

COLUMBIA AREA REPORT

The 239,748 United Methodists in South Carolina are faithfully striving to fulfill our purpose of making disciples for Jesus Christ. During this quadrennium, the equipping and connecting of local churches for ministry has been the priority. To accomplish this purpose, coaching relationships are being established. The annual conference has focused on providing resources to assist and strengthen local churches in doing their ministry. Resourcing our local churches is gradually replacing the previous practice of offering conference-wide programs.

Each year, the annual conference has been centered around worship and mission. Through the assistance of Good News Television, we have been able to experience enhanced technology and media presentations. The location of the conference was moved to the Civic Center in Florence. More than 900 conference members engaged in hands on mission opportunities again this year. Through the generosity of the South Carolina United Methodists, the Water Project was completed to provide clean water at Old Mutare Mission in Zimbabwe. A geological study was conducted which mapped the underground water sources, a new reservoir was constructed, and the original reservoir and equipment was repaired. During the quadrennium, special mission offerings received during conference have been in excess of \$295,238. The faithful stewardship in our local churches has resulted in the increase of apportionment giving from 78.9 percent in 2004 to 86.9 percent in 2007.

In order to help our churches serve more effectively, several major transitions have occurred. During these four years, the Conference Council on Ministries officially became Connectional Ministries. In addition to the Appointive Cabinet, an Extended Cabinet has been established to provide guidance for the annual conference. The conference approved several additional staff positions. The employment of a Communications Director is enabling the conference to use media technology more effectively, to develop relationships with news media, and enhance better communications within and beyond the conference.

Six Congregational Specialists have been trained and deployed across the state. Each of these specialists is assigned to two districts and works directly with the local churches and superintendents of those districts. Without increasing the budget, additional funds have been available for Emerging Ministries because of a new funding approval process. It is anticipated that the addition of a Congregational Specialist concentrating on the African American churches will be able to address the needs of this significant constituency within our annual conference. We celebrate that there are more than 48,000 African American members in the South Carolina Conference.

Connectional Ministries and Congregational Development have worked in partnership to launch Natural Church Development as a conference-wide strategy to strengthen our churches. To date, 280 churches are engaged in self evaluation through a Natural Church Development Survey and are working to become healthier faith communities. The upcoming annual Bishop's School of Ministry is a continuing education event focusing on the eight quality characteristics of healthy churches. As a way to connect with one another, pastors and laity are being recruited and trained to serve as coaches. 85 pastors have received NCD training. Another 40 persons are engaged in Coach training through Coachnet. We believe that providing opportunities for our pastors to be involved in a coaching relationship will enhance clergy effectiveness.

Reaching new persons and establishing new faith communities is a priority for South Carolina. Four new church starts and the restart of a fifth congregation are averaging 685 new persons participating in their ministries. We are working to recruit strong congregations to parent new churches. In the fall of each year a four day Discernment Academy is held with 12 prospective church planters. Our goal is to plant six more new churches by July 1, 2010. We are committed to the development of new congregations in those areas of South Carolina where there has been significant population growth. Over the past 15 years the population of our state has grown by over 1,000,000 while our church membership has stayed virtually the same. I am grateful that our conference is committing over \$1,000,000 each year in the conference budget to fulfill this important ministry opportunity.

Rusty and I have been blessed beyond measure by the assignment to the South Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church. It has been an inspiration to get to know and serve beside the faithful lay and clergy of this great conference. I want to express a personal word of gratitude to my Administrative Assistant, Ms. Bettye Rivers, for her dedication and the gracious way she responds to the needs of this office and the conference.

What a joy it is to have the opportunity to be in ministry in South Carolina. As I have often said, "Nothing could be finer."

Mary Virginia Taylor
Resident Bishop

FLORIDA AREA REPORT

The 2004-2008 quadrennium was a time of significant change in the Florida Conference.

The quadrennium began with changes that no human planned. In 2004 three major hurricanes caused widespread property damage across the state, including more than half of the local churches. Subsequent to these disasters, the Florida Conference established its office of Disaster Recovery Ministry, which continues to serve communities affected by storms and other disasters. Since the hurricanes of 2004, the Florida Conference has strengthened its risk management program with new personnel, philosophy, and strategies. Reflecting these changes, the risk management program, by which the Florida Conference provides liability and property casualty insurance for all its churches, is called Ministry Protection. However, the cost of insurance in Florida continues to be a detriment to ministry. For example, in 2007, the churches paid more than four million dollars more for insurance than they had paid in 2006.

In the midst of natural disasters in 2004 the Florida Conference initiated a plan by the Cabinet for a new organization of districts. There was a successful transition from fourteen to nine districts with new corporations and structures. Each district has a Leadership Council that provides oversight and both a Committee on New Church Development and a Committee on Congregational Transformation. Also, each year the districts pool a percentage of their income to be available for common purposes, and the district superintendents share their budget plans and agree on criteria for district personnel policies.

At the same time that the Florida Conference re-organized the districts, it also replaced the Council on Ministries with a new system featuring a Leadership Connection and staff re-organization.

There have been twenty Conference Table events to address fundamental issues facing the Florida Conference. The topics have been very diverse, ranging from conflict management to the revision of "In Defense of Creation." From one Conference Table emerged the vision for the Center for Clergy Excellence, and from another, awareness of the need to develop lay leadership. A Conference Table identified the needs of children as a common social witness of the Florida Conference, and now the Conference is part of the Florida Partnership to End Childhood Hunger.

The Conference has both an office of New Church Development and an office of Congregational Transformation. New missions are begun every year with reliance upon healthy churches being the parent of new missions. Nineteen new missions will be started in 2008, and sixteen in 2009. Most of these are ethnic missions. As new churches are begun, the Conference is also leading congregations into an intentional process of transformation, employing teaching about the Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations and coaching in Re-Focus and Natural Church Development. Both offices have employed an Hispanic staff person to strengthen new church development and congregational transformation in Hispanic communities.

The Conference has approved an African American Comprehensive Plan for strengthening African American ministries, and the plan includes a new staff position in the office of Congregational Transformation.

During this quadrennium the Florida Conference has greatly strengthened its global mission. It continues its covenant with The Methodist Church in Cuba. It has signed a covenant with the Methodist Church in Haiti. The partnership with the East Angola Conference is strong and growing.

The Conference is attempting a new approach for financial advancement for capital and endowments. There is an on-going development office for the Conference in The United Methodist Foundation. In 2007 the Conference approved a campaign proposed by the Bishop's Capital Campaign Commission, *Together! Bringing Hope, Changing Lives*. Rather than to give goals to churches, major donors will be solicited with general solicitation of members to follow.

Florida is a dynamic setting of mission with a cosmopolitan population, rapid social change, and a hard secularity in major urban area such as Miami, Orlando, and Tampa. The Florida Conference continues to pray for the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit as the people called United Methodists make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Timothy W. Whitaker
Resident Bishop

HOLSTON AREA REPORT

In the fall of 2004 the people of the Holston Area began a prayerful quest to listen to each other and the Holy Spirit to discern what God's Vision is for us.

God envisions bold, passionate, and joyful communities of faith where the spiritual hunger to worship God and to serve Christ sets disciples on fire with Spirit-filled, risk taking love for all God's children until Holston Conference reflects the saving grace and redeeming justice of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The following is a list of the many ministry settings and umbrella headings under which we are living out this exciting Vision that God has breathed into the Holston Area.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT—this area is crucial to the fulfillment of God's Vision for the Holston area. In response to this need we have been hard at work offering opportunities for developing and discovering new leaders both laity and clergy.

- Camp Discovery—an event that averages about 30 participants designed to help youth and young adults discover God's call to Ordained Ministry.
- Resurrection—this event draws about 15,000 Middle School and Senior High Youth, many answer the call to Ordained Ministry.
- Divine Rhythm—about 650 young adults from college age up to age 35 gather for worship, fellowship and learning.
- Jubilation—draws about 300 older adults for worship, learning, training in leadership and fellowship.
- Minister's Convocation—has offered practical training in justice ministries, stewardship, evangelism, self care and continues to receive high marks from our clergy.
- Camp & Retreat Ministries—draws over 5,000 children and youth. One of the outgrowths of this has been the development of youth and young adult counselors that often see ministry as a committed layperson or clergy as an option for them. We train over 100 per year.
- Large Church Initiative—was offered in March of 2007 and drew over 300 from across the SEJ and from SCJ.
- Cokesbury Pastoral Leadership Academy—offered to fifteen clergy to help develop confidence and competencies for pastoral ministry. We plan to start phase two next year.

MISSIONS—continue to be supported at record levels by the people of Holston.

- Annual Conference Missions Offering—has raised over \$450,000 for missions efforts in Zimbabwe, Liberia, Alaska, Brazil and Sudan.
- Hands on Mission—has generated tons of school supplies, clothing, industrial school supplies, and other items for Alaska, Zimbabwe and Liberia.
- Church & Community Workers—now number six, the most employed by any annual conference.
- Youth Service Fund—was the top giver among annual conferences for 2007 and our youth are spear heading a campaign to raise \$200,000 for the Nothing But Nets Campaign.

CONGREGATIONAL DEVELOPMENT & REVITALIZATION—has sought to answer this need in the following ways:

- Natural Church Development—has led to the training of over 75 teams of NCD coaches now working with close to forty congregations.
- New Church Developments—are now underway in four locations with three of these being ethnic congregations and two mission situations.

SOCIAL JUSTICE MINISTRIES—are underway that speak to many of the ills that plague our society such as:

- Domestic Violence Task Force—now offers training for clergy and churches and help for victims.
- Health Care Task Force—was in dialogue with the governor of Tennessee around health care for the poor and working poor and offers workshops for local congregations.
- Green Task Force—speaks to environmental issues and seeks to help churches and families live environmentally friendly lives.
- Amachi Program—is designed to connect children of incarcerated parents with Big Brothers/Big Sisters.

We purchased a new office building to bring together our staff into one place and provide ourselves with a home for our ministry efforts for years to come. Our worship attendance continues to increase. Currently 11% of our clergy are under the age of 35, which gives us the largest percentage within the connection.

James E. Swanson, Sr.
Resident Bishop

LOUISVILLE AREA REPORT

The Louisville Area covers both the Kentucky Annual Conference and Red Bird Missionary Conference. Our conferences have emphasized the timeless values of worship, fellowship, stewardship and evangelism. We have lifted these values as essential in the formation of disciples of Jesus Christ.

Red Bird Missionary Conference

Our Mission: To minister to the spiritual, physical, educational and economic needs of people and to equip them to meet their God given potential.

Our Vision: To see Appalachian people living in union with Jesus Christ and empowered to transform their communities.

While Red Bird Missionary Conference receives mission support, it also believes the Gospel mandate to “go into all the world” through service and mission giving. In 2008 the Advance awarded the conference for “the most significant increase of church participation in 2007 in the Southeast Jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church.” Apportionments were paid at 100% during each year of the quadrennium. In 2005 and 2006 conference mission offerings totaling \$30,075 were given to Wesley Camp in Latvia. In 2007 the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference received the RBMC mission offering of \$15,170. In 2008 the mission offering of \$21,500 was given to “Light at The Dumpsite” of Phnom Penh, Cambodia. This is a generous accomplishment for the twenty seven churches and outreach centers and the personnel of the four mission institutions that comprise RBMC. 62% of the churches received 5-Star Giving certificates and 59% gave to all six Special Sunday offerings. Total church membership has increased during the quadrennium. Red Bird VIM teams went to several locations over three years in the wake of hurricane Katrina. Teams worked in the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference in 2007 and in Tennessee in 2008 to do tornado rehab work.

The conference Strategic Plan during 2004-2007 led to accomplishments in five areas: Adequate Resources for Mission, Drug Abuse Response Ministries, Training for Conference Mission Personnel, Building Self Esteem and Youth Ministry. As Red Bird Missionary Conference looks ahead, strengthening local churches, developing leaders, continuing drug abuse response ministries, and making effective disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world are the essential goals.

The sixteen clergy are organized into accountability and support groups. These are important for spiritual formation and mentoring. Candidates for ministry are being actively recruited and mentored for service in RBMC churches. The Appalachian Local Pastors School (ALPS) has become a success story among UM Course of Study Schools.

Red Bird Missionary Conference is blessed with dedicated missionaries, pastors, and laity leaders who give themselves tirelessly and unselfishly in service to Christ and his people in this part of southern Appalachia. Red Bird Missionary Conference is indeed making a difference!

Kentucky Conference

The Kentucky Conference is made up of 152,014 members in 12 districts. During the past quadrennium we saw a net gain of 106 members. While this is not a huge number it does reverse the trend of membership loss. There were 8,798 profession of faith in the Kentucky Conference during the past four years.

The Primary Task Team identified these priorities as the conference strives to be intentional about the mission and vision of the conference. They are:

- planting new churches
- developing effective leaders, both clergy and lay
- developing vital congregations in every place
- witnessing for justice in our conference and Commonwealth
- funding our Mission Covenant Together.

In 2006 we proposed a balanced budget to the Annual Conference for 2007 which was adopted. We paid 100% of our apportionments for the first time as a merged conference.

Outreach beyond our conference has included our continued partnership with the East Africa Conference. Many Volunteer in Mission Teams have gone to Uganda and Kenya. Currently we are partnering our 12 districts with the 6 districts in Uganda for salary support for their district superintendents. Individual churches in Kentucky have partnered with local churches to provide prayer and financial support. In spring of 2008 the children’s Hope for Africa Choir was our guests. They sang in each district of the conference as well at

Annual Conference for the Mission and Ministry Night. Our offering of over \$55,000 will be shared with East Africa, Red Bird Mission and Katrina Recovery.

Our conference initially responded to Hurricane Katrina with an outpouring of supplies and money. Churches in the Kentucky Conference continue to send work teams to the Gulf Coast. The Full Cabinet and I spent a week in Pass Christian, Mississippi on one of these trips and discovered the needs are still great.

Through an initiative of the Board of Ordained Ministry, the conference has developed a clergy evaluation tool that was introduced in 2007. This was followed by a congregational assessment tool developed by the Connectional Ministries and New Church and Congregational Development Teams. Training of Staff Parish Relations Committee and clergy will continue into the next quadrennium. Opportunities for congregational assessment are also available through our Natural Church Development initiative.

Over the last four years the Louisville Area has made meaningful strides in making disciples of Jesus Christ. We constantly examined our strategy and redirected our resources for effectiveness, particularly as it relates to the local church. The love and grace of God through the people called United Methodist in Kentucky continues to impact the church for the transformation of the world and for this we give thanks.

James R. King, Jr.
Resident Bishop

MISSISSIPPI AREA REPORT

The Mississippi Conference celebrates God's radiant power and our place in God's unfolding providence: *Arise, shine, for your light has come!* God's light shines in darkness, God's light shines through us, God's light leads us onward.

We identified together in the fall of 2004 areas of focus for our life and ministry. We sensed the convergence of God's leading across The United Methodist Church as we embraced wellness of clergy and laity and congregations, new church development, development of spiritual leaders, racial reconciliation, ministry with the poor, ministry with children and youth, growth in stewardship of our lives and the earth and our resources, and overflowing mission in our communities and the world.

The destructive power of Hurricane Katrina on August 29, 2005, shaped us in lasting ways. 70,000 homes were destroyed in south Mississippi. 340 United Methodist Churches sustained damage, with 20 severely damaged and 7 destroyed. United Methodist places of ministry, including Gulfside Assembly, Seashore Assembly, Seashore Mission, and Moore Community House, were destroyed.

Ministry continued in amazing ways despite the destruction of ministry facilities. Three years later, 12,000 families have returned home through the efforts of The United Methodist Church. Every United Methodist Church in Mississippi continues in ministry. Over 7,000 Mississippi families live in FEMA housing. We are grateful for the partnership of the Southeastern Jurisdiction in the long, continued recovery on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

As the quadrennium draws to a close, we celebrate:

- the planting of nine new churches and the creation of a School for Congregational Development for future church planters and leaders of church renewal.
- Congregations for Children, an interfaith legislative advocacy initiative making a difference in the lives of Mississippi children.
- wellness initiatives, with accountability through the Amazing Pace pedometer program and quantifiable improvements in clergy wellness indicators.
- A2 congregational self-assessments (drawn from the qualities of Christian community founds in Acts 2:42-47) and the development of resources for congregational development and coaching developed in response to the expressed needs of congregations.
- racial reconciliation, with four "Journeys Toward the Light" spiritual pilgrimages each year to places where difficult stories of the Civil Rights Movement are told, prayers offered and reconciliation experienced.
- Chabadza partnership with the Zimbabwe Area of the United Methodist Church, partnership with the Methodist Church of South Africa, the establishment of the Society of St. Andrew Gleaning Network in Mississippi.
- a new generation of leadership in our local churches, districts and annual conference as we change to reach more people, more younger people and more diverse people.

Mike and I give thanks for the gift of our assignment to the Mississippi Area, and for the loving support and partnership of the United Methodist people of Mississippi.

Hope Morgan Ward
Resident Bishop

NASHVILLE AREA REPORT

The Nashville Area is composed of the Memphis and Tennessee Annual Conferences. Each Cabinet consists of seven districts. The Area has had parallel ministries and in some instances projects have been done jointly.

The Cabinets of the two Annual Conferences went to Mexico on a mission trip designed to make both Cabinets bilingual. Both Cabinets also did work as a VIM team on the coast of Mississippi. This year both Cabinets met at the same place at the same time for Spring Cabinet meetings. Each Cabinet met in separate rooms to work on appointments. During our common times as we began each day and during breaks, both Cabinets worked on possible appointments from the other Conference. This year we made nine cross Conference appointments and one cross racial appointment which was also a cross Conference appointment.

After many years, The Reverend Barbara Garcia retired as the Executive Assistant to the Bishop. We are deeply grateful for her many years of unselfish service to each of the three Bishops she assisted. The Reverend Roger Hopson was named as the Executive Assistant to the Bishop. The Reverend Hopson began his current appointment to the Episcopal office in July of 2007. Both Conferences are deeply grateful for the ministry of The Reverend Garcia and The Reverend Hopson.

The Area has focused on clergy health with many clergy living more healthy lifestyles. It is hoped better clergy health will lead to more effective leadership in our local churches and a reduction in clergy health insurance premiums.

The Area has also focused on reading through the Bible every year. Pastors and laity have been encouraged to use the Life Journal which is also on each Conference's web site.

Both Conferences are working hard to raise the level of apportionment giving. Many of our local outreach ministries are being assisted by the Area Foundation to establish endowment funds for future funding of those ministries. I am grateful for Dr. Vin Walkup and his leadership in the Area Foundation for the work he has done to move both Conference outreach ministries in the establishment of endowment funds.

The Tennessee Annual Conference has had an increase in worship and membership each of the last four years. While the Memphis Annual Conference has not shown increases in worship and membership, there is much work to reverse the trend of decline in the Memphis Annual Conference.

Plans are underway to start new churches in our urban areas of Memphis especially among the poor and the working poor. Methodist Healthcare Systems has pledged to put a wellness person with each new church start pastor. Each new church in these urban areas of Memphis will have faith and wellness as part of the beginning DNA. We are hopeful we can change the way of life among many of the poor and working poor in the city of Memphis. If this is successful, then this will be replicated in the urban areas of Nashville and other towns and cities in both Annual Conferences.

Martin College and Lambuth University continue to be outstanding centers of higher education in the Area. We are fortunate to have two such fine institutions which are so closely connected to the United Methodist Church.

While there have been many new beginnings in each Conference, there is still much to be done for each Conference to be healthy, growing and paying 100% of their apportionments. We are committed to being an Area where United Methodism is vital and growing.

Eileen and I want to express our gratitude to the Nashville Area for the hospitality and constant prayer support we have received. We feel so blessed to be among God's people called United Methodists in the Nashville Area.

Richard J Wills, Jr.
Resident Bishop

NORTH GEORGIA AREA REPORT

During the past four years, the North Georgia Conference has continued its steady pattern of membership growth, adding over 16,000 new members, to close 2007 with 350,087. Since 1996 we have grown by over 65,000 members to become the largest conference in the United States. 2007 realized a net gain in membership of 3,657. With the planting of seven new congregations in June 2008, the North Georgia Conference has now started 98 new churches since 1996. New Church Development and Evangelism remains our highest priority. The opportunities for inviting persons into a deep abiding relationship with Christ are abundant in the North Georgia Area. Our Church Development Office has done a magnificent job of identifying, recruiting, training, coaching and deploying clergy who have a passion to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Our Director of New Church Development, Dr. Parks Davis, has been a fundamental part of the overall success of our program. Under his leadership we have made major strides to reach new ethnic minorities. For example this year we will be establishing our first Vietnamese congregation in Atlanta and another strong Korean congregation in West Point, Georgia. Atlanta is an international city and the world has come to us. New Church Development has been instrumental in helping us to be good neighbors to these persons who come now to live beside us and with us.

Our Area has been privileged to launch several new mission efforts during this past quadrennium. Plans are currently being made for a Capital Fund Campaign to benefit Camp Wesley, a ministry focused primarily on children who live in the urban area, and Simpsonwood Conference and Retreat Center, where our United Methodist Center is located. In 2007, the Conference voted to invite a private company, Hotel Equities, to run the daily operations of our Conference and Retreat Center. Since that important move was made Simpsonwood is growing in its capacity to meet its primary mission and also proceeding toward greater financial stability. I am grateful in particular for the leadership of our Treasurer, Mr. Keith Cox, and the Board of Directors of Simpsonwood in these important efforts.

North Georgia continues to be a leader in communications and technology under the guidance of Dr. Jamie Jenkins, Executive Assistant to the Bishop. Our staff, led by Mr. Tim McDaniel, has been able to provide cutting edge web-based communications, advertising and video production enhancing the ministry of our Area. During this past General Conference over 40,000 people watched live streaming of the events over our website.

The Board of Laity, under the guidance of Ms. Lyn Powell, has made tremendous progress in the past four years, taking their own responsibilities for leadership very seriously. The Board has strengthened the laity programs throughout our Area. Their premiere lay training program called *Leadership UMC* continues to develop young adults who are now providing leadership at all levels of our Annual Conference.

North Georgia continues to be one of the strongest Annual Conferences in all of United Methodism. I am particularly thankful for the rich system of United Methodist institutions which are within the bounds of our Annual Conference, including Emory University and Candler School of Theology, Gammon Theological Seminary, Paine College, LaGrange College, Clark Atlanta University, Reinhardt College and Young Harris College. Aldersgate Homes for persons with developmental problems, the Children's Home and Murphy Harpst, which reach out to hurting children and families of our Area, Action Ministries, the Housing and Homeless Council, and Wesley Community Centers are all an integral part of our overall ministry. Wesley Woods, which is our ministry to older adults, and its relationship to Emory HealthCare, is a premier model for such institutions throughout the country.

During the past twelve years, Jennifer and I have been honored to be associated with the North Georgia Annual Conference. It has been a high privilege for me to serve here. Of my thirty years of ordained ministry in the United Methodist Church, twelve of them have been in North Georgia. As we leave this Area this year, we leave with deep gratitude for all the kindness that has been shared with us. A part of our hearts will always be in the red clay of Georgia. Special thanks to my administrative assistant, Ms. Chris Selleck. Chris has served with me for the past eleven years. Her ministry to me, my family, and this conference has been wonderful evidence of God's rich grace in our lives. Special thanks also to Dr. Ed Tomlinson, who served as my Executive Assistant for eight years. Ed's support and guidance has been invaluable to me.

I pray that the years to come will see North Georgia become all that God envisions it to be. It has been a great joy to serve with the laity and clergy of this outstanding Area.

Lindsey Davis
Resident Bishop

RALEIGH AREA REPORT

The Apostle Paul reminds us to “live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Philippians 1:27). This desire to have our lives reflect the Presence of Christ is manifest in an abundant and vital local church ministry. During this quadrennium, we have established 13 new congregations and have witnessed our membership grow to 237,159, an increase of 3,103 members. We continue to believe that every congregation can be a fruitful, vibrant, healthy missional and evangelistic congregation regardless of size.

Our desire to live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ is also reflected in the efforts of the North Carolina Conference to pay 100% of World Service Apportionments for each year of 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008. Congregational leadership has continued to be a primary focus of our work with local churches as we affirmed our conference mission statement, “Healthy Congregations and Effective Leaders in Every Place Making Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World.” Toward this end the Raleigh Area has established an Academy of Leadership Excellence. The initial efforts to establish this leadership academy was led by a gift of \$1,000,000. Our Annual Conference has invited church leaders, clergy and lay, into a conversation to focus on effective leadership and healthy congregations.

The conference has also emphasized its attention to our comprehensive plan of inclusiveness, leading to the creation of a Director of Hispanic Ministries. This conference initiative is paralleled by continued support of clergy families through our Clergy Counseling and Consultation Services offered to strengthen and nurture our churches.

A new partnership has been created between the North Carolina Conference, Western North Carolina Conference, The Duke Endowment, and Duke Divinity School, as we focus attention on thriving rural churches. This partnership hopes to identify pastoral leadership dedicated to serving our rural congregations and churches of small membership. In addition, this same partnership will focus increased attention on factors that contribute to a clergy health initiative, believing that healthy clergy will be more productive in offering long term leadership to our churches.

The youth and young adults of the North Carolina Conference meet annually for their Youth Pilgrimage with more than 6,000 youth gathering each year to affirm their desire to live lives worthy of the gospel of Christ. Every congregation has moved to embrace Safe Sanctuaries in order to create safe environments for children, youth and families.

Finally, the North Carolina Conference has completed a conference-wide structure review affirming our desire to align all resources with our vision and the guidance of our Council of Bishops to be led by the Seven Pathways for ministries of transformation.

Living our lives in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ offers much to celebrate in the common ministry shared by churches and pastors in the Raleigh Area. May we seek the power of the Holy Spirit to remain faithful to our calling and baptism. Amen.

Alfred W. Gwinn, Jr.
Resident Bishop

RICHMOND AREA REPORT

The Virginia Conference is comprised of 18 geographical districts, from the Shenandoah mountains to the Eastern Shore, from Northern Virginia bordering Washington, D.C. to Southside bordering North Carolina, from the capital city of Richmond to the Tidewater area. United Methodists number 338,000 persons in over 1,200 churches.

The Conference continues to be guided by its vision statement: “We envision churches where all God’s people are welcomed at table, nurtured and transformed to be Christ to others in the world.” We have lived into a new Common Table structure this quadrennium. Out of that leadership table came a Challenge to the Annual Conference which has been embraced- “Let’s Get Growing! More People, More Young People, More Diverse People – All for Jesus!” At the 2006 Annual Conference we adopted a goal of establishing 250 new faith communities in 30 years in Virginia. We are exploring a Conference-wide Capital Campaign to assist in reaching our goal. One of our ongoing challenges in a large, diverse Conference is to faithfully align our mission and ministry resources to live into God’s dream for us of being fruitful, multiplying disciples of Christ.

We continue to support our own Initiatives of Hope partnerships with our Methodist friends in Mozambique and Brazil. Teams from all 3 areas have gone back and forth across the globe in strengthening our relationships and partnerships. A yearly average of 295,728 in annual conference offerings over the quadrennium helps sustain our partnerships. In addition, Advance special giving in our Conference remains in the top three in the denomination.

We have organized 18 new church starts this quadrennium. Of these, 10 have been targeting ethnic populations. Of these 10, 6 are mission starts across the Conference to respond to a growing population that is highly diverse in the Commonwealth.

Our clergy and laity have been resourced by the Lewis Center for Leadership and Dr. Lovett Weems and also by GBOD staff on a contractual basis. We are blessed to have both a Stockton Academy for Evangelism and Goodson Academy for Preaching that are additional leadership resources in strengthening our skills in ministry. In addition, a Joe E. Pennel, Jr. Endowment is being developed to focus on leadership resourcing for clergy and laity.

As we continue to live into our vision, we embrace the 4 Focus Areas that have emerged for The United Methodist Church: 1) developing Christian leaders 2) creating new faith communities 3) ministry with the poor; and 4) stamping out diseases of poverty.

It is a privilege and humbling task to live and serve among Virginia United Methodists. May we continue to offer our best for the cause of Christ and the world.

Charlene P. Kammerer
Resident Bishop

SOUTH GEORGIA AREA REPORT

Margaret and I have been richly blessed to serve in the South Georgia Area for these last two quadrennia. We are deeply grateful to God for this holy privilege.

The South Georgia Annual Conference began this quadrennium by living into God's vision, which had been prayerfully discerned and articulated near the end of the previous quadrennium. The vision statement, "God envisions faithful, fruitful and bold congregations and ministries passionately growing mature disciples of Jesus Christ who are living vessels of the Holy Spirit's desire and miraculous power to redeem every soul and circumstance," gave focus to all our efforts.

The interventions and initiatives generated by our faithful response to God's vision are very much aligned with the **Seven Pathways** recently articulated by the Council of Bishops and embraced by the 2008 General Conference.

Developing New Congregations and Transforming Existing Congregations: The Office of New and Revitalized Congregational Development has completed its seventh year in existence. Currently, eight new congregations are growing and thriving in South Georgia. A ninth new congregation is being launched this summer with the appointment of a pastor to begin a new church in Statesboro, GA. Eleven churches are engaged in intentional revitalization efforts. Two groups of Natural Church Development coaches have been trained and are beginning to work with 62 additional congregations in a program jointly sponsored by the Office of Connectional Ministries and the Office of New and Revitalized Congregational Development.

Developing Clergy and Lay Leadership: South Georgia has used many different approaches to develop clergy and lay leaders to enhance disciple-making. A Bishop's Day Apart has been offered twice during the quadrennium. Transition workshops are now offered to clergy as they prepare to move to a new appointment. Sexual Ethics workshops and Safe Sanctuaries workshops have been offered across the conference in a effort to better prepare clergy for effective service in the Church. An annual "Pathways to a Healthy Church" event is held offering training for laity and clergy. Each year's event offers about 45-50 workshops with 500-600 leaders being better equipped to offer leadership in their local church. Other training opportunities for laity during the quadrennium included a Lay Leadership Academy, a LAOS retreat, two Black Church Summits, and many other lay speaker training opportunities. All of these events for clergy and laity have reinforced a **Wesleyan Model of Reaching and Forming Disciples**.

Reaching and Transforming the Lives of a New Generation of Children: South Georgia has long been known for having a dynamic ministry with children and youth. The conference-sponsored camping program has grown tremendously during the past quadrennium. In addition to the summer camps, the Office of Connectional Ministries has sponsored two Confirmation retreats each year that supplements the confirmation experience young people receive in their local churches. In the last quadrennium over 2,600 young people have been guided toward professing their faith in Jesus Christ through these retreats.

Eliminating Poverty in Community with the Poor: The South Georgia Annual Conference has many local church ministries creatively working in community with the poor to eliminate poverty and transform their lives. Additionally, our mission agencies connect with many people living whose life circumstances are shaped by poverty. Simple, loving and generous gestures offered through living vessels are being used by God in ways that redeem souls and circumstances. Globally, a partnership has been solidified with the East Africa Annual Conference during this quadrennium. The benefits of genuinely being in community and in partnership has benefited both East Africa and South Georgia in untold ways. Our economic abundance has helped raise the level of care for fragile children. Their spiritual abundance has helped increase our faith in the Living God.

Expanding Racial Ethnic Ministries: Over the last quadrennium, South Georgia has increased its racial ethnic ministries. The growing Latino population has presented need and opportunity to expand our outreach to the Hispanic community. Currently, South Georgia has 17 mission congregations spread across our Annual Conference. Our African-American congregations have had

opportunities for enrichment by engaging in two Black Church Summits for leadership development. These conference-sponsored summits were in addition to the participation of several congregations in the Strengthening the Black Church for the 21st Century. Our Korean congregations have experienced the challenges of ministering to their second and third generations which were born in the United States. These efforts have been enhanced by the conference's support of, and encouragement to participate in, the retreats and training events sponsored by the jurisdiction.

South Georgia's pursuit of God's vision has generated many signs of fruitfulness. We give thanks to God for giving us the opportunity to serve and the ability to discern where souls and circumstances are being redeemed. Each experience stimulates and expands our faith, and invites all of us to trust and serve with greater boldness.

B. Michael Watson
Resident Bishop

Committee on Episcopacy Report

Report No. 1

Subject: Episcopacy Committee Members

Number of Members of Committee: 26
 Number Present When Action Was Taken: 26
 Number Voting for the Report: 26
 Number Voting Against the Report: 0
 Number Abstaining: 0

Since the 2004 session of the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference there have arisen four vacancies in the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference Committee on Episcopacy. In accordance with Paragraph 522.1 of *The Book of Discipline* (2004), the conference delegations involved have nominated persons to fill those vacancies. We therefore submit the following persons for your election as members of the committee, with service to continue through this 2008 Jurisdictional Conference:

- Thomas M. Berlin, Virginia Conference, replacing James C. Logan, who resigned on June 27, 2007,
- Paul L. Leeland, North Carolina Conference, replacing Sam Wynn, who resigned on June 29, 2008,
- James L. Branscome, Virginia Conference, replacing Darlene Amon, who resigned on July 3, 2008, and
- Sue Brunk, Red Bird Conference, replacing Joyce Sizemore, who resigned on July 15, 2008.

Report No. 2

Subject: Election of Bishops

Number of Members of Committee: 30
 Number Present When Action Was Taken: 30
 Number Voting for the Report: 30
 Number Voting Against the Report: 0
 Number Abstaining: 0

Paragraph 522.3d of *The Book of Discipline* (2004) places upon the jurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy the responsibility of determining the number of effective bishops eligible for assignment. We have determined that the current number of active bishops in the Southeastern Jurisdiction—thirteen—is within the limits prescribed by Paragraph 405.2.

We note, in accordance with Paragraph 409.1, that one of the active bishops of the Southeastern Jurisdiction—Bishop J. Lawrence McCleskey—has elected to retire at this session of the jurisdictional conference under the provisions of Calendar Item #184 enacted April 28, 2008 by General Conference even though he has not reached the new age specified for mandatory retirement. No additional active bishops have notified the Council of Bishops of their intention to voluntarily retire at the end of the current quadrennium in accordance with Paragraph 409.2.

We further note that the Southeastern Jurisdiction College of Bishops and the Committee on Episcopacy voted not to request a fourteenth bishop for the upcoming quadrennium, and that under the provisions of Calendar Item #790 enacted April 29, 2008 by General Conference a fourteenth bishop will continue to be an option for our jurisdiction in 2012.

We therefore recommend that one (1) bishop be elected by the 2008 Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference and, in conformity with Paragraph 406.2b, that an elder be declared elected a bishop when that elder has received the votes of 60% of the delegates casting valid ballots in the jurisdictional conference.

We further recommend that September 1, 2008 be established as the date newly assigned bishops should be in their new areas with each outgoing bishop coordinating with the incoming bishop a date for moving.