

GPconnect - AC 2015 Daily

June 11, 2015

Welcome to Wichita, Kansas, and the 2015 Great Plains United Methodist Conference Session!

The weather will be on the warm side, and there may be some thunderstorms. We hope you enjoy the city and its amenities, while taking in the grand worship, productive business and timely learning of this conference session.

Each day there will be a special edition of "GPconnect." You can expect to receive GPconnect Daily today through Saturday. Below you can find information on what attendees can expect during AC 2015, along with announcements and featured stories.

Watch the live streaming of the session at www.greatplainsumc.org/livestream. See the [official schedule](#) to help make your viewing plans. Follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) to view additional photos and stay current with everything AC 2015. Don't forget to use hashtag #GPUMC and #GPAC15. Have a great week.

Conflict can cause rifts, but the cross provides unity



The act of communion and the reconciliation it represents serves as a metaphor for how we should relate to others during times of conflict, Stephanie Hixon, executive director of JustPeace Center for Mediation and Conflict Transformation, told attendees of the Great Plains Annual Conference session Thursday, June 11, in Wichita.

Hixon said it is important for United Methodists to handle conflicts constructively so we preserve our resources around the world to fulfill our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ, bring reconciliation in conflicted areas and so justice can be realized by all.

Hixon said we fulfill that goal by drawing on the best practices that we learn worldwide. And it is important for United Methodists – indeed, all people – to treat others with respect because we are the visible example of Christianity to others.

“You are the message, the Gospel, embodied,” Hixon said. “How we show up matters.”

Hixon asked rhetorically if one way to embody the Gospel is to be willing to make changes to our policies and systems. She then equated that transformation to what happens when a person takes part in communion.

“What power and promise does this table hold for us?” she asked.

She encouraged the audience to think about a meaningful experience of communion in their lives and shared a thought of her as a child walking with her mother up the aisle at a Methodist Episcopal Church so her mother could take part in the Lord’s Supper. She described hearing the clatter of glasses and seeing the silver trays. But perhaps the strongest memory came from the tart taste of the juice and the aroma of the bread.

Communion was a positive experience for her, she said, because while her parents made sure their children were taken to church, her mother and father usually only attended themselves on Communion Sunday.

Hixon continued to talk about how we often gather around a number of tables – in kitchens, in boardrooms, around campfires and on porches – for a variety of reasons. She also talked about how conflicts are resolved in other nations and cultures.

But there is a unifying concept among Christians.

“Our faith, friends, is the cross,” Hixon said. Though it is a symbol of violence, it is not the end of our collective story.

“Nothing can separate us from the love of God through Jesus Christ,” she said.

Thursday plenary session – morning



Personnel Committee

The Rev. Craig Hauschild, chair of the Personnel Committee, presented the committee’s proposal to retain the minimum compensation for clergy. An increasing number of small churches are no longer able to pay for a full-time pastor. An amendment was offered to raise the minimum salary by 2 percentage points from the previous year, but the amendment failed. The proposal carried as it was presented from the Personnel Committee, with acknowledgement that local churches have full discretion to raise a pastor’s salary above the minimum.

Congregational Excellence

The Rev. Evelyn Fisher, congregational excellence director, announced that there is a new feature on the website called the local church toolbox. You can find this tool box at greatplainsumc.org/toolbox where you can find many resources to help further your ministry. There also is a link for local churches to share their best practices so the best ideas can be shared across the Great Plains Conference.

Fisher then introduced the Rev. Nicole Conard, young leadership coordinator, who spoke about the new summer internship program of the Great Plains Conference.

Thirty-three interns are serving in the conference this year in six different internship programs, including church planter, Hispanic ministry, Micah Corps, pastoral leadership, VBS and youth. These interns will work full time for the next 10 weeks. The Micah Corps interns will learn to connect faith with social justice. The VBS interns will lead Vacation Bible school in a different congregation each week. The church planter interns are shadowing a planter church pastor. Pastoral leadership is an apprenticeship with a pastor. The Hispanic ministry interns are researching how to develop leaders in the Hispanic community. The Youth ministry intern is being mentored by a youth pastor.

Conard said everyone can be involved in the program by:

- Help more graduating seniors get involved with campus ministries.
- Pray for these interns, remember them in your prayers this summer.

All then prayed for the interns to guide them in God’s work (see photo above).

Fisher then introduced the Rev. Nathan Stanton, new church development coordinator, and the Rev. Chad Anglemeyer, committee chair, who discussed the new church development celebrations and plans.

New church development is celebrating a number of positive happenings from the past year: launching New Church Lawrence, chartering Living Water in Kansas City, Kansas, 20 attending the first planter incubator, supporting nine existing new churches in the Great Plains and the start of the Five Touch program to provide for more consultation.

Plans for the 2015-2016 year were then announced: A second planter incubator for as many as 30 pastors and laypersons, the first Planting Crucible in partnership with young adult and Hispanic ministries, and the relaunch of Urban Abby in Omaha in partnership with campus ministries in Omaha, Nebraska.

The two then introduced the strategic plan "20 New Churches by 2020." Great Plains New Church Development, Inc., seeks to begin 20 new faith communities in the Great Plains by 2020. The three tiers of the plan Stanton discussed included mission field priorities, finding the highest potential planters and funding.

"If you feel like this is something you'd like to explore, we'd like to talk to you," said Stanton.

Asbury Park

Shana Smith, vice-president of development at Asbury Park in Newton, Kansas, played a video about the caring community that supports life for all ages while enhancing physical, social, emotional and spiritual wellness through caring staff, innovative programs and benevolent support. All elders receive the same amount of care, regardless of what they can pay.

"It's not what you're leaving behind, it's what's ahead," said Smith.

Smith then invited Sunday school classes and others to tour the facilities as well as the Asbury Grand Prix. The Grand Prix is scheduled for 1:30 p.m. Sept. 13 at Asbury Park, a date that corresponds with National Grandparents Day. If you would like to register go to www.asbury-park.org.

Memorial Service

Is the Lord there, or not?



Bishop Bruce Ough provided a message emphasizing God's presence among us through times of joy and sorrow during the annual memorial service of the Great Plains Conference.

The Rev. Kibum Kim, Parsons District superintendent, set the tone by reading Exodus 17:1-7.

During the service of remembrance, Bishop Bruce Ough, Dakotas-Minnesota Episcopal Area, delivered a powerful message asking the question "Is the Lord among us, or not?" during Thursday morning's memorial service.

The service, which honored the lives and ministries of 42 departed Great Plains Conference clergy and spouses, provided a time of reflection and anticipation. Bishop Ough reflected back to Exodus when the people began to quarrel and complain to Moses. The people became to question "is the Lord with us or not?" Bishop Ough shared that even now, when the force of weather causes destruction, when the economy is struggling, when children die, when lines of

homeless and hungry are lengthy, when racism is strong, when we thirst for living water, we all ask the same question they asked Moses: "Is the Lord with us or not?"

Bishop Ough emphasized to always pay attention to the questions asked of you.

"The questions always mean God is seeking you," said Bishop Ough.

Bishop Ough stated that he was sure when the three conferences became one, many hard, soul-searching questions were asked, especially, "How can we become one?" He then mentioned the movie "Ray," and played a clip from the movie during which a young, blind Ray Charles was calling out to his mom to help him. She stood there silently, not helping him. She knew that not helping him immediately would help him develop the necessary tools to become more independent. It would allow him to utilize his other senses to compensate for his lack of sight. After the struggle, and after young Ray starts to hear many other sounds he says "I hear to too momma, you're right there."

"We hear you God; you're right here," said Bishop Ough.

When he then asked all if the Lord was among us or not, a loud and affirmative "YES" was heard.

"God can hear you [too]," said Bishop Ough.

The offertory taken at the memorial service is for the United Methodist Global Aids Fund, Advance, #982345. The offertory totaled \$7,764.16.

Those remembered included the Rev. Thomas Alvin Brandy, the Rev. Donald E. Carper, the Rev. Donald G. Christiansen, the Rev. Donna D. Dudley, the Rev. Dale Lee Ellenberger, the Rev. Ardith O. "Art" Ernst, the Rev. Herman John Heise, the Rev. Beth E. Hodgson, the Rev. Delbert L. Honn, the Rev. Robert L. Hopkins, the Rev. Naomi Kaye Hull, the Rev. Lorena Hunt, the Rev. J. Karl Jones, the Rev. Larry Keller, the Rev. Hiram W. Lilley, the Rev. Lee Roy Louderback, the Rev. James L. Moores, the Rev. James Mote, the Rev. Raymond E. Neutzman, the Rev. Ross Andrew Olson, the Rev. Lynda J. Parson, the Rev. Jack E. Sample, the Rev. Kurt A. Stecker, the Rev. Maria "Riet" Stronger, the Rev. Nelson "Fuzzy" Thompson, the Rev. William Henry Winter, the Rev. M. Max Wright, Dixie Alsobrooks, Kathryn "Katy" Baker, Jerrald "Jerry" Boden, Deborah J. Burgess, Erlene M. Dillon, Willis Hodgson, Arlene T. Jensen, Violet S. Jones, Kathleen K. Karlowski, Jane Sawyer Kersenbrock, Shirley W. Lathan, Sally Mae Loomis, Melva Metzger, Maria C. Munoz, Barbara E. Nunnally, Clara P. Phillips, William H. "Bill" Post, Isabelle K. Ricker, Leona Rogers, Alvina Shaw, Blanche I. Simmer, Betty Whitsitt and Merrietta Jo Wolfe.

Celebrating global mission outreach



More than 330 attended the Mission Partnership lunch held Thursday at the Hyatt Regency hotel. In addition to messages given by the three Mission Partnership representatives (Haiti, Zimbabwe and Nigeria), attendees heard Becky Williams Harrell, an interpreter and mission advocate with the South Central Jurisdiction after spending twelve years in Latin America as a missionary with the General Board of Global Ministries ([GBGM](#)) who was excited to connect with the Great Plains Conference. Harrell talked about some of her experiences and

shared about the big change coming to the GBGM which is relocating to Atlanta, Georgia, where they were able to purchase a building for the same amount of money as one year of rent in New York.

"What can I say? It's time to move," said Harrell.

Harrell also brought two special announcements. One was an award from GBGM to Great Plains United Methodists for the highest amount of total designated giving for 2014 in the South Central Jurisdiction. Harrell also recognized the Great Plains Conference for being number one in the United Methodist Church in the United States in sending missionaries. "That's huge," acknowledged Harrell who then read through the names of all the Great Plains missionaries and those in attendance stood to be applauded.

Echoing some of what Harrell said, Great Plains Conference Mercy and Justice Coordinator the Rev. Kalaba Chali said, "We have a lot of churches with a big heart. When we see needs, we respond. The next step we need to take is to improve our response to usher people out of the system so they don't need us."

He announced the Oct. 24 seminar with author Robert Lupton based on his nationally acclaimed book Toxic Charity. This seminar will be at Baker University in Baldwin City, Kansas, near Lawrence, and will look at how churches can move from works of compassion to healthier models of life-altering change. [Register online](#). If you need more information on the Toxic Charity seminar or getting involved with our mission partnerships, contact Chali at kchali@greatplainsumc.org.

View more photos from the [Mission Partnership lunch](#) on the [Great Plains Conference Facebook page](#).

Photo: Becky Harrell, left, presents Courtney Fowler, Great Plains Conference lay leader, with an award for conference designated giving.

Conference celebrates retirees



The Great Plains Conference gave thanks for the ministries of 42 clergy members retiring after their years of service in Nebraska, Kansas and beyond.

Oliver Green, associate lay leader, and the Rev. Amy Lippoldt, the incoming chair of the Board of Ordained Ministry, offered a prayer and shared words of gratitude, respectively, before Bishop Scott J. Jones presided over a service that featured a litany led by the Rev. Kent Little celebrating the many tasks the clergy members performed over the years and a special performance of "God's Supernatural Grace," by the Wichita West All-District Children's Choir.



Retirees include Joyce Allen, Thomas Bailey, Jenny and Patrick Buss, Michael Chamberlain, Charles Claycomb, Harry Cross, Carl Ellis, Danny Ferguson, Bonnie Forney, Roger Frederick, Laura Arnett Fricker, Lawrence Fry, Stephen Griffith, Wayne Handle, Deborah Hanes-Nelson, Kelvin Heitmann, Janet Hernandez, Nita Hinds-Park, Larry Hollon, Lucinda Holmes, James Hopwood, Daniel Lord, Dennis Matthews, Gene McIntosh, James Miller, Norma Miller, William Frank Morgan, Judy Long O'Neal, R. Glenn Patterson, Christine Peterson, Lucy Pierre, Phoebe Pitney, David Ragland, Martha Sanchez, Charles Spence III, John Thompson, Lewis Van Der Wege, Faye Wagner, Dannis Wallace, Roger Walls and John Wight.

Toward the end of the program, four children from the choir shared how they had witnessed God's presence and how they could share God's love with others throughout their lives. Some retirees then were asked the same questions, with an emphasis placed on the fact that although they are retiring, their ministry is not really over. In unison, the kids said, "Thank you for your ministry and sharing God's love!"

Conference shows support for new churches, addresses pensions, children issues

The Great Plains Conference addressed issues involving clergy pensions, some of the conference's affiliated ministries and EmberHope/Youthville.

Board of Pensions

The conference approved of recommendations shared by Kelly Williams, with the Board of Pensions and Benefits. Legislation included keeping the current subsidy of \$14,232 for clergy health benefits, should the conference not reinstate a group health plan, which is a resolution scheduled for Friday's agenda.

The board shared other recommendations, including a decrease in the Clergy Retirement Security Program funding compensation billed to local churches from 3 percent of compensation to 2 percent of compensation, as well as reduced the maximum total contribution for pension at the local church level from 9 percent to 8 percent in 2016, with the understanding that it may be increased in future years.

EmberHope/Youthville

The conference approved a resolution involving EmberHope/Youthville that allows the Connecting Council to approve a merger between the youth-services organization and TFI Family Services of Topeka, Kansas, if discussions between the two organizations prove favorable.

Shelley Duncan, president and CEO of EmberHope/Youthville, also presented proposed changes to the bylaws that involve moving the office to Topeka, where the corporate addresses are located for the Great Plains Conference, and sets requirements for a certain number of board members to have ties to the United Methodist Church.

The conference approved the resolution after impassioned discussion from people who do not want to see the organization merge and from people concerned that a lack of action now will lead to financial instability and, therefore, a decline in services, particularly given difficult financial times in Kansas.

Connectional Ministries

Julie Wright, CEO of United Methodist Mexican-American Ministries, and Nathan Morgan, executive director of United Methodist Ministries, provided reports of their respective organizations, with each sharing stories of people in the communities they serve.

Episcopal Residence

The conference approved keeping the episcopal residences in Wichita, Kansas, and Lincoln, Nebraska.

Maria Campbell, chair of the committee, reported that the committee studied the possibilities of hosting the episcopal residence in Lincoln and Omaha in Nebraska and in Topeka, Wichita and Kansas City in Kansas.

The committee factored in costs associated with upkeep and relocation, proximity to airports and the spiritual and physical health of the bishop.

The task force recommended that the primary residence remain in Wichita, and secondary residence remain in Lincoln. One rationale was the likelihood of a new bishop starting in the Great Plains in 2016 and the need for that person to be able to learn and visit locations in Nebraska and Kansas.

Connecting Council

The Rev. Nancy Lambert, director of clergy excellence and assistant to the bishop, shared details of the ministry areas' strategic plans for the conference. She also brought several items forward for approval:

Redistricting Proposal: The annual conference approved a redistricting procedure proposal drafted by the committee after it was formed in compliance with the 2014 annual conference session. The team studied options and recommended extending the period of time to gather information and bring a recommendation to the annual conference session by 2018.

Three Mission Campaign: Zimbabwe Episcopal Area, the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference and the Lydia Patterson Institute each requested funding assistance from the Great Plains Annual Conference. The annual conference approved the proposal moved forward by the Connecting Council.

The program to raise \$100,000 each would start July 1 and conclude Aug. 31, 2016.

New Church Development: The annual conference voted to provide financial support to start 20 new churches by 2020.

To start the 20 new churches, NCD requested \$5 million from conference reserves to be spent as necessary. Not all of the money will be spent unless all of the 20 churches are launched and unless all of the funding is needed to start those churches.

Education Initiative

The Rev. Evelyn Fisher, director of congregational excellence, provided an update on the conference's education initiative. Twenty-four churches received grants to help build or strengthen partnerships between churches and schools throughout Nebraska and Kansas.

Fisher said she was proud to report that about 177 churches have entered into a partnership with a local public school. But she said with 1,040 churches in the conference, there is still a long way to go.

Matching grants are available again this year.

A webinar is planned for 4 to 5:30 p.m. July 7. Go to www.greatplainsumc.org/education to learn more.

General, Jurisdictional delegates elected

The Great Plains Annual Conference still has some work to do in electing alternates for the 2016 General and Jurisdictional conferences, but it wrapped up its primary delegation in a special night session Thursday, July 11.

Clergy members elected by the ninth ballot were:

- Rev. Adam Hamilton, United Methodist Church of the Resurrection, Leawood, Kansas
- Rev. Amy Lippoldt, Trinity Heights United Methodist Church, Newton, Kansas
- Rev. Mark Holland, Trinity Community Church, Kansas City, Kansas
- Rev. Zach Anderson, Hanscom Park United Methodist Church, Omaha, Nebraska
- Rev. Cheryl Jefferson Bell, United Methodist Church of the Resurrection, Leawood, Kansas
- Rev. David Livingston, St. Paul's United Methodist Church, Lenexa, Kansas

The lay delegates elected were:

- Courtney Fowler, College Avenue United Methodist Church, Manhattan, Kansas
- Oliver Green, Asbury Mt. Olive United Methodist Church, Topeka, Kansas
- Shayla Jordan, Aldersgate United Methodist Church, Wichita, Kansas
- Dixie Brewster, Milton United Methodist Church, Milton, Kansas
- Lisa Maupin, St. Paul United Methodist Church, Lincoln, Nebraska
- Wesley Gately, First United Methodist Church, Overland Park, Kansas

Laities elected three alternates: Keith Olsen, of Grant United Methodist Church in Grant, Nebraska; Randall Hodgkinson, First United Methodist, Topeka, Kansas; and Esther Hay, First United Methodist Church, Waverly, Nebraska.

Elections will continue tomorrow.

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