

Annual Conference Summary 2013

227th Session of the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference UMC

May 16-18, 2013

Greater Philadelphia Expo Center

100 Station Avenue, Oaks, PA 19456



Nearly 1,000 members of The Eastern Pennsylvania Annual Conference met May 16-18, 2013 at the Greater Philadelphia Expo Center, Oaks, PA, with the theme, "Wholeness: Physical, Spiritual, Relational."

Click here: [Photos of Annual Conference](#)

Annual Conference opened with District Celebrations. Each of the six districts presented news of their churches' ministries, and the many outstanding ways churches are reaching out with the compassion of Christ in their communities.

Bishop Peggy Johnson led Opening Devotions, noting the 275th anniversary of Aldersgate Day on May 24, 2013, when John Wesley's heart was "strangely warmed." She encouraged listeners to be "fired up and ready to spread the Good News to the ends of the earth."

Dr. Mary White, Conference Lay Leader, presented the **Laitry Report**, entitled, "It's time to take a stand." She encouraged listeners, "It's time to be the church. It's time to fill the gap. It's time to put on our armor, get up out of the pews, and reach out to those that are un-churched in the community."

The Rev. Jim Todd presented the **District Superintendents' Report**, calling for all to be "relentlessly outwardly focused." He said, "Those we are called to serve are those outside the walls of our church. We bear the light of Christ and we need to be an example in our own lives."

The conference welcomed **Gary Harke**, executive director of the Pennsylvania Council of Churches. **Steve Drachler** announced organizational changes for United Methodist Advocacy in Pennsylvania, effective July 1, when it will move from being an organization affiliated with the annual conferences to becoming a ministry under the direct guidance and oversight of Pennsylvania's three bishops.

Conference Statistician Gordon Yocum presented **2012 statistical information**, reporting that although worship attendance declined over last 5 years on all districts – down 5-10% - the rate of decline has slowed, and 62 churches report an increase of 10% or more.

The Denman Award for outstanding evangelism efforts went to two persons: Aaron Smith (laity honoree) of Woxall Tabor UMC, who started a weekly Sunday evening service at Tabor with a young-adult focus; and Rev. Ralph Stevenson of Bethany UMC, who lives out his evangelistic call through personal interactions, leadership, and ministry, and whose church has grown to be the largest church in the northeast jurisdiction.

The Kim Jefferson Award for 2013, presented by the Office of Urban Ministry, went to New Vision United Methodist Church in Philadelphia. Rev. Gregory Holston, pastor, and Ms. Jean Kershaw, lay leader, accepted the award on behalf of the congregation. New Vision, a merger of Mt. Carmel and Tioga UMC Churches, reaches out through breakfast ministry, food pantry, a church-established cleaning company, Thanksgiving Ministry, and Christmas Ministry.

Bishop Violet Fisher preached for the Memorial Service on the evening of Thursday, May 16, when the conference remembered deceased bishops, clergy, spouses, lay members and staff. “Tonight we stand on the giant shoulders of those who have gone before us,” she exclaimed. “God, I thank you that they were faithful when they received \$40 a month; that they were faithful preaching on the street corners; that they were faithful serving in the soup kitchens. Question is: do we have the same zeal -the same zest - or do we do it because somebody expects it?” She added, “God’s word stands! There is a resurrection! God has the last defining word! We keeping on preaching and singing, and because of their example we can continue to proclaim the kingdom of God. They did it because they loved God and God’s people.”

Bishop Thomas Bickerton of the Western Pennsylvania Conference spoke on the morning of Friday, May 17. “Scripture longs to be put into action,” he said of the United Methodist Church’s Imagine No Malaria ministry whose purpose is to eliminate malaria death in Africa by 2015. To date, \$50 million has been raised toward the goal of \$75 million, which will provide resources, delivery systems and support in fighting malaria. “It’s not just about malaria; it’s about evangelism and giving people hope,” he said. “In Africa I have seen people who have nothing – but absolute joy. We have everything material but we struggle with joy. Sometimes I think when I visit a United Methodist church that they ought to replace the United Methodist symbol with a picture of Eeyore. I have been in a place where people dance on land mine fields, where people have no assurance of tomorrow, but they have an assurance that God will not leave them alone, that people across the world are committed bringing them health and hope.”

The Rev. Dr. Christopher Kurien, Director of Connectional Ministries, led the Celebration of Ministries. He noted the Evangelism training and the recent missions celebration. Dr. Kurien introduced new and returning program coordinators, and each one spoke of their area of conference ministry: new church development, as well as young people’s, urban, Latino, communications, and camping ministry. Camp directors shared news from the four conference camps and an inspiring video to promote the upcoming summer camping season.

In a Service of Recognition, the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference honored seventeen retiring clergy, representing 535 years of ministry: Homer U. Ashby, Jr., William Theodore Bach, Kenneth L. Beale, Jr., David W. Brown, James T. Ford, Daniel L. Hall, Joseph W. Hodges III, Larry D. Leister, Thomas McGill, Gary L. Meekins, Brian J. Reading, Nancy J. Shane, Robert E. Sheesley, Jr., Janet Sue Steger, Dorothy Watson Tatem, George Ayer Tigh, and Ronald A. Waite.

During the symbolic passing of the mantle, the retirees placed a handmade prayer shawl over the shoulders of each ordinand, and anointed and prayed with them.

On the evening of Friday, May 17, the **Service of Ordination** included the preaching of Bishop Peggy Johnson. (**Bishop Johnson's Message**) She remarked, "Tonight we ordain and commission souls for ministry. It is the highest and most holy night of the conference year in my opinion. Lives are being offered up to God for holy service and true personal sacrifice." She added, "I am here to tell you what you already know: you will encounter a goodly number of trials on the journey (you have already, I'm sure) but God, OUR GOD is surely your strength and your song." She noted three kinds of trials: personal rejection in time of trouble, times of overwork, and times of spiritual dryness. She recommended, "Strengthen yourself through prayer, through time away with God, and through the heart of worship and service."

One person was commissioned toward Deacons orders: Erin Antrim Maurer.

Eight persons were commissioned toward Elders orders: Helen I. Adams, Tawny Leigh Bernhardt, Andrea S. Brown, Sarah Jane Fernsler, Karyn Gerber Fisher, Jennifer Sara Sauerbrun, Jared Earl Stine, James H. Wilkin.

One person was ordained Deacon: Tiffany Lynn Bidwell.

Three persons were ordained Elders: Ethel Fullen Guy, Daniel E. Lebo, Eric Steven Yeakel.

Bishop Peggy Johnson noted the absence of the Rev. Joyce Mounds Anderson, who was to have been ordained this year, but who passed away on June 20, 2012.

On the morning of Saturday, May 18, Rev. Dr. Kirk B. Jones gave an inspiring message on "Self-Care Strategies" as part of the conference *Wholeness* theme. Dr. Jones reflected on the Bible story of Jesus in the midst of a storm. He realized at a point in ministry that he was in a storm – personal burnout. "The text was a breakthrough – and then it became a blueprint," he said. Dr. Jones shared three strategies to "burn bright without burning out": get to the back of the boat more often (to get away from the pressures of ministry); live at a sacred pace; and be as purposeful about your leisure as you are about your ministry.

As part of the *Wholeness* emphasis, five Deacons and one Elder took an HIV test to raise awareness that June is HIV Awareness month. Tai-chi classes and a prayer labyrinth offers times for physical and spiritual wholeness. Penn-Jersey Blood Services Region of the American Red Cross held a blood drive with a goal of 32 donations. Thirty-seven donors participated. As each donation helps up to three people, up to 111 persons were helped.

Delegates packaged 19,848 dehydrated, high protein, and highly nutritious meals to be distributed to schools and orphanages in Haiti by Stop Hunger Now.

Annual Conference communications included **live video streaming**, posts on the conference website, Facebook, and Twitter. 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:

Project Tariro: \$3,235.52

Scholarships: \$ 3,939.81

Imagine No Malaria (collected by a pesky mosquito): \$1,242.22

Imagine No Malaria - Offering: \$ 9,037.28
Camping Envelopes: \$2,690.00

Business

Conference members voted on four Constitutional Amendments, instructed to vote either yes or no. The results will be combined with voting from all the other conferences of the denomination. Results will be announced later in the year.

Here are the results of voting on the 2013 Resolutions:

2013-01 Relating the Amendment of the By-laws of United Methodist Metro Ministries, Inc. submitted by the Commission on Urban Ministries (formerly Urban Alliance). *Approved.*

2013-02 Resolution Relating to Creating a Mission ConneXion presented by the Cabinet. *Approved.*

2013-03 Resolution Relating the Archival Preservation of Closed Church and other Conference-Related Records presented by St. George's United Methodist Church, the EPC Historical Society, and EPC Commission on Archives and History. *Approved (with friendly amendments.)*

2013-04 Resolution Celebrating the 10th Anniversary of MPASA and The Mission Leadership of Dr. Revecca Yohadi presented by the Eastern PA Congo Partnership. *Approved.*

2013-05

Substitute Resolution 2013-05S was presented by a group of 27 persons. A vote allowed the substitute resolution to be held as the main resolution. The makers of Resolution 2013-05S then withdrew the resolution in the spirit of unity.

2013-06 Resolution Relating to the Racial Justice Act presented by EPC Church and Society Work Team and EPC United Methodist Women Mission Team. *Approved.*

2013-07 Resolution Relating to Continuing Education for clergy presented by Congregational Development Team and Board of Ordained Ministry. *Approved.*

2013-08 Relating to Rental/Housing Allowances for Retired of Disabled Clergypersons presented by the Conference Board of Pension and Health Benefits (Correction change "General Board" to "Conference Board." *Approved.*

2013-09 Pertaining to the Adoption Agreement to the Clergy Retirement Security Program (CRSP) for the Year 2014 presented by the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits. *Approved.*

2013-10 Resolution Concerning a Comprehensive Funding Plan for Benefit Obligations (Correction just above signature line no X because there is no section B). *Approved.*

2013-11 Resolution Concerning Retirement Plan Participation of One Quarter-time, Half-time and Three Quarter-time Clergy presented by the Conference Board of Pension and Health Benefits (with correction on line 71 word "salary" should be replaced with "plan compensation"). *Approved.*

2013-12 Related to Creation of Task Force to Review and Revise Housing Allowance Guidelines submitted by the Cabinet. *Approved.*

2013-13 Equitable Compensation submitted by Mark Moore, Chair of CEC. *Approved with friendly amendment (to add a study on gender and ethnicity.)*

2013-14S Resolution for Setting Up a Divestment Task Force presented by the Methodist Federation for Social Action, Bob Coombe. *Friendly amendment accepted and Approved.*

2013-15 Resolution Relating the Cross Racial and Cross Cultural Appointments presented by Commission on Religion and Race and Healing the wounds of Racism Core Team. *Approved.*

2013-16 Resolution Concerning Health Care presented by Dave Koch, President of the Board of Pensions and Health Benefits. *Approved.*

2013-17 Resolution for conference Advance Specials – June 1, 2013 to May 31, 2014 submitted by Rev. David J. Davis, CSGM Eastern Pennsylvania Conference. *Approved.*

2013-18 Relating to the Redistricting of the Eastern Pennsylvania Annual Conference submitted by the Blue Ribbon Committee on Redistricting. *Defeated (not approved.) The conference will continue with six districts.*

The Nominations Committee report was accepted, with additions to the Urban Ministry Team and some edits to the list.

The conference is thankful for the many talented musicians and vocalists who led music for the praise times and worship services throughout annual conference.

Budget

The 2014 Budget was approved (as related to six districts.) The 2014 budget includes \$2,899,339 for conference ministry, and \$2,395,272 for General Conference ministry, totaling \$5,294,611.

2012 Membership/Attendance

Membership stands at 113,192, down 2606 from 2011.

Sunday School attendance stands at 13592, down 841 from 2011.

(Please note: Laity Session and Clergy Sessions were held previously on Saturday, May 4.)

Thank you to volunteer reporters: Suzette James, Myra Maxwell, Mark Moore, Bob Shank, and Denise Harris; and to volunteer photographers: Jim Mundell, Sabrina Daluisio, and Paul C. Davis.

Videos of Annual Conference 2013 (to be posted): <http://www.ourchurchvideos.com/19482/epaumc/>

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