

# GPconnect - AC 2015 Daily

## Recap from June 10, 2015

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

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

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

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

## Nebraska United Methodist Foundation to host anniversary celebration at AC



All are invited to join the Nebraska United Methodist Foundation as they celebrate the foundation's 50th Anniversary.

The celebration will take place Friday, June 12, from 3:30 - 4 p.m., in the northeast corner of the Century II Expo Hall.

The Nebraska UM Foundation and the Kansas Area Foundation have neighboring booths in the Expo Hall. Visit the booths to register for your chance to win a gift basket full of goodies. The winners will be announced Friday afternoon during the foundations' presentations. You must be present to win.



## Clergy and laity participate in meet and greet



Tuesday evening, laity and clergy had a chance to attend a meet and greet 7–9 p.m., the evening before conference began. Laity met at First UMC while clergy met at East Heights UMC. This casual gathering was set up for laity and clergy to have a chance to get acquainted with others in attendance and get to know people from other areas of the Great Plains Conference. Bishop Scott Jones and several district superintendents attended the laity meet and greet, that created an easy opportunity for laity to chat with them.

View more photos from the [laity meet and greet](#) and the [clergy meet and greet](#) on the [Great Plains Conference Facebook page](#).

## Formation of Great Plains MFSA Chapter results from annual supper



More than 100 Great Plains United Methodists supporting the Methodist Federation for Social Action ([MFSA](#)) gathered for supper and a program at College Hill UMC in Wichita on Tuesday, June 9. The Rev. Harry Knox of Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice ([RCRC](#)) spoke on the topic of "United Methodism and Social Justice." The Rev. Zach Anderson presented the Jimmy Creech Profile of Justice scholarship to Tori Osler. The Great Plains MFSA Chapter 2015-2016 temporary organizing committee was introduced. Special guests included the Micah Corps interns.

The MFSA Jimmy Creech Profile of Justice Scholarship was created in 1998 by Jimmy's family and friends to carry on his legacy of peace and justice advocacy for all people. It was fully endowed in 2004 and provides a scholarship of approximately \$1000 every year. Scholarship recipient Tori Osler couldn't be in Wichita for the supper, but sent a message of thanks, noting it was her first summer as a Micah Corps intern which opened her eyes to the possibilities of making a difference in the lives of those whose voices are suppressed. Tori is studying psychology at Nebraska Wesleyan and plans to pursue a graduate degree in social work.

"This annual conference has provided for me in my career some lights at precisely the moment when I needed them, when I had just about despaired of ministry," said guest speaker the Rev. Harry Knox who expressed his gratitude for Great Plains United Methodists who have been mobilizing clergy and laity in the United Methodist Church to take action on issues of peace, poverty and people's rights in the church, the nation and the world. Knox mentioned the Rev. Jimmy Creech, MFSA members in Grand Island working with immigrant families, and Bishop Richard Wilke.

Knox explained the concept of "losing forward" which happens when people of faith "make our witness so powerful that lives are changed" such as when the Methodist church split over slavery. "Sometimes decisions made definitively are

good things, even though they can be scary,” Knox said. People who do the work of justice make decisions to engage in ways that can mean losing yet moving forward.

The Rev. Lee Johnson of Asbury UMC in Prairie Village, Kansas, said he chose to attend the supper and join MFSA because “I wanted to be supportive of what they support, which is advocacy for people who have no voice.”

In the wake of the dissolution of the Nebraska MFSA Chapter, the Great Plains MFSA Chapter is being formed. The interim organizing committee includes the Rev. Stephen Griffith, the Rev. Stephanie Ahlschwede, the Rev. Kurt Cooper, the Rev. Gayla Rapp, Brian Sutton and Rose Roberts. Contact Steve at [sgriffith@greatplainsumc.org](mailto:sgriffith@greatplainsumc.org) or Stephanie at [sahlschwede@greatplainsumc.org](mailto:sahlschwede@greatplainsumc.org) for information on joining the new chapter.

View more photos from the [MFSA supper](#) on the [Great Plains Conference Facebook page](#).

## Laity Session provides reminder of role of lay members at annual conference



As last year, the laity session was packed wall to wall with more than 800 Great Plains lay members to annual conference, an event organized by the conference lay speaker, Courtney Fowler, and the assistant lay speakers. A worship group from St. Mark’s UMC led exuberant praise and worship that started the session with a jolt of adrenaline. After assistant

lay speaker Tom Watson encouraged to participate in all of the sessions at annual conference in order to properly represent their churches, assistant lay speaker Micole Harms reviewed the resolutions and petitions to be voted on as well as the election of delegates.

Assistant lay speaker Carolyn May recalled the good work of the Great Plains United Methodists over the year, such as serving others through the Education Partnership program, Youth Internship program, Lay Speaking program, Volunteers in Mission, UMM, UMW and many other opportunities. “You’ve not only reached out to others in your communities but also through global ministries,” said May who noted that the Great Plains Conference raised more than \$623,000 for [Imagine No Malaria](#) through grassroots efforts to end preventable deaths due to malaria. She remarked on the work of [UMCOR](#) supported by Great Plains congregations. Tom Watson brought back a tradition he had started years ago of sharing a poem written by him for the conference. One stanza: “Next time in church just look around/ Any faces you don’t know?/ If not, I’ll say this plainly/ Then you’ve got some seeds to sow.” [Read his entire poem here](#).

The second half of the time was dedicated to two-minute introductions to the 27 candidates for lay delegate to General and Jurisdictional conferences. [Download their profiles here](#). While a variety of specific concerns were noted in each candidate’s introduction, common themes were concerns for small membership churches, youth and social justice. Two people asked to be considered as “write in” candidates. One was Shane Hinderliter of United Methodist Church at the Well in Wichita and local church youth ministry coordinator for the Great Plains Conference. The other was Karelle Leeper, an 18-year-old freshman at Iowa Western Community College whose home church is Clair Memorial UMC in Omaha, Nebraska. Karelle is spending his summer as a Great Plains Church Planting intern.

View more photos from [Wednesday](#) at the [Great Plains Conference Facebook page](#). Be sure to “like” the [Great Plains Laity page on Facebook](#).

# Asbury Theological Seminary Alumni Luncheon



Graduates and friends of Asbury Theological Seminary gathered Wednesday, June 10, at the Drury Plaza Hotel for a luncheon to celebrate the 92 years that the Kentucky-based institution has prepared clergy for many denominations, including the United Methodist Church. Attendees heard about the vital statistics of the seminary and reminisced about the campus and the school's ongoing mission.

## Opening worship

## Bishop Jones calls for all to be united



Asbury Church (Wichita, Kansas) Band, led by Luke Aadalen, worship pastor, started the opening worship by getting attendees on their feet to join in celebration. Attendees joined in praise singing "You are Good," "We Believe" and "Holy Spirit."

After all joined hands and prayed in unity, asking for strength and love, and to be part of the blessings in the Great Plains, Michael Tully, taught the new song "We Are One" (Stand United).

An extra special moment was then celebrated. The Rev. Emily and Stephen Cannon's daughter, Evelyn Gayley Cannon, was baptized

by Bishop Scott Jones. Emily is a recent Transition into Ministry associate and is currently appointed at St. Paul's UMC in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Pastor Joseph Rafique, Aldersgate UMC in Lincoln, Nebraska, read from Ephesians 4: 1-7, 15-17.

Jones' message focused on unity – not only the three former conferences that were united last year, but United Methodists worldwide and Christianity as a whole. Jones mentioned how other denominations have split, and how they are much weaker now than they were.

"We are stronger together, than we are separated," said Bishop Jones.

All Christians agree when talking about essential doctrines.

We have all this technology, but what's happened is a decline in real conversation.

"Technology has allowed the conversation to become much more shallow," said Bishop Jones. "We have become more polarized and it has made it easier to demonize those who do not agree with us."

"The main this is to keep the main thing, the main thing."

The Rev. Kalaba Chali, Mercy and Justice coordinator, continued with the unity theme when he discussed the three Great Plains Conference mission partnerships, Haiti, Nigeria and Zimbabwe. The offering was then collected for those three partnerships.

Opening worship closed with Tully leading all in "And Are We Yet Alive."

## Conference opens with talk of strengths, challenges



The Great Plains Conference faces some challenges, but it represents a much stronger faith community than the three former conferences – Kansas East, Kansas West and Nebraska – did on their own. That was the message from both Courtney Fowler, conference lay leader, and Bishop Scott J. Jones during the opening plenary session of the annual conference session June 10 in Wichita, Kansas.

Fowler thanked the laity for its dedication to churches throughout the Great Plains Conference. She then cited stories from throughout Kansas and Nebraska that had developed creative ministries.

"Our laity also are making a difference as member of our mercy and justice team," Fowler said.

Among the accomplishments, Fowler congratulated Nebraska residents for their legislature's repeal of the death penalty, and she urged for continued vigilance as pro-death penalty proponents attempt to add the death penalty reinstatement to a future election ballot.

She also urged the people of the Great Plains to continue to focus on the worth of all people, especially mothers, girls and youth.

"I feel that I must lift up our youth, who has much to be proud of this year," Fowler said. She noted the growth of The One Event in January in Grand Island, Nebraska.'

Fowler said concerns about the future of the church reflect how different the church of today is from the church that she and others grew up in, asking how children will experience faith throughout their lives.

"The challenges we face are great – enormous even, but God has already blessed all of us here today," Fowler said.

Bishop Scott J. Jones provided his perspective on the state of the conference by thanking itinerant pastors for their efforts and willingness to accept the call to move, such as western Kansas pastors moving to eastern Kansas, eastern Kansas pastors moving to Nebraska and Nebraska pastors moving to various places in Kansas.

“We have clarity about our priorities, and they are the right ones,” Bishop Jones said. He cited the efforts under way to develop new churches, to recruit and train new clergy and to bolster a number of ministries, such as camping.

However, Bishop Jones pointed out that we do face challenges, particularly in fulfilling the overall mission of making disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. He cited declines from 2013 to 2014 in numbers of professions of faith, average worship attendance and small groups. Positives included an increase in the number of people taking part in hands-on missions and in an increased percentage paid on apportionments. As a whole, apportionments paid increased from 86.13 percent to 87.04 percent.

While the increase is a positive, Bishop Jones said the goal remains to have at least 95 percent of apportionments paid.

“If a church is not meeting its apportionment obligation, it is financially unhealthy,” he said.

Another challenge involves the need for more clergy because the average age of clergy in Kansas and Nebraska is 56 years old.

“In the next 10 years, half of our clergy may be retiring,” Bishop Jones said.

To address that issue, Bishop Jones said the conference needs to embrace a culture of call. He said the laity has a role to play in that effort by reaching out to people who may have the gifts and graces to lead congregations.

The address moved back to a positive note about the increased participation of young people, including 33 interns serving in various ministries and attendees at the annual conference session who have children. In fact, child care had to be increased at this year’s annual conference session.

“We have child care issues at annual conference,” Bishop Jones said. “Praise the Lord! This is good news!”

Bishop Jones concluded his address by sharing key points in a book by Missouri Conference Bishop Robert Schnase, “Just Say Yes!” From the book, Bishop Jones said the Great Plains Conference needs to embrace an attitude change to say “Yes” to new ideas, noting sometimes it is important to say “No,” such as when ideas fail to live up to the Discipline. But, he urged, we as a church should be brave and embrace new ideas.

The opening plenary session also included other business:

- Introduction of people who completed their course of study for ordination.
- Introduction and acceptance of provisional elders into the annual conference.
- Votes to approve resolutions to close seven churches, one of which, New Beginnings United Methodist Church in Wichita, will reopen as a new church.
- Celebrated the Bridges to the Future capital campaign in the former Kansas East and Kansas West conferences. The program involved raising more than \$8.7 million to help expand Hispanic ministry, build and renovate buildings for campus ministries, start churches and improve camps. Read more about the program at [greatplainsumc.org/newsdetail/1092609](http://greatplainsumc.org/newsdetail/1092609).
- The Rev. Tom Lucas, camping committee chair, and Sara Shaw, camping coordinator, provided an overview of the Great Plains camps. All of the conference’s camps have reported an increase in reservations for the summer. Shaw asked for a show of hands of people who had attended camps as a child, with the vast majority of attendees acknowledging they had done so. She then asked people to stand up if camp had changed their lives, with many people in the arena doing so.

- Lucas presented a plan for Camp Comeca, which he called a camp in transition. The proposal is to raise funds to allow for the creation of an endowment to assist with the needs for the camp, which is located near Cozad, Nebraska. The annual conference voted to approve the plan. Janelle Wilke, who will lead the fundraising effort, was introduced to the conference attendees.
- The Rev. Ashlee Alley, clergy recruitment and development coordinator, provided a report on the Transition into Ministry program. Seven pastors have completed the program, with six serving as associate pastors and one serving as a solo pastor. All seven will be solo pastors as of July 1. The team is trying to identify the best methods for mentoring for future TiM groups so the conference can best support clergy well. Nine people have participated over the past three years. She concluded her presentation by thanking the churches that participated in the program.

## UMW second in the nation in mission giving last year



Around 240 attended the United Methodist Women Annual Conference Dinner that was held at First UMC in Wichita, Kansas. The Great Plains UMW announced that it was the first in the South Central Jurisdiction in mission giving last year - and second in the nation.

Johne Green from the Topeka District was also awarded the Eunice Harrington Award. This annual leadership award, recognizes a currently serving District United Methodist Women's officer in the Great Plains Conference, who best exemplifies the leadership and work of Eunice Harrington. The leadership award was created to honor the memory of Eunice Harrington of

York, Nebraska. Eunice served from 1968 - 1972 as the president of the world's largest women's organization, the Women's Division of the Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church. Eunice was instrumental in the formation of the single women's organization that is now known as United Methodist Women.

View more photos from the UMW Annual Conference Dinner on their [Facebook page](#).

## United Methodist Men celebrate scholarship winners, conduct auction



The United Methodist Men celebrated its 26<sup>th</sup> year of awarding scholarships to students who are pursuing degrees in Christian leadership and related fields. This year's event, conducted at First United Methodist Church in Wichita, Kansas, featured words of how to maximize finances to allow for more resources to go toward ministry by the Rev. Dr. Clayton Smith, former pastor of generosity at Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas.

The “100 Club Scholarship” winners of \$1,000 each were Michael Ryan Evans, Anne Gahn, Katelyn Hilger, Nick Kaufmann, Karelle Leeper, Kayla M. Mangrich, Jonathan Poarch and Dennis Reimer.

- Fleming Family Foundation Scholarship winners of \$500 each were Evans, Gahn, Hilger, Poarch and Nick Kaufmann.
- Fleming-Humphrey Golf Scholarship winner of \$500 was Reimer.
- The Nichole Spiegel-Wheeler Scholarship winner of \$50 was Kaufmann.
- The Dean, Jean and Randy Fleming Scholarship winners of \$500 each were Gahn and Mangrich.
- The Merv and Bev Schliefert Scholarship winner of \$500 was Evans.

## Young adult leaders gather for food, fellowship, chance to meet with bishop



Some of the younger leaders in the Great Plains Conference gathered June 10 at First United Methodist Church in Wichita, Kansas, for a time of fellowship, networking and a chance to participate in a question-and-answer session with Bishop Scott J. Jones. Some of the attendees are serving as lead pastors and some as associates. Others are serving in specialized ministries, while still others are completing their seminary training.

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