

Courtney

Courtney Fowler
Conference Lay Leader
[facebook.com/greatplainslaity](https://www.facebook.com/greatplainslaity)
[@c24fowler](https://twitter.com/c24fowler)

PATH continued from page 2

communities to build transformative relationships with them in “all places.” We can do this as an elementary school reading mentors, Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts leaders, Sunday school teachers, directors for children’s church dramas and choirs, after-school program organizers and volunteers, mid-week Bible teachers and backyard kids Bible club organizers. In these ways, and others, we can support and positively influence the spiritual and social development of the next generation. We must be respectful but intentional and innovative in our efforts to create inviting and welcoming discipleship pathways that bring children beyond outside the walls of our church into the life of the church and into faith in Christ before age 12.

Jesus valued the faith of a child, and it is indeed the innocent faith of children that can lead entire families to faith. Children are super-evangelists and relational drivers. They can teach their parents the things they learned through the ministry of the church. Eventually, Christ will break through to the whole family and bring them to faith. Children have faith, and their prayers can move mountains.

It was crucial for the future of God’s life-giving influence on individuals and societies that the hearts and minds of children be informed with attitudes and knowledge of God’s precepts (Deuteronomy 6:1-9). Cultivation of faith began in the home and continued through the shared faith of the people and through religious life and instruction. It is also crucial today that the principles and attitudes of personal piety and social holiness in the Wesleyan tradition that will help shape our future also will be taught, and we should begin with the youngest of children.

One of my guiding missional principles when I pastored a local church was undergirded by Matthew 19:13 — “One day some parents brought their children to Jesus so he could lay his hands on them and pray for them.” — In Spanish, the saying is, Cuando tocas la cabeza de un niño, tocas el corazón de un padre. That is, “When you lay your hand (by drawing near and blessing) on a child’s head (mind and as a whole, dignified and accepted person), you touch the heart of a parent.” Our mission is to transform the world. And we are right to invest our time, energy and passion for working to resolve existing social problems.

We are faithful and right to commit our time, energy and passion for working to address existing symptoms and concerns in our society. But if we are going to transform the world really, our vision must include the intentional spiritual formation of the next generation of citizens who will know and trust God and who live out of the truth, beauty and goodness of Christ.

Let’s keep a hand on the present issues and concerns of our day, but let us also keep an eye toward the future. Bless the children in your mission fields by finding respectful and context-sensitive ways to share your faith, your knowledge, your accompaniment and your care with the children so that the next generation may know.

En el Camino ... On the Path,



Bishop Ruben Saenz Jr.,
Resident Bishop
Great Plains United Methodist Conference




Therefore Go 2017
Know God
Proclaim Christ
Serve Others
Seek Justice
 Great Plains Annual Conference



PHOTOS BY TODD SEIFERT AND RACHEL MOSER

Helping people know God

By **TODD SEIFERT**,
communications director,

Clergy and lay members to the 2017 annual conference in Grand Island, Nebraska, got down to business and took time to remember the call into ministry shared by all followers of Christ through song, the listening to preaching and prayer.

Noting the theme to “Therefore Go: Know God,” more than 1,700 people gathered June 7-10 to celebrate the ordination of 11 elders, the commissioning of 15 provisional elders and one provisional deacon. And for the first time since the creation of the Great Plains Conference in 2014, attendees had the opportunity to take part in two of eight workshops, most of which focused on discipleship.

The Rev. Dr. Stephen Cady, originally from the Kansas City area but now serving a church in Rochester, New York, served as the keynote speaker. His workshop, “A Problem of Magnitude: Worship in the United Methodist Church,” explored how to make worship more meaningful, which he said was a key component to extending the church to a new generation of young adults.

Cady said the church needs to live up to its words and to be authentic in building relationships if it hopes to share the love of Christ in a meaningful way with millennials. His workshop challenged attendees to consider the positive possibilities for the future of the denomination in the Great Plains and beyond.

“What would it mean if we met people where they were, treated them as if they were already where they longed to be?” he asked. “What would it mean if instead of just focusing on



the music of our worship we focused on the community of our church, the people around us? What would it mean if we wore the shoes we spend so much time talking about?”

While half of attendees remained in the arena space for Cady’s workshop, the other half chose from seven other workshops, three of which focused on making disciples or helping people mature in their journey to becoming a disciple of Christ.

Earlier in the session, Bishop Ruben Saenz Jr. delivered his first episcopal address to the Great Plains Conference. He used the opportunity to reflect on five pathways that he believes are essential to congregational vitality, all of which are tied to the theme of

helping the people in the communities we serve know God:

- Start new small groups for people in and outside of your church.
- Reach and spiritually form the children in your community.
- Work collaboratively with other United Methodist churches in your community, county and region to create a collective and synergistic missional impact.
- Foster an atmosphere of prayer and dialogue in your congregation and among the other Great Plains constituents.
- Seek to create a robust culture of missional purpose and movement at the local, county and regional levels supported by the right strategy and the passionate thrust of capable clergy and laity.

As part of the business side of the

conference, clergy and lay members:

- Approved consolidating the three conference offices to a single location in Topeka. (See story on Page 16)
- Voted to maintain the health care stipend so clergy serving three-quarter time or full time can purchase their own health insurance. (See story on Page 6)
- Approved three resolutions brought forward by the Mercy and Justice team (See story on Page 7)
- Voted on five constitutional amendments to the Book of Discipline. No results will be announced until all annual and central conferences have voted on the amendments.

Conference votes to keep health allowance

By **TODD SEIFERT**, communications director, and **DAVID BURKE**, communications coordinator

To educate clergy and lay members as much as possible, the Pension and Health Benefits team hosted a livestream



PHOTO BY RACHEL MOSER

Kelly Williams, chair of the pension and health benefits team, addresses annual conference members during the healthcare vote.

After studying options and engaging in multiple opportunities for discussion, clergy and lay members to the Great Plains Annual Conference voted June 10 to maintain its system of providing a health insurance stipend to clergy who serve three-quarters time or full time.

The conference's Pension and Health Benefits team had proposed a group health plan, through Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Kansas, as an alternative based on feedback it had received from some clergy in surveys regarding health coverage and because of fewer and fewer options for insurance being available in government-facilitated health insurance exchanges.

In the past few months, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas City has announced it is leaving the exchange that became popular after passage of the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare, beginning in 2018. Aetna announced in May that it plans to leave the Nebraska exchange in 2018.

With several changes made in insurance coverage since the stipend was introduced in 2014, the board "felt it was prudent to go outside and look at other options," said Kathy Williams, chair of the Pension and Health Benefits team.

broadcast June 1 to lay out the alternatives and to answer questions submitted both prior to and during the broadcast. In materials distributed to lay members and the clergy prior to the conference session, both the current plan and the group-health alternative were presented, along with the advantages and disadvantages for each. The proposal chosen on the conference floor maintains the current stipend system but increases the amount given to

clergy to purchase insurance to \$15,850. This amount, paid by the local church or charge, represents a 5.7 percent increase over the 2017 amount. The alternative proposal would have moved eligible clergy to a group health plan provided by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Kansas. The cost for that plan would have been the same \$15,850, paid by the local church or charge. However, in the group-health option, clergy also would have paid an out-of-pocket premium ranging from 3 percent to 7 percent of their salaries, depending on whether they choose single or family coverage, as well as the PPO or high-deductible plan.

A motion from the floor prior to the vote suggested that full-time clergy contribute 1 percent of their base compensation into a pool for assistance for financially challenged pastors to pay their premiums. The idea was referred to the Pension and Health Benefits team after discussion on the floor for further study and consideration.

Bishop Ruben Saenz Jr. said the discussion was fueled by the uncertainty of health coverage on the national level.

"Let's leave some space for the creative spirit of God to find a way forward," he said.

Legislation during annual conference

By **TODD SEIFERT**,
communications director

During the business time of the 2017 annual conference session, clergy and lay members considered a motion from the floor related to the 2020 General Conference, three resolutions brought forward by the Mercy and Justice team and five constitutional amendments passed by the 2016 General Conference.

Delegation proposal

Clergy and lay members defeated a motion to elect the delegates to the 2020 General Conference during the 2018 Great Plains Annual Conference session instead of the planned 2019 election date.

The motion, introduced by the Rev. Andrew Conard of First United Methodist Church of El Dorado, Kansas, called for the election of 2020 General Conference delegates a year earlier for what he said would be a smoother transition from the 2016 Great Plains delegation to the 2020 General Conference. He argued that the newly elected delegates in 2018 could serve as observers during the special session of the General Conference scheduled for February 2019 in St. Louis to discuss human sexuality issues. The additional observers would have been paid for through reserves realized because of money remaining from the 2016 delegation sent to Portland, Oregon.

Conard said he thought the earlier election would allow for a smoother transition because of the short 16-month window between the special

session in 2019 and the regular session in 2020. He said he thought this change in election dates would allow the Great Plains Conference not only continue its leadership role for the denomination but, perhaps, enhance it.

Arguments against the motion noted the unknowns that could result from the 2019 special session, including

potential dramatic change based on

decisions made in St. Louis.

Mercy and Justice Resolutions

After some spirited discussion, three resolutions promoting human rights issues passed on the floor of the conference Saturday morning.

The approved resolutions:

- **Affirming the Right to Peacefully Address Injustice** – The conference voted to oppose any state or federal legislation that would seek to restrict the right to address injustice through boycotts, divestment and sanctions. It directed the conference secretary to write a letter to the president of the United States, and legislatures and governors of Kansas and Nebraska informing them of this resolution. It also urges congregations and church members to contact locally, regionally and nationally elected officials to advocate against legislation that would restrict boycotts, divestment and sanctions.
- **Welcoming Migrants in Our Midst** – The conference voted to commit to work to eliminate racism and violence directed toward newly arriving migrants from around the world. It also encourages all churches to educate and equip members to provide hospitality and welcome migrants and refugees in communities across Kansas and Nebraska. The resolution also calls upon political leaders to continue to accept refugees and to grant asylum based on the needs of those seeking help

in the United States.

- **Create a Covenant Partnership Between the Great Plains Conference and the Nigeria Episcopal Area of the United Methodist Church** – In what is really a reaffirmation of a relationship with Nigerian Christians, the conference voted to work together to support education and leadership development for Nigerian orphans, pray for our Nigerian brothers and sisters, help people in the conference learn about the history and culture of Nigeria, develop a procedure for an accountable and transparent transfer of funds, report each year about the partnership during annual conference, and to cooperate in developing projects and activities to sustain the orphanage ministry in Jalingo.

Constitutional Amendments

Clergy and lay members to annual conference will have to wait for results from a single ballot taken on the floor.

Like conferences around the world, the Great Plains voted on five proposed constitution amendments. The results will be made public once all of the annual conferences and central conferences have voted.

The proposed amendments:

- **Adding language on gender justice**, comparable to rights on racial justice.
- **Adding “gender”** (meaning male and female) to the constitution to affirm the United Methodist Church’s commitment to gender equity throughout the worldwide connection.
- **Firming language** that delegates be elected by their annual conferences rather than being appointed by their bishops.
- **Calling for episcopal elections** in the central conferences to take place in the regular sessions of the conferences.
- **Changing language** that was ruled unconstitutional by the Judicial Council that held individual members accountable for decisions by the Council of Bishops.

Bishop Saenz gives charge to new ordinands



PHOTO BY TODD SEIFERT

The 2017 ordinands with Bishop Ruben Saenz Jr. Back row from left: the Rev. Doug Gahn, the Rev. Kim Shank, the Rev. Austin Rivera, the Rev. Ashlee Alley, the Rev. Kyle Nelson and the Rev. Kyle Reynolds. Middle row from left: the Rev. Chad Boling, Bishop Ruben Saenz Jr. and the Rev. Tyler Kaufmann. Front row from left: the Rev. Terri Lucas, the Rev. Chris Jorgensen and the Rev. Mik King.

By **DAVID BURKE**,
communications coordinator

Though he gave an admittedly lengthy address to his first class of ordinands during the Great Plains Annual Conference on June 9, 2017, Bishop Ruben Saenz Jr. brought the secrets of ministry down to four words.

“Love Jesus. Love People.”

In a sermon frequently punctuated with humor, Bishop Saenz told the ordinands they were entering “adventurous times” in the history of the church.

“Are you sure you want to do this?” he asked with a laugh.

Entering the ministry, Bishop Saenz said, goes beyond a job or a career.

“Christ has summoned you. You have been called,” he said.

Bishop Saenz showed a top-10 list of the careers that bring the most meaningful and personal reward, from payscale.com. Topping the list was clergy, “because it makes the world a better place.”



PHOTO BY TODD SEIFERT

The 2017 provisional members with Bishop Ruben Saenz Jr. Back row from left: Sang Hak Lee, Matthew Sigler, Jordan McFall and A.G. Turner Jr. Middle row from left: Daniel Kipp, Bishop Ruben Saenz Jr., Libby Oberdorf, Javier Martinez Osuna and Mike Evans. Front row from left: Hannah Ebling-Artz (commissioned as a provisional deacon), Jeff Goetzinger, Amanda Pouget, Emmanuel Afful, Michelle Byerly, Curtis Magelky Jr., Stefanie Hays and Rebecca Goltry Mohr.

Conference happenings

By **TODD SEIFERT**, communications director

Over the four days of the annual conference session, clergy and lay members worship, engaged in fellowship and settled the business of the conference. Here are a few items not addressed in other accounts of the 2017 session.



PHOTO BY RACHEL MOSER

Opening sermon

The Rev. Claudia Bakely, Flint Hills District superintendent, delivered the sermon for the opening worship service by expanding on the thoughts of Jesus as the shepherd and we as the sheep.

“We’ve been through a lot this year,” Bakely said. “The sheep have been particularly fractious this year.”

Sheep, Bakely said, will flock and follow together even if it might not be a good idea. Through videos and photos projected to the congregation, she showed sheep crossing busy streets in the Mideast and crowding into one small opening to get through to the other side.

Bakely said she has heard complaints from church members that their pastor was letting into the fold “sheep that were dirtier and unrulier than the ones already in church.”

However, she said now more than ever “the world needs a shepherd.”

The service included honoring this year’s deceased clergy and clergy spouses, communion and the baptism of three children.

Minimum salary increases approved

Great Plains Conference clergy and lay members approved a 2 percent increase in the minimum salary for pastors effective Jan. 1, 2018.

The minimum for full-time local pastors was increased to \$36,156. The minimum for associate members was increased to \$38,496. The minimum for provisional elders was increased to \$40,836. The minimum for full-time elders was increased to \$43,176.

There were slight adjustments to make the minimum salaries evenly divisible by 12 for monthly paychecks, said

the Rev. Craig Hauschild, chair of the Personnel Committee.

Before presenting the salaries, Hauschild addressed a concern based on the June 8 decision to consolidate the three conference offices into one in Topeka, leaving some staff members uncertain about their futures.

People don’t fear change, Hauschild said, They fear loss.

“What we fear is losing connection,” he added.

Hauschild said the conference is dedicated to providing “support, care and healing” to employees affected by the decision, including aid in job searches and employee assistance programs.

Conference beats 89 percent on mission shares

“This conference is moving in a really good direction,” the Rev. Gary Beach, retiring treasurer and director of administrative services, said of individual churches’ contribution to mission shares.

The conference’s mission share payout rate was 89.48 percent, the largest in the history of the Great Plains Conference, which was formed in 2014.

The Gateway District had a record high of 98.73 percent, edging out Blue River with 97.61 percent and Prairie Rivers with 95.07 percent.

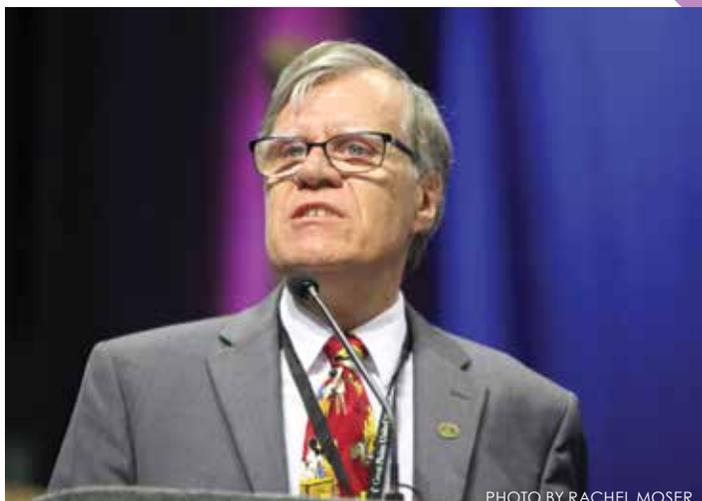


PHOTO BY RACHEL MOSER

Conference commissions interns

On Thursday, June 8, the conference prayed for and commissioned more than 30 interns who will serve this summer in the following ministry areas: Micah Corps, Vacation Bible School, church planting, youth ministry and pastoral leadership.

See you next year

The Rev. Nan Kaye-Skinner, pastor of Trinity UMC in Lincoln and conference secretary, announced that next year’s annual conference session will be June 13-16, at the Century II convention center in Wichita.

Workshops bring new to Annual Conference

By DAVID BURKE,
communications coordinator

One of the early goals of Bishop Ruben Saenz Jr. was to make the Great Plains Annual Conference sessions become more than just reports and business on the floor.

That was accomplished through a series of seminars from noted leaders in and outside of the conference, who spoke to groups on a variety of topics for them to take back to their local churches.

Attendees took part in two workshops. Everyone took part in the keynote from the Rev. Dr. Stephen Cady, an Olathe, Kansas, native who is senior pastor of Asbury First United Methodist Church in Rochester, New York, as well as an adjunct professor at Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School in Rochester.

Cady received his doctorate from Princeton Theological Seminary in 2014 and his dissertation — “Creative Encounters: Toward a Theology of Magnitude for Worship with United Methodist Youth” — was the basis of his presentation to the Great Plains Annual Conference sessions.

He made a similar presentation January to the Orders & Fellowship gathering for clergy, and Saenz called his presentation “engaging, insightful, funny (and) convicting,” inviting him to the conference session immediately after his talk.

“Why should the clergy enjoy this presentation without the laity present?” Saenz said in introducing Cady.

Cady said his senses of hope, call, justice and humor were all shaped by his time in the former Kansas East Conference.

Cady described himself as “one of those strange youth who enjoyed annual conference, learning from the people around me and growing as a result of it.”

“So many of the adults who were so influential in my life I see out here today,” he told the audience. “It’s such an honor for me to come back and think that I might have something to offer back as a result of the research that I’ve been a part of.”

Other workshops that took place during the morning of June 9:

“Disciples Making Disciples: The Wesleyan Way of Disciple-making”

The workshop was led by the Rev. Dr. Steve Manskar, a clergy member of the Minnesota Conference who is now on the staff of the Leadership Ministries



PHOTO BY RACHEL MOSER

Unit of Discipleship Ministries as director of Wesleyan leadership.

Manskar’s workshop introduced participants to concepts of covenant discipleship and how it helps congregations re-tradition Wesleyan classes for today. Participants learned about the general rule of discipleship, covenant discipleship groups, the group covenant, group meetings, class leaders and their role in the congregation’s life and mission.

“Sabbath as Center in an Unstable World”

The Rev. Marjorie Thompson, led

the workshop. Thompson, is a former director of Pathways in Congregational Spirituality with Upper Room Ministries in Nashville, where she was chief architect of Companions in Christ, an innovative small-group resource series for adult spiritual formation.

Thompson said the pressures of life are intense: a 24/7 news cycle; work that seems to demand the impossible; family care responsibilities; a planet in crisis. Challenges in our personal, national and global lives never cease. How do we maintain balance and equilibrium amid the turbulence? Come, deepen your vision and practice of Sabbath — the still center God invites us to enter, the gift of rhythmic rest and replenishment. Here we can receive again, and yet again, the soul-filling Love that fuels our ministry and mission.

“How to Grow Closer to God: Advice from John Wesley”

This was led by the Rev. Dr. Hal Knight, a 24-year veteran of St. Paul School of Theology, who teaches Wesleyan Studies, contemporary theology, worship and evangelism.

Knight asked workshop attendees how to develop a relationship with God that transforms our hearts and lives and enables us to be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ in the world. That was the central question for John Wesley and his Methodists. This workshop shared the answers that they found and their implications for the church today.

“Membership to Discipleship”

The Rev. Dr. Phil Maynard, former director of congregational excellence for the Florida Annual Conference and ministry coaching director, led the workshop.

Maynard said there was a lack of

perspectives

“TeamMates Mentoring Program”

Brandon Leppke and Allyson Horne led this workshop. Founded by former University of Nebraska football coach Tom Osborne (who appeared in a video about the program during the conference session) and his wife, Nancy, TeamMates is a safe and practical school-based mentoring program. Church leaders were taught how to launch a TeamMates chapter in their community or recruit mentors.

certainty in the mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ.” Drawing on the experiences of those congregations doing this well and on the best of current research, Maynard provided practical steps for helping disciples in our congregation become more like Jesus. Maynard explained bringing clarity about what discipleship is, identifying catalysts for spiritual growth, and exploring how to build the process for intentional development as disciples of Jesus.

“Self-Care as a Spiritual Discipline”

Led by the Great Plains Conference’s own the Rev. Dr. Anne Gatobu, pastor of the United Methodist Church in Ashland, Nebraska, and affiliate professor of pastoral care and counseling at Asbury Theological Seminary.

Literature on self-care, especially for those serving in ministry, is growing, and becoming central to the health of the pastor, the laity and the whole church, Gatobu said. Participants considered “self-care” as a spiritual discipline, exploring scriptural and spiritual basis for self-care, Godly mandate for self-care, and the practical and ethical dimensions of being intentional about self-care. An inventory that covered the five major areas of wellness was provided as an opportunity to reflect on habits for self-care and respond to an invitation for an intentional life-long discipline of self-care.

“Narrative: The Most Important Thing About You”

This workshop was led by the Rev. Dr. James Bryan Smith, executive director of the Apprentice Institute and theology professor at Friends University in Wichita.

The way we view God is potentially the most important thing about us, Smith says. The stories and narratives we have about God determine the way

we interact with and are in relationship with God. It is true that we are spiritually formed, he added. But the more we understand our narratives about God, the more we can move toward Christ-likeness and being formed in Christ.

Three baptized during opening worship

Bishop Ruben Saenz Jr. baptized three children as part of the opening worship service of the 2017 Great Plains Annual Conference session.

The children are:



James Joowon Lee, son of the Rev. Shin Hyo Lee and Eun Hye Lim

Hael Kim, daughter of Pastor Taejong (David) Kim and Hye Jin Cha Kim



Theodore Jase Kaufmann, son of the Rev. Tyler and Nicole Kaufmann

PHOTOS BY RACHEL MOSER

Bishop invites discussion on Way Forward commission

By DAVID BURKE, communications coordinator

Bishop Ruben Saenz Jr. invited discussion about the Commission on a Way Forward during the Friday, June 9, afternoon plenary session during the Great Plains Annual Conference.

“The church has pressed the pause button” in discussion about LGBTQ issues, the bishop told clergy and lay members, with findings of the commission to be discussed during a special General Conference session in 2019 in St. Louis.

A video highlighted the commission and its members, and annual conference attendees were invited to discuss with each other their impressions about the commission and its work through five questions posed by Bishop Saenz.

Bishop Saenz told the clergy and laity present that he was torn on his feelings toward a decision by the United Methodist Church.

“With much fear and trembling, this is part of my discernment process,” he said.



Bishop Saenz confided to the clergy and laity that the LGBTQ issues facing the denomination were almost enough for him to withdraw his name from consideration as an episcopal candidate last year during the General Conference in Portland, Oregon.

But on the floor, he said, he heard impassioned pleas for unity from Great Plains Conference delegation.

“I want to help this body discern its right next step,” Bishop Saenz said.

He said he would do his best to answer concerns via email at questions@greatplainsumc.org.

Offertory totals during AC

The Great Plains Annual Conference took three offerings during its session in Grand Island, Nebraska.

Here are the totals:

Refugee support

\$4,951.30

School partnerships

\$6,826.99

Youth Service Fund

\$7,507.87

Conference attendees show support for UMCOR

By TODD SEIFERT, communications director

Relief kits for the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) got a big boost thanks to contributions from those attending the Great Plains Annual Conference session in Grand Island.

The Rev. Hollie Tapley, disaster response coordinator, reports that clergy and lay members contributed 2,847 health kits, 114 cleaning buckets, 1,493 school kits, 134 layette kits and 17 bedding kits.

Leftover supplies for these kits are headed for the UMCOR West Depot in Salt Lake City for use as needed.

Monetary donations for UMCOR totaled \$11,595. An announcement that the initial total fell just short of \$10,000 resulted in checks being offered from the stage by Bishop Ruben Saenz Jr., the Rev. Nancy Lambert and the Rev. Nan Kaye-Skinner. Others were encouraged to continue making donations throughout the day, which accumulated to the final total.

2017 award winners

By **TODD SEIFERT**,
communications director

Each year, the annual conference presents awards for evangelism and service to Christ and others. The following award winners were announced during the 2017 annual conference session in Grand Island, Nebraska.

Harry Denman Evangelism Award

Each year, the conference honors clergy and lay persons who exhibit outstanding efforts for the work on Christian evangelism with the Harry Denman Evangelism Award. This award recognizes people whose life and ministry exemplify the teaching of Christ and the Great Commission.

Clergy winner: Pastor Shawn O’Trimble, Topeka First UMC and Oakland UMC

Laity winner: Mary Ray, First UMC, Superior, Nebraska

Youth winner: Ridge Pinkston, Kingman UMC, Kingman, Kansas

Ministry of Memory Award

Lona Dearmont, chair of the Archives and History team, presented the award on behalf of the Historical Society of the United Methodist Church to Maureen Vetter, who served as director of the United Methodist Historical Center at Nebraska Wesleyan University from 1997 to 2005. The award recognizes excellence in archival and historical work in the local church, annual conference, jurisdictional or central conferences.



PHOTO BY RACHEL MOSER



PHOTO COURTESY OF GARY SCHMIDT

Angie Newman Award

Carolyn May, associate conference lay leader, presented the award to Rose Schmidt of First United Methodist Church in Lawrence. The award honors laywoman of the Great Plains Conference of the United Methodist Church whose contribution to the church and the community is an example of the spirit of Angie Newman. Newman (1833-1910) was active at many levels in the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC), the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society of the MEC, the Woman’s Home Missionary Society of the MEC and the WCTU. In 1888, Newman was the first woman elected as a delegate to General Conference. While she and other women were denied seats on the floor, they made their presence known and worked so that women would have the privilege of voice and vote at General Conference.

Well done, good and faithful servants



PHOTO BY TODD SEIFERT

Longtime friends and some relatively new acquaintances celebrated the ministries of the 39 clergy members who retired effective the end of the appointive year on June 30 during a special dinner event.

The Rev. Jim Reed served as host for the event, which featured short statements from the Rev. Amy Lippoldt, chair of the Board of Ordained Ministry, Kelly Williams, chair of the Pension and Health Benefits team, and Bishop Ruben Saenz Jr.

The Rev. Caren Looper provided music, and Brutal Bear, the band for the SoCe Life ministry in south central Wichita, offered special music, including a rendition of "Will the Circle Be Unbroken" with words written to represent retiring pastors. Each retiree present also took part in a "pinning" ceremony in which they received a branded United Methodist retired clergy pin.

The evening concluded with the reading of each retiree's name, followed by a congratulatory affirmation of "well done, good and faithful servant."

Those celebrated were:

- Rev. Jim Akins
- Rev. Kay Alnor
- Rev. Les Bartlett
- Rev. Gary Beach
- Rev. Susan Bell
- Rev. Billie Blair
- Rev. La Verne Bolling
- Rev. Larry Buss
- Rev. Brent Clayton
- Rev. Scherleen Cross
- Rev. Nancy Davis
- Rev. Keith Fink
- Rev. Evelyn Fisher
- Rev. Dr. Dan Flanagan
- Rev. Susan Greene
- Rev. Jay Henderson
- Rev. Dee Ann Heptas
- Rev. Michael Howard
- Rev. Tess Hufford
- Rev. Gene Huston
- Rev. Steve Hysom
- Rev. Randy Jellison-Knock
- Rev. Dean Joy
- Rev. Ronald King
- Rev. Buzz Lambrecht
- Rev. Dr. Linda Louderback
- Rev. Michael McKee
- Rev. Ralph Metschke
- Rev. Pam Nolan
- Rev. Frank Pritz
- Rev. Mark Richardson
- Rev. Tom Richel
- Rev. Beverly Russell
- Rev. Daniel Safarik
- Rev. Fred Snyder
- Rev. Diana Stewart
- Rev. Glenn Tomaugh
- Rev. Kenton Van
- Rev. Don Wharton
- Pastor Jerry Yount

Scholarships and Fellowship

UMMen award \$6,000 in scholarships



PHOTO BY DAVID BURKE

More than 75 people attended the 28th annual United Methodist Men Dinner and Auction on June 7 at Trinity United Methodist Church in Grand Island, Nebraska.

More than \$6,000 in scholarships were distributed during the dinner and auction, which included a variety of items and experiences.

Recipients of the scholarships are Nick Kaufmann, St. Paul School of Theology; Marcee Binder, Illff School of Theology; and Katelyn Renea Hilger, Asbury Theological Seminary.

Fleming Family Scholarships were received by Kaufmann, St. Paul; Binder, Illiff; and Hilger, Asbury.

The Dean, Jean and Randy Fleming Scholarships were awarded to Kaufmann, St. Paul; and Binder, Illiff.

Madeline Baugous, Garrett Evangelical Seminary, was the recipient of the Nichole Spiegel-Wheeler Scholarship.

The Merv and Bev Schliefert Scholarship was awarded to Hilger, Asbury. The Fleming-Humphrey-

Goff Scholarship was awarded to Kaufmann, St. Paul. Kaufmann also received the Joe Meehan 32nd Degree Master Mason Scholarship.

Mission Partnership lunch spreads social awareness

The Mercy and Justice team of the Great Plains Conference hosted a Mission Partnership lunch Thursday, June 8, featuring guest speaker Susan Burton, director of women and

children's advocacy for the General Board of Church and Society.



PHOTO BY RACHEL MOSER

Burton said a colleague tells her that her job is "to make sure social principles don't sit on the shelf and collect dust."

Burton shared her thoughts on several issues including climate change, women's rights, health care policies and welcoming the stranger as your neighbor.

She closed the message with a question-and-answer session, during which she shared, "When I'm silent, God's children lose."

The text of Burton's message is available at www.greatplainsumc.org/annualconference.

Campus ministries celebrated at dinner

Bringing the United Methodist church to 13 colleges and universities in Nebraska and Kansas was celebrated the night of June 9 at the Campus Ministry dinner.

Grace Woods, a Tonganoxie High School graduate and incoming student at the University of Kansas, and Emily Logback, an Emporia State University campus ministries participant, talked about the importance of the program for students.

The Rev. Justin Jamis, nearing the end of his tenure as Kansas State campus minister, received the Francis Asbury Award. The Rev. Kurt Cooper, Emporia State campus minister, was presented an award for 25 years of service to students.

Campus pastors each introduced themselves and told of their work reaching students. Those wanting to make connections between the campus ministries and incoming students can fill out information at www.greatplainsumc.org/studentcontact.



PHOTO BY DAVID BURKE

58 remembered during memorial service

Clergy

The Rev. Walter Bailey, the Rev. John F. Bartleson, the Rev. Loyd J. Bliss, the Rev. Roy J. Brotton, the Rev. Dale Lee Clare, the Rev. A. Mark Conard, the Rev. Stephen Eldred, the Rev. Eleanor "Ellie" Marie Foster, the Rev. Eugenia Fultz, the Rev. Gregory F. Hall, the Rev. Leslie Melvin Heisz, the Rev. L. Robert Holbrook, the Rev. Elton L. Hunter, the Rev. K. F. Kaleuati, the Rev. Dwight Wilbur Kemling, the Rev. Dorothy "Dottie" Forinash Knetsch, the Rev. Joyce Kochersperger, the Rev. Julian Miguel, the Rev. Susan A. Montgomery, the Rev. Charles A. Moorner, the Rev. Sandra Sue "Sam" Patterson, the Rev. Alvin C. Rose, the Rev. Roger O. Shanks, the Rev. Alvin H. Smith, the Rev. Eugene Victor Solomon, Sheila Taylor and Miriam Weber.

Spouses

Michael Dan Adams, Lily Ann Berlie, Patricia A. Bliss, Bernice M. Boilesen, Marjorie L. Bruning, Mary Elizabeth Buren, Lillian Joan Bush, Hazel Inez Calcote, Karen Kay Carroll, Maribel Cockerill, Mildred Emma Engstrom, Margaret Lee Ertz, Phyllis Evelyn Birrer Frary, Dr. Glenn Froning, Laura Belle Haines, Donita Mae Houghton, Mina Jean Johnson, Mikael "Mike" Karlsson, Emogene Ryan Picou Kuhn, Margaret L. "Peggy" Minner, Mary C. Howland Newlin, Anna Faye Nugent, Patricia Jean Osborn, Judy E. Pinkerton, Reita Powell, Beverly Jean Horton Rasmussen Charlotte E. Reed, Versa Lee Sims, Betty Stubbs, Cheryl Thompson and Leona Denise Winter.

Annual conference members affirm Topeka as city for single office

By **TODD SEIFERT**, communications director, and **DAVID BURKE**, communications coordinator

When the former Nebraska, Kansas West and Kansas East conferences unified in 2014 to become the Great Plains Conference, it retained its three offices in, respectively, Lincoln, Wichita and Topeka.

But that era is scheduled to end sometime in 2018, as the Great Plains Conference voted by an overwhelming margin to consolidate the three offices into one, located in Topeka. The city was chosen based on a recommendation by a five-member task force set up to recommend a location and was approved by the conference Board of Trustees.

The new conference office, officials said, would not be in the current Topeka office location on Southwest 15th Street.

Through a series of motions from the Rev. Steve Flader,



chair of the Board of Trustees, clergy and lay members to annual conference voted to consolidate the current Lincoln, Topeka and Wichita offices; approved the Topeka location; and authorized the trustees to purchase, lease, sell or transfer property accordingly. The second and third votes, by voice, were overwhelmingly approved.

The decision to consolidate offices resulted from a staffing study conducted earlier this year by consultant the Rev. John Wimberly. A singular office, the consultant concluded, would increase staff collaboration and unity, as well as improve customer service for clergy and laity.

“We want to create a culture that is the Great Plains

Conference,” said the Rev. Craig Hauschild, Personnel Committee chair. “Currently we are tethered to three respective areas. It is time for us to not have those tethers.”

Topeka was chosen from eight possible sites in Kansas and Nebraska for its relatively low cost of operation, cost of living, office space availability and location to an airport, as well as its smaller metro area and small-town feel, Flader said.

Flader gave no timetable for the consolidation and move, except that it possibly would happen sometime in 2018. Motions from the floor to delay the decision until 2019 were soundly defeated.

The Rev. Gary Beach, conference treasurer and director of administrative services, said there are enough funds in trustees reserves for construction of a new building or the purchase of an existing building, and there would be no need for a mortgage.

“It’s not about savings,” he said of the move to a single office.

Initial candidate locations included Topeka, Kansas City, Lawrence, Lincoln, Manhattan, Omaha, Salina and Wichita. Based on factors including the labor market, operating costs, access to air travel and overall quality of life, McCallum Sweeney Consultants — a company that provides businesses, municipalities and organizations assistance with site selection — recommended narrowing the initial list to Topeka and Kansas City. The firm provided information comparing the various markets on those factors before the task force made its decision, which was affirmed unanimously by the Trustees.

“Topeka’s strengths as we saw them were in affordability of housing, cost of living and of available office space, cost per square footage,” Flader said. “The committee saw the benefits of being in a smaller metro area, commuting time to an office and a smaller-town feel. Topeka is also closer to the center of church attendance for the conference.”

Bishop Ruben Saenz Jr. said the decision to maintain three offices when the former Kansas West, Kansas East and Nebraska conferences unified in 2014 was correct at the time.

“Conference staff at all three office sites provided a seamless transition and continuation of mission critical ministries, administration and local church support for the newly formed Great Plains Conference,” Bishop Saenz said. “Their dedicated work and contributions to successfully unify and sustain the conference’s support of the local churches are to be highly commended and deeply appreciated.”

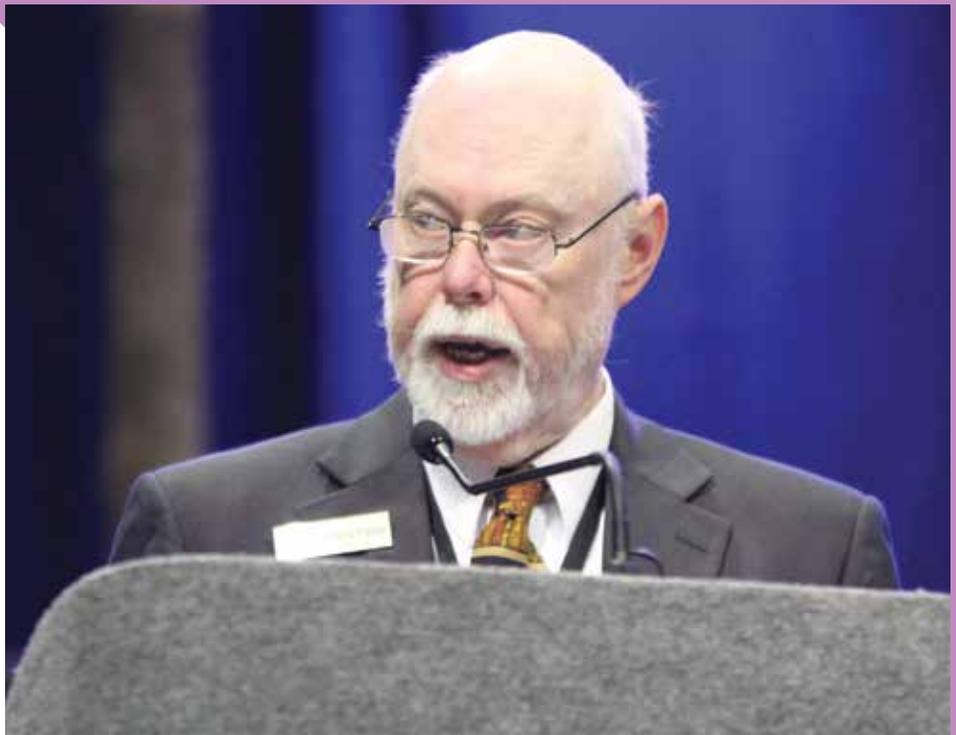
The Board of Trustees then will decide whether to lease or purchase an existing building, renovate an existing building or build a new office structure. If renovations or complete construction is necessary, the move may not happen for

more than 12 months. And even then, conference staff would migrate to the new location in shifts to ensure the work of the conference continues unabated.

Conference staff who do not move to the new location will be offered severance packages to be determined by the Personnel Committee. Hauschild told conference attendees that he wanted to be clear that the conference was not a corporation but instead a representative of the church. As such, the intent is to treat departing employees fairly and to provide as much support as possible to assist them in finding new employment after the consolidation of the three offices.

PHOTO BY RACHEL MOSER

The Rev. Steve Flader, chair of the conference Board of Trustees, explains the decision of Topeka as the home of a single conference office during the 2017 annual conference session in Grand Island, Nebraska.



Study leads to conference staffing changes

By **TODD SEIFERT**,
communications director,

Recommendations from a staffing study commissioned early in 2017 already have started to shape the future for the Great Plains Conference.

The study — conducted by the Rev. John Wimberly, a retired Presbyterian pastor, author and consultant — was received by the Connecting Council at its meeting in April. That group of 75 clergy and laity from across Kansas and Nebraska overwhelmingly voted to implement many of Wimberly's suggestions.

Perhaps the best-known portion of the consultant's report was the idea to consolidate the three conference offices in Wichita, Topeka and Lincoln to a single location in Topeka. The rationale for such a move included the increased efficiency and effectiveness expected in ministry at the district and local church levels when the conference resources are centralized, thanks in large part to improved communication and collaboration.

Prior to deciding which parts of the report to support, the Connecting Council examined all of Wimberly's report by reading sections in their entirety, conducting small-group

discussions and then taking part in discussions with the larger group. The council then voted on each point.

"This study is meant to be used as a tool to help the Great Plains Conference move forward as good stewards of our resources and to be as effective as possible at changing lives and bringing hope to the least, the last and the lost in our mission field," said Bishop Ruben Saenz Jr. "The fact that almost all of the recommendations passed unanimously shows that the findings of our consultant are things we already knew but for which we needed guidance to take actions on important matters related to our structure."

The bishop said none of the decisions were based solely on budgetary savings, though that would be the result in a few cases. Instead, the consultant was directed to focus on strategies for effectively and efficiently supporting the mission of the conference.

"This is not about money," Wimberly told the Connecting Council in presenting his report. "Everything you read in this document is about furthering the mission of your conference."

Wimberly's report suggests that the conference staff will be more efficient, improve internal communication and foster greater teamwork if it is all

in one location. Wimberly said that during his more than 160 interviews with staff, clergy and laity in late winter across the two states, it became clear to him that a single office would help the staff better deploy resources to local congregations for use in addressing needs in their mission fields.

During the 2017 annual conference, clergy and lay members voted to move forward with a single office in Topeka. The conference Board of Trustees now must decide whether to build a new structure, renovate an existing building or lease space. No timetable has been set for the move to a single office, though such a move could happen at some point in 2018.

The bulk of Wimberly's report focused on staffing size, location and functions of various roles.

"Let me tell you that whoever has been doing the hiring for your conference over the past three years has done an outstanding job," Wimberly told the Connecting Council prior to presenting his full report. "As I say in the report, any redesign of structure or reductions in positions that I recommend have nothing to do with the talent of the people you have. Your

See **STAFF** on page 18



PHOTO BY RACHEL MOSER

The Rev. Craig Hauschild, chair of the Personnel Committee, explains that the conference will do its best to care for employees who do not make the move to Topeka.

STAFF continued from page 17

conference is served by a very talented group of people very much committed to ministry.”

Key to the missional strategy of the conference, Wimberly said, is the hiring of an executive director. This position will fulfill duties of assistant to the bishop and directly supervise the directors of congregational excellence, clergy excellence, administrative services and communications. This shift will allow for day-to-day operations to be run with improved communication and collaboration. The addition of this position will give the conference a chief operating officer and will free the bishop to focus more on the spiritual guidance, vision and leadership.

Among Wimberly’s other suggestions, the Connecting Council:

- Authorized the creation of a team to overhaul the way the Great Plains Conference manages data. This group will focus on how information is processed to avoid duplication of efforts among the many administrative forms required within the denomination.
- Authorized the creation of a team to

assess which districts need physical offices and analyze best practices for how administrative assistant work is done in the 21st century.

- Authorized moving the Safe Gatherings function from the congregational excellence team to the administrative services team.
- Voted to cease publication of the quarterly GPconnect magazine in favor of more 21st-century friendly modes of communication after this summer 2017 edition.

The consultant also recommended several changes in personnel within the conference. The council approved the increase of the lay leadership development coordinator position, served by David Brant, from a part-time to a full-time role and directed the Personnel Committee to rewrite the job description of the property manager, currently served by Patrick McKaig, to focus more directly on real estate sales and acquisition, reflecting the growing need for concentrated attention on the purchase, sale and management of properties.

Two areas of conference work were

approved for further study. A team will evaluate the use of the Resource Center, which serves as a library for Christian education materials in the Lincoln office, and make recommendations about its continuation. Diane Dunkerson, the Resource Center director, retired effective June 16. No replacement will be named until the decision on the center’s future is made.

Another team will evaluate best practices for conducting the duties of administrative assistants at the district level and will make a recommendation as to which offices should remain open and, potentially, determine how to perform some functions within a smaller team of administrative assistants.

The recommendations adopted by the Connecting Council also resulted in the reduction of three staff positions on the congregational excellence team, effective July 1. As the new director of that team, the Rev. Nathan Stanton will continue to manage a portfolio of tasks associated with new church development but also will oversee small-membership church ministries and Hispanic ministries, the latter of which was led by Corey Godbey.

Stanton moved to his new role July 1, and the Rev. Micki McCorkle, former coordinator of small-membership church ministries, accepted an appointment to serve as pastor of Trinity United Methodist Church in El Dorado, Kansas.

The only two recommendations rejected by the council included the creation of a new full-time position on the clergy excellence team to address concerns about the health and well-being of pastors. Citing budgetary concerns, the Connecting Council decided instead to add a component of clergy wellness to the position of clergy excellence director, currently served by the Rev. Nancy Lambert.

The second item rejected was a recommendation to “bridge the gap” between conference staff and laity by using community-building events such as conference staff visiting districts for training and “mission fair” style road shows so laity better understand what resources are available from the conference. The council decided the conference staff already takes part in such visits but urged the conference staff to find more ways to take part in those kinds of events.

Workshop shares strategies for reaching new generations

By DAVID BURKE, communications coordinator

Foam fingers, a study group with Applebee's appetizers and "mugging" first-time visitors.

Those were some of the ideas that sprouted from a new satellite church in Wichita, shared in a workshop throughout the Great Plains Conference via livestream on April 29, aimed at helping churches reach new generations of people.

The Aldersgate ReNew campus had its first services in



PHOTO BY DAVID BURKE

September. The Rev. Jordan McFall, pastor of the ReNew campus, said the church now averages 120 people for its Sunday morning service, and had 330 worship on Easter, including a sunrise service at the elephant veranda at the Sedgwick County Zoo.

"God is doing some really cool stuff in the past seven

months," McFall said at a workshop for churches trying to attract younger people. "God is truly renewing lives."

McFall said the basis of ReNew, a satellite of the established Aldersgate UMC in northwest Wichita, came from the book "The New Adapters: Shaping Ideas to Fit Your Congregation" by the Rev. Jacob Armstrong — pastor of Providence UMC in Mount Juliet, Tennessee — which included contributions from the Rev. Mike Slaughter, lead pastor of Ginghamburg Church in Dayton, Ohio, and the Rev. Adam Hamilton, founding pastor of Church of the

Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas.

"We have to adapt or die," McFall told about 80 gathered in the church, as well as others watching on the Great Plains Conference website. "It isn't going to be easy."

There is a "gaping hole" in young people between ages 18 and 35 not attending church, McFall said. According to studies, 65 million people have not gone to church in the past six months.

"Where are the people at?" ReNew leaders asked themselves last year, and set out to high-attendance events, including football games at nearby Goddard High School — where they distributed foam "No. 1" fingers with the church's logo and website on the back — and fall festivals, where they distributed water bottles with the same information on the label.

"There's no pressure-selling," said Mike Janzen, one of the ReNew team members. "It's just a matter of keeping that in front of them."

Janzen, who runs a sign company, had a "no Sharpies" rule for the signs, and every image of the church projects was high quality.

"You want it to look professional," he said. "You want to make it look like you know what you're doing."

One of the families brought in by ReNew's mailers for its inaugural block party and worship service was Jeremy and Jessica Steele and their three children.

"I never felt I had a home in a church until I came to ReNew," Jeremy Steele said. "I'm one with my faith. It's everything."

McFall said ReNew has constantly worked to balance traditional and contemporary elements in its services.

The authenticity shown in those services attracted Tad Hatfield of Wichita.

"You meet genuine people," he said. "They're just there to love one another and to love Jesus."

Once visitors get in the door for a service, a committee

Find resources from ReNew online at www.greatplainsumc.org/videos. Simply select training and view six videos.

has 48 hours to visit them at their homes — insisting they don't want to come in — to give them a ReNew coffee mug and answer any questions they might have about the church.

Of the ReNew congregation, 62 of them are involved in some sort of small group, McFall said. Those groups meet anywhere from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m., the latter of which regularly meets at a local Applebee's "for the half-price appetizers," he said.

Twenty-two churches were represented at the nearly three-hour workshop, a venture of the Wichita East/West District's Laity Connection.



Church of the Resurrection to new sanctuary

By **DAVID BURKE**,
communications coordinator

As a teenager, the Rev. Adam Hamilton worked at Hardee's. He was part of a crew opening a new Overland Park location of the fast-food franchise, which had a "soft opening" where staff members could invite their parents.

"In case we killed somebody with hamburgers, we wanted it to be family," Hamilton joked to his congregation.

The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas, which Hamilton began in a funeral home 26½ years ago, had the self-proclaimed "soft opening" of its new sanctuary during services March 25-26. The 3,500-seat, \$81.3 million project will get an official grand opening at its five services April 1-2. Church members were encouraged to attend the "soft" opening, but wait to

invite others until the grand opening so they could, in Hamilton's words, "work all the kinks out."

The first services at the new sanctuary of Church of the Resurrection — which has grown to become the largest United Methodist congregation in the world — included a blessing of the baptismal font and the altar by Great Plains Conference Bishop Ruben Saenz Jr.

"Today is a special day of rejoicing," Bishop Saenz told the congregation. "Some of you have been here from the very beginning. To see this, you know nothing is impossible through God."

Bishop Saenz said every house of worship has a spiritual value that exceeds its material value.

"When you walk in, you experience that space where heaven and earth touch, where we hear the Good News of God's saving grace, where our lives

are transformed. We experience the call and claim of God to send us back out into the world, so the world can be what God envisions it to be."

The new sanctuary, with three-quarter round seating, includes seven stainless steel "sails" that represent both the seven days of creation and the seven days of Holy Week. The carpet and theater-seat cushions in the sanctuary are a light green, to suggest grass.

"All of this is meant to tell a story," Hamilton told the congregation.

But the visual centerpiece of the new sanctuary is its stained glass window, nearly 100 feet wide and 37 feet high, which uses 161 panels to tell the story of Christianity from the Garden of Eden to 20th century civil rights leaders, with more than 70 individuals depicted, with an image of Jesus Christ dominating the center.

A video by the window's creator says the work weighs eight tons and is the largest single-image stained glass window ever made. Its fused glass



View an interactive view of the stained glass window at sacredspaces.org/leawood/window.

opens doors

PHOTO PROVIDED BY CHURCH OF THE RESURRECTION

has never been tried on this scale, according to its creator. Each panel was made in California and shipped to Leawood.

“Step into the garden, step into the stories in this room,” Hamilton invited the congregation. “I feel God’s presence when I walk in this room and I hope you do too.”

A five-year project, Hamilton said the goal was to create an intimate and a sacred space, as well as something that gave a sense of community.

Various architects, bank officials and

contractors were invited to the services and recognized throughout the day.

Hamilton said he hoped the new sanctuary would be an example for United Methodists “for centuries to come,” and would be a gathering place for present-day Methodists from around the world.

The botanical theme continues outside, with plans for a memorial garden outside of the new building.

Hamilton and his wife, LaVon, were presented with the first two spaces in the garden by the church’s managing

executive director, Dan Entwistle, who joked during the services that there was no easy way “to give someone a burial plot.”

“There’s no other human we could recognize that has made this project possible,” Entwistle said. “We love you, and we’re so grateful for you.”

Those in the first services also watched a video of the construction process.

Church of the Resurrection’s previous sanctuary will be converted into ministerial space and small group gathering areas in another \$22 million project, Hamilton said.

In his sermon about the Promised Land, Hamilton said that he didn’t want the completion of the sanctuary to be similar to a friend’s church in Missouri, where its parishioners stopped attending because the new building project was complete.

“This is not the Promised Land,” Hamilton told those in attendance. “We’re just getting started.”



PHOTO BY DAVID BURKE
The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection opened its new sanctuary with services on March 25-26, 2017.

the united methodist **open door** ministry **opens** **doors to new building** Food • Clothing • Shelter

By **DAVID BURKE**,
communications coordinator

Location, location, location.

It's a watchword for real estate, and one of the key components for the new home of United Methodist Open Door ministries in Wichita, the largest food bank in south-central Kansas.

Open Door, which opened in 1965 as United Methodist Urban Ministry, recently moved its food operations from its former home in downtown Wichita to 2130 E. 21st St. in Wichita, which puts it onto public transportation lines and in a cul-de-sac with the Boys and Girls Club and The Opportunity Project's Early Learning Center, a day care and preschool for low-income families.

"We're sitting very nicely," Open Door executive director Deann Smith said May 15 at the new facility's open house. "The other building was not on bus transit. Now there is a bus stop literally here in front."

Open Door's shelter and used clothing operations remain in downtown Wichita.

With its new neighbors, "we hope to meet and have conversations about how we can work together with each other's clients," Smith added.

It also puts Open Door within blocks of Wichita State University, which will help both low-income students and students wanting to volunteer for community service.

The new facility is about 24,000 square feet, compared to the 14,000-15,000 square feet it had at its food locations on Moseley Street in downtown Wichita.

A former training facility for Cessna Aircraft, the building was opened thanks to a \$2.75 million capital campaign that included financial support from Textron, Cargill, the Kansas

Health Foundation and the Mabee Foundation.

"We called upon many of our city's great corporations, and they gave us unbelievable response and support," board member Steve Martens said.

Open Door provides two food programs – a community food ministry, a food box program that provides nutritionally balanced, emergency food assistance; and the commodity supplemental food program, a monthly food box for items provided by the USDA for income-eligible individuals 60 and older.

The new location is also the home of the Head to Toe Hygiene Pantry, which provides personal items that are not covered by government aid programs.

Jeremy Kindy, Open Door development director, said the new location is more inviting and less intimidating for those in need.

"The biggest thing is people swallowing their pride and coming in here for the first time," Kindy said. "The hardest thing to do is to ask for help. I'm hoping by this central location that people will feel welcomed and can come in here and get the things they need."

Smith said that about 24,000 individuals are served by Open Door, which reached a height of 34,000 at the peak of the 2008 recession.

"We're very thankful that's coming down," she added. "We'd love to work ourselves down to where there wasn't any more poverty. But I don't see that happening any time soon."

Smith said the capital campaign, Open Door's second in 10 years, will give way to more strategic planning for the organization's future.

"We're going to take a moment to breathe and celebrate and then go back to the drawing board," she said.



PHOTOS BY DAVID BURKE

Volunteers and donors look
at the new warehouse for
Open Door.

Judicial Council asked to reconsider ruling

A case with ties to the Great Plains Conference involving the United Methodist Church's first openly gay bishop continues to work its way through the denomination's legal system.

On June 14, the Western Jurisdiction College of Bishops filed a motion asking the Judicial Council to reconsider its ruling involving Bishop Karen Oliveto of the Mountain Sky Episcopal Area. Just minutes after her election in July 2016 in the Western Jurisdiction, Great Plains delegate Dixie Brewster of Kansas made a motion in the closing moments of the Southcentral Jurisdictional Conference requesting a declaratory decision on whether a gay person could serve in the episcopacy. In a ruling in April, the Judicial Council found that an openly homosexual and partnered bishop may be charged with disobedience to church law.

Under the Book of Discipline, people who are self-avowed, practicing homosexuals may not be ordained and may not be appointed as pastors. Bishop Oliveto is legally married to another woman.

The council said it had no jurisdiction over the nomination,

election and assignment of a bishop.

Richard A. Marsh, chancellor of the Rocky Mountain Conference, which is part of the Mountain Sky Area, told United Methodist News Service (UNMS) that the Book of Discipline defines "self-avowed practicing homosexual" as a person who openly acknowledges to "a bishop, district superintendent, district committee of ordained ministry, board of ordained ministry or clergy session" that the person is a practicing homosexual. The General Conference definition does not permit disqualification "on an inference of sexual practice arising from common understanding and practice or from a public record, no matter how reasonable the Judicial Council or anyone else in the world thinks it might be to draw such an inference."

The motion also argues that the decision violates the presumption of innocence, creates a new chargeable offense and treats Social Principles as church law.

The motion for reconsideration was met with protest by the Rev. Keith Boyette, who served as counsel for Brewster during the April hearing.

"The motion for reconsideration is without merit and raises no issues that have not already been

raised and addressed by the Judicial Council," Boyette told UNMS.

According to the Judicial Council's procedures, requests for consideration must be filed within 45 days of the date of the decision. Then, a majority of the Judicial Council members must vote in favor of reconsideration for it to be placed on the docket.

The legal posturing takes place as the Bishop's Commission on a Way Forward, a group of 32 clergy and laity from around the world, continues its work of examining and recommending possible revisions to paragraphs of the Book of Discipline regarding human sexuality. The group is exploring options for maintaining unity in the denomination prior to a special session of General Conference in 2019 in St. Louis.

The commission was formed after the 2016 General Conference in Portland, Oregon, during which delegates from the Great Plains Conference urged the Council of Bishops to show leadership on the divisive issue of human sexuality. Bishops came forward with the idea for the commission, which was approved by delegates.

Todd Seifert, conference communications director, and Kathy Gilbert, United Methodist News Service, contributed to this report.



PHOTO COURTESY OF UNITED METHODIST NEWS SERVICE

Bishop Karen Oliveto (left) and Dixie Brewster (right) meet for the first time prior to the opening of oral arguments before the United Methodist Judicial Council.

Call to prayer for the church

United Methodists in the Great Plains Conference have been asked to set aside Sept. 3-9 as a deliberate week of prayer for the denomination as it continues to discern issues surrounding human sexuality.

A prayer movement has been launched in response to the Council of Bishops initiative called "Praying Our Way Forward." The bishops ask that all United Methodists pray for God's leadership to guide us effectively in fulfilling the mission of the church.

More details will be made available as the dates assigned to the Great Plains draw nearer. The Upper Room is helping organize the prayer effort. In the meantime, a Facebook community titled "Pray UMC" has posted a call for United Methodists to make Mondays a day of prayer for the denomination.

Resources and more information can be found on the special Upper Room website at <http://umcprays.org>.

Fisher reflects on 40 years in ministry

By DAVID BURKE,
communications coordinator

As a young woman, the Rev. Evelyn Fisher was uncertain of her career path.

She earned undergraduate degrees in journalism and political science, but her first job working in corporate public relations and public affairs for a Fortune 500 company in Kansas City led her to purveying what she called “propaganda.”

Her father had been a city manager for two towns in Texas, and she had begun taking classes to earn her masters of public administration. She thought of enrolling in law school but realized, “I didn’t want to practice law.”

Her decision became clearer when she attended a job fair at Johnson County Community College in Kansas and attended a presentation on women in ministry by the Rev. Pat Ault-Duell and the Rev. Sharon Howell, both United Methodist pastors at the time.

“It was the first time in my life I had known that women could be in pastoral ministry,” recalled Fisher, raised a Southern Baptist. “It just clicked for me.”

The summer before she started at St. Paul School of Theology in Kansas City, she was hired as associate pastor and youth director at a nearby Disciples of Christ church. Her second Sunday at the church was the beginning of the senior pastor’s five-week vacation and put the fledgling Fisher in the pulpit.

“I was in charge. I was terrified,” she remembers. “But for the first time, I had walked into the pulpit I thought, ‘I’m coming home.’ That’s the only way to describe it. This is what I need to do.”

And that’s just what she has done.

Fisher retired from a 40-year ministerial career at the end of June, fairly evenly splitting her tenure between pastoring local churches and administration. After working for six years as the former Kansas East Conference’s consultant for

pastoral and congregational concerns, she served as Topeka District superintendent, Kansas director of clergy and congregational excellence and, for the past four years, as director of congregational excellence for the Great Plains Conference.

“I have been privileged to serve with some amazing team members, and I have been moved by the faith and commitment of the laity and clergy of the Great Plains,” Fisher said during her final annual conference session as a staff member. “You have given me the great gift of allowing me to walk beside you for just a portion of the journey, and I am deeply appreciative.”

Pastoring at local churches — which she did at Bucyrus, Pomona-Richter, Burlington, Manhattan and Lenexa, all in Kansas — was her greatest joy, she said.

“I loved preaching. There’s nothing like being pastor to your own congregation. There’s nothing like those relationships,” Fisher said.

Fisher was appointed to the unique position of consultant for pastoral and congregational concerns in the former Kansas East Conference, which she said combined her training as a conflict consultant and marriage and family therapist with coaching those new in ministry, including working through transitions with churches in crisis after misconduct by clergy or laity.

“I used to laughingly describe the position as ‘things the DS didn’t want to do,’” she recalled. “I’m one of those weird people who thinks that kind of work is challenging and even fun at times.”

That led to her 2006 appointment in the Topeka District.

“I may have been the only DS for whom becoming a DS was less stressful than what I’d been doing before,” she added with a laugh.

Fisher said being on the front row of the unification that led to the Great Plains Conference was her greatest accomplishment.

“In general in these five years, I’ve worked with some amazing lay people. The pastors are amazing, too, but I



PHOTO BY DAVID BURKE

had already worked with them rather than lay people,” Fisher said. “They’re just incredibly gifted with all kinds of ability and creativity and resources. The challenge has been trying to develop a way to engage those in the ministry of the church and the mission of the conference. We’ve made some steps in the right direction, I think.”

The Rev. Nathan Stanton, who succeeded Fisher on July 1 as director of congregational excellence, said he appreciates her wisdom and experience.

“It’s really been invaluable to me,” said Stanton, currently coordinator of new church development for the Great Plains. “She’s a really strong leader, and works at communicating well and keeping everyone apprised. I’ve appreciated her strong leadership in that way.”

Stanton said Fisher also has “been very encouraging and very trusting to allow for some experimentation, and not to get too wound up over failure — or perceived failure.

“That benefitted me as far as learning how to take things to a different level,” he added.

Fisher will remain in Wichita upon her retirement and will serve as a consultant and coach for churches “on a very limited basis.” She’ll spend more time with her 11 grandchildren — six of whom live in Wichita, and one for whom she is legal guardian. Fisher has three daughters that she adopted through the foster care system, where she served as a foster parent for 10 years.

Stanton to lead congregational excellence

By **TODD SEIFERT**,
communications director

Bishop Ruben Saenz Jr. announced Wednesday, March 29, that the Rev. Nathan Stanton will be the new director of congregational excellence for the Great Plains Conference.

Stanton previously served as the conference’s new church development coordinator. He replaces the Rev. Evelyn Fisher, who retired June 30 after nearly 40 years in ministry.

“I’m excited about Nathan’s gifts and graces and how he will take what he has learned during his time with new church development to provide mission field-focused leadership that will help congregations grow by reaching and discipling new people for Jesus Christ across the Great Plains Conference,” said Bishop Saenz. “The lessons Nathan learned planting new churches will provide important insight and strong leadership that fits well with the recently launched mission field emphasis in the Great Plains Conference.”

The mission field-based system has reduced the number of district superintendents in favor of equipping local congregations with effective clergy while empowering the laity for a more active role in ministry. It is meant to harness the gifts of congregations in the more than 1,000 Great Plains Conference churches to focus outward on the mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

Stanton earned his bachelor’s degree in 1991 from Kansas Wesleyan University in Salina and then earned his master’s of divinity degree from Saint Paul School of Theology in 1995. He served as youth coordinator for First United Methodist Church in El Dorado, Kansas, during seminary. Prior to serving in full-time ministry, he served as coordinator of the North Central Kansas Regional Prevention Center from 1994 to 1997. He earned a second master’s degree from Kansas State University in speech communication and theater. He



was ordained a deacon in 1999 and served as executive pastor for Wichita Saint Mark UMC from 1999 to 2002. Prior to becoming an elder in 2004, Stanton served the Plains and Kismet UMCs, after which he served churches in Anthony, Kansas, and in Wichita at Pleasant Valley UMC before being named to his current role in 2013. Stanton also currently serves on the board of trustees for Kansas Wesleyan.

Stanton said the conference’s shift in focus back to the mission field of each local church will not come easily, but he is excited to be part of the solution to help local congregations become more vital in their communities.

“What is needed in Omaha is very different from what is needed in Grand Island, and that is different than what is needed in Topeka or Dodge City,” he said. “Ultimately, we have to be willing to unleash the creativity of disciples across the conference in leading people to Christ.”

Bishop Saenz said such an effort to discern and equip will require “tearing down silos” of ministry.

“Nathan will oversee the entire congregational excellence staff and help shift the team to a more integrated approach,” the bishop said. “He will help cultivate a collaborative approach between our local churches and lay leadership in churches large and small.”

One slight change in conference structure meant to help Stanton in his new role is that the bishop has appointed him to the cabinet.

“He will be there not just to participate in discussions about strategy,” Bishop Saenz said, “but he will be there to hear first-hand what needs there are in the districts, and he will be part of developing solutions to help our local churches flourish.”

Stanton said he values the opportunity to play an active role in shaping the future of the conference.

“I’ve learned a lot in my four years with new church development,” Stanton said. “I’ve had the chance to dig more deeply into what makes a congregation vital from the very beginning. One of my core values, if you can call it that, is to unite clergy and lay people in partnerships built on innovation and entrepreneurial ministry with strong, passionate, courageous leaders who are willing to show some creativity in making disciples for Christ.”

AFTER SUCCESSFUL GREAT READY FOR RETIREMENT

By **DAVID BURKE**, communications coordinator

After the unification that created the Great Plains Conference, the Rev. Gary Beach considered himself a survivor.

Literally.

Beach, who is retiring as treasurer and director of administrative services for the conference at the end of June, said laying the groundwork that united the Nebraska, Kansas East and Kansas West conferences in 2014 took its toll on his health.

In a meeting in March 2013, he began to feel uneasy.

“My blood pressure went crazy that night. I ended up in the ER and almost had a stroke,” Beach recalled.

After five weeks of rest, while he was splitting his time between the Topeka and Wichita offices, he returned to work.

Stress, he says now, took its toll on him.

“There was no doubt,” he said from his Topeka office. “I had had one day off in seven weeks, working 70 hours a week. The stress and tension in some of those meetings was pretty high.

“From the outside it looked like things came together real well — and in many ways it did — but getting to the decisions was not easy,” Beach added.

Beach credits his employees with filling in the gaps while he was gone.

“Fortunately I have two amazing staffs here and in Wichita for the Kansas conferences,” he said. “I can’t imagine how many hours some of them worked to cover me at that time.”

Now that the unification is behind him, Beach feels like

he can smile and somewhat relax.

“Bringing the conferences together was quite a challenge when it came to money and property and technology and benefits,” he says. “It feels like we’ve pretty well got that accomplished.”

Beach’s retirement after 42 years of ministry draws to a close a career that has balanced both faith and financial obligations.

Born in Paola, Kansas — just south of Kansas City, but at the time farmland — 65 years ago, Beach went to Wichita State University, where he graduated with a degree in business and financial administration. While in college, he worked for the National Shirt Shop chain in Wichita, where he was promoted to assistant manager, studying during the time he didn’t have customers.

An offer came to make Beach a manager at the store, but he turned it down — he felt a calling to enter seminary.

“I thought, ‘I’ll never use that degree in business administration and accounting again,’” he said with a laugh.

After graduation from St. Paul School of Theology in Kansas City, he served churches in Pittsburg, St. Mary’s-Emmett-Belvue, Council Grove and Ottawa, all in Kansas. He became the Emporia-Manhattan district superintendent from 1995 to 2001, and was director of connectional ministries for the former Kansas East Conference from 2001 to 2010.

A vacancy in the treasurer/director of administrative services office of the conference led to his appointment in 2010. Kansas West was added to his duties in 2011.

Beach said his business background has been a benefit to the job.

District superintendents close careers

Dan Flanagan

Missouri River District served since 1970
(Will be serving as associate pastor for senior adults at First UMC, Richardson, Texas, as a retired elder.



Linda Louderback

Wichita West District served since 1986



PLAINS START, BEACH

“Having had theological education and being ordained brought a different aspect to the treasury side, and a closer understanding why we’re paying for some of the things we’re paying for — and understanding the structure of the United Methodist Church more fully, maybe, than some lay treasurers,” he said.

His successor, Scott Brewer, agrees.

“Gary has such a deep knowledge of this conference and the previous conferences, and such a commitment to doing it right and caring for all he’s been entrusted with,” Brewer said. “He’s got such a deep and abiding love for this work and this conference.

“Even as he’s wearing his green eyeshade, he still takes his role as a pastor very seriously,” Brewer added.

Brewer began working under Beach at the beginning of the year, and will become treasurer on July 1.

“I’ll get what I can as I drink from the fire hose” of Beach’s expertise, he said.

Beach and his wife, Betty, a retired educator, will remain in Manhattan where he plans to garden, read books, travel and deepen his interest in genealogy. Their daughter and son-in-law live in Wichita, and their son with them in Manhattan.

A longtime resident of Manhattan, Beach has made the 60-mile, one-hour commute daily. He was carpooling with a friend who worked down the street from the Topeka office until about a year and a half ago.

“I have four-lane interstate almost the entire way,” Beach said. “Just set it on cruise and go — nothing stressful about it at all.”

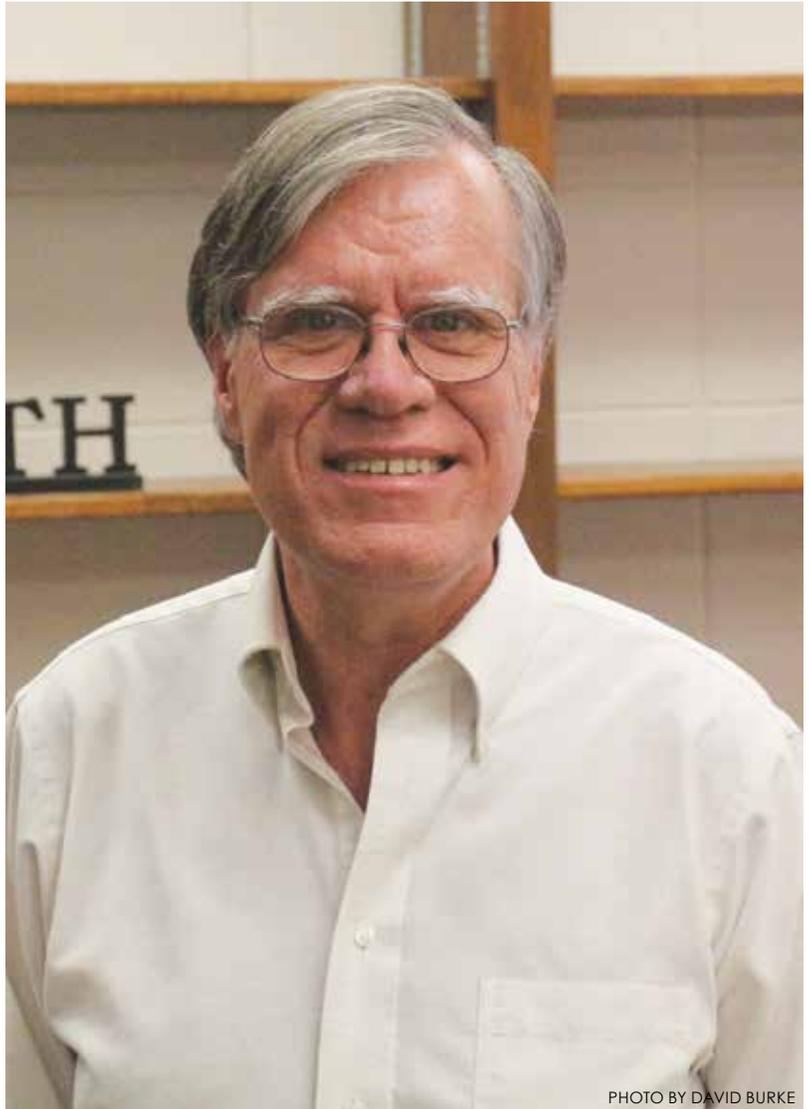


PHOTO BY DAVID BURKE

Four district superintendents retired effective June 30.

Jim Akins

Hays District,
served since 1980.
(Will be serving Frankfort,
Kansas, as a retired elder.)



Kay Alnor

Great West District
served since 1987



Great Plains contingent meets Nigeria counterparts

By JERRY FREESE and ANDREA PARET

Nigeria Mission Round Table

On March 6-8, 2017, the United Methodist Church of Nigeria (UMCN) held a Mission Round Table in Lagos, Nigeria. According to the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM), a Mission Round Table is a process of bringing together a group of partners in God's mission

from a geographical area or in relation to a specific topic. The UMCN is an Episcopal Area consisting of four annual conferences in Nigeria. Bishop John Wesley Yohanna of the UMCN called the Round Table to identify a vision and mission statement for the UMCN and to come up with goals to achieve that vision. Participating in the Round Table were several representatives from each of the four Nigeria Annual Conferences, a few representatives from GBGM and some



PHOTO COURTESY OF JERRY FREESE AND ANDREA PARET

international partners. Among the international partners were Andrea Paret and Jerry Feese, representing the Great Plains Conference Mercy & Justice Team.

During the three-day Round Table, the 50-plus participants worked together and in small groups to identify

all working toward the shared goals. Paret and Feese both stated that they felt privileged to witness and participate in this endeavor and they both made new friends within the UMC in Nigeria.

Jalingo Orphanage Visit

After the UMCN Mission Round Table, Andrea Paret and Jerry Feese travelled to Jalingo to visit the orphanage and school which the Great Plains Conference supports. About 95 orphans live there. The primary school students attend the school on the orphanage grounds. The orphans in secondary school attend a public school in the city. There are also over 100 non-orphan children who attend the orphanage primary school. An assembly was held at the school so Paret and Feese could greet all the children. They also got to meet each of the teachers and orphanage staff. Simon Benjamin, the orphanage coordinator, and Mary Jonathan, the chair of the orphanage board of governance, gave Paret and Feese a tour of all the buildings in the orphanage compound.

Paret and Feese attended a meeting with Benjamin, Jonathan and Tanico Lawrence, another board of governance member; Harry Ibrahim, partnership coordinator for UMCN; and a few other representatives of the Southern Nigeria Conference. In this meeting, Benjamin presented an overview of the current situation of the orphanage, including its successes and challenges. The biggest challenge at this time is the cost of food which has more than doubled in Nigeria in the past year. The board of governance, which was formed in 2016, is working closely with Benjamin to address the problems. As the group discussed the goals for the orphanage two main themes emerged. First, the orphanage has to work at becoming more financially sustaining. An agricultural sustainability project is badly needed which could provide food for the orphans, some

cash, and agricultural training for the students. A second goal is to build a secondary school at the orphanage to eliminate having to pay for the older orphans to attend a public school.

Bethuel Inasu, accountant for the orphanage, met the next day with Paret and Feese to show how the finances are handled at the orphanage and to answer questions they brought from the GPC.



PHOTO COURTESY OF JERRY FEESE AND ANDREA PARET

Jerry Feese with round table delegates.

the challenges facing the UMCN, identify their vision of the future UMCN, write a mission statement for the UMCN and create SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely) goals for key action items.

The mission statement created by the group is “The mission of the United Methodist Church of Nigeria is to raise faithful and fruitful disciples of Jesus Christ who are passionate to transform the world through preaching, teaching and the provision of services to care for the spiritual and physical needs of the church and the society.” Six areas were defined as most needing to be addressed and goals for making progress in each area were agreed upon. These areas and their goals were:

- sustainability — empower people to be more self-sufficient and prosperous by making available micro-financing loans;
- education, training and leadership development — build a new United Methodist college in Nigeria;
- peace and relationship building — create a task force to work on reconciliation throughout the Episcopal Area, and build a prayer network to promote peace;
- agriculture — go into crop production on church owned land to train people in agriculture and to help sustainability;
- health and social services — build a hospital in Jalingo;
- evangelism and discipleship — plant two churches in each of the four conferences.

Bishop Yohanna declared the Round Table a great success. The UMCN leaders worked together to create an ambitious path forward for the church with



PHOTO COURTESY OF JERRY FEESE AND ANDREA PARET

While in Nigeria, Jerry Feese and Andrea Paret, were able to witness a wedding ceremony in Jalingo, at McBride UMC.

See Nigeria on page 30

Death notices

Lily Ann (Sunblade) Berlie, 81, spouse of a retired clergy member, passed away April 6, 2017. Survivors include her husband, the Rev. Robert E. Berlie, Sr., and children Steve Sunblade, Mike Sunblade, Stan Sunblade, Mitch Sunblade, Lenny Sunblade and Michele Crom. Memorial contributions may be made to ruralMED Home Care Resources, P.O. Box 470, Holdrege, NE 68949 or First UMC, P.O. Box 30, Holdrege, NE 68949.

Stephen D. Eldred, 72, a retired clergy member, passed away April 5, 2017. Survivors include his wife, Barbara Jean Eldred and children Mark Eldred and Laura Eldred. No memorial information is available.

Rev. Joyce Kochersperger, 94, a retired clergy member, passed away March 9, 2017. Survivors include her four children, Bob Jr., Kathy, Wendy and John. Memorial contributions are suggested to the Grace United Methodist Memorial Fund, 11485 S. Ridgeview Road, Olathe, KS 66061.

Emogene Ryan Picou Kuhn, 82, spouse of a retired clergy member, passed away on April 19, 2017. She is survived by her husband, R. Laney Kuhn and two sisters, Evelyn Stafford and Bernedette Meadows. Donations may be made to the Mary Ryan Memorial Park Fund, 30000 Huff Chapel Road, Springfield, LA 70462.

Helen L. Murray, 93, a surviving spouse of a clergy member, passed away May 14, 2017. Helen was married to the Rev. Henry Murray of Marion, Kansas. Survivors include her children Nancy Mulholland and Harold Murray. Memorials are suggested to the Henry and Helen Murray Endowed Scholarship Fund at Southwestern College in care of Petersen Funeral Home, 215 N. Main, Newton, KS 67114.

Virginia L. Near, 78, the spouse of a retired clergy member, passed away April 26, 2017. She is survived by her husband, the Rev. Richard Near, and children Ralph Supernaw, Cheryl Atkinson, Barry Supernaw and Bradley Supernaw. Memorial donations may be made to Merrick County Fitness Center, in Central City, Nebraska.

Richard V. Odgers, 84, a retired clergy member, died on June 1, 2017. He is survived by his wife, Marie, and children, David Odgers and Jane Odgers. Memorials may be given to Parkinsons.org or Nebraska Wesleyan University.

Charlotte Loraine Reed, 94, spouse of a retired clergy member, passed away April 6, 2017. Survivors include her husband, the Rev. Earl Reed, and children Loraine Eurek, Margaret Klimek and David Reed. Memorials may be given to Epworth Village, PO Box 503, York NE 68467.

Alvin C. Rose, 68, a retired clergy member, passed away March 13, 2017. He is survived by two daughters. Memorial information is unavailable.

Roger O. Shanks, 87, a retired clergy member, passed away April 23, 2017. He is survived by his wife, Kay, and children, Michael Shanks, Michelle McGuire and Monty Shanks. Memorial contributions may be made to the Meadowlark Memory Program. Memorials can be sent to the Yorgensen-Meloan-Londeen Funeral Home 1616 Poyntz Avenue, Manhattan, KS 66502.

Nigeria continued from page 29

A New Nigeria Partnership Agreement

The GPC Mercy & Justice Team, working with the Nigeria Partnership Team, has drafted an updated partnership agreement between the GPC and UMCN. The original partnership agreement between the Nebraska Conference and the UMCN was signed in 2001 and adopted by the GPC when the GPC was formed. This new agreement changes the focus for the GPC to doing more for the education of the Jalingo orphans, while in the orphanage and afterwards. The focus for the UMCN is to do more for the feeding, clothing and health care of the orphans while working toward sustainability for the orphanage. It also calls for better communication and accountability between the partners.

The new Nigeria Partnership Agreement was approved at the Great Plains Annual Conference in June. It will be submitted to the UMCN to be voted on at its Annual Conference in December.



PHOTO COURTESY OF JERRY FREESE AND ANDREA PARET

Pictured from left: Magdiel, a teacher at the orphanage; Mary, the chair of the Board of Governance of the orphanage; Andrea Paret; Benjamin, director of the orphanage; Jerry Freese; and Bethuel, treasurer of the orphanage.

SURVEY SHEDS LIGHT ON WORSHIP, RELATIONSHIPS AND STRESS FOR CLERGY, LAITY



By **TODD SEIFERT**,
communications director

A survey of clergy and laity conducted prior to an annual conference session workshop on self-care as a spiritual discipline sheds light on the stress levels of pastors, the scriptural anchors for laity and the health of relationships between clergy and their congregations throughout the Great Plains.

The survey — conducted by the Rev. Dr. Anne Gatobu, pastor at Ashland United Methodist Church in Nebraska, associate professor of pastoral counseling at Asbury Theological Seminary and leader of the workshop at annual conference, and Dr. Alice Koech, adjunct professor of counseling at Asbury — garnered responses from 261 clergy and 148 members of laity.

“Because of your excellent response, the fact that there was no incentive offered and that the survey was randomly offered to any willing respondents, we can confidently say that the results of the survey are a true sample, representative of general patterns of clergy and laity in our conference,” Gatobu and Koech wrote in a report on the survey.

The survey featured 10 questions that attempted to gather information on matters such as worship experience, the quality of the relationship between

clergy and their congregations, goals for ministry and levels of exhaustion and/or stress.

The survey found positive results. Both 59 percent of clergy and laity responded that they were “very open” regarding communication with their spouses or significant others. And 56 percent of clergy responded they were “very close” to their children, with another 17 percent saying they were “somewhat close.” Only 3 percent of clergy said the relationship with their children was “distant and poor.” None of the laity responded that they had a “distant and poor” relationship with their children.

The survey also found that many clergy and laity make encouragement and accountability a priority, with 63 percent of clergy and 60 percent of laity reporting they meet at least once per week or month with colleagues to encourage one another.

However, the survey also discovered some cause for concern. About 75 percent of clergy and 70 percent of laity reported they encounter mental exhaustion at least two to three times per month, with 17 percent of clergy and 18 percent of laity reporting they experience mental exhaustion weekly.

“Mental exhaustion is a major factor in the measure of healthy balance of self-care,” Gatobu and Koech wrote. “Frequent mental exhaustion curbs

one’s capacity for creativity, awareness, empathy, conceptualization and good intentional listening, five of the 10 characteristics named by Larry C. Spears in his 10 characteristics of effective servant leadership.”

Almost half of clergy — 48 percent — questioned whether they are making a difference in the lives of parishioners. About 54 percent of laity questioned whether they are making a difference in the lives of people. As part of the same question, 29 percent of clergy and 30 percent of laity reported they sometimes do not feel like praying.

“Feelings of not wanting to pray are usually associated with stress, anger toward God or experience of being in crisis — all of which if not addressed can lead to burnout and greater distance from God,” Gatobu and Koech wrote in the report.

The authors noted that a more robust study that takes into consideration of variations of clergy and laity age, gender, experience and longevity in ministry would provide more correlative data. They also said a comparative study with other conferences or across denominations may also provide more insight.

Regardless, the report shows self-care for both clergy and laity should be a priority.

“We would also recommend that pastors pay attention to their own emotional health and seek help when needed,” the report concludes. “We also encourage them to be aware of signs of unhealthy symptoms in any of the six areas of holistic health namely: mental, intellectual, emotional, relational, spiritual and financial, and seek help or preventive measures as necessary.”

Read the full analysis at www.greatplainsumc.org.

Last issue of magazine

We certainly live in a time of great change. If you have read — or even just turned the pages and scanned headlines — through this magazine you already know that the annual conference session members voted to consolidate the three Great Plains offices into one. That's a big change.

The decision came after a consultant well versed in the structures of religious organizations interviewed more than 160 people in our two states to ascertain how we collectively use the resources for ministry in its many forms. From that process came the concept of a single conference office and a realignment for staffing to help us best fulfill our purpose of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Both were affirmed by the Connecting Council in its April meeting. Again, big changes.

Another recommendation approved by the Connecting Council was the discontinuation of this quarterly publication, GPconnect. Created as a magazine to help keep people across our two states informed on ministry, best practices and the nitty-gritty of being United Methodists in America's heartland, the communications team has dutifully produced the magazine each quarter since the unification of three legacy conferences gave birth to what we now call the Great Plains.

The ceasing of publication saves the conference a considerable bit of money, and it also allows our staff to focus on more 21st century forms of communication, such as social media and video.

Just as the small banner on the front of the magazine indicates, this will be the final issue of GPconnect magazine. Ceasing publication will bring an end to one vehicle for disseminating information, but it will not leave United Methodists throughout Kansas and Nebraska lost as they search for news pertinent to them and their local churches.

We still have many methods for providing information you need or want to know.

The communications staff will continue to update the Great Plains website — www.greatplainsumc.org — multiple times a week. For the latest news, check the large photo area on the home page, where the newest information will appear first. Or click on the "News" tab across the top and then click on "The Latest News."

The weekly GPconnect email newsletter will continue to publish Wednesday afternoons. If you don't subscribe, it's free and easy. Just go to www.greatplainsumc.org/subscribe. We can pack much more information into this email than we ever could in a printed product. Each week contains stories from our staff, news from across the connection, resources for local churches, registration information for training and fun events, as well as



desperately
Todd Seifert is the Great Plains Conference communications director. Contact him at tseifert@greatplainsumc.org.

GPconnect, news and information for Great Plains United Methodists.



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submissions from churches across our two states.

We also will share even more information on our social media channels — Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest. We encourage you to share the posts you find there to help us spread the word. Stay tuned for an app that is currently in development.

Occasionally, you may see some print products from us, such as bulletin inserts we work with local churches to provide or pamphlets promoting events or ministry opportunities.

But since we live in a digital age, the bulk of our communication will come via your computer, tablet or smartphone.

That's a change that isn't all that big in this day and age.

We know some of you will miss GPconnect magazine. It's been a great companion as we've traveled this far from three separate conferences to one. But we invite you to join us on this journey as we enhance and explore new ways to communicate the mission to make disciples of Jesus in a world that needs light and hope.