2011 Annual Conference Summary

By Suzy Keenan*

Nearly 1,000 members of The Eastern Pennsylvania Annual Conference met May 19-21, 2011 at the Philadelphia Expo Center, Oaks, PA, with the theme, “Journeying with the Poor.”

Laity Session on the morning of May 19 featured keynote speaker, Rev. Joseph Daniels, Jr., pastor at Emory United Methodist Church in Washington D.C., who spoke on being the REAL church (relevant, enthusiastic, authentic, and loving).

Opening Worship, organized by the young adult clergy of the Annual Conference, started with a procession led by members of the Wings of Victory Praise Dance Ministry including Ms. Gladys Banks (100 years old) and Miss Felicity Guepet (6 weeks old) accompanied by her mother, the choreographer, Rev. Monica Guepet. Mrs. Jennifer Berry-McNulty, a young adult from First United Methodist Church of Germantown preached on “Jesus vs. Superheroes.” She said, “Jesus knew the poor. No condescending handouts for him! Jesus lived among the poor.” She added, “Would you be willing to spend a single week with a mother on welfare? What would it take for each of us to realize that poverty is not simply a lack of money – it is a prison!” She challenged listeners, “Christians are charged with loving injustice out of existence.”


Rev. Rudy Rasmus led three teaching sessions at the 2011 Eastern Pennsylvania Conference. “If people matter, then we look at the challenges in today’s economy. I realized something. I have to trust God! I have to trust God for the poorest in our community,” Rasmus said. He accentuated that things need to change, that the church has lost its place of influence in our communities, and often stands as walled fortress, with, “everyone right on the inside, and everyone wrong on outside.” Rasmus said, “We love God with our heart, mind, soul strength – but we have trouble loving our neighbor as ourselves.” He also emphasized, “The church has become boring as heck!” Rasmus relies on the younger membership in his church to keep him culturally relevant. Pastor Rudy preached from 1 Corinthians 13, and noted especially verse 3: “If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.” Rasmus is author of TOUCH: Pressing Against the Wounds of a Broken World, a book on how to touch the lives of “the least of these” in our own communities. (www.cokesbury.com) All three teaching sessions will be available free of charge online in the Conference's new video gallery: www.ourchurchvideos.com/19482/epaumc.
In a Service of Recognition, the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference honored twenty-two retiring clergy: Lee F. Adams, Robert A. Bailey, Michele Wright Bartlow, Edward L. Bean, Cookie F. L. Bracey, Susan Cole, David R. Cramp, Herbert N. Gibbons, Edward C. Goodley, Cecile J. Grantham, James R. Hallam, Sandra L. Hargrove, Howard W. Milton, Jr., David C. Nissly, Sally W. Ott, Robert A. Pope, Thomas Ross, Richard S. Sarley, John T. Truitt, H. Joe Tyson, Charles E. Weigel, Jr., and Donald R. Williams. In a symbolic moment, Rev. Michele Wright Bartlow, representing the 2011 class of retirees, passed the mantle of ministry to Rev. Jonathan Wesley Hall, representing the 2011 Class of Ordinands. The retirees anointed and prayed with those who were to be commissioned or ordained.

On the evening of Friday, May 20, the Service of Ordination included the preaching of Bishop Julius Trimble, Iowa Area of the United Methodist Church. “I came to bring you a word of encouragement,” he said. “You are not called to save the church, but to serve this present age. Take risks on behalf of the marginalized and be gentle with yourself.” He added, “What a privilege it is to be in ministry, and what a privilege it is to bring the love of God to a hurting world.” One person was commissioned toward Deacon’s orders: Tiffany Lynn Bidwell. Seven persons were commissioned toward Elders orders: Joyce Anderson, Christopher Eden, Daniel Lebo, Gary Lefever, Ethel Guy, Kevin Rutledge, and Eric Yeakel. Two persons were ordained Deacons: Jane McCarthy and Stephanie Brown Wilson. Three persons were ordained Elders: Tracy Ann Duncan, Jonathan Wesley Hall, and Joseph W. Hodges III.

On the morning of Saturday, May 21, the Memorial Service honored deceased bishops, clergy, and spouses. Bishop Peggy Johnson preached in a sermon entitled, “Blessed Comfort,” quoting Jesus from the Beatitudes that “Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted.” Noting the strange irony one after another in this passage, “this blessed or happy is not the happy of a funny movie or good meal, but is the deep abiding joy that depends on an invisible faith thing.” Bishop Johnson urged us to live and carry on the example the faithful lives of those we mourn, to honor them by being like them in this world.

Two churches received the Kim Jefferson Award for effective urban ministry: Iglesia Metodista Unida Nuevo Nacimiento, Elena Ortiz, pastor, and Grace United Methodist Church in Philadelphia, Grant Johnson, pastor. Two clergy and one lay person received the 2011 Denman Evangelism Award: Rev. David Woolverton, Rev. Steven T. McComas and Mr. Earl Rutledge.

In her laity address entitled The Joy of Christian Service, Dr. Mary White, Conference Lay Leader, said, “The truth is that joy comes in knowing that when we help others, we show our love for Jesus Christ.”

The Rev. Dr. Christopher Kurien presented the Superintendents’ Report.
Election of Delegates

The Eastern Pennsylvania Conference elected five delegates to the 2012 General Conference (GC), an additional five delegates for the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference (NEJ), plus three alternates. Those elected for General Conference, to be held April 24 – May 4, 2012, in Tampa, FL, will also attend the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference, July 18-20, 2012, in Charleston, WV. Those elected are:

**Laity:**

**GC:** Mary White, Judith K. Ehninger, Thomas Gibson, Ruth A. Daugherty, Brenda Tildon  
**NEJ:** Jordan Harris, Candace Carter, George Hollich, Elisabeth (Lisi) Santos Fisher, Ann Jacob  
**Alternates:** Lenora Thompson, Jason Perkowski, Jane Bonner

**Clergy:**

**GC:** James B. Todd, Robin M. Hynicka, Lillian C. Smith, Dawn Taylor-Storm, Tracy L. Bass  
**NEJ:** Doris K. Dalton, Alan J. Smith, Joseph DiPaolo, Christopher Kurien, Andrew Foster  
**Alternates:** Dorothy Watson-Tatem, Michele Wright Bartlow and Bronwyn Yocum

For more information:

**2012 General Conference:**  
[http://www.umc.org/site/c.lwL4KnN1LtH/b.6171105/k.1E2E/General_Conference_2012.htm](http://www.umc.org/site/c.lwL4KnN1LtH/b.6171105/k.1E2E/General_Conference_2012.htm)

**2012 Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference:**  

Delegates participated in mission projects as part of the “Journeying with the Poor” theme of the conference. The United Methodist Men distributed 50,000 pounds of potatoes in 50 lb. bags to delegates to take back to their churches or community food banks. Amid the noise of a clanging gong and motivating music, delegates and Youth Day participants worked together in assembly lines packaging dehydrated, high protein, and highly nutritious meals to be distributed to schools and orphanages in developing countries around the world by Stop Hunger Now.

Youth Day at Annual Conference, attended by over 100 youth on Saturday, May 21, featured motivating speaker, Sean McBride, and music by the Josh Blackmun Band. Youth put Bishop Johnson, Conference Secretary Rodney Miller, members of the Cabinet, and many others “in jail,” and raised monies for the Youth Service Fund by receiving “bail” donations.

A live video stream of the entire annual conference was available on the Internet, watched by over 1300 persons, seen from both the Conference website and its Facebook homepage. News
and photos were posted throughout the conference on both Facebook and Twitter (@epaumc). Interpretation in American Sign Language, assistive listening devices, and on-screen transcription of the spoken word were offered for Deaf and hard-of-hearing persons. A big-screen reader made written materials available to persons with visual disabilities. Prior to the opening of the conference, the Eastern Pennsylvania Renewal Fellowship led a prayer walk around the conference rooms. The Order of St. Luke held morning communion in the Prayer Room.

**Offerings** received during Annual Conference will go to these important ministries:
Imagine No Malaria and Hope for the Children - $8,519.41;
Scholarships for undergraduate and seminary students - $2,898.33; and

Worship Arts were coordinated by Mrs. Mary Smith. Rev. Lydia Munoz served as worship leader, accompanied by the worship band: Rev. Irving Cotto, Mr. Andres Cotto, and Rev. Chris Schiavino. A ten-foot high cross created of dry tree branches dominated the stage, and reflected the Opening Worship theme, “Renewing God’s Creation,” by gradually coming to life with greenery over the three days of the conference. The cross was designed and built by a young adult of the conference, Katie Naber, a previous recipient of conference undergraduate scholarships.

**Business**

The Eastern Pennsylvania Conference approved a motion to amend the Rules of Order, adding a new Article XVII with all articles following it to be re-numbered accordingly. The new article reads: “The Annual Conference shall not consider, debate, or vote on any General Conference-related resolution or proposed Disciplinary change unless submitted for endorsement by a Conference agency, board, or standing committee. Rather, the Conference Secretary shall instruct all others submitting such proposals to forward them directly to the General Conference Secretary without Eastern Pennsylvania Conference endorsement.”

As a result of this approval change to the Rules of Order, Resolutions 2011-3 and 2011-20 through 30 were not voted upon; persons submitting these Resolutions were instructed to submit them directly to the General Conference Secretary.

**Resolutions:**

2011-1 Simpson House Designated a Heritage Landmark, approved

2011-2 Alcohol and Privatization, approved

2011-4 Immigration Reform, approved
2011-5 Urging Gov. Corbett to tax Natural Gas Drilling, approved

    Friendly amendment: Line 22: Strike “local communities” and replace with “Department of Environmental Protection”

2011-6 Discontinuance of Cressona UMC, approved

2011-7 Discontinuance of Cookman UMC, approved

2011-8 Discontinuance of Tamaqua: Salem UMC, approved

2011-9 Discontinuance of Bustleton UMC, approved

2011-10 Merger of Easton: First and Easton: Calvary UM Churches, approved

2011-11 Property and Liability Insurance, approved

2011-12 Health Care, approved

2011-13 Mandatory Health Plan, approved

2011-14 Retiree Health Plan, approved

2011-15 Adoption Agreement to the Clergy Retirement Security Program (CRSP) for 2012, approved

2011-16 Conference Group Health Insurance Program, approved

2011-17 Rental/Housing Allowances for Retired or Disabled Clergypersons, approved

2011-18 Conference Advance Specials, approved with additions:

        Northwest District HUB $________

        Millersville Campus Ministry $10,000

        Hazleton Enlarged Ministries $30,000

2011-19 Relating to Salary/Benefits Recommendations for 2012, approved

2012 BUDGET

The Annual Conference approved the 2012 Budget of nearly $6 million with the following additions/changes:

Friendly amendment approved: #10. All thirteen billed funds are temporarily restricted funds to be used only for the specific purposes designated.
And motion approved: That CCFA will study the issue of ministry with the poor with the intention of designating 10% of the 2013 Budget to ministry with the poor.

The 2012 Connectional Ministries Fund (EPA Conference) budget of $3.4 million is down 2.9% from the $3.5 million budget for 2011. The General Church budget of $2.6 million for 2012 reflects giving of $1.3 million for World Service and $1.3 million for the General Church apportioned funds.

Membership/Attendance for 2010

Total Professing Members: 114,991

Average Weekly Attendance - Worship Services: 45,867

Average Weekly Attendance – Sunday Church School: 19,178

Thank you to our volunteer photographers: Rev. Jim Mundell, Ms. Sabrina Daluisio, and Mr. John Shannon.

For more information, including links to photographs, videos, sermon texts, resolutions, and more, go to: http://www.epaumc.org/news/stories/2011-annual-conference-summary.

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