

## REPORTS

### ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

#### COMMISSION ON ARCHIVES AND HISTORY

by Lona Dearmont, Chair

The mission of the Commission on Archives and History of the Great Plains Conference is to preserve the historically significant records of the conference. We oversee the maintenance of archival collections of value to a variety of users, from conference officers to local church leaders, to researchers and the general public. These records are used in a variety of ways, such as assisting with administrative tasks, doing background research, writing historical accounts, as well as helping local congregations and other groups to mark special anniversaries and events.

In 2014 we recognized the 150th anniversary of two churches, Swede Creek UMC in rural Randolph, KS, and Rulo UMC in Rulo, NE, both founded in 1864. We recognized nine churches celebrating 125th anniversaries and one celebrating its 100th anniversary.

In support of the Great Plains Conference's Public Education Initiative, we made a presentation at the annual conference session on the Methodist Church's strong advocacy for public education in the early years of Kansas and Nebraska statehood. Our collections are housed in two locations. Nebraska records are maintained at the Nebraska United Methodist Historical Center/Archives at Nebraska Wesleyan University in Lincoln and overseen by Director Karrie Dvorak. Kansas records are housed at the Kansas United Methodist Archives at Baker University in Baldwin City under Director Jen McCollough.

We continue to move forward with several key projects: updating agreements between the conference and our host universities; planning for records retention and storage needs for the Great Plains Conference; and making contact with local churches in order to better assist them in preserving their history.

#### NEBRASKA RETIREE HEALTH CARE TEAM

by Ron Harris

The committee met via email with a vote that ended on March 31, 2015 for the following recommendations:

1. We recommend that in 2016 that the funding request for the "Nebraska Retiree Health Subsidy" be set at the current rate of 1.25% of church income as approved last year at Annual Conference.
2. We recommend that the wording of the subsidy statement be revised "The subsidy was established for clergy who served in the Nebraska Annual Conference on or before December 31, 2013 and who have or will retire by December 31, 2019 and 5 years of full-time service immediately prior to retirement."

#### BOARD OF PENSION AND HEALTH BENEFITS

by Kelly Williams, Chairperson

Kelly Williams was appointed chair and Tammy Shepherd, secretary.

The Board consists of eight laity, one retired clergy member and three active clergy members. Ex-officio members include the conference treasurer, the Rev. Gary Beach, the conference benefits officer, Carol Fusaro and Cabinet Rep. the Rev. Dan Flanagan.

The Board along with CFA has an Investment Committee for the purpose of advising the Board regarding the investment of discretionary funds.

It remains the desire of the Board to continue using the resources of Wespeth (the General Board's Investment arm) for the investment of our discretionary funds until such time the Investment Committee deems it necessary to move the funds.

##### Health Insurance

Late in the summer of 2014 the Board had received a 39 percent increase in health insurance premium from Cigna. With plan design changes and an increase in deductibles the premium increase could be dropped to 29 percent. The local churches were looking at an increase in premium from \$14,232 for 2015 to \$17,196, and deductibles for clergy would double for each three-quarter or full-time pastor.

This was presented to the Connecting Council at the October meeting. After much discussion, the Connecting Council determined it would be better to end the Conference health insurance program for pastors and instead provide a health care allowance. Moving this recommendation forward required a vote of the annual conference members, including permission to honor the mail/email ballot.

The Board held a webcast on Oct. 9, 2014, to answer questions and address concerns. Gary Beach began the webcast, then Kelly Williams explained the bidding process and other solutions that the Board explored regarding traditional insurance. Gary Beach then described the proposal for dropping group health insurance and instituting a health care allowance,

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followed by Mike Chamberlain reflecting on the Appointive Cabinet's recommendation in regards to how the health care allowance was proposed to function.

**AC vote ends clergy health plan, replaced with allowance** - This was the announcement made by Bishop Jones Oct. 20, 2014. By mail and email ballot, the vote was overwhelming to approve the recommendation of the Connecting Council to end the conference health plan for clergy appointed to local churches and enrolled lay staff of the local church.

The health care allowance will be reviewed each year to determine if it is adequate enough to meet the needs of the clergy members while maintaining a reasonable amount to be met by the local churches. To assist with this, the Board sent out a survey to the clergy members and the results weren't available at the time of this report.

**Retiree Health Insurance:** The conference partners with One Exchange through the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits for Retiree Health Insurance. One Exchange is an exchange that will assist each retiree in selecting the private Medicare plan that best meets their medical needs and budget. Retirees are not required to use this service unless they are from Nebraska as use of this service is a requirement to receive the subsidy provided to retirees of the former Nebraska Conference.

**Nebraska Retiree Health Insurance Subsidy:** During the GPUMC Annual Conference regular sessions there will be time set aside for clergy serving churches in Nebraska and lay members from Nebraska churches to vote on the policies governing the retiree health care benefit.

A bi-annual Retiree Health Valuation is required by the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits. The valuation for 2014 completed by Towers Watson indicates that there will be adequate funding to meet the needs of this subsidy from designated reserves and the billings going to Nebraska churches.

#### **Life Insurance**

We continue to offer affordable voluntary life insurance. This benefit is available to clergy members and conference lay staff members who work at least 30 hours per week. The benefit can be portable when employees terminate.

#### **Vision and Dental**

We continue to offer affordable vision and dental insurance. This benefit is available to clergy members and conference lay staff members who work at least 30 hours per week. These benefits are optional coverage and the costs are paid by the participant on a pre-tax basis.

**Critical Illness and Accident:** Two new optional coverages were made available for clergy members serving three-quarter time or more, along with family members and conference lay staff and family members.

**Virgin Pulse Health Miles:** This program is available to active clergy members serving three-quarter time or more and spouses and retired clergy and spouses, along with conference lay staff and spouses. The participant can earn actual dollars by completing their activity goals.

#### **Retirement Benefits**

The conference has an over-funded position in the Pre-82 Pension Plan and substantial pension reserves. The Board recommends we continue to use the over-funding and reserves to reduce the overall cost of the pension benefits to the local churches. The retirement contributions in excess of those paid by local churches will be funded first from the Pre-82 fund, and then out of the pension reserves, if needed. The excess funds will be used as long as the Pre-82 funding balance is not reduced below 120 percent.

**The local church funding is as follows:**

	2015	2016
CPP death and disability	3%	3%
CRSP defined contributions	3%	3%
CRSP defined benefit	3%	2%
Total	9%	8%

The CRSP benefits apply for those clergy members serving 50 percent and above. For those members serving 25%, the local churches will fund 10 percent into the members' UMPIP account. The 2 percent balance required will be funded from the Pre-82 over-funding, and then out of the pension reserves, if needed.

#### **Other Board Activities**

**Farmer Fund Emergency Grants:** The Board received three Farmer Fund emergency grant requests. Two were approved with the Board's total match amount of \$1,723.00. One request was denied. The Board maintains written guidelines for emergency grants.

**Short-term Disability:** Short-term disability funding is available to assist member churches in the event a full-time or part-time (1/2 time or more) clergy or District Superintendent Assignment (DSA) is unable to perform the duties of his/her appointment due to a documented medical disability when the period of the clergy or DSA's absence exceeds 30 days but is anticipated to be less than 180 days.

Five short-term disability grants were funded throughout the year. The Board maintains written guidelines for short-term disability funding.

**Use of Reserves:** Budgets go to Mission Alignment teams first. Requests were \$1.2 million more than funds available. The Board of Pensions has \$13.5 million of reserves for pension benefits (BOP Pensions \$9.6 million, KWC Endowment corpus \$2.2 million and KWC Endowment Earnings \$1.7 million).

The Mission Alignment team requests the Board of Pensions draw 5 percent of earnings on pension-designated reserves to pay for a portion of Conference Staff benefits. Benefit costs for Conference Staff are about \$1.1 million. Currently five percent of the \$13.5 million reserve is about \$675,000, of which \$200,000 must be restricted for pensions.

The Board established a 5 percent fund spending of the pension reserves to be utilized to offset Conference Staff benefit costs, with health insurance benefits coming from the share of unrestricted funds.

This will take the place of the extra 72 percent draw on the Conference Deposit Account.

**Past Service Rate (PSR):** The PSR shall be increased from the 2015 rate of \$729.00 for each past service year to \$744.00 for each past service year, beginning Jan. 1, 2016. (The past service rate is a defined benefit based upon years of service through Dec. 31, 1981.)

**Contingent Annuitant Percentage (CAP):** The CAP for the surviving spouses shall remain the same for 2016. Former Nebraska and Kansas East conferences have the rate of 85 percent, and the rate for the former Kansas West conference is at 100 percent. The former Nebraska and Kansas East conferences rates will be reviewed each year with the possibility of moving the rate to 100 percent sometime in the future.

**Special Pension Grants:** Special pension grants have been provided for the following:

- **Esther R. Miller**, surviving spouse of Alfred Miller. The grant is for 12.5 years of service credit at the surviving spouse contingent annuitant for the former Kansas West Conference (100 percent).
- **Lance Lingard**, dependent son of Richard H. Lingard, clergyperson of the former Nebraska Conference, (25 percent of pension rate times years of service of the father) payable to Mrs. Jeanette Lingard Hanson.
- **Kathy Kirkus**, dependent daughter of Eldo Kirkus, clergyperson of the former Nebraska Conference (25% of pension rate times years of service of father).

**Funding percentage:** A minimum funding level of 120 percent is to be maintained to protect the Pre-82 commitment. Any increases to the annuity Past Service Rate (PSR) shall be funded immediately in the year in which the increase occurs.

**Lockton Consultant Services:** The Board continues a contractual relationship with Lockton. As our broker we are provided updates/reporting requirements in regards to Affordable Care Act (ACA) and Lockton conducts the bidding processes on all of the benefits made available to conference members and staff.

The following are the recommendations of the Board of Pension and Health Benefits of the Great Plains Conference of the United Methodist Church for 2016:

**1. Resolution on Rental/Housing/Household Expense Allowance, in accordance with Federal Guidelines for clergy housing, the following resolution is recommended.**

**WHEREAS**, the religious denomination known as The United Methodist Church (the Church), of which this Conference is a part, has in the past functioned and continues to function through ministers of the gospel (within the meaning of Internal Revenue Code section 107) who were or are duly ordained, commissioned, or licensed ministers of the Church (clergypersons);

**WHEREAS**, the practice of the Church and of this Conference was and is to provide active Clergypersons with a parsonage or a rental/housing allowance as part of their gross compensation;

**WHEREAS**, pensions or other amounts paid to active, retired, terminated, and disabled Clergy persons are considered to be deferred compensation and are paid to active, retired, terminated, and disabled **Clergypersons in consideration of previous active service; and**

**WHEREAS**, the Internal Revenue Service has recognized the Conference (or its predecessors) as an appropriate organization to designate a rental/housing allowance for Clergy persons who are or were members of this Conference and are eligible to receive such deferred compensation;

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED:**

THAT an amount equal to 100% of the pension, severance, or disability payments received from plans authorized under The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist (the Discipline), which includes all such payments from the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits (GBOPHB), during the period January 1, 2016 through December 31, 2016, by each active, retired, terminated, or disabled Clergyperson who is or was a member of the Conference, or its predecessors, be and hereby is designated as a rental/housing allowance for each such Clergyperson; and

THAT the pension, severance, or disability payments to which this rental/housing allowance designation applies will be any pension, severance, or disability payments from plans, annuities, of funds authorized under the Discipline, including such payments from the GBOPHB and from a commercial annuity company that provides an annuity arising from benefits accrued under a GBOPHB plan, annuity, or fund authorized under the Discipline, that result from any service a Clergyperson rendered to this Conference or that an active a retired, a terminated or a disabled Clergyperson of this Conference rendered to any local church, annual conference of the Church contributions to or accrue a benefit under, such a plan, annuity, or fund for such an active, a retired, a terminated, or a disabled Clergyperson's pension, severance, or disability plan benefit as part of his or her gross compensation.

Note: The rental/housing allowance that may be excluded from a Clergyperson's gross income in any year for federal (and, in most cases, state) income tax purposes is limited under internal Revenue Code section 107(2), and regulation thereunder, to the least of: (a) the amount of the rental/housing allowance designated by the Clergyperson's employer or

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other appropriate body of the Church (such as this Conference in the foregoing resolutions) for such year: (b) the amount actually expended by the Clergy person to rent or provide a home in such year; or (c) the fair rental value of the home, including furnishings and appurtenances (such as a garage), plus the cost of utilities in such year. Each clergy person or former clergy person is urged to consult with his or her own tax advisor to determine what deferred compensation is eligible to be claimed as a housing allowance exclusion.

2. **Past Service Rate (PSR):** The PSR shall be increased from the 2015 rate of \$729.00 for each past service year to \$744.00 for each past service year, beginning January 1, 2016. (The past service rate is a defined benefit based upon years of service through December 31, 1981.)

3. **Contingent Annuitant Percentage (CAP):** The CAP for the surviving spouses shall remain the same for 2016. Former Nebraska and Kansas East conferences have the rate of 85%, and the rate for the former Kansas West conference is at 100%. The former Nebraska and Kansas East conferences rates will be reviewed each year with the possibility of moving the rate to 100% sometime in the future.

4. **Special Pension Grants:** Continue to provide Special pension grants for the following:

- **Esther R. Miller**, surviving spouse of Alfred Miller. The grant is for 12.5 years of service credit at the surviving spouse contingent annuitant for the former Kansas West Conference (100%).
- **Lance Lingard**, dependent son of Richard H. Lingard, clergy person of the former Nebraska Conference, (25% of pension rate times years of service of the father) payable to Mrs. Jeanette Lingard Hanson.
- **Kathy Kirkus**, dependent daughter of Eldo Kirkus, clergy person of the former Nebraska Conference (25% of pension rate times years of service of father).

5. **Clergy Retirement Security Program (CRSP) Funding:**

- Use the Pre-82 over-funding to fund the 2015 and 2016 CRSP-DB portion while maintaining a minimum funding level of 120%.
- While maintaining a minimum funding level of 120%, use the Pre-82 over-funding to fund the 2015 and 2016 UMPIP contributions needed (2%) to bring the amount up to the funding level of those serving 25%.
- Decrease the percentage of compensation billed to local churches by 1% of compensation making the rate for the CRSP-DB 3% for 2016.
- Maintain the CRSP defined contribution funding and CPP funding at 2% of compensation for each.
- Maximum total contribution for pension and CPP at the local church level will be 8% for 2016 with the understanding that it may be increased in future years.
- Spousal benefit at 85% for (former) Nebraska and Kansas East and 100% for (former) Kansas West.
- Continue PSR increases at or near the level of the average (annual basis) clergy COL.

6. **Use of Reserves:** Establish a 5% fund spending of the pension reserves to be utilized to offset Conference Staff benefit costs, with health insurance benefits coming from the share of unrestricted funds.

## PERSONNEL

By Craig Hauschild, Chair

New responsibilities were placed on the Personnel Committee in 2014 with the discontinuation of a conference-wide health insurance plan. This move thrust the Personnel Committee into the role of figuring out Conference Employee Group Health Insurance coverage. We worked with the Lockton company. The rates for conference staff only, instead of going up 20 percent as would have been the case if we had kept group insurance for all clergy, went down 18 percent when it was staff only. Deductibles for conference staff stayed the same instead of doubling.

The Personnel Committee continues to review our Conference Employee Handbook. The challenge of working with laws in two states at times is complicated. The conference chancellors have advised us along the way. We will continue to be observant of new work laws and requirements of Nebraska and Kansas.

With the birth of the Great Plains Conference, former committees were merged into the new structure. While our title is Personnel Committee, we also hold the responsibility of recommending minimum compensation levels for clergy and recommending conference employee pay increases. In addition, we receive the requests for minimum compensation support to local churches. These are all difficult tasks that impact the morale of segments of our Conference. We take these responsibilities quite seriously and seek to practice equity and fairness in our recommendations.

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The Great Plains Annual Conference Session approved the following:

Minimum Base Compensation for 2016

Full time Local Pastor = \$34,750

Associate Member = \$37,000

Provisional Elder or Deacon = \$39,250

Full Member = \$41,500

This recommendation reflects no increase in minimum compensation for 2016.

## BOARD OF TRUSTEES

by Rev. Steven L. Flader

The Great Plains Conference Board of Trustees continues to work with the conference in helping properly support the church's mission. We assist local churches in protecting their property in furtherance of their mission of making disciples. We assist the Conference in maintaining, organizing, and evaluating conference property over a two state area. This includes 17 District parsonages, six campus ministries, three conference buildings and an episcopal residence in Wichita and an apartment for the Bishop's use in Lincoln. In addition, we maintain a fleet of conference vehicles and insure and dispose of discontinued churches.

Maintaining district parsonages is one task given to the board by the Book of Discipline. Major updates to district parsonages include: a new water softener, carpet, repairs to the master and basement bathrooms, new curtains for the living room, repairs to the fireplace, replaced garage doors, replacement of weather stripping on doors and painting the downstairs bedroom and entryway at the Blue River District parsonage; installed guttering and landscaping and added a fence gate at the Dodge City District parsonage; landscape trimming and drainage repairs at the Elkhorn Valley District parsonage; replaced water heater at the Missouri River District parsonage; new roof from hail damage at the Prairie Rivers District parsonage; installed a ramp and replaced stove at the Salina District parsonage; reclaimed west portion of backyard and reseeded and repaired electrical issues at the Topeka District parsonage; repaired walls and repainted and addressed drainage issues at the Wichita East District parsonage; and removed overgrown landscaping and adjusted drainage issues at the Wichita West District parsonage.

We corrected some foundation issues, replaced small basement windows, completed carpet work in one room of the basement and filled dirt around the foundation to ensure drainage in the Episcopal residence

Once again the Conference Board of Trustees has acted to save a struggling Camp Comeca by loaning the Camp an additional \$320,000. This was used to help secure an additional grant from the Wilson Foundation. However, the needs of this camp go beyond these loans and grants. In order to secure the potential of Comeca over the next generation it is necessary that the conference seek to put Comeca on a sound financial and missional path just as the previous Nebraska Annual Conference did in the past. This is why the Board of Trustees joins the Conference Camping Committee in supporting the request for the fundraising campaign being brought before our conference at this annual session.

One of the unfortunate realities is that the number of discontinued local churches continues to grow. The following churches or properties have been sold or disposed of within the last year: Omaha Pearl Memorial (Living Hope) UMC; Emmanuel UMC, Alta Vista UMC, KS; and Dresden UMC, KS was deeded to the community for a community center. For all these properties, the Board is responsible for insurance and legal fees following their closing. In some cases, the expenses exceed the proceeds from the sales of the property.

The Board of Trustees has purchased a building from the city of Wichita to be leased by the United Methodist Open Door Inc. of Wichita to continue their food ministry outreach to the citizens of the city.

Because Bishop Jones continues to reside in Wichita, the Board of Trustees is renting an apartment in Lincoln for his use when he is in Nebraska. This will be reevaluated on an annual basis by the Episcopacy Committee and the Board of Trustees.

The Conference Board of Trustees has been blessed by the support and hard work of Bishop Jones, the Cabinet, our conference treasurer and director of administrative services, Gary Beach, and our property manager, Patrick McKaig. Gary and Patrick handle a ton of detail work connected to financial and property issues for the conference. I would also like to thank those who have served this past year on your Conference Board of Trustees. They have been a great team to work with.

**EPISCOPACY COMMITTEE**

by Rev. Maria Campbell

The Episcopal Residence Task Force was formed to bring a recommendation for the location of the Episcopal residence and Episcopal office to Great Plains Annual Conference 2015 as per the Plan of Organization. The team gathered information regarding the needs of the bishop and the requirements for the residence. It then determined the primary criteria that would be used to evaluate potential locations. After further investigation and discernment, five cities were determined to have the most potential for a residence: Lincoln, Topeka, Wichita, Omaha and Kansas City.

The key factors considered were: proximity to airports, proximity to conference offices, cost of relocating residence/s, requirements for an episcopal residence, and housing costs. (Other considerations included parsonage standards and the amenities of the community.)

As a result of studying the parameters and prayerful discernment, The Episcopal Residence Task Force recommends that we maintain our current episcopal residence in Wichita and keep a secondary residence in Lincoln. (A determination may be made to determine if the current apartment is the most suitable option in Lincoln).

The most compelling rationale for making this recommendation is to be good stewards of all of our assets (physical, financial and spiritual). This recommendation is the result of careful consideration of the key factors regarding the major cities in Kansas and Nebraska.

The rationale for keeping two residences is that an incoming bishop will need to become acquainted with both states. This will necessitate more travel in both states for at least several years. Providing for the bishop's well-being is a prime objective for our conference.

**COUNCIL ON FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION POLICIES****Central Treasury**

The Great Plains United Methodist Conference (conference) shall operate a central treasury under the direction and supervision of the conference treasurer in accordance with the policies and procedures of The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, the conference and its Council on Finance and Administration (CFA). The funds of all boards, councils, committees and task forces of the conference (hereinafter called agencies or individual agency) as well as districts and related corporations and their units shall be held in the central treasury, unless otherwise authorized by the CFA.

The conference treasurer shall be the custodian of all Mission Share (apportionment) funds, non-budgeted funds, special offerings, and other designated funds. The conference treasurer shall make accounting of all receipts and disbursements in accordance with The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, and the policies and procedures approved by the CFA.

Donor restricted funds given to the Kansas East, Kansas West and Nebraska conferences will be respected as to both purpose and geography as assets are combined into the conference. Unrestricted funds given to the three conferences will be combined for the benefit of the conference as a whole.

**Fiscal Year**

The fiscal year of the conference shall be Jan. 1 to Dec. 31. All local church remittances that are postmarked on or before Jan. 8, will be credited to the immediately preceding fiscal year, unless otherwise designated by the church. All remittances by local churches postmarked and received after that date shall be credited to the next fiscal year, regardless of fiscal year designation. Any variance to this deadline, due to extraordinary circumstances, will be at the discretion of the conference treasurer.

**Mission Share (Apportionment) Formula**

The mission share formula for the conference will be based upon a percentage of each church's total operating income, with total operating income to be equal to the amount listed on table 3, line 62, of each church's annual report to the conference. The conference will use a 10 percent mission share formula for the base budget. Amounts required for retired clergy medical benefits under procedures established by the former Nebraska Conference shall be above and beyond the base mission share formula.

**Mission Agency Support**

Each local church in the conference will be asked to contribute 1 percent of its total operating income to the mission work of key partner agencies. This amount is over and above the mission share tithe. These agencies are separately incorporated

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and have a historic missional tie to the work of the conference. In each budget, the list may be adjusted by action of the Annual Conference. The CFA will recommend a list each year. Money given to mission agency support will be divided proportionately among the agencies listed in the Budget section.

General Church Mandated Special Sunday Offerings

Human Relations Day – Jan. 17, 2016

One Great Hour of Sharing - March 6, 2016

Native American Ministries Sunday – April 10, 2016

Peace with Justice Sunday – May 22, 2016

World Communion Sunday – Oct. 2, 2016

United Methodist Student Day – Nov. 27, 2016

### Conference Advance

The Conference Advance list is recommended each year by the Mercy and Justice Team for action by the annual conference. All ministries on this list have the privilege of approaching the churches of the conference to raise funds in support of their efforts.

### Special Appeals

No agency, institution or organization beyond those in the Mission Agency Support or Conference Advance lists shall make a special conference-wide appeal to the local church for funds without the approval of the annual conference session, upon recommendation of the CFA. In case of extreme emergency, approval may be given by the Connecting Council upon recommendation of the CFA.

### Annual Conference Budget

The conference budget is to be developed by the CFA, in consultation with the agencies, and submitted to the annual conference for adoption. In the fall the CFA will send out a letter to all conference councils, boards and agencies advising them of the process for submitting budget requests and shall provide direction to the agencies regarding budget building. Boards and agencies shall submit their budget request according to the prescribed process to the conference treasurer no later than Jan. 31. The Mission Alignment Team (as selected by the Connecting Council) shall study the budget requests, consult with the agencies of the conference, and recommend to the CFA the total sums they recommend for the respective groups. The CFA shall examine the work of the Mission Alignment Team and bring a recommendation to the Connecting Council and the annual conference of a budget that includes the full amount apportioned to the conference for the several general funds authorized by the General Conference, and that amount shall be apportioned to the churches (Discipline, ¶ 613.3).

### Budget Administration

Meeting expense reimbursement:

The mileage rate for conference and district board, agency and council meetings shall be 40 percent of the standard rate established by the Internal Revenue Service for business expense (in 2015 this is \$0.23/mile, which is 40 percent of \$.575/mile). Clergy and lay participants in such meetings are encouraged to submit for reimbursement through the conference rather than through their local church. Procedures and policies will be developed to encourage carpooling and video venue usage with this policy.

Dependent (child and/or adult) care reimbursement to people attending approved meetings is \$5 per hour for one dependent, \$8 per hour for two dependents, and \$10 per hour for three or more dependents. The total shall not exceed \$50 per day for one participant.

Lodging may be reimbursed at actual expense if attendance at such meetings requires an overnight stay due to distance traveled. Lodging will be arranged for by leadership of such conference or district boards. Shared rooms will be expected when appropriate.

Meals may be reimbursed if attendance at such meetings requires an overnight stay due to distance traveled. Meals will be arranged for by leadership of such conference or district boards. Reimbursement to participants will be at \$20 per day with that amount prorated for partial days based on the length of meetings and the travel required.

At or immediately following the close of any fiscal year, the CFA's Executive Committee shall have the authority to pay any remaining General Church and South Central Jurisdiction mission shares from available cash.

All available funds remaining in the conference budget shall be transferred to conference reserves. Notwithstanding the forgoing sentence, those available funds remaining in the accounts of the three related corporations: New Church Development, Inc., United Methodist Campus Ministry, Inc., and United Methodist Camps, Inc., as well as accounts for the work of the Board of Trustees related to property management, and Missional Opportunities shall not be so transferred.

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Operating Reserve: The operating reserve provides for cash flow needs of the conference. The goal of the operating Reserve shall be to maintain an annual balance of no less than ten (10) percent not to exceed twenty (20) percent of the conference budget. Operating reserve balance above twenty (20) percent at the end of the fiscal year shall be reported to the Connecting Council with potential uses for such funds to be approved by both the CFA and the Connecting Council.

### **Great Plains Conference Restricted Reserve Fund (amended June 2014)**

The conference has at its disposal an account referred to as the Great Plains Conference Restricted Reserve Fund. This fund is restricted by the annual conference and is to be administered by the CFA. The purpose of the fund is to support conference ministries. It is the conference's intention that, unless action is taken by the annual conference, the balance of this reserve fund will never drop below \$20,000,000. This provides an additional protection against stock market downturns for the purpose of meeting potential pension obligations. It is the conference's understanding that this reserve fund may grow over time even with up to 5 percent of the earnings being withdrawn each year to support conference ministries.

### **The Missional Opportunities Reserve Fund:**

\$3,000,000 of the fund shall be treated as the Missional Opportunities Reserve Fund. Each year CFA will designate an amount up to 5 percent of the Missional Opportunities Reserve Fund to be available to the conference for missional opportunities according to policies set up by the Connecting Council. Any team of the conference, including the Extended Cabinet or Appointive Cabinet, can request money from the Missional Opportunities Fund for any conference-wide strategic purpose or one that implements or strengthens one of the conference's missional priorities.

### **The Budget Reserve Fund:**

The balance of the Restricted Reserve Fund is restricted for support of the Conference budget. Each year in February, the CFA will calculate the 36 monthly average of the fund ending on Jan. 31 of that year. They will apply a percentage not greater than 5 percent to that average. (In 2016 a 25 month average.) The calculated amount shall be designated as an income source for the next budget year and shall be withdrawn from the Restricted Reserve Fund during the budget year in accordance to the directions from the conference treasurer. The CFA may also designate a special distribution of the fund if its earnings make that prudent and possible.

Non-Budget Fund Accounts: The conference treasurer may receive and disburse funds for designated purposes, separate from the conference budget. Such funds shall be listed as "non-budget fund accounts." All non-budget fund accounts must be sponsored by an agency of the Conference. Interest from money held in Non-Budget Fund Accounts may be credited to the respective account as determined by the CFA.

When an unrestricted non-budget fund account has been terminated or has been inactive for a period of one year, the balance shall be transferred to the conference reserve, unless otherwise determined by the CFA.

### **Investments**

Investments of the conference funds shall be made by the conference treasurer, under the direction of the Conference Investment Committee under the policies and procedures for all investment transactions and balances as described below.

### **Investment Policy**

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of the Great Plains United Methodist Conference Investment Policy is to provide governance and oversight to the Investment Committee of the conference with the intent to facilitate and not hinder conference committees, commissions, institutions and agencies in the execution of their duties related to their investment portfolios and in the use of their funds.

In recognition of fiduciary responsibilities and the mandate of the 2012 Book of Discipline (§ 613.5), the CFA has approved this investment policy governing the Investment Committee of the Conference. This investment policy shall comply with the policies related to Conflict of Interest and Investment Management of Annual Conference Pension and Pension Related Funds under § 1508 of the 2012 Book of Discipline.

### **Delineation of Responsibilities**

Under the 2012 Book of Discipline (§ 612.1), the purpose of the CFA shall be to develop, maintain and administer a comprehensive and coordinated plan of fiscal and administrative policies, procedures and management services for the annual conference. The CFA is responsible for establishing principles, policies, standards and guidelines for the investment of all monies, assets and properties of the conference. The CFA is responsible for the financial integrity and oversight of the financial resources of the conference.

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By this investment policy, the CFA delegates, to the extent provided, to the Investment Committee the management and operations of the conference's investment assets, which are made subject to this investment policy. Under this investment policy, the conference's investment assets are comprised of funds under the responsibility of the CFA, the Board of Trustees (BOT), the Council on New Church Development (CNCD) and the Board of Pension and Health Benefits (BOPHB), except for funds within the conference pension plans. The Investment Committee shall establish investment objectives for the conference funds under the responsibility of the CFA, BOT, CNCD and BOPHB, except for funds within the conference pension plans, so as not to hinder the stewardship of their respective conference funds as required by the United Methodist Book of Discipline or conference policies and procedures.

The Investment Committee shall be fully accountable to the CFA. The CFA shall review the investment policy and the work of the Investment Committee, as needed, to determine the effectiveness of and the overall results of the investments.

### The Investment Committee shall:

1. Define and develop investment goals and operational guidelines;
2. Select and discharge investment managers, and carry out any other duties required for the legal operation of the Investment Committee, including but not limited to hiring outside vendors to perform various services;
3. Monitor and evaluate the performance results and risk posture of the investment manager(s) to insure they are striving to achieve the investment goals and objectives as formalized by the Investment Committee.
4. Provide annual written accounts of the investment results, accounting summary and any significant developments to the CFA, BOT, CNCD and BOPHB, and to the conference at its annual meeting;
5. Provide annual written evaluation of the performance of the investment managers to the CFA, BOT, CNCD and BOPHB;
6. Require all portfolios be managed with the aim of optimizing funds available for mission in a manner consistent with the maximization of total return (consistent with the preservation of capital), the Social Principles of The United Methodist Church and shall fully comply with the United Methodist Book of Discipline;
7. Establish and maintain effective communication procedures between the Investment Committee and the CFA, BOT, CNCD, BOPHB, staff and outside service providers;
8. Monitor and control investment expenses; and
9. Report to the CFA any significant deviations from this policy for prior written approval before they are implemented.

The Investment Committee may delegate the execution and administration of certain Investment Committee responsibilities as appropriate to the conference treasurer who serves as its staff;

### Fiduciary Responsibility

Persons that are charged with investing funds have a fiduciary responsibility for those funds. Fiduciary responsibility requires those responsible for investments to fulfill the legally imposed duties of loyalty, care, and prudence. The members of the Investment Committee are fiduciaries subject to the rules and laws governing fiduciary behavior.

The duty of loyalty prohibits self-dealing by persons who are fiduciaries. They are not permitted to take part in investment decisions that would create a conflict of interest. All investment decisions are to be made with a view to the interest of the beneficiaries, in this case the various agencies, committees, boards, and councils of the conference providing funds for investment, rather than to the personal interests of the fiduciary. When conflicts do arise, they should be disclosed to the chairperson of the Investment Committee (or if a conflict of interest involves the chairperson, then to the conference treasurer) immediately. Advance disclosure in writing will provide evidence of the disclosure in the event the issue of conflict of interest is raised. Any fiduciary with a conflict involving an investment decision should abstain from any participation in that decision and document the abstention in the minutes of the meeting.

The duty of care requires that a fiduciary act at all times in good faith and in a manner which is in the best interest of the beneficiaries. Fiduciaries are to be adequately informed about alternatives available at the time of decision. Where specific instructions are left with regard to legacies, those instructions must be followed unless changed by court order. The duty of care includes prudence in the investment context (including diligence in attending meetings), efforts to ascertain relevant information prior to decision making, balanced judgment, adequate assessment and balancing of potential investment risks and returns and adequate diversification of investments.

Fiduciary responsibility cannot be delegated. The decision of the Investment Committee to engage investment manager(s) will not absolve the Investment Committee from its ultimate responsibility for the care of the funds. In order to discharge adequately the duties of care and loyalty, the fiduciary will need to demonstrate that appropriate procedures were used for selecting the investment manager(s) and for monitoring the results of the advice received. The investment manager(s) should be trustworthy and competent to perform the work as outlined by the Investment Committee. The loyalties of the investment managers(s) must run to the beneficiaries, not to the individual members of the Investment Committee.

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Fiduciaries are permitted to accept and rely on the advice of an investment manager where they can demonstrate that their initial decision to engage the investment manager was well-founded and where subsequent development do not give rise to a basis for suspending that reliance.

The standard of care when making decisions is the Prudent Expert Standard, defined as:

"... the care, skill, prudence and diligence under the circumstances then prevailing that a prudent person acting in a like capacity and familiar with such matters would use in the conduct of an enterprise of a like character and with like aims."

### **Members of the Investment Committee**

The Investment Committee shall be comprised of nine voting members, who shall be appointed by their respective councils, boards, and committees, as follows:

Four representatives from the CFA,

Three representatives from the BOPHB,

One representative from the BOT;

One representative from the CNCD.

Conference staff may attend Investment Committee meetings with voice, but without voting rights, on Investment Committee matters.

The Investment Committee members shall be appointed annually by their respective councils, boards, and committees. For purposes of consistency, it is desired that the Investment Committee members will serve multiple years, but not to extend past their terms on their respective councils, boards and committees. The Investment Committee, from among its voting members, shall annually elect the chairperson and other officers as deemed necessary. The officers as so elected shall perform the duties traditionally handled by officers with those titles.

The Investment Committee may appoint subcommittees and taskforces to prepare recommendations and review particular issues. These subgroups will not have the authority to take action, but shall be information gathering and reporting groups.

### **Investment of Pooled Funds**

To the extent possible, funds from individual boards, agencies, councils and committees from within the conference shall be pooled for the purposes of investment. Investors in a pooled fund investment will benefit from economies of scale, which allow for lower trading costs, diversification and management. The pooled fund investors will proportionally share costs, capital gains and losses, and earnings. The determination of the funds to be pooled shall be done in consultation with the conference treasurer. Proper accounting and reporting procedures will be established and used to keep accurate records for the purpose of proportional distribution.

### **Time Horizon**

The time horizon for investments shall be based on the liquidity needs of each conference account as specified by the conference treasurer. Capital values fluctuate over shorter periods and the Investment Committee recognizes that the possibility of capital loss does exist. However, historical asset class return data suggest that the risk of principal loss over a holding period of at least three to five years can be minimized with a long-term investment mix.

### **Risk Tolerance**

The Investment Committee intends that the investment portfolio should be managed in a manner that seeks to achieve the stated rate of return while limiting principal fluctuations over the established horizon for each Conference account. Financial research has demonstrated that risk is best minimized through diversification of assets, except in very limited circumstances when diversification may not be prudent. The Investment Committee would present a documented finding as to the nature of such circumstances before limiting diversification.

### **Asset Allocation**

The purpose of allocating among asset classes is to insure the proper level of diversification and risk for each investment portfolio. The primary considerations in the asset allocation decision process are:

maintaining inflation-adjusted purchasing power; growing the corpus of the funds to meet future obligations;

achieving a minimum return in excess of inflation but with minimal annual fluctuations in the corpus; satisfying the cash liquidity needs of short-term obligations; and maintaining the longevity of the assets and their distributions while taking into consideration that there may be no additional contributions.

When mutual funds, commingled funds, ETFs and funds in general are used as an investment vehicle, then it is understood the Investment Committee has adopted the investment policies of those funds. With the adoption of this Investment Policy, the conference establishes the funds into which it allocates its assets as set forth on Appendix A.

### **Investment Performance Benchmarks**

The investment performance of all portfolios will be measured against commonly accepted performance benchmarks. Consideration shall be given to the extent to which the investment results are consistent with the investment objectives and guidelines as set forth in this investment policy.

### **Investment Manager(s)**

An investment manager must be knowledgeable and experienced in the prudent investment process, so that they may assist the Investment Committee in reaching investment objectives effectively. Investment managers shall be selected through a process to achieve the desired investment objectives as stated in this Investment Policy. The Investment Committee may engage one or more investment managers from the following categories:

A United Methodist institution;

An independent investment manager who receives a fee based on portfolio value;

A bank trust department (not all bank trust departments can offer this service) whose fees may be based on portfolio value. The fees usually vary widely depending on the services needed and are based on a percentage of the managed assets, depending on the type of account, types of assets managed, and market value of the portfolio.

Deciding when to replace a portfolio manager is often subjective as much as objective, however it is a decision that the Investment Committee will be responsible for and will make when deemed necessary.

### **Responsibilities of Investment Managers**

Each investment manager will have discretion to make all investment decisions for the assets placed under its jurisdiction, while observing the operating within the guidelines, constraints, and philosophies as outlined in this Investment Policy. Specific responsibilities of the investment managers include:

Exercising discretionary investment management, including decisions to buy, sell, or retain individual securities, and to alter asset allocations within the guidelines established by this Investment Policy;

Reporting on a timely basis, quarterly investment performance results in adherence to the Global Investment Performance Standard (GIPS) net of all external and internal fees, as governed by the CFA Institute;

Communicating any major changes to the economic outlook, investment strategy, or the investment objective progress of the funds' investment management;

Informing the Investment Committee regarding any qualitative change to the investment management organization, e.g., changes in portfolio investment management personnel, ownership structure, investment philosophy, etc.; and,

Voting proxies, if and as requested by the Investment Committee, and communicating such voting records to the Investment Committee on a timely basis.

### **Rebalancing**

Changes in the mix of assets or assignment of assets to different investment managers shall be made by action of the Investment Committee at a regular or called meeting with the advice and consultation of the investment manager(s). The Investment Committee shall undertake to maintain its desired asset allocation within 5 percent of the determined mix for any particular assets, except under unusual market conditions.

### **Socially Responsible Investment Guidelines**

The Investment Committee shall pursue intentional investment decisions that further the principles of economic and social justice consistent with the goals outlined in the 2012 Book of Discipline and Social Principles of The United Methodist Church.

¶ 717 of the 2012 Book of Discipline states: "Socially Responsible Investments — It shall be the policy of The United Methodist Church that all general Boards and agencies, including the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits, and all administrative agencies and institutions, including hospitals, homes, educational institutions, annual conferences, foundations and local churches, shall, in the investment of money, make a conscious effort to invest in institutions, companies, corporations or funds whose practices are consistent with the goals outlined in the Social Principles; and shall endeavor to avoid investments that appear likely, directly or indirectly, to support racial discrimination, violation of human rights, sweatshop or forced labor, gambling, or the production of nuclear armaments, alcoholic beverages or tobacco, or companies dealing in pornography, or the management or operation of prison facilities. The Boards and agencies are to give careful consideration to shareholder advocacy, including advocacy of corporate disinvestment."

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### Records

The Investment Committee shall keep a proper and prudent record of all-important documents, meeting minutes and other information relating to the management of the funds. They shall be available at Custodian of the Records, which shall be the conference treasurer

### Amendments and Revisions

Amendments or changes to this Investment Policy shall be made to and approved by the CFA and incorporated directly into the policy as a revision and restatement or acknowledged and noted in an addendum until such time as the Investment Policy is revised and restated. The committee may amend Appendix A from time to time upon approval of CFA. Following each such amendment the committee shall replace the respective with one that reflects the amendment approved by CFA.

### Surety Bond

Surety Bond coverage in the amount of \$1,000,000 is secured to cover the conference treasurer and staff. The conference does not provide bonding for local church treasurers. Local churches are to provide adequate bonding of their treasurer(s).

### Annual Audit of Conference Treasury

An annual audit of all conference financial records shall be conducted by an independent certified public accountant as selected by the CFA upon recommendation of its Audit Review Committee. The Audit Review Committee will review such audit and present it to the CFA for final approval. A copy of the financial statements shall be included in the conference Journal. The entire audit report may be viewed at the conference office.

### Audits of Boards, Agencies and Institutions

The CFA has a fiduciary responsibility to the conference in administering conference funds. Therefore, the CFA is required to review the financial statements of organizations to which grants or contributions of conference funds are made. The CFA shall appoint an audit committee that will have on its membership at least one member of the CFA plus additional members recruited for their expertise. This committee shall work with the auditor of the conference as well as review audits, reviews, and compilation reports of boards, agencies and institutions as described below.

Reports from an independent certified public accountant (CPA) are required annually from each agency or institution that receives funds from the conference treasury in accordance with the requirements listed below. Funds shall not be transferred to any agency or institution that has not forwarded its annual audit, review or compilation report for the preceding year within six months' time after the close of its fiscal year. (2012 Discipline, ¶ 617.2.) Agencies of the conference using the conference central treasury for all their financial activity shall be included in the conference audit and are not required to submit separate audit reports.

In addition to audit and financial reports submitted to the conference, organizations receiving conference funds shall also provide to the conference a copy of all other required communications received from the external auditor. These communications may include, among other items, comments regarding any significant deficiencies in the design or the operation of the organization's internal controls.

### Audit, Review and Compilation Report Requirements:

Each agency or organization that has annual gross receipts of \$500,000 or more shall submit a copy of its audited financial statements, together with any required communications from its external auditor and management letter (if applicable).

Each agency or organization that has annual gross receipts of between \$250,000 and \$499,999 is required to submit a copy of its financial statements together with a review report from a CPA.

Agencies and organizations with annual gross receipts of less than \$250,000 must submit financial statements accompanied by a compilation report from a CPA with a CPA review required every third year.

Agencies and organizations with annual gross receipts below \$500,000 may request a variance from the requirements listed above. Any variance granted is valid for the current reporting year only. A variance from these requirements shall not be granted for more than two consecutive years. The organization granted the variance shall submit the following information:

Financial statements. The agency shall submit financial statements that reflect its financial position and results of operations for the fiscal year then ended.

Tax statements. The agency shall provide documentation stating that all necessary tax returns (including payroll tax returns) have been filed in a timely manner. Documentation shall also be required regarding the status of any unpaid taxes to federal, state or local authorities as of the date of the request.

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### Other Circumstances:

Grants or contributions of conference funds to organizations not meeting the above requirements shall not be made without special approval. Special approval shall require a favorable vote of at least 2/3 of the members of the CFA present and voting.

### Mortgage Indebtedness

Any institution/agency whose board is elected by the conference, and that has mortgage indebtedness, shall provide an annual report to the conference showing the:

- Total indebtedness
- Amount paid on indebtedness last year
- Plans to retire the indebtedness

If any such institution/agency plans to mortgage assets or to pledge endowment funds or to transfer funds from endowments to operating budgets and total indebtedness exceeds 10 percent of total assets or one million dollars, whichever is less, that mortgage must be approved by the conference prior to the transaction, or in an emergency between sessions of the conference, by a joint session of the conference Cabinet and the CFA.

### Protection of Contact Information

Contact information for clergy, churches, and laity held by the conference is for the use and benefit of the Conference. Councils, boards, and agencies of the conference, conference and jurisdictional Advances, local churches and districts, and agencies of the general church may request contact information. Except as provided below, contact information held by the conference, or provided to its respective agencies and institutions by the conference, shall be considered confidential as to outside parties and shall not be provided to any person, group or business beyond those for whom the contact information was compiled, without the written approval of the CFA.

Contact information for clergy, churches, lay members of annual conference, and laity serving in conference or district leadership is printed in the conference Journal. Directory Information placed on the conference website is limited to churches, clergy's business contact information, and a few specific lay leadership positions. Information is not provided in a downloadable list.

### Local Church Report to The Annual Conference (Tables 1, 2, & 3)

The local church shall electronically submit the Local Church Report to Annual Conference no later than 5 p.m. on the last business day of January each year.

If a report is not received by the due date:

The only figures that will be reported will be prior year membership and benevolences sent to the conference treasurer.

When calculating the church's mission share, 10 percent shall be added to the prior year's operating income.

The Journal record shall indicate that the report was not received or not received in time to be used for mission share calculations.

The pastor is responsible for the accuracy of the information submitted and assuring the report is received by the deadline (2012 Discipline ¶ 340.2c(2)(f)). Information about submission of these reports will be sent to the pastor as soon as the General Council on Finance and Administration makes such information available.

Correction of errors with these reports after final submission should be made by the last business day of February each year. If errors are discovered after that date and the adjustment would affect mission shares, the district superintendent would need to be contacted. Changes would only be made for extenuating circumstances at the discretion of the district superintendent and the conference treasurer.

### Local Church Audits (amended June 2014)

Church members and others provide substantial financial resources to local churches, and expect church staff and lay leadership to provide proper oversight of such resources to ensure these resources are (1) used in a manner consistent with that expressed through the church's annual operating budget and designated gifts, and (2) adequately safeguarded from improper use or loss. In light of expectations, every local United Methodist church, at a minimum, shall conduct an audit (review) as defined and described in the Local Church Audit Guide published by the General Church Council on Finance and Administration. The guide may be obtained at [www.gcfa.org](http://www.gcfa.org).

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In addition to such minimum requirements for all churches, and consistent with the expectations for integrity, transparency and accountability described above, larger churches shall periodically subject their accounting records and controls to assessment by an independent certified public accountant. Specifically, larger churches (i.e., those with annual total receipts of more than \$500,000) shall adopt one of the following two options (for purposes of this section, "total receipts" of each local church shall be annual total combined funds received through the operating budget; designated or restricted gifts given for a particular purpose, including special offerings collected throughout the year; monies received for capital buildings or improvements or for debt service; contributions received for endowed funds, preschool tuition and fees received; and any funds received from other sources):

- 1) Have an audit performed by an independent certified public accountant (CPA) in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards; OR
- 2) Have independent CPA perform a set of agreed-upon procedures established by the CFA.

For purposes of this requirement, the frequency of having either option 1 or option 2 performed shall depend on the annual total receipts of each local church from all sources as described above. For purposes of determining the applicability of this requirement, "total funds received" shall be the average annual total receipts (as defined above) for the prior three years. (For example, for purposes of applying this test in 2014, local churches would determine the average of total funds received for the years 2011-2013.) If average total funds received by a local church exceed \$2,000,000, the local church should have audit work performed by an independent CPA under either option 1 or option 2 annually. For those local churches who have average total funds received of less than \$2,000,000 but more than \$1,000,000, those churches should have audit work performed by an independent CPA under option 1 or option 2 once every two years. For those who have average total funds received of less than \$1,000,000 but more than \$500,000, those churches should have audit work performed by an independent CPA under option 1 or option 2 once every three years. For any year in which a larger church (as defined above) is not required to have work done by an independent CPA under option 1 or 2, such churches shall conduct an audit (review) as described in the first paragraph of this section.

### Moving Guidelines

**People eligible for a paid move:** All clergy appointed fulltime or part-time to a local church/charge or conference staff position or a lay person assigned as a DSA (District Superintendent Assigned) or CLM (Certified Lay Minister) fulltime or part-time to a local church/charge.

**Allowance for Household Items:** 15,000 pounds maximum paid for by the Great Plains United Methodist Conference (GPUMC). Any weight over 15,000 pounds will be the responsibility of the moving pastor.

**Accessorial Allowance:** \$750 maximum paid for by the GPUMC. Services which may be applied to this allowance are limited to the following items:

1. Packing material
2. Packing services provided by a moving company (such as securing of antiques and large items, not entire home)
3. Extra pickup or delivery, beyond the parsonage/home and church office, provided that the extra pickup or delivery is on the moving route and that no additional miles will be added to the move
4. Additional insurance premiums (moving companies reference additional value or valuation protection charge)
5. Piano, organ, antiques or other specialty services
6. Storage
7. Lodging up to a maximum of \$75 per night

The limitation on the amount allowed for these services will necessitate clergy securing packing cartons and doing most of their own packing. The maximum allowance for packing and special services may be waived for emergency or unusual situations, subject to the prior written recommendation by the district superintendent and approval by the conference treasurer/director of administrative services. The Accessorial Allowance is not applicable to weight overages.

**Clergy couples** will be entitled to up to two moving allowances only if they are required to maintain separate housing accommodations by their appointments. For clergy couples who need an extra pick-up and/or delivery because they serve separate charges but live in the same house and have offices located in their respective churches, an allowance of up to \$200 above the maximum moving allowance is available. Exceptions for overages for clergy couples will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis by the conference treasurer/director of administrative services. In addition, an amount of up to \$500 over the maximum moving allowance is available for the moving weight over 15,000 pounds. *(Rationale: clergy couples often have two libraries, two sets of files, and extra office items.)*

### People in other appointive statuses

1. **Medical Leave** (formerly called Incapacity Leave): Expense for one move of a clergy approved for medical leave and benefits by the Joint Committee on Clergy Medical Leave shall be paid. Claim for this benefit must be made within two years of approval for this leave.

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2. Retirement: Expenses for one move of a clergy retiring from active service in a local church/charge or conference staff position shall be paid to the place of retirement within the conference boundary or up to 200 miles beyond the conference boundary. Moving expenses incurred by a move beyond the 200 mile limit will be calculated and payable by the pastor. Claim for this benefit must be made within two years of ending of appointive service. When a retired pastor is appointed out of retirement to serve a local church, the above allowances (15,000 pounds/\$750) will apply.
3. Surviving Spouse and/or dependent in the home: Expenses for one move of the spouse and/or dependent(s) of a clergy that was under appointment/assignment at the time of death (local church/charge or conference staff positions) shall be paid. Claim for this benefit must be made within two years of the clergy's death.
4. Pastors appointed to and compensated by United Methodist institutions, whether related or unrelated to the Great Plains Conference, shall become the institution's responsibility for all moving costs.
5. Pastors moving to yoked, federated, or union churches shall be entitled to moving expenses on the basis of the covenant agreement in force in that setting. In cases where there is not a covenant agreement, the moving expense payment will be negotiated by the District Superintendent, pastor and the appropriate representatives of the other denominations. The district superintendent is responsible for communicating the agreement to the conference treasurer/ director of administrative services. In no case shall this be greater than a percentage of the cost of moving 15,000 pounds for the total move.
6. People leaving pastoral ministry for appointments beyond the local church (other than Great Plains Conference staff), for service in another annual conference, service in another denomination, leave of absence, family leave, educational leave, sabbatical leave, or withdrawal from the ministry shall NOT be entitled to moving expenses. Upon return to pastoral appointment in the Great Plains Conference, moving costs will be granted according to the guidelines above.

Requests for exceptions to these guidelines must be made in writing to the district superintendent and the conference treasurer/director of administrative services.

**How to arrange for a move**

The conference office will send a moving packet to the pastor upon receiving notification of the appointment change. The packet will inform the pastor of their maximum move benefit and will include a copy of these moving guidelines. Directions for completing the moving packet and any additional relevant information will be included in a memo from the moving coordinator.

## 1. Licensed company move option

For any person appointed/assigned to serve an appointment in the Great Plains Annual Conference, the pastor shall be responsible to make all arrangements for his/her move with the moving company of his/her choice. It is recommended that two or more estimates be secured to obtain best pricing. Pastors should be aware that some movers use the state approved "tariff" system of billing and others bill by the hour. Estimates can be obtained for either type of move to determine which might be most cost effective. The pastor is responsible for coordinating his/her pick-up and drop-off dates with the church from which he/she is moving and with the church to which he/she is moving. Conflicts in scheduling are to be referred to the district superintendent. On request of the moving pastor or their district superintendent, the moving coordinator shall be authorized to send a letter of certification when a moving company requires verification of a pastor's authorization to arrange a move at the conference's expense.

## 2. Self-move option

A letter with original moving expense receipts and personal vehicle mileage logs should be sent to the moving coordinator for reimbursement. Charges for rental trucks, trailers and other equipment may be directly billed to the conference (arrangements to be made prior to the move date). Reimbursement will be to the pastor only except for those expenses that are pre-arranged. Locally hired labor and packing materials are allowed expenses as is mileage at the IRS approved rate for moving for the use of personal vehicles to haul personal belongings. Pastors choosing the self-move option will be given a taxable \$500 stipend on top of the above described approved expenses for selecting this option.

**Procedure for payment of the moving bill**

1. The itemized bill of lading and delivery receipt shall be signed by the pastor or the pastor's designated representative.
2. The moving company shall be directed by the pastor to send a copy of the signed bill of lading and delivery receipt with the invoice to the moving coordinator's office for review and to be vouchered for payment.
3. The staff person assigned shall prepare a voucher in accordance with the moving guidelines for the amount of the invoice and forward it to the conference treasurer for payment.

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4. The moving coordinator shall notify the moving pastor that their move was within the moving guidelines or bill the pastor for any charges in excess of the applicable moving guidelines. Excess moving costs paid by the conference shall be reimbursed to the conference by the moving pastor within 12 months of the completion of the move.
5. Moving bills must be submitted to the treasurer/director of administrative services within 90 days of the move in order for the pastor to be reimbursed for any moving expenses incurred within the provisions of the moving guidelines.

**Tax Consequences**

Reimbursement for moving expenses or direct payment of moving expenses are taxable income for clergy moving 50 miles or less, as well as retired clergy involved in a retirement move. This applies to moves by a licensed mover or a self-move.

*Note: A 1099 will be issued at the end of the year to pastors with taxable moves.*

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Great Plains Budget Summary

	2014			2015		2016	
	Approved Budget	Actual	Actl as % Bdt	Approved Budget	Proposed Budget	\$\$\$ Chng from 2015 to 2016	% Chng from 2015 to 2016
<b>INCOME:</b>							
Mission Shares	\$15,725,272	\$15,616,624	99.3%	\$15,181,611	\$14,873,247	(\$308,364)	-2.0%
Less: Allowance for Unpaid Mission Shares	(\$1,356,810)	(\$2,024,349)	149.2%	(\$1,358,907)	(\$1,002,406)	\$356,501	
<b>Net Mission Share Income</b>	<b>\$14,368,462</b>	<b>\$13,592,275</b>	<b>94.6%</b>	<b>\$13,822,704</b>	<b>\$13,870,841</b>	<b>\$48,137</b>	
<b>% of Mission Share Asking</b>	<b>91.37%</b>	<b>87.04%</b>		<b>91.05%</b>	<b>93.26%</b>		
<b>Other Income:</b>							
Restricted Reserve-Budget Support (5%)	\$1,254,559	\$1,254,557	100.0%	\$1,463,669	\$1,739,161	\$275,492	18.8%
Restr Reserve-Budget Support Special Distribution	\$0	\$0		\$600,000	\$39,132	(\$560,868)	
Missional Opportunity Reserve Draw	\$0	\$0		\$150,000	\$150,000	\$0	
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$15,623,021</b>	<b>\$14,846,832</b>	<b>95.0%</b>	<b>\$16,036,373</b>	<b>\$15,799,134</b>	<b>(\$237,239)</b>	<b>-1.5%</b>
<b>EXPENSES:</b>							
<b>I: Episcopal Office</b>							
General Church Ministries for Episcopacy	\$670,135	\$583,272	87.0%	\$698,897	\$762,774		
Episcopal Administrative Personnel	\$49,730	\$35,509	71.4%	\$38,689	\$31,050		
Episcopal Office Expenses	\$23,659	\$20,326	85.9%	\$24,466	\$24,466		
Episcopal Residence Maintenance	\$13,000	\$13,012	100.1%	\$13,260	\$16,850		
District Personnel	\$2,579,074	\$2,464,606	95.6%	\$2,601,302	\$2,215,703		
District Office Expenses	\$338,190	\$294,594	87.1%	\$384,080	\$348,310		
Cabinet Operations	\$552,500	\$633,020	114.6%	\$552,500	\$684,700		
<b>Total Episcopal Office Budget</b>	<b>\$4,226,288</b>	<b>\$4,044,339</b>	<b>95.7%</b>	<b>\$4,313,194</b>	<b>\$4,083,854</b>	<b>(\$229,340)</b>	<b>-5.3%</b>
<b>II: Clergy Excellence</b>							
General Church Ministries for Clergy Excellence	\$787,908	\$685,771	87.0%	\$800,005	\$812,368		
Board of Ordained Ministry	\$141,300	\$99,426	70.4%	\$174,800	\$188,500		
Trans Into Ministry Mission Share Request	\$0	\$0	0.0%	\$90,957	\$87,307		
Clergy Excellence Office Expense	\$11,200	\$24,147	215.6%	\$36,200	\$87,750		
Clergy Excellence Personnel	\$413,203	\$382,052	92.5%	\$435,412	\$388,250		
<b>Total Clergy Excellence Budget</b>	<b>\$1,353,611</b>	<b>\$1,191,396</b>	<b>88.0%</b>	<b>\$1,537,374</b>	<b>\$1,564,175</b>	<b>\$26,801</b>	<b>1.7%</b>
<b>III: Congregational Excellence</b>							
<b>III. A. Leadership Development:</b>							
General Church Ministries for Leadership Development	\$384,603	\$334,737	87.0%	\$390,539	\$396,604		
SCJ Ministries for Leadership Development	\$123,399	\$107,406	87.0%	\$120,477	\$117,555		
Leadership Development Ministries	\$89,500	\$38,695	43.2%	\$85,500	\$107,000		
Small Membership Church Ministries	\$20,000	\$20,028	100.1%	\$90,500	\$90,000		
Campus Ministry Mission Share Request	\$551,000	\$551,000	100.0%	\$551,000	\$572,690		
Camping Mission Share Request	\$626,997	\$627,000	100.0%	\$627,000	\$677,160		
Safe Gatherings	\$60,000	\$13,091	21.8%	\$65,500	\$30,840		
<b>Total Leadership Development</b>	<b>\$1,855,499</b>	<b>\$1,691,957</b>	<b>91.2%</b>	<b>\$1,930,516</b>	<b>\$1,991,849</b>		
<b>III. B. Vital Congregations:</b>							
Resource Center GPUMC Support	\$19,500	\$19,511	100.1%	\$27,920	\$27,920		
Youth Ministry	\$60,200	\$34,030	56.5%	\$101,750	\$116,400		
Ethnic Mission Share Request	\$588,408	\$532,428	90.5%	\$659,333	\$702,148		
New Church Starts Mission Share Request	\$595,846	\$595,846	100.0%	\$586,175	\$597,899		
<b>Total Vital Congregations Budget</b>	<b>\$1,263,954</b>	<b>\$1,181,815</b>	<b>93.5%</b>	<b>\$1,375,178</b>	<b>\$1,444,367</b>		
Congregational Excellence Office Expense	\$79,575	\$75,104	94.4%	\$79,575	\$83,300		
Congregational Excellence Personnel	\$876,335	\$794,587	90.7%	\$946,161	\$773,219		
<b>Total Congregational Excellence Budget</b>	<b>\$4,075,363</b>	<b>\$3,743,463</b>	<b>91.9%</b>	<b>\$4,331,430</b>	<b>\$4,292,735</b>	<b>(\$38,695)</b>	<b>-0.9%</b>
<b>IV: Mercy and Justice</b>							
General Church Ministries for Mercy and Justice	\$2,294,996	\$1,997,480	87.0%	\$2,330,263	\$2,366,211		
Disaster Response	\$8,760	\$5,663	64.6%	\$15,900	\$18,600		
Mercy and Justice Ministries	\$175,050	\$136,406	77.9%	\$165,050	\$169,545		
Mercy & Justice Office expense	\$13,900	\$8,199	59.0%	\$13,900	\$13,900		
Mercy and Justice Personnel	\$169,333	\$134,024	79.1%	\$151,710	\$159,727		
<b>Total Mercy and Justice Budget</b>	<b>\$2,662,039</b>	<b>\$2,281,772</b>	<b>85.7%</b>	<b>\$2,676,823</b>	<b>\$2,727,983</b>	<b>\$51,160</b>	<b>1.9%</b>
<b>V: Administrative Services</b>							
General and SCJ Ministries for Admin Services	\$382,983	\$333,337	87.0%	\$388,302	\$393,678		
Administrative Committee Expenses	\$82,262	\$95,315	115.9%	\$83,010	\$97,750		
Administrative Services Office Expense	\$159,250	\$186,821	117.3%	\$166,600	\$141,410		
Information Technology	\$220,000	\$201,923	91.8%	\$175,000	\$174,400		
Annual Conference Expense	\$127,200	\$106,565	83.8%	\$77,600	\$118,700		
Conf Office Building Maintenance expense	\$166,150	\$166,220	100.0%	\$169,473	\$213,000		
Trustees: Insurance, Auto, Dist Office & Parsonage	\$541,608	\$547,229	101.0%	\$538,259	\$475,000		
Communications Program Expense	\$155,200	\$159,850	103.0%	\$154,750	\$163,150		
Communications Personnel	\$341,408	\$322,218	94.4%	\$332,106	\$322,601		
Administrative Services Personnel	\$1,004,203	\$934,998	93.1%	\$942,452	\$880,699		
<b>Total Administrative Services budget</b>	<b>\$3,180,264</b>	<b>\$3,054,476</b>	<b>96.0%</b>	<b>\$3,027,552</b>	<b>\$2,980,387</b>	<b>(\$47,165)</b>	<b>-1.6%</b>
Missional Opportunity fund request	\$125,456	\$210,597	167.9%	\$150,000	\$150,000	\$0	0.0%
<b>Total Great Plains Conference Budget</b>	<b>\$15,623,021</b>	<b>\$14,526,043</b>	<b>93.0%</b>	<b>\$16,036,373</b>	<b>\$15,799,134</b>	<b>(\$237,239)</b>	<b>-1.5%</b>
<b>Net Income (Loss)</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$320,789</b>		<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>	

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### Great Plains Budget Summary

	2014			2015	2016	\$\$\$ Chng from 2015 to 2016	% Chng from 2015 to 2016
	Approved Budget	Actual	Actl as % Bdgt	Approved Budget	Proposed Budget		
<b>Other Billings:</b>							
<b>NE billing</b>							
Retiree Health Insurance Supplement	\$566,337	\$500,321	88.3%	\$544,324	\$558,229	\$13,905	2.6%
<b>Mission Agency Support:</b>							
1% of line 67 for Agencies	\$1,478,397	\$1,023,089	69.2%	\$1,469,802	\$1,487,325	\$17,523	1.2%
<b>Colleges/Universities</b>							
Nebraska Wesleyan Univ (scholarships) - Lincoln, NE	\$92,000	\$63,683	69.2%	\$92,000	\$130,000		
Baker University - Baldwin City, KS	\$130,000	\$89,988	69.2%	\$129,250	\$130,000		
Saint Paul School of Theology - Leawood Kan., Oklahoma City, Okla	\$125,000	\$86,527	69.2%	\$125,000	\$130,000		
Kansas Wesleyan University - Salina, KS	\$130,000	\$89,988	69.2%	\$129,250	\$130,000		
Southwestern College - Winfield, KS	\$130,000	\$89,988	69.2%	\$129,250	\$130,000		
<b>Health &amp; Welfare Institutions</b>							
U M Homes/Aldersgate Village (Good Samaritan Fund) - Topeka, Kan	\$75,000	\$51,916	69.2%	\$75,000	\$75,000		
Asbury Park, (Good Samaritan Fund) - Newton, Kan	\$25,000	\$17,306	69.2%	\$25,000	\$25,000		
GraceMed Health Clinic - Wichita, Kan	\$55,000	\$38,071	69.2%	\$55,000	\$55,000		
Released & Restored - York, Lincoln, Geneva, Neb	\$14,000	\$9,691	69.2%	\$14,000	\$16,325		
EmberHope (Youthville) - Newton, Dodge City, and Wichita, Kan	\$30,000	\$20,767	69.2%	\$30,000	\$30,000		
Epworth Village - York, Neb	\$30,000	\$20,767	69.2%	\$30,000	\$30,000		
<b>Ministries with the Poor</b>							
United Methodist Ministries - Omaha, Neb	\$185,000	\$128,059	69.2%	\$185,000	\$200,000		
Justice for Our Neighbors - Nebraska	\$150,000	\$103,831	69.2%	\$150,000	\$160,000		
Friendship House of Hope - Ogden, Kan	\$37,000	\$25,612	69.2%	\$37,000	\$37,000		
Wesley House - Pittsburg, Kan	\$50,000	\$34,610	69.2%	\$50,000	\$60,000		
Fellowship and Faith - Topeka, Kan	\$14,000	\$9,691	69.2%	\$14,000	\$14,000		
UM Open Door - Wichita, Kan	\$55,000	\$38,071	69.2%	\$55,000	\$55,000		
UM Western Kansas Mexican-American Ministries	\$55,000	\$38,071	69.2%	\$55,000	\$55,000		
<b>Ecumenical/Interchurch organizations</b>							
Interchurch Ministries of Nebraska	\$35,000	\$24,228	69.2%	\$35,000	\$0		
Rural Response Hotline (Interchurch Ministries of NE)	\$25,000	\$17,306	69.2%	\$25,000	\$25,000		
Kansas Christians United (KS Ecumenical Ministries)	\$6,000	\$0	0.0%	\$0	\$0		
<b>Retreat Centers</b>							
Forest Park Conference & Retreat Center - Topeka, Kan	\$30,000	\$20,766	69.2%	\$30,000	\$0		
<b>Total Mission Agency Support Budget</b>	<b>\$1,478,000</b>	<b>\$1,018,937</b>	<b>68.9%</b>	<b>\$1,469,750</b>	<b>\$1,487,325</b>	<b>\$17,575</b>	<b>1.2%</b>
<b>Net Mission Agency Support Income</b>	<b>\$397</b>	<b>\$4,152</b>		<b>\$52</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>(\$52)</b>	
0							
<b>For Information Only - included in the above budget</b>							
<b>General Church Apportionments</b>							
Episcopal Office	\$670,135	\$583,267		\$698,897	\$762,774		
Africa University	\$70,329	\$61,212		\$800,005	\$812,368		
Black College	\$314,274	\$273,535		\$71,409	\$72,543		
Ministerial Education	\$787,908	\$685,773		\$319,130	\$324,061		
World Service	\$2,294,996	\$1,997,501		\$2,330,263	\$2,366,211		
General Administration	\$276,962	\$241,060		\$281,275	\$285,683		
Interdenominational Cooperation	\$61,590	\$53,606		\$62,596	\$63,564		
<b>Total General Apportionments</b>	<b>\$4,476,194</b>	<b>\$3,895,955</b>		<b>\$4,563,575</b>	<b>\$4,687,204</b>	<b>\$123,629</b>	<b>2.7%</b>
<b>South Central Jurisdiction Apportionments</b>							
Mt Sequoyah	\$22,687	\$19,746		\$22,687	\$22,687		
Lydia Patterson Institute	\$94,868	\$82,570		\$94,868	\$94,868		
SMU Wesley Foundation	\$5,844	\$5,086		\$2,922	\$0		
SCJ Mission And Administration Fund	\$44,431	\$38,672		\$44,431	\$44,431		
<b>Total SCJ Apportionments</b>	<b>\$167,830</b>	<b>\$146,075</b>		<b>\$164,908</b>	<b>\$161,986</b>	<b>(\$2,922)</b>	<b>-1.8%</b>

# GREAT PLAINS CONFERENCE

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### Mission Agency Support

*Gifts can be designated for the following Mission Agencies. However, such gifts will not count toward the payment of a church's Mission Agency Support share.*

#### Colleges/Univ/Seminary:

NE Wesleyan Univ-Scholarships - Lincoln, NE	700
Baker University - Baldwin City, KS	701
St Paul School of Theology	702
KS Wesleyan University - Salina, KS	703
Southwestern College - Winfield, KS	704

#### Health & Welfare Institutions:

UM Homes - Aldersgate Village - Topeka, KS	710
Asbury Park (Good Samaritan Fund)- Newton, KS	711
GraceMed Health Clinic - Wichita, KS	712
Released & Restored - NE	713
EmberHope (Youthville) - KS	714
Epworth Village - York, NE	715
Crowell Health Services - Blair, NE	990
Wesley Towers - Hutchinson, KS	993
E. C. Tyree Health & Dental Clinic - Wichita, KS	994

#### Ministries with the Poor:

United Methodist Ministries - Omaha, NE	720
Justice for Our Neighbors - NE	721
Friendship House of Hope - Ogden, KS	722
Wesley House - Pittsburg, KS	723
Fellowship & Faith - Topeka, KS	724
UM Open Door - Wichita, KS	725
UM Western Kansas Mex-Amer Ministries	726

#### Ecumenical/Interchurch Organizations:

Interchurch Ministries of Nebraska	730
Rural Response Hotline, NE	731

#### Retreat Centers:

Forest Park Conf & Retreat Center, Topeka, KS	736
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#### Great Plains Mission Partnerships:

Nigeria Hope for Children in Africa	300
Nigeria Scholarship for Students	301
Haiti Covenant	302
Zimbabwe East Chabadza Covenant	303
Fairfield Outreach Sponsors Organization (FOSA)	992

#### Great Plains Campus Ministries:

Emporia State - Emporia, KS	320	001
Fort Hays State - Hays, KS	320	002
Kansas State - Manhattan, KS	320	003
Nebraska Wesleyan - Lincoln, NE	320	004
University of Kansas - Lawrence, KS	320	005
Pittsburg State - Pittsburg, KS	320	006
Washburn University - Topeka, KS	320	007
Wichita State - Wichita, KS	320	008
University of Nebraska, Kearney, NE	320	009
University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE	320	010

#### Great Plains Camping Inc:

Camp Chippewa - Ottawa, KS	321	010
Camp Comeca - Cozad, NE	321	011
Camp Fontanelle - Nickerson, NE	321	012
Camp Horizon - Arkansas City, KS	321	013
Camp Norwesca - Chadron, NE	321	014
Camp Lakeside - Scott City, KS	321	015

#### Great Plains Ethnic Ministries:

Hispanic/Latino Ministries	345
Blue River Hispanic/Latino Ministries	348
Prairie River Hispanic/Latino Ministries	349
Great West Hispanic/Latino Ministries	350
<i>Centro de Alabanza y Adoracion</i>	351
<i>Imperial Ebenezer Hispanic</i>	352
El Mesias UMC - Wichita KS	353
Evangelica UMC - Garden City, KS	354
Center of Grace - Olathe, KS	360
Native American Ministries	361
Sacred Winds Native Mission Cong - Lincoln, NE	370
Korean UMC - Wichita, KS	375
Danner Mem. Scholarship African-Amer Students	376
Living Hope UMC - Omaha, NE	996
New Visions Community UMC - Lincoln, NE	996

#### Other Great Plains Missions:

Seminary Scholarship Endowment	900	
New Church Development	934	
Peace With Justice	960	
Hunger	967	
Round up for Hunger	968	
Great Plains Disaster Response Fund	975	
Rebuilding GP Churches Fund	976	
Habitat for Humanity		
<i>Beatrice</i>	978	020
<i>Hastings</i>	978	021
<i>Kearney</i>	978	022
<i>Lincoln</i>	978	023
<i>Omaha</i>	978	024
<i>Grand Island</i>	978	025
<i>Sarpy County</i>	978	026
Great Plains Volunteers in Mission	981	
Common Ground	982	
David Upp Missionary Support, KS	984	
Crossroads Center - Hastings, NE	991	
First UMC Television Ministry - Wichita, KS	995	
Sunrise Community Services - Chadron, NE	997	

**REPORT OF THE TREASURER/DIRECTOR OF ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES**

by Gary A Beach

I appreciate the opportunity to, again this year, share with you how our conference ended the year 2014, a brief report on the progress in our transition to becoming one conference in the administrative offices, and some words about resources we are providing to pastors, local church leaders and conference level leaders. Because my report will contain a number of figures I will ask the communications staff to put my report on our website soon after annual conference. That way you won't need to take notes along the way.

Regarding year-end 2014 – our conference raised 87.04 percent of **mission shares**, up from 86.05 percent in 2013 (the average that year of our three former conferences). Thanks for your assistance in moving us in a positive direction! However, Bishop Jones has challenged us to, prior to the end of his time with us, reach mission share payout of 95 percent. Is that even possible? Apparently it is as at least four of our sister conferences actually surpassed that goal in 2014. But is it possible in the Great Plains? Yes, it's possible even in Kansas and Nebraska! I'd like to recognize the laity and clergy of two of our own districts that have already met and surpassed that goal in 2013 and repeated in 2014. Would the laity and clergy of the Gateway District of Nebraska please stand and be recognized for paying 96.7 percent of their Mission Shares in 2014. Now would the laity and clergy of the Hays District of Kansas please stand and be recognized for paying 95.4 percent of their Mission Shares in 2014. Each actual raised their payout over 2013. And, finally, I'd like to recognize the laity and clergy of six more districts who paid between 90 and 95 percent – the Prairie Rivers District of Nebraska with 94.2 percent, the Dodge City District of Kansas with 93.1 percent, the Elkhorn Valley District of Nebraska with 92.5 percent, the Flint Hills District of Kansas with 92.3 percent, the Great West District of Nebraska with 92.0 percent, and the Hutchinson District of Kansas with 90.1 percent paid. If your church paid 100 percent last year your DS has a certificate issued by the national level of the church that they hope you will pick up from them before they leave today.

But mission shares are but one aspect of our financial life together. We also set as a goal to raise 1 percent of a church's operating income for **mission agency support** to undergird financially the separately incorporated institutions that are related to our conference. Because this was considered second mile giving Bishop Jones had instructed our institutions to only budget to receive 60 percent of the goal. However, you surpassed that and raised 69.67 percent! And, beyond that, a number of churches designated additional funds for specific institutions on the list raising the equivalent of another 10 percent of the goal (however, that money was not spread proportionately among the institutions so not all received equivalent amounts from these gifts). But, on average, the institutions received about 80 percent of the goal set!

Another goal for churches in Nebraska is the funding of the **Nebraska retiree health program**. While that has been a project of the Nebraska Conference for many years it was simply a part of the base budget of that conference and therefore, some churches were not even aware of it. Once it was broken out in the Great Plains Conference there was some concern by leaders of our conference from Nebraska that support for this might not be as strong as they hoped. However, churches in Nebraska paid this at 89.82 percent (even higher than the mission share itself)! Additional good news has come this spring regarding this program. At the end of 2012 the liability for this program was \$22,308,540. But with the vote of the Nebraska Conference at its last session in 2013 to make changes in it the liability was then estimated to be down to \$9,838,063. But that was an estimate made by the TowersWatson firm that does actuarial valuations on such programs as these for the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits. At the end of 2013 they gathered data on how the new program actually worked in its first year as well as updating their demographics on who is eligible to receive this benefit moving into the future. Then they produced their first real valuation of the new program and lowered the liability further to \$7,549,473! During that same time the assets invested to sustain the program grew from \$5,677,733 to \$6,161,984. So Nebraskans are quickly closing the funding gap on this program! The actual unfunded portion is now down to \$1,387,489!

But now it's 2015 and in the administrative services department we are working hard to finish the transition from three conferences into one. It took until the arrival of our new auditors this spring for us to make final entries of even some beginning balances for our conference. But all that is now done, the auditors have finished their work, and their report should arrive soon for review by the conference's Audit Committee and CFA. While we don't have their report in hand as yet they have assured us that the books are in good order and in most respects our transition into the Great Plains Conference is now complete! I am grateful for the hardworking staff in the administrative services department that have helped us reach this goal.

We continue to work closely with the communications department to provide resources that we hope will be helpful to laity and clergy alike. If you go to the administrative homepage of our conference's website you will find several links on the left that represent ways we have tried to sort such resources to make it easy for you to access. Added this spring are a number of things but I want to focus on only two today. The first is a video taken at a training for local church treasurers,

## Reports

financial secretaries, and chairs of Finance Committees. Second is a "Local Church Finance and Treasurer's Guide." We hope both are useful to persons serving in these capacities in your local church. Don't find everything you need? Don't hesitate to be in touch and let us know what else you'd hope to find and we'll work with our communications staff to see what's possible.

Beyond the website our department has created a newsletter that came out quarterly in 2014 and early 2015. Originally it was emailed to church treasurers, financial secretaries, chairs of finance committees, pastors and (if a church has one) an email address for a church secretary. But we discovered, based on the questions that we have been asked to address that other local church officers might benefit as well. So local church chairs of Board of Trustees and Staff-Parish Relations committees have been added as well to the mailing list.

As we move into the future we announced last year that we would begin to move into online bill payment for churches to the annual conference. Our first rollout for this allowed churches to pay their benefit bills in this fashion if you so choose. We will continue to explore other ways to use this system and will keep the conference updated as these developments occur.

Your gifts given thru the Great Plains Conference make mission and ministry happen. Our job as your staff is to facilitate this work. We are grateful for the opportunity to serve you, the conference and God, whose work all of us are striving to do.

## CONNECTING COUNCIL

By Rev. Nancy Lambert

The Connecting Council membership includes the district lay leaders, the Extended Cabinet, chairpersons of many of the conference teams and committees, and at-large clergy and laity. It meets twice a year "to review and evaluate the conference's missional progress, to align major initiatives of the GPUMC, to enhance communication with all parts of the annual conference, and to take such actions between sessions of the annual conference as are permitted (from Plan of Organization)."

In October, after reviewing the anticipated increase in health insurance costs to the local church and clergy, the Connecting Council recommended that the conference group plan be ended and clergy purchase insurance on the exchange or through their spouse's plan. This initiated the email/mail ballot that resulted in the end to the conference insurance plan.

At the October 2014 and March 2015 meetings the Council considered a number of items:

- It reviewed the report of the District Study task force and recommend that a final recommendation come to the annual conference no later than June, 2018.
- It approved the voting process for the election of delegates for General and Jurisdictional Conferences
- It granted \$120,000 over three years for Open Door to relocate to a new building and expand their ministry
- It approved changes to the personnel handbook
- It reviewed the strategic plans and the strategy used to develop the proposed budget for 2016
- It approved a proposed budget in conjunction with the Council on Finance and Administration for conference consideration
- It discussed the clergy age statistics and the impact these numbers have on the conference (statistics below)
- It discussed the Fast Facts report and how churches can engage the local community and become more vital (document follows)
- It approved Missional Opportunity Fund grants in the amount of \$9000 for summer pastoral interns; \$32,000 for a GCORR matching grant for "Reaching New Neighbors"; \$24,000 for a second team of VBS interns
- It approved a request from new church development to use up to \$5 million of reserves to start new churches through 2020
- It considered the need for a capital campaign for Camp Comeca in order to address deferred maintenance, the debt load, and to increase the endowment and approved a recommendation for the conference to consider
- It discussed requests for financial gifts from three mission projects: Zimbabwe, Oklahoma Indian

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Missionary Conference and Lydia Patterson Institute and approved a recommendation for a fund raising effort for consideration of the Conference

The next meeting of the Connecting Council is Oct. 30-31.

### Clergy Age Statistics for the Great Plains

Ages	Number of clergy	% f total	
75+	11	1.49%	
70-74	9	1.22%	<b>Median age is 56</b>
65-69	61	8.28%	
60-64	179	24.32%	
55-59	166	22.55%	
50-54	82	11.14%	
45-49	76	10.33%	
40-44	44	5.98%	
35-39	38	5.16%	
30-34	39	5.30%	
25-29	19	2.58%	
20-24	5	0.68%	
Unknown	7	0.95%	
<b>Total</b>	<b>736</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	

## Great Plains Conference Strategic Implementation Plan Executive Summary Approved by the Connecting Council

The purpose of the annual conference is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world by equipping its local churches for ministry and by providing a connection for ministry beyond the local church; all to the glory of God.<sup>1</sup>

The calling of the Great Plains United Methodist Conference is to equip and connect congregations to make disciples of Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

In its second year as a new conference, it is time for the Great Plains Conference to take the next steps in implementing the priorities adopted in its strategic plan.

1. Enhancing the ministry of local churches with Christ-centered excellence in: youth ministry, preaching and worship, engaging the community, transforming service to the world
2. New church starts, including hispanic congregations, other ethnic congregations, and areas of population growth
3. Leadership development, including credentialing clergy, developing spiritual leaders and building lay and clergy partnerships
4. Global mission partnerships, specifically Haiti, Nigeria and Zimbabwe. (Lydia Patterson Institute in El Paso, Texas is a Jurisdictional mission partner.)

Many of the teams of the conference have written strategic implementation plans. A summary of each plan is included in the conference workbook. You can find them the full plan online at <http://www.greatplainsumc.org/conferenceleadershipresources>. Quite appropriately they are seeking to discern the best ways to strengthen the missional effectiveness of our conference. At the same time, they do not have the whole conference in view when dreaming their dreams, and they were instructed to dream bigger than our current restrictions would otherwise indicate. The Connecting

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Council has neither approved nor disapproved the plans, but recognizes that the various teams are using them as guidelines for the future ministry of the Great Plains Conference in these areas. The Connecting Council did approve the following principles and priorities.

### Principles Shaping our Priorities

In every area of conference ministry, we need to strengthen our culture of continuous improvement in missional effectiveness. That means getting the right people into the right positions and learning best practices from other conferences and developing new methods ourselves.

- We must continue to equip the ministry of our existing churches of all sizes and locations
- We must focus on starting new churches in areas of population growth, mainly cities
- We must recruit a new generation of clergy leadership, focusing on local pastors and elders
- We must grow our capacity to determine how best to continually improve.

### Evaluation of Budget Challenges

- Enhancing the ministry of local churches through our realignment of staff has gone very well. We are seeing improvements in our abilities to resource and provide service to local churches. The budget challenge here is to absorb preaching for the Great Plains into the budget.
- We need to find additional funds to start more new churches every year.
- We need to evaluate how our various teams are addressing the challenge of recruiting new clergy leadership. We need to redesign the Transition into Ministry program so that it is a sustainable part of our conference budget. We need to evaluate how our camping ministry and campus ministries can become more effective parts of our leadership development system.
- We need to craft a plan for local churches and individuals to give to special requests from our global mission partners.
- We need to improve our ability to assess and resource ministries based on their contributions to the mission and strategic initiatives
- The Great Plains conference needs to improve its ability to interact/communicate with ministries regarding strategic planning and the use of resources.

### Guiding Financial Principles

- Keep conference budget increases to a minimum until draw on reserve fund is 5 percent
- Keep 10 + 1 mission share and mission agency support formula for foreseeable future
- No new conference staff positions (other than camps and campus ministries) for the foreseeable future
- We must reach 95 percent mission share payout and 75 percent mission agency support payout
- Any special campaign should either build endowment, contribute to mission partners or pay for capital expenses, not ongoing budgeted ministry expenses.
- New church development's request for an additional \$5 million is accepted with the understanding the money would come from two sources
  - The money is to be requested as a draw out of CFA's undesignated reserves
  - The latter amount only to be drawn as churches are actually started and expenses incurred (based on the NCD 5-year budget projection that was provided)
- That the Pension and Health Benefits Team's pension designated reserves be treated as source of funds for conference staff benefits (pension/health). A draw annually equal to 5 percent of the reserve be established beginning in 2016. The first draw is based on year-end 2014 balance. Moving forward it will be based on a 12 month rolling average as is the draw on reserves for basic budget support.
- That the UM Campus Ministry Inc. reserve for campus ministry at the University of Nebraska Lincoln campus provide an amount annually (beginning in 2015) equal to 5 percent of its balance to support the expansion of campus ministry in Lincoln.
- Campus ministry at University of Nebraska Omaha and Creighton University be started as an outreach of Urban Abbey UMC.
- Clergy excellence initiatives should be funded with Board of Ordained Ministry reserves or dedicated funds.
- That any committee's reserve funds that carry from year to year be shown in the conference budget as important information to take into account as budget decisions are made.

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- That off-budget accounts that impact the budget also be shown in the budget.
- The special requests from the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference, Lydia Patterson Institute and the Zimbabwe East Annual Conference be offered as an opportunity for special fund-raising beginning with Annual Conference 2015 and concluding with Annual Conference 2016. The goal for such a campaign would be \$300,000 as follows: Lydia Patterson \$100,000, OIMC \$100,000, and Zimbabwe \$100,000.

## STRATEGIC PLAN SUMMARY

To read the full strategic plans, go to <http://www.greatplainsumc.org/conferenceleadershipresources>.

### 1. CLERGY EXCELLENCE

**Strategic Plan Summary**  
**Department: Clergy Excellence      Team: Clergy Excellence Staff**

**Missional Priorities Addressed:** Enhancing the ministry of the local church and leadership development

**What is your purpose?** To recruit and develop clergy leaders in the conference who are able to lead congregations to become healthy, vital places of worship, mission and spiritual growth. This includes encouraging clergy to be lifelong learners who are spiritually grounded and lead with integrity.

**How will you accomplish it? (Strategies)**

- Develop continuing education opportunities in the conference addressing a variety of ministry skills and spiritual formation.
- Orders and Fellowship each year will focus on professional development and spiritual formation
- Develop resources for healthier moves
- Develop a model for a covenant group that fosters support, accountability and growth
- Recruit and train effective mentors TiM, candidacy, local pastors and provisional clergy
- Support the development of a satellite location for course of study in the Great Plains Conference
- Develop a team of people to lead Boundary Training
- Develop a response team and identify people willing to serve as advocates in cases of misconduct
- Summer Pastoral Interns will learn about ministry in the local church and experience a confirmation of their call to ministry

**How will you know how far you have come? (Measures)**

- By the end of 2016, all clergy needing Boundary Training or renewal will have accomplished this training
- Continuing education reports submitted to the District Superintendents January 2017 will indicate that 90 percent of the clergy met the continuing education requirement for the conference
- Clergy and SPRC will be accessing the materials for moving on the website
- A training manual for mentor training will be written in 2016, identifying best practices
- Course of study will begin in a satellite location Fall 2016
- Survey of pastoral interns will identify improvements needed. Tracking the interns through college and after will show how many enter full-time ministry

**What resources will you need? (Budget, personnel, etc.)**

The total proposed 2016 budget for programming, continuing education, and resource development for Clergy Excellence staff is \$57,500.

**Strategic Plan Summary**  
**Department: Clergy Excellence      Team: Board of Ordained Ministry**

**Missional Priorities Addressed:** Leadership development; enhancing the ministry of local churches; new church starts

**What is your purpose?**

The Board of Ordained Ministry focuses on the formation of men and women who are called by Christ to serve as clergy so that they are competent, equipped and effective in their ministries and faithful to the covenant connection of the United Methodist Church.

**How will you accomplish it? (Strategies)**

- Clergy candidates will be expected to develop adequate preaching skills
- Intentionally recruit Hispanic clergy

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- Quadrennial training of all district committees on ministry and Board of Ordained Ministry (BOOM)
- Establish credentialing standards for the work of BOOM and District Council on Ministry.
- High quality licensing school and candidacy summit
- Provide opportunities at summer camps, at local churches, and on college campuses for youth and young adults to consider and explore ministry
- Develop a continuing education policy in collaboration with the cabinet
- Coordinate, plan, and support continuing education events each year
- Create a team of advocates for situations of boundary violations
- Provide the funds for participant books for boundary training

### What resources will you need? (Budget, personnel, etc.)

The proposed 2016 budget for the Board of Ordained Ministry is \$188,500 for leadership development, training events, resource development and meeting expenses.

## Strategic Plan Summary

Department: Clergy Excellence

Team: Transition into Ministry (TiM)

**Missional Priorities Addressed:** Leadership Development

### What is your purpose?

The Transition into Ministry program develops young clergy into excellent preachers and collaborative, confident leaders who will empower the laity and flourish in ministry. The TiM program provides an opportunity to learn best practices that can be used to increase effectiveness of all clergy.

### How will you accomplish it? (Strategies)

- Mentoring for TiM pastors in their first two years; coaching in the next three years of the program
- Development of a “transition team” (formerly a lay committee) in each church to support, encourage, and provide feedback to the TiM pastor
- TiM pastors will meet every other month for education focusing on developing leadership capacity and for support
- Phase 2 TiM pastors will collaborate with their congregations to develop projects for their communities

### How will you know how far you have come? (Measures)

- Transition teams provide feedback to the TiM pastor, especially in regard to preaching and leading worship
- Lewis Pastoral Leadership Inventory will be taken by TiM pastors at 6, 24 and 48 months
- TiM pastors will be evaluated in these categories: General happiness, engagement at work, growth at work, subjective well-being and satisfaction with family.

### What resources will you need? (Budget, personnel, etc.)

The proposed 2016 budget for TiM is \$87,307. This is for programming, continuing education, salary and benefits for TiM associates, and travel expenses.

## 2. COMMUNICATIONS

### Strategic Plan Summary

Department: Communications

**Missional Priority (ies) Addressed:** Enhancing the ministry of local churches, new church starts, leadership development and global mission partnerships

**What is your purpose?** The Communications Team is not a ministry area, at least not in the classic definition. But this team can have a dramatic impact on all four missional priorities for the Great Plains Conference. The team aims to further the conference’s ministry goals by providing support, resources and by leading the effort to communicate efforts both at the conference and local church levels.

### How will you accomplish it? (Strategies)

- Revise the adopted crisis plan developed prior to the unification of the three conferences to help local congregations get the word out in times of disaster.
- Provide training and guidelines to local churches on how best to partner with local media to spread the word on vital ministries and outreach efforts into our communities.
- Develop a social media strategy for the conference that can be shared with local churches.
- Ensure improved communications across the conference by assigning certain staff members to serve as “champions”

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to advocate and monitor projects.

- Improve timeliness of stories posted to the Great Plains website.
- Add a video team member to the Wichita office by 2018.
- Assist with media campaigns for new church starts, particularly with marketing materials and in relations with local media.
- Help equip leaders – laity and clergy – by developing a new segment to the website that better organizes resources available in 12 key areas to help build more vital congregations.
- Assist the Board of Ordained Ministry with a media campaign to recruit future pastors.
- Develop a missions calendar, in cooperation with the Mercy and Justice team, to help people take part in mission trips across the conference and not just tied to their local church.
- Devise a communications plan to share information about global relationships topics with local churches.

**How will you know how far you have come? (Measures)** Our team will measure success via analytics of our website, Facebook likes and Twitter followers. Other measurements will come from the ministry areas as they determine success of the projects for which the communications team provides support.

**What resources will you need? (Budget, personnel, etc.)** Overall budget for 2016 is \$163,150 for personnel, website and travel expenses. Additional training costs should be less than \$750 for 2016, with some travel being incurred as the team assists with other teams' goals. The largest expense change comes only if we are able to add a video person to the Wichita office at a rate competitive with the local market there, and that would not take place until 2018.

### 3. CONGREGATIONAL EXCELLENCE

#### Strategic Plan Summary

**Department: Congregational Excellence    Team: Camping Ministries**

**Missional Priority (ies) Addressed:** Enhancing the ministry of local churches and leadership development

**What is your purpose?**

To provide a safe and sacred place apart from everyday distractions to encounter God while developing Christian spiritual leadership and nurturing each other's faith journeys.

**How will you accomplish it? (Strategies)**

- Educating and inspiring staff, volunteers and site council members to role model being great spiritual leaders and sharing their stories, with planned and intentional follow-up.
- Meeting ACA standards and making sure the camp is professionally run, cleaned and well maintained.
- Being an intentionally unplugged community, while introducing unique outdoor worship settings and providing intentional quiet spaces for prayer time
- Developing relationships with Great Plains churches with camp Sundays, outings, retreats, potlucks, etc.
- Promoting use of camps for church events, programs, organizations, schools and local agencies.
- Collaboration with other United Methodist Conference ministries
- Teaching stewardship and respect of God's resources with renewable energy programs, wildlife and live animal programs, recycling and gardening

**How will you know how far you have come? (Measures)**

- Consistently meeting ACA standards and site council goals
- Inspiring stories shared through a variety of media.
- Increased enrollment and participation with specific attendance and group use goals
- Increased and sustained camp/local church and non-profit agency relationships and partnerships, including other Great Plains Conference ministries, including programming, youth group events, cultural exchange and campus ministries
- Positive camper and staff evaluations for all camps
- Renewable energy, recycling and stewardship education programs at each camp location.

**What resources will you need? (Budget, personnel, etc.)**

A total budget of \$677,160 for 2016, providing for adequate staff, training and camp-related expenses, along with the work and dedication of many devoted camp-loving volunteers.

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## Strategic Plan Summary

Department: Congregational Excellence

Team: Campus Ministry

**Missional Priority (ies) Addressed:** Leadership Development**What is your purpose?** To equip student leaders to be disciples of Jesus Christ and transform the world through 20 proposed young adult communities/campus ministries.**How will you accomplish it? (Strategies)**

- Connecting youth with a next step in leadership and faith after high school
- Developing a foundation to develop young adult leaders through coaching, training and partnerships
- Strengthening existing campus ministries with clear pathways for vocational discernment and leadership development
- Developing a clear process for starting new young adult communities
- Developing internships for students to grow in their understanding of spiritual leadership
- Establishing mentoring through local churches through small group and vocational discernment

**How will you know how far you have come? (Measures)**

- Conduct annual site visits/benchmarking meetings for each campus ministry, with representatives from boards/leadership teams and district superintendents
- Annual one page overview of campus sites to be submitted by all campus ministers due July 1
- Detailed budgets for each campus ministry site stating explicitly how fund allocations from Great Plains United Methodist Campus Ministry Board were used annually due July 1
- Provide clear reporting and measurements for campus ministries, such as vital signs to track current reality

**What resources will you need? (Budget, personnel, etc.)**

- The Great Plains Young Adult Development staff person will facilitate the progress of the strategic plan, assist in the connectional pieces of recruitment to campus ministries, connect student leaders to other faith formational experiences and maintain communication with student leaders post-college.
- Through trainings and retreats, campus ministers will continue to dedicate themselves and renew the work and mission of campus ministry, allowing the Spirit of God to work powerfully through them to invite, disciple and equip students to be disciples who change the world.
- Additional task forces made up from the Great Plains United Methodist Campus Ministry Board, along with local boards and leadership teams, local churches, youth ministers and student leader volunteers will assist in carrying out the vision for campus ministry.
- The total proposed 2016 budget for Campus Ministries is \$651,750.00 for salaries, training and ministry expenses for new and existing campus ministries

## Strategic Plan Summary

Department: Congregational Excellence

Team: Disaster Response

**Missional Priority (ies) Addressed:** Equipping the ministry of local churches and leadership development**What is your purpose?** To oversee training of disaster response volunteers, emergency preparedness efforts in local churches, and response to disasters.**How will you accomplish it? (Strategies)**

- Provide training to enable local churches to develop disaster response teams to respond locally, regionally and nationally
- Provide Connecting Neighbors/Local Church Disaster Planning classes to local churches upon request
- Encourage local churches to expand their ministry beyond the walls of the church by applying disaster response training and concepts to local missions and providing support for missions and working cooperatively with other organizations and agencies
- Connect congregations to the needs of the world and provide opportunities for local churches to address needs
- Remove barriers that prevent people from getting involved in disaster response and prepare more people and congregations for disaster response in our conference
- Provide leadership training, spiritual growth opportunities and working partnerships for clergy and laity in the areas of disaster response and missions.
- Equip early-response trailers and hot food service trailers to provide needed equipment, supplies and meals for early-response teams and survivors at disaster sites
- Provide needed staff to support the efforts of volunteers and to ensure completion of administrative duties
- Promote and cultivate partnerships and networking with other organizations

**How will you know how far you have come? (Measures)**

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- Increased classes and training of individuals, teams and churches, with more people certified in all response areas
- Increased lay/clergy partnerships for training, planning and spiritual and emotional care
- Increase in mission trips and mission workday activities
- All early response trailers well maintained, ready and stocked with minimum inventory of equipment and supplies
- Continued relationship with other conferences in the South Central Jurisdiction for disaster response and VIM training and mutual aid
- Active partnership with UMCOR to provide needed supplies and funding to meet the needs of disaster survivors

#### **What resources will you need? (Budget, personnel, etc.)**

The total proposed 2016 budget for Disaster Response is \$18,600 for training, coordination and ministry expenses, in addition to providing funds for disaster response coordinator staff.

### Strategic Plan Summary

**Department: Congregational Excellence**

**Team: Hispanic Ministry**

**Missional Priority (ies) Addressed:** Enhancing the ministry of local churches and exploring opportunities and responding to needs for the development of new congregations for underserved ethnic groups.

**What is your purpose?** To provide leadership training and develop, equip and connect local Hispanic congregations and ministries so that they may become more vital and effective in the mission of the church.

#### **How will you accomplish it? (Strategies)**

- Equipping effective leaders for Hispanic ministry
- Developing congregations who are contextually aware and culturally competent to reach multiple generations of Hispanics/Latinos
- Encouraging cross-cultural and bi-vocational appointments by providing resources to the cabinet

#### **How will you know how far you have come? (Measures)**

- Regular periodic benchmark measurement processes for visioning, learning, progress and budget review
- Increased number of ministries reaching Hispanic/Latino populations, along with racial ethnic membership
- Language skills for clergy in conference database identified
- Increased bilingual persons in the certified lay minister and lay servant ministries process
- Increased number of candidates for ministry from Hispanic congregations
- Increased number of non-Hispanic pastors proficient in Spanish
- Increased number of Partners in Hispanic Ministry
- Increased number of cross-cultural and bi-vocational appointments

#### **What resources will you need? (Budget, personnel, etc.)**

The total proposed 2016 budget for Hispanic Ministries is \$702,148.00 for salaries, training and ministry expenses for new and existing ministries. Given that Hispanic Ministry is a mission priority of the Great Plains Conference, and due to the often fluid nature and the instability of many of those being served, we are committed to discovering new funding models that are both culturally sensitive and sustainable. There will be ongoing financial support needed for Hispanic ministry for many years to come, although there is an expectation of growth and multiplication from the congregations and supporting partners to be responsible for generating a portion of their own operating expenses to offset conference funding.

### Strategic Plan Summary

**Department: Congregational Excellence**

**Team: Mercy and Justice Team**

**Missional Priority (ies) Addressed:** Enhancing the ministry of local churches with Christ-centered excellence in engaging the community and transforming service to the world. Leadership development through developing spiritual leaders and building lay and clergy partnerships. And last, but certainly not least, continued global mission partnerships.

**What is your purpose?** Helping local congregations transform the world through ministries of mercy and through ministries of justice that address systemic issues. It fulfills the functions of the Conference Board of Global Ministries, the Conference Board of Church and Society, Christian Unity and interfaith organizations, relates to our global mission partnerships (Zimbabwe, Nigeria and Haiti), Volunteers in Mission and criminal justice and mercy ministries.

#### **How will you accomplish it? (Strategies)**

- Establish a full-time position of advocacy and action
- Create toolkits for local congregations
- Educate local churches on Mercy and Justice issues

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- Grow Micah Corps to include 16 young adults and two seminary students to serve as mentors
- Strengthening relationships with young clergy
- Leadership development opportunities and training
- Continues global partnerships with Haiti, Nigeria and Zimbabwe

#### How will you know how far you have come? (Measures)

The team's visions and goals will be responsibly monitored with periodic reviews throughout the year.

#### What resources will you need? (Budget, personnel, etc.)

The total proposed 2016 budget for Mercy & Justice Ministries is \$2,727,983.00 for salaries and operations, training, agency grants and ministry expenses.

### Strategic Plan Summary

**Department: Congregational Excellence**

**Team: New Church Development**

**Missional Priority (ies) Addressed:** Primarily new church starts, but also enhancing the ministry of local churches and leadership development.

**What is your purpose?** To oversee aspects of New Church Development throughout the Great Plains Conference in cooperation with the district superintendents and the bishop. It not only administers conference funds for NCD but may also purchase and sell property and undertake such financial obligations as are necessary to its mission.

#### How will you accomplish it? (Strategies)

By recruiting, training and equipping potential great new church planters who plant great new churches and create great new disciples for a transformed world. The team's vision is to have 100 pastors and lay persons pre-assessed for planting by the year 2020. The process will be completed through a series of planting retreats with the following focus:

- Exegeting community, connecting with community and personal evangelism
- Discipleship and discipleship systems, recruiting and training leaders.
- Business plan development, stewardship campaigns and training on large donor fundraising
- Process communication and planter reflections prepared for assessment
- Initial vision document and business or launch plan
- Following appointments, there will be continued district involvement, launch pad participation, time line development and ongoing strategic conversations, review and evaluations

#### How will you know how far you have come? (Measures)

With periodic, intentional review and assessment of goals and process completion by district superintendents, NCD Board members, current GPUMC plant pastors and the NCD Coordinator.

#### What resources will you need? (Budget, personnel, etc.)

The total proposed 2016 budget for New Church Development is \$1,054,568 for salaries, salary assistance, planter/new pastor training, operating and property expenses.

### Strategic Plan Summary

**Department: Congregational Excellence**

**Team: Vital Congregations**

**Missional Priority (ies) Addressed:** Enhancing the ministry of local churches and leadership development.

**What is your purpose?** To equip and connect local congregations so that they may become more vital and effective in the mission of the church. The team will give special attention to the development of lay leadership, ministries with ethnically diverse people and the ministry of small-membership churches.

#### How will you accomplish it? (Strategies)

- Increase the number of local churches with community partnerships each year
- Every congregation will offer a new worship experience each year to reach new people
- Increase the number of opportunities for lay-clergy partnerships
- Increase the number of local churches who conduct a confirmation class
- Increase the number of small groups
- Increase the number of individual laity who attend/participate in opportunities for spiritual development and training outside the local congregation

#### How will you know how far you have come? (Measures)

Progress toward goals will be measured through reporting of local church goals and participation in training opportunities.

#### What resources will you need? (Budget, personnel, etc.)

The total proposed 2016 budget for Vital Congregations is \$107,000 for grant programs and leadership development training.

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## Strategic Plan Summary

Department: Congregational Excellence

Team: Youth Ministry

**Missional Priority (ies) Addressed:** Enhancing the ministry of local churches through Christ-centered excellence in youth ministry. We will seek to equip local churches to reach youth in their congregations and communities by providing support and training to both paid and volunteer youth leaders. We will also equip congregations that currently have no youth program to reach youth in their communities.

**What is your purpose?** To coordinate the conference-wide youth events.

**How will you accomplish it? (Strategies)**

- Training. A large school, overnight training event, "Spring Training," will be launched in 2015. Spring training is designed for churches to bring their whole team of youth workers, and will become an annual event.
- A "speaker's bureau" of youth ministry trainers on various topics is being assembled to allow groups to have a speaker/trainer on a youth ministry topic that is relevant to them to come to their community or to an event or meeting. This will be launched in 2015 with a minimal number of speakers and by 2016 will include a wider array of speaker and topics that can be covered.
- Grants will be offered to help local church youth workers to attend national, multiple-day training events. By 2016 we anticipate providing grants to at least 30 youth workers per year.
- A Youth Ministry internship program is being developed to help train young adults considering careers in vocational ministry.
- Conference-wide youth events, such as The OneEvent, held annually, where all conference churches are invited to bring their youth to a large event.
- The Youth Service Fund will continue to offer grants to local churches and other organizations within the annual conference. These funds, which are raised by youth for youth, are targeted to new ministries or the expansion of existing ministries to reach new people.
- Working with Great Plains camps to strengthen the relationship between the Conference Council on Youth Ministries and the camp board as well as support camping events for youth.
- Partnering with the Vital Congregations team to help churches who are not offering confirmation classes offer this important ministry.
- Assist the small membership church coordinator in helping small churches create youth ministries.

**How will you know how far you have come? (Measures)**

Progress toward goals will be measured through reporting of local church goals and participation in special programs and training opportunities.

**What resources will you need? (Budget, personnel, etc.)**

The total proposed 2016 budget for Youth Ministries is \$116,400.00 for special events, grant programs and leadership development training.

**CLERGY EXCELLENCE****GREAT PLAINS BOARD OF ORDAINED MINISTRY**

Bruce Emmert, Chairperson

The ministry of the GP Board of Ordained Ministry is a striking example of how our new annual conference is greater than the sum of the work of our previous annual conferences. Together, we have rewritten the book in how the BoOM calls, equips, supports and forms those called to ministry. Together we have created an amazing Clergy Excellence Team that has enabled us to do things that we had neither the resources nor the creativity to do before. The cooperative spirit between the BoOM, the Clergy Excellence Team and the Bishop and Cabinet, while maintaining a healthy balance between these offices in the church, has grown tremendously and is resulting in more effective and fruitful ministry for the Great Plains. Together we are working with great intention and deep faithfulness to create a new culture that moves the ministry of the Great Plains BoOM into the future with vitality, joy and hope.

The Great Plains Board of Ordained Ministry is focused on the formation of men and women who are truly called by Christ to serve as clergy, competent, equipped, and effective in their ministry and are faithful to the covenant connection of the United Methodist Church. We hold 1 Peter 5:1-7 close to our hearts. Here are just two verses:

<sup>1</sup>To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings... <sup>2</sup> Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be...

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We embrace the following mission statement: *As a witness to and example of Christ's ministry, the Board of Ordained Ministry shepherds those whom God has entrusted to us. We recognize each one as a gift to the church for the strengthening of the Kingdom of God on earth. We will tend to their formation and offer oversight with humble authority and a spirit of service.*

Call Team Report: Amy Lippoldt, chairperson

1. Candidacy Summit — we successfully launched a new process for people as they enter the ordination or licensing process. Over 65 candidates for ministry attended our January and June summits.
2. Mentoring — we switched to group-based mentoring at all levels — candidacy, certified, local pastor and provisional member.
3. Seminarians — we awarded scholarships (and raised the amount for 2015-2016.) All UM seminaries were visited this year and all seminarians were sent a hand-written card with a small gift as a way to stay in touch.
4. Residency — Held five residency retreats with over 30 provisional members and local pastors who had just finished Course of Study. The first year group focused on emotional, relational skills and conflict management skills. The second year group worked on practical ministry skills by learning from a variety of conference and local church leaders.
5. Culture of Call — Several “Discover Ministry” events were held around the conference as a way to contact, inform and support people who are interested in entering ministry as a licensed local pastor. This summer we are launching a pilot “pastoral internship” program with three college-age students placed in local churches for an eight week internship, experiencing all aspects of Pastoral life.

We have accomplished a great deal this year but we also continue to ask questions like: How do we resource local church leaders to nurture, identify and support those whom God is calling into ministry? How do we develop and form leaders as they move through the ordination and licensing process? How do we best prepare people for long careers of fruitful disciple-making? Thanks for your prayers, feedback and support for the Call Team!

### **Competency Team Report 2015: Jenny Collins, chairperson**

We held two sessions of Licensing School in order to meet the growing need to supply local churches with local pastors. We will evaluate this model to make improvements for 2016. We are working to streamline requirements and forms used for interviews in order to make the process clearer and more helpful to candidates, mentors, district superintendents and the Board. We are excited about a new proposal to allow candidates to evaluate Bible study curriculum as a part of their effectiveness project. Most pastors are charged with picking out curriculum for a Bible study at one time or another. Our hope is that this will help us all think through how we choose a study and how the theology of that study shapes the theology of our congregations.

### **Covenant Team Report: Karen Nyhart, chairperson**

The Covenant Team helps clergy at all stages and places in ministry remain faithful to Christ and the call of Christ. We are working with the Clergy Excellence Team, Bishop and Cabinet to create a continuing education policy for clergy beginning in 2016 and to provide quality CE opportunities. Our team is responsible for healthy boundaries and ethics training of clergy, CLMs and DSAs. We are recruiting and training a response team and a team of advocates. About 25 people were trained by the Rev. Dr. Marie Fortune of the Faith Trust Institute. Several Healthy Boundaries 101 workshops have been held and the recruiting of advocates and response team members has begun with training to take place in November 2015. The Covenant team, along with the Bishop and Clergy Excellence team are planning the next Order and Fellowship event to be held on Feb. 17-18. The will focus will be on “Culture of Call” with Bishop Janice Huie of the Texas Annual Conference as our keynote speaker.

## TRANSITION INTO MINISTRY

by Rev. Dennis Livingston, chair

The Transition into Ministry Program (TiM) continues to learn, adapt and evolve, but the purpose and objectives have continued:

The TiM Program of the Great Plains Area of the United Methodist Church assists young pastors in making the transition from seminary to effective full-time pastoral leadership. TiM residents serve for two years with a mentoring pastor in a teaching congregation and then for three years as a solo pastor. Throughout the five years, the young pastor receives learning, feedback and peer support.

The Great Plains Transition into Ministry program's project objectives are to develop an effective leadership development system for young clergy so that the Great Plains Conference will benefit from excellent pastoral leadership. In doing so, the TiM participants maximize their gifts at a crucial period in ministry. The TiM participants include the annual conference, mentoring senior pastors and teaching congregations, TiM Associates, and seminary students. We anticipate that all people entering the ministry will experience noticeable changes in the Great Plains Conference, as leaders learn from the processes and procedures used for the TiM residents.

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### 2014 Objectives

The specific objectives for 2014 included:

- 1) Transition to a new director of the TiM Program,
- 2) Integrate the TiM Program into the Clergy Excellence program of the new Great Plains Annual Conference structure, including establishing sustainable funding sources,
- 3) Create ways of sharing best practices related to mentoring, lay collaboration in local congregations and starting well,
- 4) Recruit the third class of TiM Pastors.

The program successfully transitioned in 2014 to a new director, the Rev. Ashlee Alley, who also serves as clergy recruitment and development coordinator for the conference. Because this is now a full-time position rather than half-time, the Rev. Alley is able to focus more intently on recruitment, which should lead to a broader base of potential TiM candidates. Moreover, the aggregation of clergy recruitment, development and TiM under a dedicated coordinator will consistently inculcate a culture of call and drive deliberate recruitment of young people into ministry.

The TiM board, through the Rev. Alley, maintains contact with the Pastoral Excellence Network and other TiM programs around the country. Findings and best practices flow among all of these sources and accrue to the benefit of the Great Plains TiM program and ultimately to the conference.

Multiple evaluations and feedback of the program over the past year have resulted in an expanded understanding of effective mentoring, the deep significance of lay-transition teams, and the value of pastor cohorts for new pastors to start well and flourish for years to come. The board's evaluative work has begun to suggest best practices regarding transitions to new appointments, lay assistance in the transition process, and most effective uses of clergy mentoring. These best practices will influence not only those who engage the TiM program directly but also anyone entering a new appointment, whether the first or the sixth. The board is now in conversation about putting those best practices into usable form and disseminating information to clergy and congregations throughout the conference.

Two new TiM associates will begin appointments on July 1, 2015: Tyler Kaufmann at Lenexa, Kansas and Kyle Reynolds at Wichita Aldersgate UMC in Wichita, Kansas. We are delighted that Tyler and Kyle will now be gaining a wide range of ministerial experience alongside experienced, fruitful mentor pastors.

Three TiM associates will transition from the initial two-year phase into the three-year solo phase of the program: Bill Gepford at Tonganoxie, Kansas; Andrea Beyer at Paola, Kansas; and Emily Cannon at Auburn, Nebraska. We feel confident that the initial program phase has well prepared these three to emerge into vital solo-pastor ministries.

The TiM program will expand this year to provide a solo-pastor option in which new associates will be appointed as solo pastors to local congregations. The solo pastor will work closely with a nearby pastor, who will provide a period of initial, intensive mentoring. Mentoring intensity will diminish over time but a mentor pastor will continue with the solo pastor through the term of the program. The TiM board plans also to provide funding for solo pastors to engage special learning experiences not available otherwise.

Lilly Grant funds will run out at the close of 2015, and a major task of TiM leadership has been to determine how the program can continue self-supported. In order to maintain fiscal responsibility with the annual conference and its budget, the TiM program will evolve into a congregation-funded program or to the solo-pastor program reported above.

The TiM board and everyone involved in the program increasingly comprehend how essential it is to provide new pastors a good start in ministry. The first four to five years pour the foundation of a pastor's confidence, relational skills, vision, and determination for long-term ministerial service. TiM leaders have committed themselves to provide that good start and continue their efforts to recruit, nurture, and support clergy on their journey to excellent and flourishing ministry.

## PERSONAL CONDUCT POLICY

### For clergy, staff, volunteers and church members

#### I. Introduction

The Great Plains Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church is committed to fostering and building a culture of diversity and inclusion. "For just as the body is one and have many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ." (1 Corinthians, 12:12) "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it." (1 Corinthians 12:26)

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As a United Methodist Church, there will be times when employment preferences based on religion are appropriate and should be a factor with respect to one's employment. Subject to this consideration and the requirements of our denomination's *Book of Discipline*, we are mindful of our social obligations with respect to fair employment practices. We strive to create and maintain a work environment in which people are treated with dignity, decency and respect. We encourage differences among our leaders, employees and local congregations as embraced in the "Social Principles" contained in *The 2012 Book of Discipline* of the United Methodist Church.

This passion for reaffirming the relationship of God among all of God's people guides our desire that every congregation be welcoming to all persons. The environment of the Church, in its many settings, should be characterized by mutual trust and the absence of intimidation, oppression and exploitation. We believe that each employee and volunteer has the right to work and serve in an environment free of harassment; therefore, the Conference has adopted this Personal Conduct Policy. Anyone violating this policy will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment, discontinuation of volunteer service, or termination of membership under the provisions of Paragraph 2702 of *The 2012 Book of Discipline*. While the Conference expects church and conference staff volunteers, clergy and lay, as well as members of local churches, to abide by the terms of this Personal Conduct Policy as set forth below, the Conference recognizes *The 2012 Book of Discipline* of The United Methodist Church provides the exclusive methods for bringing complaints against appointed or ordained United Methodist clergy and the sanctions that may be applied.

## II. PROHIBITED CONDUCT UNDER THIS POLICY

It is the Conference's policy that no ordained or licensed pastor, district superintendent assignee (DSA), staff person, local church employee, church member/constituent, or volunteer may engage in any form of sexual abuse or sexual misconduct, racial or sexual harassment, or harassment based upon any other characteristic protected by law, including but not limited to, religion, disability, national origin, gender or age. Through enforcement of this policy and by education of church leaders, employees, and volunteers, the Conference will seek to prevent, correct and discipline behavior that violates this policy. All employees, church members/constituents, and volunteers, regardless of their positions, are covered by and are expected to comply with this policy and to take appropriate measures to ensure that prohibited conduct does not occur.

### A. Sexual Harassment

The definition of harassment is when an individual is subjected to unwelcome verbal or physical conduct or other offensive behavior, which is sexual in nature or based on gender, especially where:

- Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of employment.
- Submission to or rejection of such conduct is used as the basis for decisions affecting an individual's employment; or
- Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment.

The Great Plains Annual Conference prohibits all forms of sexual and other unlawful harassment. The Conference will not tolerate any offensive physical, written or spoken conduct, including the use of a computer, regarding any of the following subjects:

(1) Unsolicited and unwelcome or unwanted written, verbal, physical and/or visual contact with sexual overtones. (Written examples: suggestive or obscene letters, notes and unwelcome invitations. Verbal examples: derogatory comments, slurs, jokes and epithets. Physical examples: assault, touching, impeding or blocking movement. Visual examples: leering, gestures, display of sexually suggestive objects or pictures, cartoons, posters or magazines.);

(2) Unwelcome requests or demands for sexual favors. This includes either subtle or blatant solicitations, pressures or requests for any type of favor, including unwelcome requests for dates, when it is known they are unwelcome, and whether or not they are accompanied by an implied or stated promise of preferential treatment or negative consequence concerning employment;

(3) Verbal abuse or kidding that is sexually oriented and considered unwelcome such as telling "dirty jokes" or any tasteless, sexually oriented comments, innuendo or actions that offend;

(4) Creating a work environment that is intimidating, hostile, abusive or offensive because of unwelcome or unwanted

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conversations, suggestions, requests, demands, physical contacts or attentions related to a prohibited form of harassment;

(5) Continuing to express sexual or romantic interest after being informed that the interest is unwelcome. (Reciprocal or mutual attraction is not considered sexual harassment);

(6) Making reprisals, threats of reprisals, or implied threats of reprisals following a negative response to efforts to establish relationship, where the reprisal relates to compensation, promotion, discipline, tenure or job assignments;

(7) Engaging in coercive sexual behavior which is used to control, influence or affect the career, salary, and/or work environment of another employee; or which may have that effect;

(8) Offering favors or employment benefits, such as promotions, favorable performance evaluations, favorable assigned duties or shifts, recommendations or reclassifications in return for sexual/romantic favors;

(9) Offering sexual favors in exchange for employment benefits, such as promotions, favorable performance evaluations, favorable assigned duties or shifts, recommendations or reclassifications; and

(10) Sending pornographic, sexually explicit, or sexually erotic material through the computer or other means.

Normal courteous, mutually respectful, pleasant, non-coercive interaction among employees, both men and women, that is acceptable to both parties, is not considered to be harassment, including sexual harassment.

### **B. Sexual Abuse and Misconduct**

The Conference prohibits all forms of sexual abuse and sexual misconduct by local church employees, volunteers and members. It is the Conference's policy that no one affiliated with United Methodist Churches may engage in any form of sexual abuse or sexual misconduct. Anyone violating this policy will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination or removal from volunteer service.

**Sexual Abuse** – Sexual abuse means unwanted physical conduct of a sexual nature, sexual contact or sexualized behavior and may include, by example, touching, fondling, sexual intercourse and other exploitation or use of another person for purposes of sexual desires. Sexual abuse includes, but is not limited to rape, sexual battery, aggravated sexual battery, lewd and lascivious behavior, enticement of a child, indecent solicitation of a child, aggravated indecent solicitation of a child, or indecent liberties with a child.

**Sexual Misconduct** – Sexual misconduct means a chargeable offense within the meaning of Paragraph 2702 of *The 2012 Book of Discipline* of The United Methodist Church.

All local churches are expected to create an atmosphere free of sexual abuse and sexual misconduct. Furthermore, all staff leaders and members are expected to immediately report any knowledge of sexual abuse or sexual misconduct.

### **C. Training**

All pastors under appointment, district superintendent assignees (DSAs) and certified lay ministers (CLMs) under assignment shall complete boundary training prior to their initial appointment or within the first six months of such appointment or assignment. Documentation of completed training shall be placed in the pastor or CLM's personnel file.

## **III. PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING VIOLATIONS OF THIS PERSONAL CONDUCT POLICY**

### **A. WHEN THE OFFENDER IS A CLERGY PERSON, CERTIFIED LAY MINISTER, OR EMPLOYEE OF THE CHURCH**

Any ministerial or managerial employee who receives a complaint of sexual abuse, sexual harassment, or sexual misconduct, or who otherwise becomes aware of or suspects a violation of this personal conduct policy should immediately report the violation to the district superintendent. Reporting of sexual abuse or physical abuse of children, youth, or adults from vulnerable populations shall also be made as required by the Safe Gatherings policy.

If a complaint regarding sexual abuse, sexual harassment, or sexual misconduct is made, an investigation will be conducted as promptly as possible. The investigation of the complaint involving a non-ministerial employee of a local church will be conducted by pastor or the Staff Parish Relations Committee and will be completed within thirty (30) days from the submission of the complaint, provided there are no extenuating circumstances. If the complaint involves a ministerial

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employee, the matter will be referred to the appropriate supervising clergy for investigation and appropriate action under *The 2012 Book of Discipline*. If the complaint involves a lay employee of the annual conference, the investigation will be conducted by the Personnel Team.

If the complaint involves a violation of the computer usage policy, report the alleged violation to the chairperson of the Pastor/Staff Parish Relations Committee of the local church (or the Personnel Team chair, in the case of an annual conference employee) immediately.

If an individual is found to have violated the Personal Conduct Policy, disciplinary action may be taken, up to and including termination of employment, removal from volunteer service, or termination of membership. All actions taken in connection with a violation of the Personal Conduct Policy will comply with any applicable law or procedure under *The 2012 Book of Discipline*.

The conference will not retaliate against an employee who in good faith files a complaint alleging a violation of this Personal Conduct Policy, nor will the Conference retaliate against an individual for cooperating in good faith in an investigation of harassment.

Clergy misconduct is subject to the procedures contained in *The 2012 Book of Discipline*, and any complaint against clergy must follow the applicable provisions contained therein. Clergy, and those who have a grievance against clergy, whether or not the complainant or the violator is lay or clergy, are encouraged to address any concerns directly with the other person as a means of resolving the issues. If the issues are between two clergy, and the two cannot resolve the issues among themselves, the one claiming a violation is encouraged to seek the assistance of her/his Superintendent as a means of resolving the issues. If the clergy person's complaint involves her/his Superintendent, or if either is a Superintendent, the complainant is encouraged to invoke the guidance of a member of the Conference staff, another Superintendent, or the Bishop to assist in resolving the grievance prior to filing a formal complaint.

### B. WHEN THE VICTIM IS A CLERGY PERSON

If any clergy feels he/she has been subjected to racial, sexual, or other harassment or sexual misconduct, he or she should

(1) If the circumstances permit, state firmly and clearly to the alleged violator that this behavior is unwelcome and must stop. This action, in many cases, will resolve the issue.

(2) If the issue cannot be resolved through personal discussions with the alleged violator, the clergy must inform his/her immediate supervisor or, if the immediate supervisor is the alleged harasser, must contact the chairperson of the Pastor/Staff Parish Relations Committee. In the case of sexual harassment, sexual abuse or sexual misconduct, if the clergy person feels uncomfortable reporting the issue using the above procedure, he or she may bring the complaint directly to the district superintendent. Employees should report any incident of abuse or misconduct in writing, if possible.

The clergy person who feels harassed by a lay person is encouraged to use the following procedures. If the offending behavior and complaint is sexual abuse or sexual misconduct then the immediate procedure is a formal complaint as outlined in *The 2012 Book of Discipline* ¶ 2703.4. Identifying sexual or gender harassment depends on a determination of what a reasonable person would perceive as unacceptable. It is important to resolve complaints confidentially and, if possible, informally.

#### Initial Resolution Process

1. Clergy are responsible for establishing and maintaining clear boundaries of professional conduct.
2. Therefore, a clergy person should respond immediately and clearly to the harasser that such behavior is unwelcome and uncomfortable.
3. If the behavior continues:
  - a. Avoid being alone with the harasser.
  - b. Keep accurate records of the harassing behavior.
  - c. Contact the chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee (if the chair of the SPRC is the harasser then contact the district superintendent directly).

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- d. Notify the district superintendent to begin the informal process for complaint resolution.
4. The District Superintendent will contact the director of Clergy Excellence, who will meet with the chair of the SPRC (or person designated) to explain the informal and formal process and introduce two advocates.

**Informal Resolution Process**

1. After meeting with the director of Clergy Excellence, the chair of SPRC (or a person designated) and the two advocates will form the intervention team and will meet separately with the clergy person and with the accused. The purpose of the meeting is to:
  - a. Determine if the complaint is valid or a miscommunication or misunderstanding.
  - b. Ask the accused to make an appropriate written statement to the clergy person. The written response may include explanation of the behavior resulting in a misperception of intent, an apology, and a promise not to repeat the behavior.
2. If the clergy person finds the response satisfactory then the complaint will be considered as resolved, and the district superintendent will be notified of the result.
3. If the response of the accused is not satisfactory or the accused refuses to respond, then the complaint will move to the formal process and the district superintendent and the Staff Parish Relations Committee will be notified that a formal process of complaint has been initiated. At any point during the informal process the clergy person, the accused or the SPRC committee may request in writing to the district superintendent a formal resolution process.

**Formal Resolution Process**

1. If the district superintendent determines that the process outlined above has been followed and the complaint is not resolved, then the district superintendent will appoint a committee on investigation according to paragraph 2703.4 in *The 2012 Book of Discipline*.
2. The final decision of the committee will be communicated in writing to the clergy person, the accused and the Staff Parish Committee.

## **SAFE GATHERINGS POLICY FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN, YOUTH AND ADULTS FROM VULNERABLE POPULATIONS**

The Great Plains Annual Conference is determined to minimize the risk of abuse to participants in activities of the Great Plains Conference, its districts, and programming agencies. Each local church is required to adopt a policy which is no less restrictive than conference policy for local church personnel and events. Churches may develop best practices which are suited to their own context, as long as they are not in conflict with this policy.

**INTRODUCTION AND POLICY**

"Let the children come to me and do not stop them: for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs" (Matthew 19:14). Scripture and our United Methodist tradition inform us in our belief that God values all of human life - perhaps children most of all.

The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church states, "...children must be protected from economic, physical, emotional and sexual exploitation and abuse." (§162.C, *The 2012 Book of Discipline*) *The Book of Resolutions* encourages all conferences to become involved in the prevention of the physical and sexual abuse of children (#3084.B. 2012 Book of Resolutions, p. 241) *The 2012 Book of Discipline* names child abuse, sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, and sexual harassment as chargeable offenses for clergy and lay members (§2702, 2012 Book of Discipline).

Therefore, it shall be the policy and covenant of the Great Plains Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church to prohibit and work to prevent physical or sexual abuse against children, youth and adults from vulnerable populations involved in any ministry sponsored by the conference, its districts, and programming agencies. Further, we are called to minister to those persons who are experiencing abuse and to those who have been victims of abuse in the past. To that end, we covenant to be aware of our responsibilities and to act justly in the best interest of those who have been abused or those who are most vulnerable to abuse.

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### Scope

This policy and its provisions shall apply to all staff persons, volunteer or paid, lay or clergy, who have any direct contact with children and/or youth and/or adults from vulnerable populations who participate in any activities or events sponsored by the Great Plains Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church including its districts and programming agencies.

### Definitions

Participants - are children, youth or adults from vulnerable populations who are registered, enrolled, attending or otherwise participating in an event or activity sponsored by or under the auspices of the Great Plains Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church or programming agencies of the Great Plains Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Physical Abuse – Physical abuse is any act or omission of an act that endangers a person’s physical or mental health. Physical abuse may result from punishment that is overly punitive or inappropriate to the individual’s age or condition. In addition, physical abuse may result from purposeful acts or intentional failure to act that pose serious danger to the physical health of a child, youth or adult from vulnerable populations.

Sexual Abuse – Sexual abuse means unwanted physical conduct of a sexual nature, sexual contact or sexualized behavior and may include, by example, touching, fondling, sexual intercourse and other exploitation or use of another person for purposes of sexual desires. Sexual abuse includes, but is not limited to rape, sexual battery, aggravated sexual battery, lewd and lascivious behavior, enticement of a child, indecent solicitation of a child, aggravated indecent solicitation of a child, or indecent liberties with a child.

Staff Persons - All paid and unpaid staff, whether lay or clergy, who have direct contact with participants in any activities or events sponsored by the Great Plains Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, its districts, or program agencies.

Adult from vulnerable populations Populations - Persons, 18 years of age or older, who are unable to protect their own interest due to a substantial mental or functional impairment or for whom a guardian has been appointed.

Certification Authority - The Certification Authority shall be the Safe Gatherings coordinator, the director of Congregational Excellence, a designated district superintendent, and a conference chancellor.

Crisis Management Team - The Crisis Management Team is made up of the Bishop, the district superintendent of the area involved, the director of communications, the conference chancellor, and the director of Congregational Excellence.

### Training

The Great Plains Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church shall develop and implement training procedures for all individuals who work with children, youth and adult from vulnerable populations at conference and district activities and events. No individual shall have any direct contact with children, youth or members of adult from vulnerable populations until they have completed this training program with the exception that an uncertified worker or a youth under the age of 16 may assist as long as he or she is working with and under the direct supervision of a certified individual. In the case of a youth under the age of 16, the certified individual should be at least 21.

Safe Gatherings on-line training is the approved Great Plains Annual Conference method of training and certification, and it shall also be the training and certification process used by local churches.

### Screening

Prior to certification, applicants will complete an on-line application/consent form. By completing the form, the applicant will give the Safe Gatherings coordinator permission to perform the necessary investigation to complete the review of the application.

The Safe Gatherings coordinator shall facilitate a screening check with a national background service. A search of the National Sex Offender Public website will be performed on each applicant. A screening check with the Kansas Bureau of Investigation or other appropriate agencies will be performed on Kansas residents. A screening check with the Kansas Department for Children and Families Child Abuse and Neglect Central Registry will be performed on Kansas residents. A screening check with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Children and Family Services, Adult and Child Abuse and Neglect Register/Registry will be performed on Nebraska residents.

A lay reference and clergy reference will be provided by each applicant. Clergy will provide a reference from their district superintendent. References must have known the applicant at least two years and not be related to the applicant.

The Safe Gatherings coordinator shall review all application materials. If any of the completed forms or reports raises questions about the fitness of the applicant, the Safe Gatherings coordinator shall notify the Certification Authority. The Great Plains Annual Conference reserves the right to turn away any individuals for volunteer or paid service.

If the applicant is found to have been involved in any activity in which the applicant abused or exploited children, youth or adults from vulnerable populations the applicant will not be approved. Any conviction of a crime against children, youth or adults from vulnerable populations shall disqualify any applicant. A person who has been convicted as a sex offender will not be certified. Affirmative responses to the following questions relating to crimes will prompt a personal review of an application:

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- crimes against children,
- rape, sexual or physical assault
- possession or use of drugs, and
- suspension of a driver's license within the last five years

### Certification

Certification is valid for four years. Applicants must be 16 or older in order to be certified to serve with the Great Plains Annual Conference. Those younger than 16 years can still serve in a ministry area but they must serve with a certified worker who should be at least 21 years old. Certified applicants will be notified of their approval by e-mail. The church through which the approved applicant is applying for certification will also be notified.

If not approved, the applicant will be notified in writing, and his or her pastor will also be notified.

### Reporting Incidents of Abuse

**Kansas:** Kansas Statutes Annotated 38-2223 lists those who are mandated reporters in the State of Kansas. If you do not know whether you are in the mandated reporter category, go to the Kansas DCF (Department for Children and Families) website, [www.dcf.ks.gov](http://www.dcf.ks.gov) to find out. Certification does not automatically make you a mandatory reporter. All clergy serving United Methodist churches in Kansas will be mandated to report incidences of child abuse.

Reporting Child Abuse - Anyone has the right to report suspected abuse directly to the State of Kansas at 800-722-5330. When the DCF is not open for business, suspected abuse may be reported to a law enforcement agency. Under Kansas law, anyone who, without malice, participates in the making of a report of abuse is immune from civil liability. The Guide to Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect in Kansas is an excellent resource and is found on the DCF website, [www.dcf.ks.gov](http://www.dcf.ks.gov). ChildLine and Abuse Registry Intake Unit, call 800-932-0313 (TTD: 866-872-1677)

**Nebraska:** Nebraska Revised Statutes, section 28-711, requires any person who suspects that a child has been physically or sexually abused or neglected to report it promptly to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services at the Abuse/Neglect Hotline, 1-800-652-1999.

Mandated reporters include specified professionals and child service organizations, but also include any person who in the course of engaging in activities under this policy has reasonable cause to believe that a minor has been subjected to child abuse or neglect or observes such child being subjected to conditions or circumstances which reasonably would result in child abuse or neglect.

Failure to report is a misdemeanor. Anyone making a report in good faith is immune from any civil or criminal liability.

Procedures for Reporting, Investigating, and Resolving

Violations of this Policy

Pursuant to the provisions of ¶2702 and following of *The 2012 Book of Discipline*, in matters relating to the implementation and enforcement of the Great Plains Annual Conference Certification Policy, the following procedures shall apply (Note: These procedures will be followed except where state authority or law enforcement dictate otherwise):

1. Reporting
  - a. Immediately upon receipt of an allegation of violation of policy, the district superintendent of the church or geographic region involved shall be notified.
  - b. The district superintendent shall notify the Crisis Management Team.
  - c. The director of Congregational Excellence shall notify the Certification Authority and the conference's insurance carrier.
  - d. The Crisis Management Team will facilitate reporting to the state and/or law enforcement agencies, as appropriate.
  - e. The person against whom an allegation has been made ("respondent") will immediately be suspended from working with children, youth or adults from vulnerable populations.

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2. If a minor is involved, that individual's parent(s) / guardian(s) shall be notified of the alleged violation of policy by a person designated by the Crisis Management Team.
3. When the respondent is not certified, the Crisis Management Team shall assist the local church with the investigation of the complaint and the process to use to work through the complaint. This may include assistance with legal and public relations issues as well as interviews necessary for the investigation of the complaint. Decisions of resolution shall ultimately rest with the local church.
4. When the Respondent is certified through the annual conference, then the procedures outlined in this document shall be followed.
5. The person or persons who first report the alleged violation of policy will be asked to document their knowledge of this incident(s) and provide that documentation to the Crisis Management Team.
6. The Crisis Management Team will determine who needs to be interviewed to determine the nature of the alleged violation and its impact. All conversations shall be documented including such things as (but not exclusive of) date, time, place, and names of people involved. In addition, the substance of the conversation shall be documented, with the person interviewed asked to review notes for accuracy and to sign such notes. In addition, all contacts made and actions taken by the Crisis Management Team or Certification Authority are to be documented.
7. If a formal complaint is made, the Crisis Management Team shall provide the respondent with a copy of the complaint.
8. If the Respondent voluntarily withdraws from certification, the file shall be so marked and all pertinent data regarding the allegation and steps taken in response to it shall be placed in the person's certification file and retained.
9. If the Respondent wishes to continue to function as a certified worker, then the Certification Authority, with counsel from the Crisis Management Team, may design a procedure for determining the fitness of the individual for this work. This may include such things as a psychological assessment, counseling, etc. as deemed appropriate to the circumstances. Payment of the cost of these is to be negotiated. Results will be made available to the Certification Authority and they, with the Crisis Management Team, shall make the final determination as to whether or not to reinstate a person's certification.
10. Those making the allegations ("complainant"), the parent(s) /guardian(s) of any minor involved, the Respondent, and any persons who supervise such persons shall be notified of any result of the investigation and final decision of the Certification Authority. In all cases all documentation shall be retained in a confidential, personal file.
11. The Crisis Management Team will determine when and with whom information needs to be shared. If investigations or allegations of abuse should come to the attention of the media, a response shall come from a spokesperson designated by the Bishop.
12. It shall be the goal of the Great Plains Annual Conference to provide supportive care to both the Complainant and the Respondent, and to restore such individuals to wholeness. Supportive care can include the procedures of the criminal justice system, provisions of the current *Book of Discipline*, appropriate counseling referrals and continued pastoral visitation, and may include an Advocate provided by the Great Plains Annual Conference.
13. If the Complainant should desire to challenge the decision of the Certification Authority, he or she may utilize the complaint procedures of *The 2012 Book of Discipline* ¶2702 and following.

## CONGREGATIONAL EXCELLENCE

### VITAL CONGREGATIONS TEAM

by Eric Ford, chair

"Truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even **greater things** than these, because I am going to the Father." (John 14:12, NIV)

A great church is a vital church. The mission of the Vital Congregations Team is to equip and connect local congregations

so that they may become more vital and effective in the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Vitality is intrinsically linked to a church's local context; therefore, to be vital, a church must intentionally be on a journey of learning, growing, and leading as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Our vision is to see every congregation in the Great Plains Conference be a great church for the transformation of the world. To achieve this greatness at the local level, we envision our connectional system holding us accountable to a certain set of Wesleyan values which focus our thinking, drive our actions and support our ministries. The Vital Congregations Team believes there are three foundational values for all United Methodists in the Great Plains to profess and live out on a daily basis:

- Practice the means of grace for spiritual renewal and growth.
- Make an honest assessment of one's current congregational reality in connection with its community/context.
- Create a local, parish, cluster, district and conference culture of high expectation and accountability.

To see this vision become a reality, live out our values and complete our mission, the Vital Congregations Team will intentionally engage in the following process:

- DREAM of what the Great Plains Conference will look like in 2020 and beyond.
- DISCOVER places of fruitfulness and signs of vitality in the local context.
- DISCERN the movement of the Holy Spirit in the Great Plains Conference.
- DEVELOP vital strategies for moving the local church forward.
- DEPLOY spiritual teams of lay and clergy who are learning, growing and leading together.

To better serve, equip and connect all local congregations of the Great Plains Conference, the Vital Congregations Team will manage its work through three sub-teams: Hispanic Ministries, Small Membership Churches, and Vital Congregations. The following list outlines 2016 priorities:

Vital Congregations Team:

1. Increase the number of local churches with community partnerships each year.
2. Equip every congregation to offer a NEW worship experience each year to reach NEW people.
3. Increase the number of opportunities for lay/clergy partnerships.
4. Increase the number of local churches who offer a confirmation class.
5. Increase the number of small groups in local congregations.
6. Increase the number of individual laity who attend/participate in opportunities for spiritual development and training outside the local congregation.

Hispanic Ministries:

1. Equipping effective leaders for Hispanic Ministry,
2. Developing congregations who are contextually aware and culturally competent to reach multiple generations of Hispanic/Latinos.
3. Encouraging cross-cultural and bi-vocational appointments by providing resources to the cabinet.

Small Membership Churches:

1. Provide another 18 month ABIDE process for churches with average weekly worship attendance under 50.
2. Host second annual Small Wonders conference, focusing on worship in the small church.
3. Offer small churches the opportunity to have vacation Bible school via summer interns.

Vital Congregations:

1. Offer fourth year of Next Steps academy, with more churches participating in phase 2 coaching.
2. Develop plan for equipping and connecting mid-size and county seat churches.
3. Continue to refine vitality markers and connect congregations with best practices and resources.

## **GREAT PLAINS UNITED METHODIST CAMPS, INC.**

The Rev. Thomas Lucas, chair. Great Plains Camps Board

In conference last year, you elected me as chair of the Great Plains Camps Board. It has been an interesting year of growth both personally and corporately. Our board consists of representatives of each camp within our conference. We also have several members not affiliated to any of the camps to provide 'balance.'

In January of 2014, Great Plains Conference was blessed with a new coordinator of Camping Ministries, Sara Shaw. She and I have worked very closely together during this past year. And, I must say, I am very impressed with her capabilities,

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her fortitude, and her willingness to do whatever is necessary to keep our camps healthy and thriving.

Our primary challenge, as a board, was to overcome the misgivings of the camps that we ‘the CONFERENCE’ would become a bully, trying to force plans and actions that did not work for their particular areas. I believe we have generally succeeded in building the trust required to grow our camps into a unified ministry of the Great Plains Conference.

Some of the things our board has tackled this past year are:

- American Camping Association certification: our camps are scheduled to be reviewed, inspected, and accredited during this summer and fall.
- Safe Gatherings certification for all camp Employees
- Developing mission and vision statements and a unified strategic plan: two thousand fifteen stories in 2015
- Developing and implementing standardized reporting for all camps: currently in effect
- Building collaborative relationships within the conference: Mercy and Justice, UMM and UMW, Walk to Emmaus, campus ministries, youth and young adults coordinator, disaster relief, American Red Cross, VIMTeam, Bishop’s Confirmation Rallies
- Engaging with various conference agencies to recruit and develop summer interns and other summer youth employment opportunities.
- Actively raising the overall standard of camping throughout our conference.

Goals for this coming year are:

- Standardized forms throughout the camps
- Standardized definition of, and training program for, camp site councils and our Camping Board.
- Complete online communication system for the board and the camps.
- All camps with the exception of Camp Horizon to be accredited by the end of 2015.
- Camp Horizon to receive their accreditation in 2016
- Create an organized method to provide ongoing spiritual support for our camp counselors after their summer employment is complete.
- Review and update the living document of our strategic plan.
- Utilize the standardized reporting system to best disperse conference funds to areas of greatest need and potential.

## UNITED METHODIST CAMPUS MINISTRY, INC.

The Rev. Caren S. Loper, chair of GPUMCM

The Great Plains United Methodist Campus Ministry Board fulfills missional priorities of the conference under Congregational Excellence in leadership development. Our vision and goal is to develop 2,000 student leaders to be disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world by the year 2020. Campus ministry is a gathered community of faith for worship, study, and service.

The Campus Ministry Board is passionate about all 14 unique Campus Ministry Sites and leadership. In the school year of 2014-15, New Church Lawrence, under the leadership of the Rev. Jacob Cloud, has more than tripled the number of young adult leaders. Beginning July 1, 2015, another new Campus Ministry, Urban Abbey, will launch in Omaha, Nebraska, under the leadership of Chris Jorgensen.

Through a system of “Measures of Progress” our goals and visions will be realized. Site visits for every campus ministry have been implemented twice a year, beginning in the fall semester of 2014. Local and conference board members, student leadership teams, campus ministers, district superintendents, and the young adult leadership development coordinator come together in site visits for holy conversation.

The following are several exciting ways Campus Ministry in the Great Plains is living into its 2020 Vision!

- The Great Plains Planter Incubator gathered all campus ministers together Aug. 8-10, 2014, to learn from Paul Nixon, Path 1 coordinator, and Amanda Garber-Miller, Rise Community from Harrisonburg, Virginia.
- Nine campus ministries attended Imagine Next (nextumc.org) Nov. 6-8, 2014 in Denver, Colorado.
- Five campus ministries attended the All Wesley Retreat of the South Central Jurisdiction.
- Representatives from four campus ministries went on the first Great Plains Haiti Mission Partnership during Spring Break, 2014.
- Four campus ministries went to Heifer International on mission trips.
- In Feb. 2015, Campus Ministry Summit took place where all 14 United Methodist campus ministries and colleges gathered to talk about strategic planning and how to reach more students for Jesus Christ.

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These activities took place in addition to weekly worship and small group opportunities.

Each local church has nurtured many young lives. Seize the opportunity to connect young adults, with the next steps of faith at [www.greatplainsumc.org/campusministries](http://www.greatplainsumc.org/campusministries). Schedule a visit with our United Methodist pastors and ministries. Discover all that awaits you at college campuses throughout the Great Plains Conference.

## MEXICAN AMERICAN MINISTRIES

by Sarah Trapp, chief development officer

Care Centers: Garden City, Dodge City, Liberal, Ulysses, Johnson, Satanta

Medical Clinics: Garden City, Dodge City, Liberal, Ulysses

Dental Clinics: Garden City, Dodge City

Contact: Julie Wright, CEO [jwright@ummam.org](mailto:jwright@ummam.org)

Website: [www.ummam.org](http://www.ummam.org)

### Community Care Centers

UMMAM's Community Care Centers provide a variety of social services and other help for individuals in need. These counts are by service and do not represent unduplicated clients. The same individual may receive one or several services over the course of the year.

Services	Families	Individuals
Food	2,140	7,437
USDA Commodities	335	872
Emergency Assistance	629	2,169
Clothing/ Household Items		16,889
Immigration		319
School Supplies		324
Holiday Gifts/Food Boxes		484
Mittens/Gloves/Caps		524
Layettes/Baby Items		61
Job Applications/Form Assistance		1,156
Volunteer Hours		1,270

### Community Health Centers

Family practice services are available at all community health centers. Services include treatment of illnesses and injuries, wellness and preventative care, behavioral health services, prenatal care, health education and routine laboratory work. Our dental clinics offer complete dental care including preventative, restorative and emergency care. In order to utilize our behavioral health and other health services, patients must be established through our medical clinics.

Medical encounters	19,940	Unduplicated medical clients	4,899
Dental encounters	13,118	Unduplicated dental clients	3,982
Behavioral health encounters	153	Behavioral health clients	24

### Outreach/Special Programs

#### Early Detection Works (Breast/Cervical Cancer Program)

488 mammograms; 511 clinical breast exams; 80 abnormal/ indeterminate results; 7,450 individual and group contacts for education.

#### Southwest Kansas Diabetes Prevention and Control

Provided diabetes counseling to 905 individuals; optometry appointments to 161 individuals; podiatry appointments to 61 individuals; and screened 4,040 individuals for blood sugar.

#### Prenatal Case Management/Parents as Teachers

250 case management activities, including home/hospital visits and phone calls, plus prenatal classes.

#### Lifetime Smiles Dental Outreach

Children are screened for visual oral decay, and referred to a dentist for follow-up. Lifetime Smiles held sealant clinics with children, and fluoride clinics were held at schools and health fairs

#### Healthy Living Kansas

Community Health Educators in southwest Kansas are dedicated volunteers equipped with skills to engage community members in raising breast health self-awareness. Promotoras attended 29 events with 2,482 encounters.

#### Health Center Outreach and Enrollment

1,372 encounters; 568 applications submitted to the Marketplace; 417 estimated applications enrolled with the Marketplace.

## MERCY AND JUSTICE

### MERCY AND JUSTICE TEAM

by Kent Little, chair

The Great Plains Annual Conference Mercy and Justice Team has had a busy year finding ways to resource local congregations in fulfilling our mission inviting Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World.

As a team we have utilized not only our conference technology through video conferencing, but conference calls to stay in touch and build on our plan of lifting up the task of Justice and Mercy work in the Great Plains Annual Conference. The Team also has had several face-to-face two day retreats in order to come together for focused and intentional work.

We have strengthened and support expanding our Micah Corp connection as well as Peace with Justice and other contacts that help further our work in the conference. We have begun the task of deepening our connection and relationship with our Great Plains Annual Conference Global Partnerships with Nigeria, Zimbabwe and Haiti. One of the ways we are deepening that connection is to begin a closer relationship while encouraging sustainable assistance finding ways we might help these partnerships be even more self-sustaining.

Another important decision we made as a team was to put some action behind the resolutions we passed at our 2014 Annual Conference session. The Mercy and Justice Team in addition to the education resolution, also brought resolutions, which passed, addressing Gun Violence, Compassionate Immigration, and Healthy Families Healthy Planets. In each of these three we dedicated funds to bring special speakers and events into the Great Plains Annual Conference to speak to these important issues that might give local congregations even more resources in their Mercy and Justice work in their local communities.

It has been a busy year and while each one on you Mercy and Justice Team is passionate about the work we do there is a focus on the work in resourcing local congregations. We recognize as a team are only a small part of bringing the mercy and justice of the Kingdom to a reality here in the Great Plains Annual Conference and the world it takes all of us, the whole of the conference to realize that day when Justice will roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream!

I would say a huge thank you to our whole team, they work hard on behalf of the Great Plains Annual Conference. I would also say thank you to the whole of the Great Plains Annual Conference for your commitment to Justice and Mercy work here in our conference and the world. We remain committed and resolved to lifting up and resourcing us all in the task and mission of Making Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World.

### DISASTER RESPONSE TEAM

Steve Burnett, chair

The Great Plains Disaster Response is a Ministry of Care that has theological, material, mental health, advocacy and social service components designed to provide for the spiritual, emotional and physical recovery of disaster survivors and for the well-being of their caregivers. It is the goal of this ministry that all the affected people will experience God's grace and mercy through our presence and our response efforts.

The local church is the point of contact for all church assistance in a disaster. The conference Disaster Response Program links the local church to the resources of the district, conference and the general church.

Operating within UMCOR's philosophy, we stand ready to assist communities within the Great Plains Conference throughout the Long Term Recovery process. We work with other aid organizations to insure that all resources are used effectively and efficiently and to reduce duplication of services. This allows us to reach the most survivors and especially those with the greatest need.

The Disaster Response Team is actively involved in meeting the mission priorities of the Great Plains Conference. We are equipping congregations to understand and connect with their local communities and others throughout the conference and beyond, by providing training and assistance for local churches in developing disaster plans and providing training in disaster response that can also be used in local missions.

Disaster Response offers congregations the opportunity to address the needs of disaster survivors through our service and our presence. Our ministry provides a visible presence of the church and offers spiritual and emotional healing as

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well as physical restoration of people's lives. We are transforming the world through our service one person, one family, and one community at a time.

Training, such as spiritual and emotional care, and the opportunities for mission provided by Disaster Response are often a "stepping stone" to greater involvement in the United Methodist Church. Members often become involved in leadership roles on disaster response teams, on committees in their church and in outreach programs.

We offer opportunities to build lay and clergy partnerships in our training and missions. Lay and clergy are encouraged to work together in developing disaster response plans for the local church, in training for and responding to disasters, and in planning local missions to name a few. We stress that everyone has spiritual gifts and that all are important and needed as we strive to be the hands and feet of Christ in service to God's children who are in need.

"Share with God's people who are in need." Romans 12:13a

The Great Plains Disaster Response Team welcomes the Rev. Hollie Tapley as the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator. Hollie assumed this position in February and has been "on the run" ever since.

The team has developed a Disaster Response Plan for the conference that was adopted by the Connecting Council. The plan is available on the Great Plains website. We encourage everyone to review the plan, especially Appendix B which contains handbooks that provide specific information for each position from local church disaster coordinator to the Bishop.

In 2014 we responded to tornados in Baxter Springs, Kansas; Beaver Crossing and Pilger/Wakefield, Nebraska. The Baxter Springs and Beaver Crossing responses are completed and we continue to work in the Pilger/Wakefield area in Nebraska.

The Disaster Response Team is focusing on training to insure that we have an adequate number of volunteers trained at the Early Response Team and Basic Disaster Response levels throughout the conference. We are also providing training and assistance to local churches in developing a disaster response plan for their church and community. We invite anyone with an interest in serving Christ through disaster response and preparedness to join us. Contact the Rev. Hollie Tapley at the Wichita conference office to sign up for classes or for more information.

"This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God." 2 Corinthians 9:12

### **GENERAL BOARD OF GLOBAL MINISTRIES - "FROM EVERYWHERE TO EVERYWHERE"**

by Alan Gager, conference secretary of Global Ministries

The conference secretary of Global Ministries (CSGM) serves as a link between The General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) and our local churches. Through the work of the CSGM, local churches are to be made aware of local, national and worldwide UMC ministries. Once people are aware of the vast array of ministries, it is hoped that they will be empowered to be in mission through financial support, volunteer hours and prayers. The Rev. Alan Gager serves as our conference secretary of Global Ministries (CSGM) and also serves as the Jurisdictional CSGM representative on The Advance Committee. The Rev. Nathan Stanton serves on The General Board of Global Ministries Board of Directors.

In 2014, \$1,346,960 was donated to the projects of The ADVANCE by individuals and groups/churches in our conference. The ADVANCE is an official program of The United Methodist Church for voluntary, designated, second-mile giving. Through The ADVANCE, United Methodist annual conferences, districts, local churches, and organizations, as well as individuals and families, may choose to support mission programs or mission personnel with their financial gifts. Each ADVANCE project has been vetted and approved by Global Ministries and ADVANCE staff. **100 percent of all ADVANCE giving goes to the chosen mission project or ministry.** The ADVANCE strives to be the leading conduit for United Methodist designated giving. The ADVANCE works with church leaders around the world to ensure that approved projects are aligned with the goals of The United Methodist Church in the local area, help develop partnerships that are mutually advantageous, tell the story of projects and missionaries, and report how giving is making an impact.

Global Ministries has personnel, programs and mission partners in 136 countries. It facilitates international and domestic mission, including missionary service. Through the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), Global Ministries provides humanitarian relief and development on behalf of the denomination.

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**PEACE WITH JUSTICE MINISTRIES**

by Andrea Paret, Peace with Justice coordinator <http://www.greatplainsumc.org/peacewithjustice>

Jesus said: *“Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen this way?”* Matthew 26:52-54

Our world is full of violence, hatred, lack of forgiveness and pain. Children in our country and around the world are suffering from hunger, many lacking health care, the violence in the Middle East, our treatment of immigrants coming to our country fleeing violence and hunger, racism, human trafficking, gun violence, torture, our violent treatment of God’s creation and much more comes to mind. When God’s children are hurting, whether in our own communities or half way around the world, we need to be concerned and ask ourselves what we can do. Often we feel overwhelmed. How are we individually and as members of our congregations and our conference called to follow Christ, to transform the world and be “peace-makers” – to work for systemic change and not just give hand-outs?

Thanks be to God that we are part of a community, part of a bigger entity. Jesus sent the disciples out in pairs and not alone. If we join together, we can encourage each other and our voices become stronger. Many United Methodists in our conference have been passionately involved in peace and justice issues for years.

The General Conference assigned the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) to implement the Peace with Justice Program. It called the church to “strengthen its capacity to act as a public policy advocate” to make shalom visible and active in people’s lives and communities throughout the world.

The Great Plains Peace with Justice Ministries (PWJ) is part of this network with the PWJ coordinators coming together once a year for spiritual renewal, mutual sharing of peace and justice work happening in our conferences and discerning issues to focus on. The main task of the PWJ coordinator is to make resources and information available to local churches to strengthen their transforming service to the world. Information being sent out through GBCS is made available through articles in GPconnect and through The Mustard Seed (a newsletter giving concrete ideas for prayer, study and action) and Voices to the Capitol (which includes a meditation and current legislation about peace/non-violence and hunger and contact information for national decision makers). If you are interested in signing up for either one of these or both, please contact me at [amparet08@yahoo.com](mailto:amparet08@yahoo.com).

This year, the **Peace with Justice Special Sunday** falls on May 31 but can also be observed on a different Sunday. In 2014, 345 churches across our conference participated in this special offering. Half of the funds are sent to GBCS for grants given to projects around the world and half of the funds stay in our conference. A few examples of what this offering made possible are: Last summer, PWJ Ministries supported the work of the Micah Corps interns as they learned new prayer practices, developed their leadership skills and linked their faith with social justice action. In August, scholarship money helped representatives from our conference attend the conference “Walking with Palestinian Christians” which was organized through the General Board of Global Ministries, the General Board of Church and Society and United Methodist Women among others. Information was brought back and shared in our churches and action steps are taken. The Rev. Bonnie McCord joined the GreenFaith Fellowship Program, a comprehensive education and training program preparing lay and ordained leaders from diverse religious traditions for religiously based environmental leadership. And this spring, a service trip for students at Emporia State University was organized through campus ministries and partially supported through PWJ funds. The group visited Heifer Project International learning about poverty and hunger and how to work on immediate as well as long-term change and empowerment.

Earlier this year, we commemorated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Selma to Montgomery March that took place in 1965. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote in his letter from Birmingham Jail: “More than the fire hoses and the police dogs of Bull Connors, I fear the silence of the churches. The contemporary church is so often a weak, ineffective voice with an uncertain sound. It is so often the arch-supporter of the status quo.” Christ calls us to help create God’s beloved community, a community with abundant life for everybody. With God’s help change is possible that we cannot even envision. Let us continue to work for peace and justice in the Great Plains Conference and beyond, stepping out in faith, unafraid to speak truth to power and give a voice to those who don’t have a voice.

*“What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.”* Micah 6:8

## OTHER

### **LAY LEADER REPORT, GREAT PLAINS CONFERENCE**

by Courtney Fowler

Now in our second year as the Great Plains Conference, our Lay Leadership team continues in the mission to serve Christ, serve the Great Plains laity, while working toward the transformation of the world. The five-member team is composed of Courtney Fowler, conference lay leader, and four associate conference lay leaders: Tom Watson, Micole Harms-Brazell, Carolyn May and Oliver Green. In addition, there are 17 District lay leaders who assist their district superintendent when called upon.

There are also many lay people who are serving on committees and teams throughout the conference with several in leadership positions. We are committed to lay leadership development and continue to seek out resource materials, information and technology that will help move us toward excellence in this area.

Opportunities for service and leadership are also found within Lay Servant Ministries, Volunteers in Mission, United Methodist Women, United Methodist Men and our newest initiative, Education Partnerships with local schools. It has been a great joy and blessing to see the difference our churches and laity have been making in their communities, helping provide the children of Kansas and Nebraska with supportive programs to enhance learning. We are very proud of the efforts and the results we have been seeing as a result of this partnership.

We continue to work toward strengthening the lay-clergy relationship through team-building activities and workshops. Our social media presence is growing as we hope to utilize these tools to reach new people and enhance our communication.

In addition, the Lay Leadership team is connected with the Association of Annual Conference Lay Leaders, a national network of conference lay leaders. Courtney Fowler and Carolyn May attended the association's annual meeting during February in Baltimore, Maryland. It was a renewing experience. We approved 13 petitions to General Conference. Carolyn May was able to worship at Lovely Lane United Methodist Church, one of the historic churches in our denomination. Courtney Fowler serves on the executive committee of the organization and the planning team for the laity presentation at the 2016 General Conference.

Developing lay leadership and providing a supportive link to laity and clergy remain the top priorities of our team. We seek to help other laity find their voice and calling and an outlet to serve through their local church, thus strengthening our conference with their many gifts.

It is a great privilege and blessing to be your conference lay leader.

### **UNITED METHODIST WOMEN GREAT PLAINS CONFERENCE**

Esther Hay, conference president

*"For Such A Time As This"*

It's a great time to be a United Methodist Woman! We are part of an organization that has been transforming the world by putting hope, faith and love in action for over 145 years!

As the Great Plains Conference United Methodist Women, we stand on the solid foundation of our three legacy conferences and are continuing the process of growing in new ways. We do that individually and as an organization as we continue our lifetime journey of developing our faith, connecting with others and taking action that transforms the world.

Our work in the Great Plains is focused around Journeys and we began and ended our first meeting as the Great Plains Conference United Methodist Women singing about "The Journey – the Journey is long" and inviting everyone to join us on the Journey. We have lifted up six Journeys to guide our work as United Methodist Women in the Great Plains – Faith, Learning, Giving, Growing, Planning and Action.

As a conference organization we have much to celebrate - too many to list, however here are four...

- Our 2014 Great Plains Conference Pledge to Mission was \$600,000, we gave \$695,000! Hallelujah!
- Beyond our Pledge to Mission, our 2014 Mission Giving Plus designated giving was \$86,000, which included support for our three conference designated National Mission Institutions (Epworth Village, United Methodist Ministries and Della C. Lamb), other National Mission Institutions and international mission project support.
- We collected and put together over 3,000 UMCOR birthing kits as part of our focus on maternal and child health.

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- Forty (40) young women, ages 15-22 participated in the 10-day 2015 METour, May 29-June 7. METour is an educational experience that gives young women the opportunity to not only learn firsthand about mission work, but to participate in hands on mission and learn more about United Methodist Women and The United Methodist Church. This year's trip was to the southeastern United States.

And three of many things that are happening or still to happen in 2015...

- In July 2015 there are three Mission opportunities being offered – one in Topeka, Kansas one in Salina, Kansas and one in Kearney, Nebraska. This annual collaboration with the Great Plains Conference United Methodist Church is an opportunity to study current issues impacting society and is open to everyone, clergy and laity, men and women, children and youth as we “Learn Together for the Transformation of the World.” This year's studies include *Created for Happiness: Understanding Your Life in God*. This study examines our United Methodist heritage of happiness in God. John Wesley preached about happiness almost as often as he preached about holiness. Our geographic study is on *Latin America: People and Faith*. Our Issue study continues the focus on *The Church and People with Disabilities*.
- We have two women from our conference participating in a National Seminar in Chicago, July 29-Aug. 2. This seminar will launch the four priority issues for the 2016-2020 quadrennium: Climate Justice; Maternal and Child Health; Racial and Gender Justice; and Economic Justice.
- We are intentionally including something about the Charter for Racial Justice in each of our upcoming conference meetings as we continue to reach out, welcome, love and include all God's beloved children in our sisterhood of grace.

We put our Faith, Hope and Love in Action as we give our pledge to mission, collect box tops and labels, donate gardening tools, develop women's leadership skills, participate in hands on mission opportunities and advocate for justice. We pray, we read, we study, we hold seminars, retreats, legislative events and mission studies. We knit prayer shawls, make 9x13 casseroles for funeral dinners and put together UMCOR kits and so much more! We are concerned about many issues, including human trafficking, immigration, maternal and child health, economic justice and others that impact the well-being of our world's most vulnerable people - the women, children and youth. We are “Called for Such A Time as This.” We are called to live the heart of God...to be the hands and feet that make God's love real as together we help transform the world.

### NEBRASKA AND KANSAS UNITED METHODIST FOUNDATIONS REPORT

by Anita Crisp and Alan Herndon

Anita Crisp stated that the mission of the Nebraska United Methodist Foundation is to support the ministries of the Great Plains Conference and the local church of the United Methodist Church through the development of gifts and the stewardship of resources entrusted to the foundation in support of God's work. The foundation ended the year 2014 with over \$33.2 million in assets. In 2014 the foundation received over \$5.2 million in contributions and earning and distributed \$3.1 million consisting of grants, seminary scholarships, donor support, and operations.

Alan Herndon, president and CEO of the Kansas Area United Methodist Foundation stated that their mission is about sustaining the United Methodist witness. The foundation completed 2014 with just over \$47 million of assets and distributed just over \$3.2 million offering support to various United Methodist ministries, Kansas United Methodist churches, individuals and scholarships. He discussed the Certificate of Participation for empowering Kansas United Methodist churches and how to make a million dollar difference. He recognized several churches that are currently participating.

# Mission Agencies

## COLLEGES/UNIVERSITIES

### BAKER UNIVERISTY

Dr. Lynne Murray, president

Baker University, the first university in Kansas, celebrated its 157<sup>th</sup> anniversary in February. Since 1858, the university has been committed to providing quality education for the next generation in the United Methodist tradition. The values statement of the university includes these words:

- **Student learning and academic excellence.** We provide quality learning environments promoting intellectual, professional and personal development resulting in lifelong learning.
- **Critical thinking, inquiry and freedom of expression.** We challenge all participants to think critically using open inquiry and freedom of expression.
- **Integrating learning with faith and values.** We expect all participants to be open to questions of faith

and values as part of intellectual inquiry in the United Methodist tradition. In particular, we expect personal and professional responsibility that is based on high standards of ethical conduct.

- **Connections.** We promote a community of belonging and Baker family connections, which result in lifelong associations.
- **Inclusiveness.** We embrace diversity of community, thought and expression.
- **Service to the community.** We address the civic, social, health and environmental needs of our global community.

We are proud of our strong affiliation with the United Methodist Church. The 2014-15 academic year has brought much change and achievement to Baker, with more to be anticipated for the year to come.

Our student body president, Rachel Haley, recently participated as a student lobbyist for the 2015 Fraternity and Sorority Congressional Visits in Washington, D.C. William Miller, Baker's director of research in biology, and Baker were awarded a National Science Foundation grant for \$286,285 over three years to conduct the "Tardigrades and Wheel Chairs in the Canopy" Research Experience for Undergraduates program. Baker's prestigious Inside-Out Exchange Program was featured prominently by the *Kansas City Star* in early May. Alexia Nyoni, a senior from Zimbabwe, was presented the prestigious David Merchant International Student Award for Achievement for her efforts leading our community of international students, now 20 strong.

In 2014-15, Baker captured conference titles in seven sports — men's soccer, men's cross country, women's indoor track, men's indoor track, men's outdoor track, women's outdoor track and women's golf. Athletics are an important part of the university's life. Sixty percent of Baker students are student-athletes, with the emphasis on student. The university proudly produced 35 NAIA Scholar-Athletes in the past year.

Phase two of the renovation of our student union was completed a year ago as we continue to attract the best and brightest students. It provided an update to public areas in other parts of the first floor with a coffee bar and patio. The upper level is being upgraded to accommodate our outstanding Student Affairs team. These updates, plus others planned for the future, will bring the student union in line with student needs and expectations.

The Rev. Kevin Hopkins is completing his first year serving as minister to the university. He is the third minister in Baker's long history. In March, Hopkins and sophomore Madison Wendt traveled to Haiti to develop plans for a group mission trip in 2016.

University ministry is ecumenical in nature, open to all people of faith, regardless of practices and denomination. Weekly chapel services are held in the Clarice L. Osborne Memorial Chapel on our Baldwin City campus. The services are filled to capacity throughout the year.

I have been privileged to serve as Baker's 29<sup>th</sup> president for the past year. We continue to raise funds to support scholarships for students and for academic and faculty excellence. I will continue to build on the foundation of past presidents and faculty members.

## KANSAS WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY

by Matthew R. Thompson, Ph.D., president & CEO

The Kansas Wesleyan University campus is alive with energy, galvanized by a shared sense of mission and ready to be an even greater force for good in the community and in the world.

There is renewed vigor in the pursuit of excellence. It starts with the very foundation of a KWU education with a transformation of the university's Liberal Studies curriculum. Next fall, the liberal studies core will have a markedly different look and feel. It will be comprised of four interdisciplinary categories (personal awareness, human expression, community and world exploration, and natural world stewardship) designed to challenge and invigorate students through their four years at Wesleyan while preparing them to be global citizens. We will redefine what we teach, how we teach and where we teach through online and distance learning and service-learning courses that will transform the rain forests of Costa Rica and the reefs of the Florida Keys into laboratories of learning that will change lives and the communities we visit.

Leading the curriculum change is our new executive vice president and provost, one of several new key positions in the university. Our new vice president for strategic initiatives and institutional effectiveness is launching KWU Everywhere, which includes online and distance learning that will give access to education to students in rural Kansas, across the state and throughout the world. We recently received a \$1 million gift from Sunflower Bank for technology upgrades that will power these initiatives.

Our students are active learners with a curiosity to explore the world and make it a better place. They are using the world

as their classroom by participating in The Washington Center internships, spending a service-learning semester in Greece and studying in the labs in England.

The university, now recognized as a College of Distinction, has received numerous accolades this year, including being ranked in the Top 20 Emergency Management programs and being ranked among the Best Psychology degree programs. FEMA has endorsed the Emergency Management program by selecting KWU as the host of an annual training event this summer.

We continue to expand personal and spiritual growth opportunities for students, including hosting Ashlee Alley, clergy development and recruitment coordinator for the Great Plains Conference (GPUMC), KICA for Christ, an inaugural event for students to come together in fellowship, welcoming people of all faiths to campus for a third-annual community Prayer Breakfast with the Rev. Sharon Howell as the featured speaker, and hosting the communitywide Martin Luther King Jr. celebration.

As the university approaches its 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, we have begun revisiting our rich United Methodist heritage — how we articulate and live out what it means to be a college affiliated with the United Methodist Church. Robust conversations have taken place on campus with faculty, students, staff and administration, and a plan is beginning to formalize that will help direct our mission and vision as we move into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

We are excited to have been selected as the beta test site by The Upper Room Ministries for its young adult spiritual formation program. Plans are being formulated for a fall 2015 launch. This, along with our popular Tuesday Night Alive worship event and numerous opportunities for spiritual development, provide value and enrichment to the student experience.

As we continue our mission to educate the mind, body and spirit, we have hired internationally renowned musicians and music educators that have enriched our music programs. We hosted an international String Extravaganza and added a marching pep band. Our theatre department engaged in collaboration with the Salina Community Theatre in its spring performance of *Godspell*. These experiences allow KWU students to hone their talents and develop lifelong skills preparing them for fulfilling careers and full lives.

We value the partnership we have with the Great Plains United Methodist Conference, and continue to feel blessed with the opportunities we have to enrich our students' faith journey while they pursue their academic goals at Kansas Wesleyan University. I invite you to come and see all that we have to offer at Kansas Wesleyan University.

## NEBRASKA WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY

by Fred Ohles, president

Nebraska Wesleyan University continues to pursue its mission as an academic community dedicated to intellectual and personal growth within the context of a liberal arts education and in an environment of Christian concern. Our success is deeply rooted in our connection with the churches and church members of the Great Plains Annual Conference. This connection allows us to equip present and future leaders of the United Methodist Church, increase the diversity of its leaders and resource local congregations in their mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

Support received from the churches in the conference has been channeled to assist us in providing scholarships to our United Methodist students. During the 2014-15 academic year, 192 United Methodist students received \$2,593,812 in scholarships, grants and tuition waivers provided by Nebraska Wesleyan University. Included in this total are 91 students who received \$68,250 in need-based Nebraska United Methodist Scholarships and one ministerial dependent who received \$13,975 in ministerial discounts.

Our commitment to partner with the Great Plains Annual Conference in equipping present and future leaders goes well beyond the money we offer in scholarships. This is our fourth year sponsoring the Hispanic Youth Leadership Academy (HYLA) on the NWU campus. HYLAs seeks to nurture United Methodist Hispanic youth, teaching them about the United Methodist Church and empowering them to continue their education through college.

We hosted the second annual Confirmation Rally with the Bishop. In cooperation with the Conference Council on Youth Ministries, we welcomed more than 120 students and mentors from Nebraska and Kansas. We look forward to partnering with the United Methodist Church and the Great Plains Annual Conference in other events that will strengthen emerging leaders.

### University Ministries

The goal of University Ministries is to have a spiritually healthy campus. At Nebraska Wesleyan we have discerned a spiritually healthy campus to be one where people: feel free to speak openly about their faith; are able to dialogue with others about their faith even when they hold differing views; and, in the midst of their differences, are able to serve together. University Ministries' programming focuses on helping individuals grow in their faith journey and building a spiritually healthy campus.

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Spiritual life is nurtured with a weekly worship service in our chapel. We worship as students, faculty and staff, and invite guest preachers from the community to share with us in worship. This year we supported five faith-based student organizations and a Christian fraternity. We supported 15 Bible studies led by students and staff from differing faith traditions. More than 200 students are involved every week in a faith-based group.

University Ministries' reach is not limited to students. We sent weekly messages to staff and faculty to encourage and challenge them to think of their spiritual selves. We offered pastoral care to members of the Nebraska Wesleyan community as there was need.

This spring we promoted an alternative spring break trip. We worked in partnership with the Methodist Church of Puerto Rico with one of their after-school programs. The students who participated came from very diverse faith backgrounds. As they worked together they learned to love and respect each other even in the midst of their differences.

Our commitment to equipping leaders spread beyond the classroom as we invited students to explore their vocation. We organized five vocational discernment groups, with students meeting for four weeks to identify their gifts, passions, and what they see to be the world's greatest needs. In November 2014 we took seven students to the GBHEM event, *Imagine What's NEXT*. We are sending students to three internships that the Great Plains Annual Conference is sponsoring for young adults this summer.

#### Speakers and Events

On November 4, the Mattingly Distinguished Visiting Scholar Lecture hosted Dr. Mark Braverman. His lecture, "Israel, the Palestinians, and the Failure of Global Diplomacy: the Emerging Grassroots Movement for a Long and Lasting Peace," was open to the Nebraska Wesleyan campus community and the public.

On April 30, Dr. Sarah Sayeed, a member of the Interfaith Center of New York and board member of Women in Islam, gave a lecture, "Muslim Women: Challenges and Possibilities." Part of the Mattingly Lecture Series, Dr. Sayeed's event was open to the public.

#### Wesleyan Live!

During spring 2015 Dr. Robert Jewett, retired United Methodist minister and theologian, taught a six-week class, "The Sermon on the Mount in the 21st Century." Jewett helped class participants see Jesus' teaching of love and forgiveness as opposed to the current global situation of religious and political extremism.

Wesleyan Live is held in a classroom setting at the conference office in Lincoln and is streamed live online. Wesleyan Live programming is organized by the Rev. Mel Luetchens in cooperation with the President's Office.

## SOUTHWESTERN COLLEGE

by Steve Wilke, vice president for Planning and New Programs  
executive director of the Institute for Discipleship

Why did Methodists in the Southwest Annual Conference of Kansas build their college in 1885? The original reasons still guide us at Southwestern College today. Persons served by the college are invited into a learning community based on Christian values and are encouraged to live lives of service. Our church leadership focus involves intentional programming concentrated on the educational efforts to nurture lay and clergy for effective ministry. Below are the programs we offer which touch countless lives in an effort to build disciples and transform the world.

**Campus Ministry** is a vibrant part of the Winfield campus. With conference support, a new full-time United Methodist campus minister will oversee the classes, chapel services, Bible studies and outreach activities that stimulate spiritual growth and challenge students and staff in their faith. More than 200 students participate in some form of campus ministry each year.

**Discipleship** exists to encourage college students as they begin, or continue, the journey of becoming mature disciples of Jesus Christ at home, work, church and in the world. This program has a full-time director and approximately 40 students. Activity scholarships are provided for participation.

**Most Philosophy and Religion Majors** have discerned a calling for ministry. Our academic program, while not limited to ministry preparation, is designed to cultivate that calling by providing both a theological foundation and practical experience in ministry settings. This program has a strong track record of students continuing on to seminary or going directly into ministry.

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**Worship Outreach** develops students to serve through small worship teams on campus, in the community, and in the world. Each year, three or four teams are formed with more than 20 involved students. Teams lead worship in area churches two times a month.

**Chapel** meets weekly during the school year and is carried out by a student-led worship team. These students are equipped with skills to share the Gospel. Eighty to 100 persons gather weekly in an open, Christ-centered, participatory worship experience.

**BeADisciple.com** provides an online location for workshops, trainings, Bible studies, and other educational opportunities for Christian leaders, lay and clergy. Beginning in 2006, BeADisciple has provided more than 500 classes to more than 7,000 participants.

**The BeADisciple Academy** is a global online faith-building fellowship for high school or college students who want to go deeper in their faith lives and leadership skills.

## HEALTH & WELFARE INSTITUTIONS

### EPWORTH VILLAGE

by Harrietta Reynolds, CEO United Methodist Missionary

#### *TIMES OF CHANGE AND GROWTH*

Epworth Village has been in the business of offering Hope and Healing for 126 years. It was founded on the teachings and example of Christ. Through the years, many necessary changes have occurred. The past three years have perhaps presented more challenges than most throughout the history of its long ministry. After nearly closing in June, 2014, the Board of Directors re-organized. An Interim CEO was engaged, and many people and churches came forward with prayers, care, gifts and work. Programs have been going through birth or re-birth. Epworth is now offering residential and educational services to girls for the first time in 25 years. A new Transitional Living Program for youth aging out of foster care is starting. Children, youth, and families continue to be the focus of this ministry, especially the left out, alone, poor, neglected ones who are often looked over by our society and culture. Again, this work of justice, is based on what Jesus taught and demonstrated for his followers.

Epworth Partners, an outreach program sponsored by the Epworth Village Foundation, started in June, 2013. The purpose of Epworth Partners is to connect the entire United Methodist Church with Epworth Village. Epworth has always been a work of what is now the United Methodist denomination, but mostly it was supported by United Methodist Women in the past. Epworth Partners has trained speakers ready to go out across the area to speak with the **whole** church. The results are astounding: In 2012, 3 percent of total income came from all sources of the United Methodist Church. In 2014, 18 percent of total income came from the United Methodist Church. Epworth Village and the total United Methodist churches partnership are making a huge difference in the lives of many children, teens and families. **Epworth Village needs the whole church to become involved in this work of mercy, justice, and love.**

Epworth Village is boldly asking every church to: 1) Choose it as a mission project. 2) Request a speaker and resource person to come to share with the congregation. 3) Pray for the entire ministry. When we work together, in the name and spirit of Christ, miracles happen.

*“Without change, there would be no Butterflies.”*

## GRACEMED HEALTH CLINIC, INC., HEALTH CARE MINISTRY OF THE GREAT PLAINS UMC

by David Sanford, CEO

The GraceMed health care ministry had another “banner year” in 2014. The breadth and depth of services we offer increased. We provided medical, dental and/or vision care for 34,279 unduplicated patients through 83,780 patient visits — a 12 percent increase from 2013. But the numbers don’t tell the real story of GraceMed. Our most important goal is to show and share the love and compassion of Jesus Christ with people who are hurting, people who need care and encouragement.

During the year, we opened a new school-based clinic at Oaklawn Elementary School in south Wichita. In addition, GraceMed will open another school-based clinic in April. The clinic is located on the campus of Jardine Middle School (3610 Ross Parkway) and will provide primary medical and dental hygiene services not only for its students, but other children, adults

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and seniors within the surrounding community. GraceMed looks forward to serving this community and also has plans for yet another school-based clinic in the near future that will be located at West High School (755 W. Lincoln St.). The clinic has been approved by the USD 259 School Board and will open in July 2015.

We have also been working hard to complete the remainder of our fundraising efforts for “Project Oasis”. Soon, GraceMed will start construction of a 26,000 square foot “hub” clinic that will be located on property provided by the Greater Wichita YMCA at their South Y campus (Meridian and I-235). The “hub” clinic will offer affordable medical, dental, vision, behavioral health and pharmacy services for our uninsured neighbors.

And God continues to bring more opportunities our way as He knows many people still do not have access to quality health care. GraceMed has the opportunity to partner with COMCARE and Sedgwick County to establish a primary care clinic at COMCARE’s Twin Lakes offices later this year (1919 N. Amidon). COMCARE reports they serve over 2,000 patients annually for mental health issues at their Twin Lakes location who do not have a primary care provider. Integrating primary care with behavioral health services has certainly proven to be successful for patients in other parts of the country. We will pioneer such an effort in Wichita and will continue to work with COMCARE on this project during 2015.

As a Christ-centered health care ministry of the United Methodist Church, GraceMed’s objective is to use the platform of providing quality health care as a way to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. With mission-minded and spirit-filled providers, managers and staff, led by Chaplain Jon Jones, our most important goal is to show and share the love and compassion of Jesus Christ with those who are hurting, those who need care and those who need encouragement.

GraceMed’s relationship with the Great Plains United Methodist Church is important. We sincerely appreciate your prayers and financial support as we continue to be the “hands and feet” in providing and sharing Christ with the people of south central Kansas.

## RELEASED AND RESTORED

by Pastor Ruth Karlsson

### **Released and Restored Celebrates 10 Years of Ministry to the Least of the Least of These**

2015 has been a banner year for Released and Restored! We are celebrating our 10-year anniversary of providing the message of God’s amazing love, mercy and grace to a population group that is very often marginalized, ostracized and despised by many in society – prison and jail inmates.

It continues to be our joy and privilege to provide this glorious message to these women and men in a practical way through the structured programs we provide inside six of Nebraska’s ten state prisons and at the second largest jail, the Lancaster County Adult Detention Facility.

The biggest ministry highlight for 2015 has been our ability to hire two additional staff. We have hired a program director and a lead facilitator. Our biggest joy however is not simply that we have increased our staff from one to three, but the fact that these two new hires are both felons – we definitely practice what we preach.

Our lead facilitator served 12 years at the Nebraska State Penitentiary. He was released in June 2010. He has volunteered with Released and Restored throughout that time, and so was a natural choice to become our lead facilitator. Our program director served 3.5 years in the federal prison system 25 years ago. She has volunteered with us at the Nebraska Correctional Center for Women for the past two years, and she too was a natural choice for our program director. We are truly blessed that these two individuals have come to work for us. They embrace, and represent Released and Restored’s passion for serving the least of the least of these.

We would love to come to your church and share our passion and message! For those near Lincoln, Omaha or Tecumseh, we have several volunteer opportunities available for congregations and individuals to become involved in mission work right here in Nebraska.

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## MINISTRIES WITH THE POOR FRIENDSHIP HOUSE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH AND THE HOUSE OF HOPE- OGDEN

Rev. Diana Chapel, executive director

**OUR CHURCH** — Celebrated 30 years of ministry to the community of Ogden, Kansas on Palm Sunday, March 29, 2015! The church's after school program is supported by Kansas State University Wesley students. Additionally this school year, a KSU leadership studies group conducted a seven week nutrition and cooking class with the kids. OFHUMC participated in Change the World Day and CROP Walk, and had two bake sales to raise money for missions. We purchased an AED machine for the community center and also funded a "safe sitter" class for community youth. Once each semester, the church provides meals for the KSU Wesley. OFHUMC raised funds to help start the Circles program in Manhattan, helping people out of poverty. The church is very active in support of Ogden Elementary School, which recently received a National "Blue Ribbon School" award for excellence in education and received a matching education grant from the Great Plains Conference.

**ECUMENICAL PARTNERSHIP** — Gearing up for the third ecumenical VBS this year with the Ogden Bible Church and Ogden Baptist Church. We have done quarterly community worship and potlucks that have been very successful. The three churches have begun a monthly free community meal at the Baptist church, to offer a hot home cooked meal at the end of the month when resources run short. Approximately 70 people are coming each month. Each year the churches host a huge Thanksgiving meal serving 300, and provided the first Christmas Day dinner for the community in 2014.

**HOUSE OF HOPE** — Fills the gap in an underserved community that lacks many basic services, by providing a thrift store, food pantry, emergency funds, Alcoholics Anonymous and professional and pastoral counseling.

Assistance provided through the House of Hope (fiscal year Oct. 1, 2013-Sept. 30, 2014):

- Thrift store clients: 2,445 (last year 2,107)
- Food pantry clients: 741 (last year, 582)
- Mobile pantry clients: 4,947 (last year 4,262)
- Benevolence fund clients: 13 (last year 20)
- Gas vouchers : 45 (last year 35)
- Thrift Store income: \$8,672 (last year \$9,045)
- eBay income: \$1,596 (last year \$3,321)

The House of Hope distributed holiday food baskets for Thanksgiving and Christmas. With help from KSU Leadership Studies students and the Baptist church, we hosted a Christmas party for all Ogden children and their parents and had an "Easter Eggstravaganza" on March 28 with hundreds participating at both events. The House of Hope Alcoholics Anonymous group celebrated three years of service to the community and continues to grow and reach people who desire sobriety.

We are grateful for the support we receive from the Great Plains Conference, individual churches, United Methodist Women and all mission teams and individuals that make this possible. We are thankful for the United Methodist Church - for the past 30 years provides financial support, missionaries, prayers, volunteers and everything we have asked for. We are blessed! Without the connection, we could not do what we do.

## JUSTICE FOR OUR NEIGHBORS OF NEBRASKA

Emiliano Lerda, Esq., executive director [www.jfon-ne.org](http://www.jfon-ne.org)

Justice For Our Neighbors of Nebraska (JFON-NE) is a faith-driven ministry, welcoming immigrants into our churches and communities by providing free, high quality immigration legal services, education and advocacy. JFON-NE was started by, and is affiliated with, the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) of the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM). This year, JFON-NE is proud to be able to celebrate its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The first legal clinics were started in January 2000 by churches in Omaha, Sioux City, and Des Moines through support from the Nebraska and Iowa conferences. Attorneys from JFON in Washington D.C. flew in once a month to supervise the clinics and advise the clients. Volunteers coordinated the clinics and conducted initial interviews. In 2001, the two conferences funded the hiring of an attorney. As the ministry continued to expand, Nebraska and Iowa each became separate JFON sites with their own attorneys.

Today JFON-NE continues to grow. It is partially funded through the 1 percent mission agency support from the Great Plains Conference. With this support we are able to fulfill our biblical mission according to Leviticus 19:33-34: "When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."

## 2015 JOURNAL Reports

In 2014, JFON-NE provided immigration legal services to 898 individuals with 1,664 cases. That is a 57 percent increase in the caseload from the previous year. A large percentage of our clients are the most vulnerable in our communities, most often women and children who are victims of domestic violence, sexual abuse or other crimes. We also have clients that are seeking help to reunite their families or to prevent them from breaking apart due to deportation. In 2014, JFON-NE started the Attorney of the Day program to make pro bono legal help available to the unaccompanied minors who arrive in Nebraska. When these children and youth have legal services available, they are five times more likely to successfully resolve their cases.

With headquarters in Omaha, JFON-NE holds monthly immigration legal clinics at:

- Grace United Methodist Church in Omaha
- Trinity United Methodist Church in Grand Island
- First United Methodist Church and Hispanic Ministries/Nuevo Pacto in Lexington

At the monthly clinics, congregations and their members, as well as other volunteers, extend hospitality to the immigrants in our communities. Through our ministry volunteers learn about the immigration legal system, understand how to advocate against unjust laws and structures and get to know and welcome the wonderful people who are our new neighbors. By developing and using their gifts in building relationships with the clients and their families our volunteers extend the impact of JFON-Nebraska's work by building a welcoming community for immigrants living among us.

JFON-NE also collaborates with several other organizations offering weekly consultations at their sites: Latino Center of the Midlands, Completely KIDS, Siena Francis House Homeless Shelter, Heartland Family Service, and Centro Latino.

Part of the mission of JFON-NE is to educate the public and to advocate for immigrants and immigration reform. In 2014, JFON-NE staff made 65 presentations to nearly 3,000 people in the communities we serve. Advocacy efforts produced significant successes in halting extended jail stays for immigrants in Douglas and Sarpy Counties, and in correcting a long-standing internal flaw in the immigration system regarding refugee deportations. This victory represents one of the many ways JFON-NE works to help immigrants address barriers in a system that can prevent them from accessing their rights under our laws.

On Jan. 16, 2015, JFON-NE Executive Director Emiliano Lerda and Child Welfare Attorney Virginia Maynes provided an overview of the immigration process and President Obama's executive action in a webinar hosted by the Great Plains United Methodist Mercy & Justice Team. They also provided resources for people who work with our new neighbors which can be found at <http://www.greatplainsumc.org/immigrationresources>. The webcast is also available on Vimeo at <http://vimeo.com/117945332>.

We look forward to continuing to grow our program in 2015 to welcome more neighbors to our churches and communities.

### **UM OPEN DOOR, INC.**

by Deann Smith, executive director

The year 2015 marks Open Door's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in ministry. In 1965, a group of laity and clergy started what was then United Methodist Urban Ministry to address the inner city needs of Wichita. The agency has since grown into a public charity that provides food, clothing and shelter to more than 33,000 unduplicated individuals a year in south central Kansas. What a significant impact that handful of clergy and laity made when they started our agency.

Last year, Open Door, due to Department of Housing and Urban Development funding priority changes, had to end the 17-year-old Transitional Housing Program, which helped homeless families transition from emergency shelters to permanent housing. The funds allocated to this program were used to start a new program called Family Rapid ReHousing. This is a permanent supportive housing program that provides tenant-based rental assistance to homeless families for up to 12 months while providing case management and other supportive services aimed at helping the family maintain housing on their own after the rental assistance ends. The program will be able to assist up to 12 families a year.

Additionally, Open Door will be a primary partner in another permanent supportive housing program serving chronic homeless individuals with a dual diagnosis of mental health and addiction disorders. The program will provide housing to approximately 19 individuals a year.

In 2014, Open Door started a \$2.5 million capital campaign to create a food distribution center in the north central part of Wichita. The new facility will replace the two existing, well-worn buildings on North Mosley that house both our Community

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Food Ministry (largest food pantry in the area) and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (government food program for elders in 11 counties in south central Kansas). This new adventure is possible through a partnership with the Great Plains Conference. In May 2015, the conference trustees closed on one of the old Cessna training buildings at 21<sup>st</sup> Street North and Opportunity Drive in Wichita. The trustees will lease the building to Open Door until our capital campaign raises enough funds to purchase the building from the conference trustees. That is expected to occur within the next two to three years. A special ministry grant was also given to Open Door from the conference to help support the cost of the project. This partnership allows us, as United Methodists, to be in ministry to the hungry and struggling for the next 20 to 30 years from a much better suited facility.

Open Door is very thankful for the close connections between our ministry and the Great Plains Conference. Together, we are truly United Methodists in action! For more information on the capital campaign or other ministries of United Methodist Open Door, email [administration@umopendoor.org](mailto:administration@umopendoor.org) or call 316.265.9371.

## UNITED METHODIST MINISTRIES, MISSOURI RIVER DISTRICT

by Nathan Morgan

United Methodist Ministries cultivates food security by developing community gardens, creating opportunities to serve, and providing education on issues related to hunger. UMMinistries seeks to fulfill this mission through our Big Garden and Volunteers in Mission programs.

Our Big Garden network expanded to nearly 120 garden sites across Nebraska, Kansas and Iowa. Those gardens grew a combined total of over 80 tons of produce. Over 90 percent of our Big Garden sites donate some or all of their produce to local food pantries and homeless shelters. Produce from gardens in our network has provided thousands of meals to low-income individuals who might not have access to fresh vegetables.

In 2014 our Big Garden program staff developed a 10-week organic gardening curriculum that covers topics from healthy soil to food preservation. The Big Garden employed four interns who taught weekly classes to approximately 250 children and youth. In 2015 we plan on expanding our education programming by hiring six interns and reaching over 400 children and youth each week.

Through our VIM program over 250 youth and adults participated in mission experiences where they engaged in hands on service with those in need and learned about systemic issues related to hunger and poverty. Volunteers in our mission experience program work in community gardens, fill food pantry baskets and spend time learning about issues such as food insecurity and homelessness. These experiences are eye-opening and often life changing for the young people who engage in them. They are also encouraged to take what they learn back to their own communities and engage in mission and justice work back home.

One VIM story was especially touching last summer. Susan and her son were on their first mission experience with us. They had been attending their local United Methodist Church but hadn't yet joined. During their time with us Susan related that until only a few weeks before she and her son had been living in a homeless shelter. The work she was engaged in during her mission experience touched her deeply and she asked one of our staff if she could be baptized while she was with us. Our staff arranged for her to be baptized at a local United Methodist church. Because of the community she had found at local United Methodist Church and the important work she did while she was with us, Susan made a commitment to follow in Christ's footsteps. We were humbled to have been a small part of that experience.

UMMinistries is proud to be a designated VIM site as well as a UMW National Mission Institution. These designations have deepened our relationships with United Methodist Churches in the Great Plains Conference. Although our offices are located in Omaha, we are proud to have program sites throughout our new conference. We are grateful for the mission agency support of the Great Plains Annual Conference as it allows us to touch the lives of thousands of people each year by growing food and building community.

## WESLEY HOUSE

Marcee Binder, Pastor / executive director

I remember sitting at the annual conference session last year, listening to the Rev. Ellie Foster, thinking this will be me next year. Boy has this year flown by. I cannot believe it has been a year since I assumed the appointment as the pastor and executive director of Wesley House. I have learned a lot in 2014, one thing being that Wesley House has extravagantly generous donors. I would like to personally thank you for every single penny you have donated to Wesley House; it is greatly appreciated and noticed. It takes a village to help Wesley House help the underserved in Crawford County. Thank you for being part of the village.

## 2015 JOURNAL Reports

I had a few goals for the last half of 2014. I really wanted to add some programming to Wesley House. I am pleased to let you know that we have a cooking class, which K-State Extension Office's EFNEP program conducts weekly, as well as the Crawford County Health Department March of Dimes Becoming a Mom class. In addition to programming, a children's playroom was added by a grant we received from the Community Foundation. I also wanted to have a family fun night. We were able to do a monthly movie night, monthly craft night, a Halloween party and a Christmas party complete with pictures with Santa. We are having excellent attendance with these additional programs and activities.

Literacy seems to be an issue with children in poverty. A summary from "The Early Catastrophe: The 30 Million Word Gap by Age 3" reports that "children from high-income families were being exposed to 30 million more words than children from families on welfare." In September, we received a "United Way Success by Six" Little Blue Bookshelf. This little bookshelf is stocked with books for ages zero to third grade and children can pick the book of their choice to take back to their houses indefinitely. This is a free program. Of the five bookshelves in Pittsburg, our bookshelf, stocked by United Way and Wesley House, is the most used bookcase with 300 books being given out in 2014. Wesley House also decided to give an age appropriate book to every child this year at Christmas. We collected over 2,000 books through book donations, cash contributions and two grants from First Book in Oklahoma City. We are also working on partnering with K-State Extension Office to bring a literacy program to Wesley House to teach parents how to be better readers to their children.

I also believed that Wesley House needed to have technology so we added a great website at [www.wesleyhouseumc.org](http://www.wesleyhouseumc.org), a Facebook page at Pittsburg Wesley House and Twitter @pittsburgwesleyhouse. We are receiving financial contributions from the website and lots of donations from all over Kansas because of Facebook.

I also thought it was important to let you know about the special projects here at Wesley House. Here is the breakdown of these projects:

- Children's Summer food expense was \$10,000 and we served 2,400 children
- Back to School Distribution expense was \$30,000 and we served 661 children
- Cozy Kids (coats) expense was \$8,500 and we served 285 children
- Fans expense was \$1,180 and we served 147 people
- Christmas Distribution expense was \$43,000 and we served 3,575 people
- Food Pantry expense was \$80,000 and we served 17,500 people

It is a blessing to be able to reach out to struggling families on your behalf. Because of your faithful generosity, we are able to make a difference in the lives of many Crawford County residents. Again, thank you for your support. Please feel free to call, visit or email me at [wesleyhousepastor@yahoo.com](mailto:wesleyhousepastor@yahoo.com) any time.

## ECUMENICAL/INTERCHURCH ORGANIZATIONS

### INTERCHURCH MINISTRIES OF NEBRASKA

by Jerry Albright, executive director

*Interchurch Ministries of Nebraska's purpose is to be an instrument of Christ's Church in Nebraska to address areas of special need. In addition to engaging in ministries of service and social justice, IMN also calls the churches to their common mission of proclaiming the good news of God in Jesus Christ*

Interchurch Ministries of Nebraska is honored to be a partner with the Great Plains Conference of the United Methodist Church. While IMN is not a new organization, I believe that the words of Isaiah really apply to our ministry together: "Behold, I am about to do a new thing . . ." (Isaiah 43:19). Thanks to the hard work and dedication of our volunteer board of directors and the expert assistance of the conference minister and staff of the United Church of Christ in Nebraska, I am happy to report that IMN is alive and well. After nearly a two year period without our own home office, IMN is now reestablishing itself with a new office and staff. I am Jerry Albright, M.Div., new executive director of IMN. My part time administrative assistant is Ms. Shelby Mook, the Rev. Kim Morrow is the executive director of Nebraska Interfaith Power and Light, and our staff is rounded out by Ms. Jennifer Fry, who is our outreach coordinator for the Suicide Prevention/Military Reintegration program of IMN.

We respectfully submit the following report for your review:

#### **Public Witness Ministry**

There were 180 persons who attended the Ecumenical Legislative Briefing Day on Feb. 14. John Mackiel, former superintendent of schools in Omaha, presented a moving address on poverty and racism in Nebraska. There were 10 workshops on a variety of topics such as immigration, human trafficking and creation care.

### **Native American Ministry**

IMN provided grants for Harvest Festivals for the Native American Assembly in Omaha and the Sacred Winds Church in Lincoln, emergency assistance funds to assist with utilities shut-offs, rent deposits, groceries, and other basic survival needs were distributed through the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska (locations in Niobrara, Norfolk, Lincoln and Omaha). Scholarships were provided to six outstanding Native American Students to Nebraska colleges and universities.

### **Farm Family Ministry**

The Rural Response Hotline was utilized by 3,876 callers in 2014. Thanks to the support of our ecumenical partners we were able to provide spiritual, emotional, legal and financial counseling and mediation services to thousands of rural Nebraskans in need. We received a large number of calls this year from individuals affected by the tornadoes in Northeast Nebraska and Beaver Crossing. Thanks to a partnership with Lutheran Family Services we were able to provide mental health counseling to many of the persons affected by last summer's terrifying storms. For example, one family we assisted lost their home, two horses, barn, fences and crops. We also assisted a pastor who is suffering from PTSS who has been on call around the clock counseling victims whose own home was badly damaged.

### **Returning Military Ministry**

IMN operates the state's only Suicide Prevention Hotline. We have been active in providing suicide prevention and postvention support to the military/veteran populations throughout greater Nebraska. With the collaboration of the Nebraska State Suicide Prevention Coalition, and other partners, IMN is providing services to our military population as well as identifying gaps in services. This includes distributing awareness and educational materials pertaining to suicide and the importance of seeking help for mental illness along with identifying local referral resources. We have responded with caring, supportive ministry each time that a military member or veteran has died by suicide.

### **Disaster Response Ministry**

We had 71 persons attend the second-annual Nebraska Disaster Response and Recovery Summit. IMN is a member of the state VOAD (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster) which provides coordination and collaboration with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), American Red Cross, Salvation Army, Church World Service and local long-term recovery groups across the state to prepare for and respond to disasters. We have successfully concluded the disaster response in Beaver Crossing and the work that we have done in responding to the disaster in Pilger and the surrounding area is being viewed as a model for the rest of the nation. The next Disaster Response Summit will be held Aug. 14-15, 2015 at the Country Inn and Suites in Lincoln.

### **Creation Care Ministry**

We met with our members of Congress on the moral urgency of responding to climate change. Nebraska Interfaith Power and Light had an important role in the clean energy plan adopted by Omaha Public Power District to reduce carbon emissions by 49 percent and to stop burning coal at one of the nation's dirtiest coal plants. We also worked with the Lincoln Electric System which has adopted a plan to receive 48 percent of its energy from renewable sources by 2016. We have developed resources for use by local congregations for "Climate Conversations" and a study guide for Mary Pipher's latest book, "The Green Boat." We have made presentations to churches across the state and sponsored a conference at UNO called "God, Creation and Climate" in which Dr. Richard Miller, professor of theology at Creighton University was the keynote speaker.

### **Strengthening Families Ministry**

IMN received a federal grant from Lancaster County to offer parenting and relationship classes to persons in Drug Court. Currently classes are being held at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Lincoln with other locations to follow. It is anticipated that the support that the participating churches are providing to these families affected by substance abuse could be offered in other parts of Nebraska as well.

## **RETREAT CENTERS**

### **FOREST PARK CONFERENCE & RETREAT CENTER**

Larry VanWalleghem, chair  
Jennifer Rea, executive director  
Rev. Kevin Rea, director

2014 was a year of preparation and change for Forest Park. The Board of Directors began the New Beginnings-Seeds of Faith Campaign to raise funds for an executive director. By the end of 2014, they had raised 78 percent of the funds needed to cover the two year contract, had interviewed applicants, and hired a Director team. Although it was disappointing to

learn that Forest Park will not be receiving mission shares in 2016, we are not discouraged. We know that God's hand has been with Forest Park through these many changes and that God is preparing us to begin new ministry.

The Rev. Kevin Rea and Jennifer (Braker) Rea started their new ministry with Forest Park this spring. Kevin, an ordained elder with 23 years of service in the Western Pennsylvania Conference of the UMC, has been appointed to Forest Park as an extension ministry. Jennifer grew up in the Topeka area, graduating from Topeka High and later K-State with a Bachelor of Science in Education. Both have master's degrees from Methodist Theological School in Ohio. We look forward to them putting their many years of United Methodist Church Camp experience to work here as they design new programs and opportunities for ministry.

We are excited to have some of these ministries ready for the summer (2015). Forest Park will be providing four weeks of vacation Bible school this summer in tandem with the Free Summer Meal Program to the children in the Topeka area. We will also be continuing our annual Science is a Blast program that features Mr. Wizard, Steve Jacobs. July 8, 2015 The Blackwood Brothers, a Gospel Quartet, will join us for a concert in the park, open to the public. We would love to have you join us.

## South Central Jurisdiction

### **MOUNT SEQUOYAH CENTER, INC.**

by Lamar Pettus, Interim executive director

Thank you Great Plains Conference, for your faithful support. Great Plains work teams continue to provide valuable assistance as Mount Sequoyah strives to improve its facilities. The dedicated men and women of the Great Plains Conference not only provide needed labor and resources but their presence also sets an example of how we can allow others to see Christ through the way we live and work daily. This year our campus offered a peaceful natural setting where parents visited their University of Arkansas students, churches volunteered their time and pastors came for spiritual renewal and training.

Mount Sequoyah Center continues to support the mission of The United Methodist Church by delivering radical Christian hospitality to all who enter our gates. The year 2014 saw usage increases of 28 percent in meeting facilities and 29 percent in overnight lodging. Staff-sponsored youth programs have been emphasized for the past three years, and in 2014, approximately 450 youth participated in these programs. More than 200 collegiate women meet weekly on our campus as well as a Boy Scout troop and other small groups.

Program Manager Emily Gentry oversaw the growth of youth programs and helped improve programs designed to address the spiritual and physical needs of adults. We had more children than ever before participate on our Marlin Swim Team, and we doubled the amount of Kampers who attended Kanakuk KampOut on our grounds. We were also blessed with the opportunity to work with two interns from the Lydia Patterson Institute this summer.

Denni Palmer M. Div., a United Methodist diaconal minister, joined our staff as Christian Education and Spiritual Formation coordinator. By the close of 2014, more Christian-based education training seminars and workshops were on the calendar for 2015 than in the previous six years. Mount Sequoyah now provides "Bible Studies to Go" that are available for any guest with individuals staying on the grounds for weeks of training specifically in mind.

Our Board engaged Run River Enterprises to conduct a long-range Jurisdiction wide review of our mission and programming and to provide guidance in development of a strategic plan to better serve the South Central Jurisdiction. Capital improvements of \$536,000 have been completed. The United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas matching grant has \$120,000 of the \$300,000 remaining available for capital improvements.

If you have not been to Mount Sequoyah in the past two years, you will be astounded by the renovations and remodels. Many of our guests rooms have been redecorated and are now equipped with more modern amenities such as flat screen TVs, Wi-Fi and coffee makers. It is truly amazing what a difference our staff, with your support, has made on our facilities.

We miss you and hope you will visit us soon so that you can experience our radical Christian hospitality for yourself.

# University & Seminary Reports

## AFRICA UNIVERSITY REPORT

by James H. Salley, associate vice chancellor for Institutional Advancement

Thank you, Great Plains United Methodists, for maintaining a strong commitment to Africa University as you discern and forge a common vision and path for your annual conference. In 2014, the faithful support and generosity of local congregations in the Great Plains Conference resulted in an investment of 87.03 percent of the asking to the Africa University Fund (AUF) apportionment.

We are grateful to have had Bishop Scott Jones and a delegation from the Great Plains Conference visit the main campus in Zimbabwe in 2014, to see and experience the ministry that is Africa University first-hand. Your continuing investment is helping to keep Africa University in the forefront of disciple-making, leadership formation and positive change in Africa.

**Student Enrollment:** Full-time student enrollment at Africa University held steady in 2014 with 1,478 young men and women from 25 African countries. Female students were a record 53.4 percent of the total enrollment in a context where women consistently lag behind men in access to higher education.

**Graduation:** In June 2014, 480 young people were awarded degrees from Africa University at the 20<sup>th</sup> graduation ceremony, bringing the total number of alumni to just under 5,300. Without your support, a college education would have been unattainable for the majority of these students.

**Training and Research:** Africa University is addressing critical skills and capacity gaps in sub-Saharan Africa. A collaboration with the Raoul Wallenberg Institute in Sweden supports a new master's degree program in human rights, peace, and development. Africa University is preparing to launch its first PhD program, which links issues of peace, leadership, governance and development, and targets policymakers.

**Leadership and Service:** Africa University graduates — trained in theology, environmental studies, psychology, education, health sciences, business, and peace, leadership and governance — are answering the call to serve, heal and uplift communities. More than a dozen Africa University graduates are currently helping disadvantaged communities to experience God's love and care through service as Global Mission Fellows and missionaries in Africa, Europe and Latin America. In the Africa Central Conferences, graduates of Africa University are evangelists, agriculturalists, managers, educators, health professionals, mediators and more. Many are key decision-makers and they're making a difference.

**Strategic Priorities:** Following a successful leadership transition in 2014, Africa University is engaged in a vigorous review of its academic programs and service delivery. This effort is aimed at enhancing its students' potential for life-long success. Professor Munashe Furusa took the helm in July 2014 as the fourth vice chancellor in the university's 23-year history. He was formally installed in March 2015 and has put fiscal accountability, student quality of life, and support for academics, at the top of his agenda.

**As you gather for annual conference, we urge you to embrace 100 percent support for the Africa University Fund and other shared ministries as your goal for 2015.** Last year, the Great Plains Conference's shortfall in the asking to the AUF was \$9,122.86 — an amount that is almost enough to support two students for a year at Africa University.

The shortfall represents an unrealized opportunity to change a life and the future prospects of a community. Africa University exemplifies what it means to journey together in connection — it unifies and heals, while nurturing and equipping disciples to be hope in dark places. This is the mandate that you have entrusted to Africa University and your ongoing investment is vital to helping this ministry to expand its impact.

We hope that the Great Plains Conference will continue to invest, engage and allow our shared journey to model that though many, we are truly one in Christ Jesus.

For every individual who has been touched by the ministry that is Africa University, there are many others — tens of thousands, in fact — who are awaiting the miracle of an answered prayer.

Thank you, Great Plains Conference, for what you have already done and for what you will do in the future. May God bless and strengthen the leadership and fellowship across the conference.

## BOSTON UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

by Mary Elizabeth Moore, dean

Greetings in the Spirit of Jesus Christ! In this anniversary year, Boston University School of Theology (BUSTH) celebrates 175 years of seeking God, building knowledge, and equipping leaders for the church and society. We especially celebrate our students, alums and church partners, with whom we seek to serve God as transforming leaders in a multitude of local and global communities.

### BREAKING NEWS

## 2015 JOURNAL

### Reports

- The **Doctor of Ministry in Transformational Leadership** is well underway with outstanding students and eager teachers. In its first year, the program has attracted two cohorts of students from three countries, eight faith traditions and a variety of church, educational, health care and other faith-based contexts.
- BUSTH celebrated art and creativity with four major **art exhibits and receptions**: James Crane's *motive* cartoons; Robin Miller's "African America in Art and Poetry"; John August Swanson's poster art; and Beth Neville's paintings.
- The **STEWARD program**, funded by a grant from the Lilly Endowment, is preparing students for stewardship of all of life, including spiritual, physical and financial life.
- **Raices Latinas**, funded in part by the United Methodist Church Young Clergy Initiative, has begun! It invites and supports Latino/a young adults toward a life-giving journey in ministry. BUSTH also works closely with the UMC in leadership of the Hispanic Youth Leadership Academy. Both focus on education, mentoring, service learning, and spiritual formation.

### MILESTONES

- **175 Years**: The founders of BUSTH were abolitionists, pastors and lay leaders who envisioned a school to carry the spiritually rich, socially transformative, leadership-forming legacy that centered their own lives. Our annual theme, *Leading in Transformation*, honors that vision and reflects on how to reshape it in response to changing social realities.
- **Women in the World**: This year, the Anna Howard Shaw Center celebrates 30 years of its Women in the World Conference, a witness to women's leadership in the church and a celebration of their brave, audacious ministries.

**PARTNERING FOR TRANSFORMATION.** Preparing students for ministry means meaningful partnerships with the local spiritual community.

- **Partnering in transformational learning** through courses in congregations with church leaders and students together.
- **Serving the church** through workshops and mutual projects, especially in church renewal, mission, and the cultivation of difficult conversations that enhance dignity and justice.
- **Traveling across the globe** through seminars where students engage with diverse cultures and traditions. In this year, students and faculty have explored the Arizona-Mexico Border, Israel and Palestine, Ephesus and Mexico.

**CELEBRATING JUSTICE:** From Selma in 1965 to the Arizona-Mexico border and the streets of U.S. cities, we celebrate transformational leadership and explore paths to just peace.

- **Retracing history** by commemorating civil rights milestones with: Walter Fluker, Martin Luther King, Jr. Professor of Ethical Leadership; and a panel of alumni and faculty on "Selma at 50, Ferguson Today."
- **Moving forward** to understand and build justice, engaging with Cornell William Brooks — BUSTH alumnus and President of the NAACP — and with our students, faculty, and alumni who seek to build justice in Boston, Ferguson, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Uganda and beyond.

As we look back on the past year — and the last 175 years — we celebrate transformational leaders who have loved God and cared mightily for God's world. Their living legacy gives us hope and courage for the future.

## CANDLER SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

by Jan Love, Dean and Professor of Christianity and World Politics

For 100 years, Candler School of Theology at Emory University has prepared real people to make a real difference in the real world. Since our founding in 1914, more than 10,000 students have graduated from Candler, where they have been shaped as Christian leaders who put faith and love into action, transforming the world in the name of Jesus Christ. Here, students are challenged academically, encouraged spiritually and immersed in Christian service from the first day they arrive on campus. This unique approach ensures that our graduates are ready to serve wherever God leads.

One of 13 official seminaries of The United Methodist Church, Candler is grounded in the Christian faith and shaped by the Wesleyan tradition. We are one of seven graduate professional schools of Emory University, a top-tier research institution offering extensive resources and a rich context for study. Our location in the city of Atlanta offers a learning environment that reflects the highly diverse communities of the 21st century world. There is no better place for ministry preparation that addresses our major denominational priorities: developing leaders, starting and growing churches, ministry with the poor and improving global health.

During the 2014-2015 academic year, Candler celebrated its Centennial, marking our 100th anniversary with a series of commemorative events highlighting memories of the past and visions for the future. The yearlong celebration began in the fall of 2014 with the dedication of the final phase of our new LEED-certified building and the premiere of "Religion

## Reports

and Reason Joined: Candler at 100,” a new book on our history. The commemoration continued through the spring of 2015 with guest lectures, exhibits and “Prophetic Voices,” a major academic conference addressing the challenges and opportunities facing theology in the 21st century.

Not only has Candler expanded its physical space this year — we have expanded degree offerings as well. In response to the changing needs of the church, Candler introduced five new degrees to equip Christian leaders: the Doctor of Ministry, the Master of Religious Leadership, the Master of Religion and Public Life and two dual degrees with social work and development practice.

Candler’s student body reflects the diversity and breadth of the Christian faithful. Our enrollment stands at 447, with 320 seeking the Master of Divinity, 43 the Master of Theological Studies, 14 the Master of Religious Life, 20 the Master of Theology, 29 the Doctor of Ministry, 10 the Doctor of Theology, and 11 enrolled as Non-Degree students. The student body is 52 percent women, 35 percent people of color (U.S.), and the median age of the entering class is 27. Students represent 42 denominations, with nearly half identifying as United Methodist.

Candler draws considerable strength and inspiration from its relationship with The United Methodist Church. Our ability to fulfill our mission of educating faithful and creative leaders for the church’s ministries in the world depends upon your support, gifts, and prayers. Thank you for the countless ways you advance this vital ministry in the life of our denomination. Visit us in person in Atlanta or online at [candler.emory.edu](http://candler.emory.edu) to see firsthand how Candler prepares real people to make a real difference in the real world.

## GARRETT-EVANGELICAL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Lallene J. Rector, president

Early in the calendar year, I met with various constituencies of Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, including alums, faculty, staff, trustees and students regarding their hopes and concerns for the school. As a result, we began the 2014-2015 academic year with the following priorities:

- To prepare and equip our graduates as public theologians,
- To nurture a more diverse community at Garrett-Evangelical so that the entire community develops cultural competency,
- To value and promote inclusivity at Garrett-Evangelical, and
- To construct a sustainable model for theological education.

### Public Theology

This year we launched a Public Theology Lecture Series to help the Garrett-Evangelical community understand more about the intersection of theological perspectives and shared values held in the public arena as persons in ministry work with others toward the common good and the wellbeing of all persons and creation. The lecture series included:

- Oct. 15, 2014: the Rev. Janet Wolf, director of Haley Farm and Nonviolent Organizing for the Children’s Defense Fund, lectured on various Children’s Defense Fund programs including restorative justice, mass incarceration, cradle to prison pipeline and freedom schools.
- Dec. 3, 2014: Dr. Mark Lewis Taylor, Maxwell M. Upton professor of Theology and Culture at Princeton Theological Seminary considered structures of the global orders and everyday living which public theologians may claim to engage and where “the powers and principalities” are always in contestation in “public” life.

In the fall, we will offer a course, “Public Theology in the City,” taught by Dr. David Frenchak, former president of Seminary Consortium for Urban Pastoral Education (SCUPE). The class will collaborate with the mayor’s office in Evanston on an anti-violence initiative. Dr. Frenchak will also provide a Public Theology lecture this spring.

### Cultural Competency & Inclusivity

As part of the commitment to nurturing a more diverse community, we welcomed a new vice president for Academic Affairs, Dr. Luis R. Rivera, our first Latino Academic dean. Our current ethnic/racial profile is:

- 20 percent black; 6 percent Asian; 3 percent Hispanic/Latino; and 54 percent white; 14 percent international
- More than 33 religious traditions, four continents, 15 countries and 36 states are represented in the student body
- 232 students are United Methodist with 25 additional students from other Pan-Methodist denominations
- 94 new students began their studies at Garrett-Evangelical this fall, raising total fall enrollment to 365 (FTE of 305)
- The average age of the entering Master of Divinity student is 31
- 52 percent of the student body is women

Consistent attention to issues of inclusivity, justice and grace within the seminary setting are critical for preparing future leaders to enter an increasingly diverse world. To respond to these concerns, Garrett-Evangelical will offer a number of

Circle of Trust conversations this spring for trustees, faculty, staff, and students. Our goals are: 1) to provide safe space to discuss difficult topics, 2) to reduce any gap between stated values and actual behavior, both personally for participants and institutionally; and 3) to update our 1997 statements of inclusivity.

#### **Sustainable Theological Education**

Garrett-Evangelical is beginning work on a Sustainable Theological Education Model for the school. We are guided by a commitment to generational stewardship of our resources and to maintaining a thriving seminary for the future. We will attend to the areas of business, academics programs and external programs.

Our priority continues to be making seminary education affordable. To this end we award more than \$2.5 million in scholarship aid to students each year and we lead all United Methodist seminaries in the Dollars for Scholars program with 45 recipients. In October, the seminary publicly launched The Final Lap of its \$100 million Forging Our Future campaign, and announced that \$88 million has been received to date. Much has already been accomplished, but more remains to be done (expanding the number of new leadership scholarships from 80 to 100, renovating Sherman apartments, endowing several more faculty positions, continuing to grow the unrestricted endowment), gifts for any of these goals are always welcome.

Thank you for your continued interest in our work. We are dedicated to serving The United Methodist Church and the church at large. For more information about Garrett-Evangelical and our work, I encourage you to visit our website, [www.garrett.edu](http://www.garrett.edu), and to visit us on campus.

### **ILIFF SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY**

Rev. Dr. Thomas V. Wolfe, president and chief executive officer

Greetings from the Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado. We wish you blessings as together we continue the work of strengthening the Church and offering a compassionate presence to the world.

The Iliff School of Theology's commitment to the Wesleyan tradition of providing intellectually alive and spiritually grounded theological education for our students continues. From Tanzania to Texas, Denver to Delhi, Missouri to Mexico, Iliff students and graduates are holding constructive tension with the human condition as it is and courageously standing with those who seek justice.

This past year saw one of Iliff's largest enrollments since its founding by the United Methodist Church in 1892 - 333 students, 60 percent female and 40 percent male, 35 percent Methodist – all actively engaged in both the classroom and a host of ministry contexts. Some are leading congregations toward revitalization while others are doing ministry by establishing new forms of community.

Interest in online and hybrid classes continues to grow from across the nation in our Journey MDIV Program - one of the first to bring quality theological education online. As a concerted move by Iliff to reduce student debt and grow the ability of students to lead financially sound, engaged communities, many MDIV students are also participating in the Spiritually-Integrated Financial Resiliency Program, funded by a \$250,000 grant from the Lilly Endowment.

We welcomed participants to our first Spanish-Speaking Local Pastors Licensing School hosted in partnership with the Rocky Mountain Conference and participated in healing events for commemoration of the Sand Creek Massacre. In addition, Iliff students participated in an immersion trip to Africa University and are planning an additional experience this year. We look forward to continuing these vital relationships.

Iliff created numerous events for area clergy and supporters. Via forums on leadership, policing, the role of faith in world events, and more, campus speakers included: Amy Goodman, Garry Kasparov, and the Rev. Dr. Rebecca Chopp, this year's Jameson Jones Preacher. Bridging theological education to new arenas was further cultivated through Iliff's Authentic Engagement™ Program with trainings for civic and non-profit groups. Our efforts were duly noted by McCormick Theological Seminary's Center for Faith and Service when we were named as one of the nation's "Seminaries That Change the World."

We continue to look to the future with courageous theological imagination. We are grateful for our denominational connection.

### **PERKINS SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY**

William B. Lawrence, dean and professor of American Church History

Perkins School of Theology celebrates our vital connections with the Great Plains Annual Conference and the distinguished accomplishments and service of our alumni/ae, including Bishop Scott Jones. One student from the Great Plains Conference currently is enrolled in our M.Div. degree program.

### Reports

Total enrollment at Perkins exceeds 400 students, of which approximately two-thirds are United Methodist and more than one-third are ethnic minority students. Master's degree programs comprise approximately 51 percent female and 49 percent male students. The D.Min. program includes students from southern Asia taking classes in Singapore and Dallas. Our Ph.D. program comprises 30 active students, including two Latino Ph.D. students supported through a grant from the Luce Foundation to Perkins' Center for the Study of Latino/Christianity and Religions.

Dr. Jack Levison (Ph.D., Duke, 1985) joined the Perkins faculty as the third appointee to the W.J.A. Power Chair of Biblical Hebrew and Old Testament Interpretation. Dr. John Martin, new director of Development, came to Perkins after serving as president of Roberts Wesleyan College in Rochester, New York. Following a nationwide search, a senior scholar and teacher eligible for appointment to the Lois Craddock Perkins Chair in Homiletics is expected to join the Perkins faculty in fall 2015.

Perkins restructured its Master of Divinity degree, effective spring 2015, enabling full-time students to complete the program in three years and reducing overall cost of the degree. The M.Div. now requires 73 term hours of academic credit, including the nine-hour internship.

A new "Master of Arts in Ministry" (M.A.M.) degree has replaced the C.M.M. The M.A.M. offers five tracks: two previously-existing tracks in Christian Education and Urban Ministry, and new tracks in Theology and Social Justice, Christian Spirituality, and Evangelism and Mission.

As part of SMU's "Operational Excellence for the Second Century" (OE2C) initiative, Perkins streamlined its organizational structure in early 2015.

A \$2.5 million gift to SMU will establish the new Susanna Wesley Centennial Chair in Practical Theology at Perkins.

Perkins thanks our many colleagues, friends and alumni/ae across the connection for generous support in many ways, including referrals of prospective students, as we continue our vital mission of preparing women and men for faithful leadership in Christian ministry.

## SAINT PAUL SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

by Rev. H. Sharon Howell, president

Saint Paul School of Theology is a seminary of the United Methodist Church that educates leaders to make disciples for Jesus Christ, renew the Church, and transform the world. We are one institution with two campuses, in Oklahoma and Kansas.

In July 2014, Saint Paul welcomed a new president: the Rev. H. Sharon Howell, who most recently served as the executive director of the Scarritt-Bennett Center in Nashville. In August, Dr. Elaine Robinson became the interim vice president of Academic Affairs and dean for both campus locations. CFO Laura Snow was honored by the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce as CFO of the year for a nonprofit. She has been a driving factor in getting the seminary debt free.

This past academic year, Saint Paul enrolled 231 students from 23 annual conferences and five countries on both campuses. The Course of Study School at Saint Paul served 237 students at the Kansas City, Missouri, Springfield, Missouri, and Oklahoma City, Oklahoma locations.

Saint Paul is pleased to announce the Saint Paul Fellows Program due to collaborations with the Oklahoma United Methodist Conference and United Methodist Church of the Resurrection. Saint Paul Fellows is a first-of-its-kind pastoral program designed to eliminate student loan debt, immerses students in varied church settings.

Four full-ride scholarships were given to seminary students commencing study in 2015. The three-year Fellows program offers a groundbreaking opportunity to equip candidates called to full-time ministry with excellent academic formation and real-life pastoral experience while reducing the need for student loans. The awards will cover tuition, books and fees for three years. Two Oklahoma Conference Fellows will receive a student appointment to pastor a small church, including a parsonage and salary to cover living expenses; the two Church of the Resurrection Fellows will receive a stipend to cover living expenses while serving at the 21,000 member congregation's suburban campus in Leawood, Kansas within the Great Plains Annual Conference.

Saint Paul introduced a new curriculum this year for its master's degree programs. The Master of Divinity degree has been reduced to 79 credit hours and includes exciting new components to better prepare students for a lifetime of ministry. Each semester students take short courses called "practicums" that are taught by ministry practitioners. These offerings include such skill areas as "budgets and finance," "funerals" and "ministry with children." Students are also required to attend off-campus spiritual formation retreats which are intended to deepen their spirituality. Saint Paul continues to offer the core curriculum that is vital for ministry and emphasizes our long-standing model of action-reflection in which students learn to reflect theologically upon the practice of ministry.

## 2015 JOURNAL Reports

The Native American Ministries Program hosted a group of Native American scholars, elders and clergy who have together written a book on Native Christian Theologies titled, "Coming Full Circle." This book will be published by Fortress Press in August 2015 and proceeds will go toward funding Saint Paul's Native American Ministries Program.

Throughout the year we have connected with graduates and donors face to face at gatherings called Holy Conversations. We look forward to more in the upcoming year. The trustees, faculty, staff and students of Saint Paul thank you for your interest, prayers and support.

### SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY

R. Gerald Turner, president

SMU is celebrating the centennial of its founding in 1911 by the Methodist Episcopal Church, South and its opening in 1915. Highlights of recent developments follow:

- In fall 2014 SMU's total enrollment of 11,272 included 6,391 undergraduates and 4,881 graduate students. Ethnic minority students made up 25 percent of total enrollment. An international enrollment of 1,483 represented 92 foreign countries, with the largest numbers from China, India and Saudi Arabia.
- SMU ranks among the nation's top universities. In the 2015 *U.S. News & World Report* listings, SMU ranks 58<sup>th</sup> among 280 of the "best national universities." Several individual schools and academic programs also earned national rankings.
- SMU received \$31 million in external funding during 2013-14 for research in the U.S. and worldwide. Current research subjects include water quality, natural hazards, learning disabilities and treatments for cancer and diabetes.
- SMU Unbridled: The Second Century Campaign is the largest fundraising effort in the University's history, with a goal of \$1 billion. To date, SMU has received more than \$927 million to support student quality, faculty and academic excellence and the campus experience.
- Recent campaign gifts have supported five residence halls and a dining center, opened in 2014, and a new education building, under construction. Other 2014 campaign gifts support several endowed faculty positions and new centers focusing on research, cyber security, communities in education, victims of crimes against women, family law and legal research in science and technology.

SMU treasures its Methodist heritage, and we ask for your continued prayers and support.

### UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

by Wendy J. Deichmann, president

Is God calling you to the ministry of Jesus Christ? Come and check out amazing opportunities for study and spiritual growth in person or online at [www.united.edu](http://www.united.edu)!

Why United?

- United offers an excellent, accredited M.Div. degree required for ordination in The United Methodist Church.
- United students participate in a community of deep faith and avid learning.
- Degree programs include traditional and/or online classes.
- United specializes in preparing persons for ordination and pastoral ministry.
- Join our graduates' long track record of successful service!
- United's focus on church renewal will prepare you to become an agent of new life and revitalization, Spirit led, a faithful leader in the mission of Jesus Christ!
- At United you can enroll in a hybrid UM Course of Study program.
- United's D.Min. program leads the nation through the faithful ministries of its pastoral graduates.
- United is committed to teaching the Bible and the historic Christian faith, cultivating spiritual formation for personal and social holiness, and renewing the Church for the mission of Jesus Christ in the world.
- 

What could be more interesting, important or exciting?

In addition to expanding residential offerings in Dayton, Ohio, United continues to extend its service across the U.S. and the world. United's degree programs are accessible anywhere with Internet service in conjunction with periodic intensive weeks of class and community activities in Dayton.

Please let us know if you have questions about how United can best assist you. If you would like to help make it possible for a future pastor to study at United, please let us hear from you. We invite you to call or visit soon! For more information, please contact [admissions@united.edu](mailto:admissions@united.edu). Thank you for your prayers, partnership, service and support in the ministry of Jesus Christ!

## WESLEY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

by David McAllister-Wilson, president

At Wesley, we are a church-based seminary committed to **multiplying the number of people who love God and love their neighbor** locally, nationally and globally. Our degrees and programs – traditional and new alike – reflect our dedication to the Great Commandment and Great Commission. We ask you to pray for us, hold us accountable, and join us in this Kingdom work.

### ***Equipping Faith Leaders through Degree Programs***

In fall 2015, our new master of divinity curriculum launches. We thoroughly **redesigned the M.Div. to prepare leaders for both church and society**. This 81-hour degree offers flexibility and an excellent core curriculum focused on empowering passionate, mission-focused leaders.

Wesley also offers a 36-hour Master of Arts and a 60-hour Master of Theological Studies to **equip those called to ordained deacon ministries or a wide range of ministries**.

In our doctor of ministry program, we continue to offer **the most practical and spiritually renewing tracks** in theological education. These include leadership excellence, pastoral counseling, arts, and new mission-focused tracks. Wesley is accepting applications to two tracks based in Cambridge, England. These tracks, *Transformative Leadership in Wesleyan Perspective* and *Creative Ministry for Church Renewal in a Changing World*, are each limited to 20 students.

Wesley provides **more than \$2 million annually in scholarships** to our students thanks to the consistent support of graduates, congregations and friends of the seminary. *Talk to someone at (202) 885-8659 or [admissions@wesleyseminary.edu](mailto:admissions@wesleyseminary.edu) about how Wesley's degree programs equip people to lead others to loving God and neighbor.*

### ***Providing Resources to Faith Communities and Leaders***

Wesley's **Lewis Center for Church Leadership** continues to be the go-to resource for actionable best-practices for clergy and laity. The center's free *Leading Ideas* newsletter provides well-researched, discipleship-growing ideas to more than 15,000 people. Visit [www.churchleadership.com](http://www.churchleadership.com) for resources in: Taking Church to the Community, Doing Good Well, Funding Your Congregation's Vision, and Reaching New Disciples. Also, learn about the newest book by the Rev. Tom Berlin and the Rev. Dr. Lovett Weems Jr., "High Yield: Seven Disciplines of the Fruitful Leader."

In early 2015, we developed the **Institute for Community Engagement at Wesley Downtown** to help the church turn itself inside-out. The institute encompasses the existing Urban Ministry Program and the Missional Church Program, which includes Heal the Sick, an initiative to congregations for public health work in their parishes. The third component of the Institute for Community Engagement is Wesley's emerging **Center for Public Theology**. Under the leadership of Distinguished Professor of Public Theology, Mike McCurry, we are developing this center to provide churches and their leaders, and seminary students tools to help navigate the connection between faith and public policy.

The **Luce Center for Arts and Religion** remains the only seminary-based program uniting arts and theology. The center celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Dadian Gallery in late 2014.

Wesley faculty members are continually developing resources for the faithful, including **books by Drs. Carla Works, Deborah Sokolove, F. Douglas Powe Jr., Cedric Johnson and Lovett H. Weems Jr.** Throughout the academic year, Wesley hosts Second Mondays – a series of lectures on campus and streaming live. This year we explored "Living Matthew 25 – Focusing on the Big Things." In this chapter of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus challenges us to heal the sick, feed the hungry, and welcome the stranger. In their lectures, **Wesley's faculty unlocked the Holy Scriptures and the church's history, traditions and theology to clarify these Gospel imperatives**. These presentations are available at [www.youtube.com/c/wesleyseminaryedu](http://www.youtube.com/c/wesleyseminaryedu) and via live stream at [www.ustream.tv/channel/wesley-seminary](http://www.ustream.tv/channel/wesley-seminary). Sign up for the monthly electronic newsletter *eCalling* at [www.wesleyseminary.edu/ecalling](http://www.wesleyseminary.edu/ecalling) to be reminded of this opportunity.

*Learn more at [www.wesleyseminary.edu](http://www.wesleyseminary.edu) about the exciting ways Wesley's resources are equipping people to spread the love of God and love of neighbor.*

# Miscellaneous

## UNITED METHODIST HEALTH MINISTRY FUND

by Kim Moore, president

United Methodist Health Ministry Fund's mission is *Healthy Kansans through cooperative and strategic philanthropy guided by Christian principles*. From an endowment provided by the former Kansas West Conference in 1986, the Health Ministry Fund has provided resources, primarily through grants of more than \$65,000,000, to targeted areas of potential health improvement. Our current work targets three key areas of activity: young childrens' mental health, healthy lifestyles for young children, and access to primary care, principally aimed at improved health care systems in rural areas. The Healthy Congregations program works with local congregational health ministry teams to build healthier lives in the congregations and their communities.

Work continued on developing systematic, universal screenings for children six and under for social and emotional health throughout Kansas. With increasing knowledge of brain development and new interventions to address child behavioral issues and family functioning, the long-term benefits are clear for catching behavioral issues early. Twelve coalitions are at work in regional areas covering much of western Kansas. In addition to thousands of screenings using the ASQ-SE, many coalition projects successfully promoted the Edinburgh Depression screening for prospective and newly-delivered mothers. Mental health centers and other providers significantly improved their capacity to do work with very young children through trainings and awareness developed by these coalitions.

Kansas Rural Health System Improvement Pilot Project finished a year of planning involving the following counties: Cheyenne, Smith, Osborne, Phillips, Kearney and Clark. The scale of the project grew significantly with the receipt of an \$895,000 federal grant from HRSA. Four separate pilot sites covering the six counties will start work on community paramedicine, mental health integration and care coordination in mid-2015 with more than \$300,000 available to each site from Kansas funders and the federal government.

The Fund joined other Kansas funders in providing significant support to Enroll America. Enroll America, through traditional and social media, promoted enrollment opportunities in the new federal insurance marketplace. The fund also provided matching grants to Kansas agencies for full-time Affordable Care Act navigators located in Beloit, Minneola, Coffeyville, Wichita, Hutchinson, Pratt and Garden City.

New work targeting improved rates for initiation and duration of breastfeeding gained momentum in 2014. The *High Five for Mom and Baby* program reached 49 Kansas hospitals. This program promotes five practices and policies which hospitals can implement to improve both the initiation and longevity of breastfeeding. Participating hospitals receive scholarship support for staff members to become certified lactation consultants. A Breastfeeding Summit, organized with the Kansas Health Foundation, engaged almost 200 Kansans in strategic planning related to breastfeeding. These two foundations are developing a significant funding opportunity for 2015 to implement many of the Summit's ideas. Our new engaged philanthropy project, *Impact Funding Teams*, raised contributions from individual donors and organizations, which were matched by the Health Ministry Fund, to provide mini-grants for breastfeeding work in 12 Kansas communities. The donors developed the grant guidelines and selected the awardees. United Methodists, congregations and units of churches (classes, UMWs, etc.) are invited to join this effort in 2015 with minimum investments of \$500. The Health Ministry Fund is creating a place where more people can engage directly in philanthropy.

Healthy Congregations — open to Kansas and Nebraska churches — involved 36 local churches. Health ministry teams in these congregations received training in person and on-line. The annual Healthy Congregations Retreat drew more than 100 participants. A special mini-grant opportunity for Healthy Congregations, facilitated by the Big Garden Project in Omaha, attracted seven congregations which developed new or expanded church/community gardens. A new transitions workshop for retiring and retired clergy was developed by the Fund with the assistance of the Rev. Tom Mattick. The workshop was provided twice in 2014, once in cooperation with the Conference Board of Pensions and Health Benefits.

Our longtime vice president for programs and active worker in many annual conference committees, Virginia Elliott, retired at the end of 2014. Our new vice president for strategic development is Aaron Walker. Check our website, [www.healthfund.org](http://www.healthfund.org), for the 2014 annual report and additional information about our work.

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## GENERAL BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND MINISTRY

Greetings from the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry! In 2014 and 2015, GBHEM staff has been busy with a number of initiatives assigned to the Board by the 2012 General Conference, including the **Young Clergy Initiative** and the **Central Conference Theological Education Fund**. Here are some of the ways GBHEM has been working to resource our church:

- GBHEM continues to train Group Candidacy Mentors, and Conference Board of Ordained Ministry (BOOM) members, BOOM staff, District Committee on Ministry members and district superintendents on ministry legislation and best practices for navigating the ordination process with new candidates.
- Work continues on the **Young Clergy Initiative (YCI)**. Forty-six YCI grants were awarded during the second round of applications in August 2014, bringing the total amount awarded to \$5.5 million. The grants support programs geared toward increasing the number of young clergy in the UMC and supporting young clergy already serving the denomination.
- The **Commission on Central Conference Theological Education** continues to distribute the \$5 million fund for theological education in Africa, Europe and the Philippines. So far, the commission has awarded 130 grants to fund training for local pastors, faculty development, provision of e-readers, curriculum development, and libraries at theological schools across 22 countries.
- **Africa University** continues to graduate scholars who are changing the face of Africa. The \$50 million Endowment Campaign, a fundraising plan to ensure Africa University's financial independence, is well underway. Contribute online to Africa University at the new giving website, [support-africauniversity.org](http://support-africauniversity.org).
- More than 680 college students, campus ministers and chaplains attended **Imagine What's NEXT** last fall, an event which focused on helping students plan how they can be active in God's dreams for their communities and the world.
- For the 2014-2015 academic year, GBHEM's Office of **Loans and Scholarships** awarded 2,293 recipients a total more than \$5 million. Explore all scholarship opportunities within the UMC using the scholarship portal at [scholarship.umc.org](http://scholarship.umc.org).
- Registration is open now for **Exploration 2015**, a three-day event where young adults ages 18-26 ages come to hear, discern, and respond to God's call to ordained ministry in The United Methodist Church. This year's event will be held in Orlando, FL, Nov. 6-8. Read more or register at [gbhem.org/exploration](http://gbhem.org/exploration) and follow @explorecalling on Twitter for updates.
- Technology enables us to make our training resources more readily available to the church. The **UMC Cyber Campus** provides free video training sessions and lectures, as well as an online listing of continuing education courses, at [umccybercampus.com](http://umccybercampus.com).
- GBHEM and Discipleship Ministries continue to expand the **E-Reader Project**, a simple, sustainable and cost-effective way for theology schools in remote areas of Africa and Asia to access current textbooks. Through financial support from annual conferences, local churches, universities and individual donors like you, we're making theological education available to more people in more places than even before. Learn more or donate at [umcereader.org](http://umcereader.org).