

GPconnect

Connecting United Methodists across the Great Plains

Winter 2014



In this edition of GPconnect:

TiM: equipping future church leaders
Education Partnership case studies
Annual Conference Session prep



Great Plains
UNITED METHODISTS

Kathryn Witte

Editor

Rachel Moser

Communications coordinator

Cindy Kelly

Communications coordinator

Nick Kumpula

Media producer

RoxAnn Delisi

Circulation

"GPconnect" (ISSN 0194-7761 USPS #376-540) is published four times a year (Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter) by the Great Plains United Methodist Conference, 3333 Landmark Circle, Lincoln, NE 68504; phone 402-464-5994 or 800-435-6107; fax 402-464-6203. Periodicals postage paid at Lincoln, Nebraska, and at additional mailing offices.

Postmaster: Send address changes to GPconnect, 3333 Landmark Circle, Lincoln, NE 68504.



Letters to the editor

"GPconnect" welcomes letters from its readers. All letters should be limited to 200 words, signed and include the author's name, address and church affiliation. Letters should address the mission and ministry of the church. Editing and publication of letters are at the discretion of the editor and as space allows. Editorial opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the Great Plains United Methodist Conference. Columns and letters to the editor are the views of that writer and not necessarily of "GPconnect" or the Great Plains Conference. Letters to the editor may be posted in the weekly "GPconnect" email blast. Please send letters to:

GPconnect - Print

3333 Landmark Circle

Lincoln, NE 68504

email: info@greatplainsumc.org

fax: 402-464-6203

Circulation

Send any print circulation changes to rdelisi@greatplainsumc.org. Include both old information and new. If you would like to stop receiving "GPconnect" - print, please include complete address information. If you would like to receive the PDF version via email, go to greatplainsumc.org/subscription.

Cover photo

Dr. John Holbert speaks to Great Plains clergy during the 2013/2014 Great Preaching Studio. Great Preaching consists of five sessions — three retreats and two regional gatherings. See story on page 9 for more information. Photo by Kathryn Witte.



Bishop Scott J. Jones

View the bishop's blog at
greatplainsumc.org/bishopsblog

The spiritual value of curiosity

United Methodists believe in prevenient grace.

Most of us understand that grace is the unmerited love of God. 1 John 4:8 teaches us that "God is love." God loves everyone and desires that everyone should find salvation through Jesus Christ. "Prevenient" has Latin roots. "Pre" means before, and "veni" means come, so prevenient grace is the grace of God active in our lives before we are aware of it. We know that God is a big God. As Paul said to the people of Athens, God is the one "in whom we live and move and have our being." (Acts 17:28) When you worship such a big God whose very nature is love, then it makes sense that this loving God is actively at work saving the world in ways we don't yet know.

For all of these reasons, I believe that curiosity about God's activity in the world has great spiritual value. It is first and foremost an act of humility. As the priest said to Rudy in the movie of the same name, "Son, in 35 years of religious study, I have only come up with two hard, incontrovertible facts: there is a God, and...I am not Him." I am deeply aware that my knowledge of God is quite limited. I trust what the Bible teaches, but I know there is much more to God than what has been revealed in Scripture.

Second, I want to find out what God is up to in the world. Years ago, on the advice of Bishop Dick Wills, I quit praying "God, please bless what I am doing." Now, one of my daily prayers is "God, help me be a part of what you are blessing." I want to discern the movement of the Holy Spirit so that I can make choices that align myself with God's will for the salvation of the world.

For missionaries, the spiritual value of curiosity is very high. When a missionary arrives in a foreign country, they are not taking Christ to a place where he is not already at work. Prevenient grace means that the Holy Spirit has already been at work among those people long before the first Christians arrive. Thus, they should start by asking, "What has God already been doing in this place?" That was Paul's method in Athens. He pointed to the altar to an unknown God, quoted from the Greek's own poets, and then said, "What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you." (Acts 17:23)

For lay people who want to grow their churches, curiosity about the work of the Holy Spirit is also very important. Each reader of this article should see herself or himself as a missionary, because there are hundreds and thousands of non-believers in your neighborhood, town or county. We should be curious about the spiritual needs of such persons, about their questions and struggles and about the ways in which they are being touched by the grace of God.

For clergy, we have to balance two competing values. On the one hand, we have a gospel that needs to be shared with others. We have some answers that others need to hear. Yet, which answers we give and how we communicate them depend on the questions being asked. So, on the other hand, we need to find out what God is already doing in the life of the other person so we can make our best contribution to their spiritual growth and development.

As I watch children — especially toddlers — explore their worlds, I know they are very curious and want to learn as much as they can. Surely that is part of what Christ meant when he said, in Luke 18:17 "Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."



Bishop Scott J. Jones,
Resident Bishop
Great Plains United Methodist Conference

[@Extreme_Center](https://twitter.com/Extreme_Center)

From your lay leader

Looking forward

As we approach a new year in the life of our Great Plains Conference, I'm filled with a great sense of gratitude for this past one, our first year as a new conference. We've come a long way together as United Methodists from Kansas and Nebraska, working together so that our churches continue outreach and ministry in their communities. I'm so proud of the work we are doing and continue to do.



Courtney Fowler

One area in particular that I am so proud of is our education partnerships with local schools which continue to bless our children, churches and communities. I'd especially like to lift up Ogden Elementary School in Ogden, Kansas, who recently earned a National Blue Ribbon as an Exemplary Achievement Gap Closing School and the Rev. Diana Chapel for her efforts in building school-community relationships through Ogden Friendship House UMC. Congratulations on a well-deserved honor! I know this is just one of many examples of the great blessings that can arise from these partnerships. I encourage you and your church community to explore how you can build a relationship with your local schools.

As we look to 2015, it's going to be another busy year for the Great Plains Conference. I hope you'll make plans to attend Annual Conference next June in Wichita, Kansas, where we will be electing delegates to General and Jurisdictional Conference — an important piece of our United Methodist denomination. As the world unfolds outside our church walls, we see our many opportunities to be part of Christ's work in the world, connecting all of us together.

I hope the recent holiday season was a blessing to you and your family and that 2015 is filled with God's abounding grace.

Courtney Fowler
Conference Lay Leader

Conference events are posted
at greatplainsumc.org/events

Conference events

Jan. 3-4

The OneEvent, Grand Island, Nebraska

Jan. 9-10

Candidacy Summit, Emporia, Kansas

Jan. 10

Next Steps Phase One training webcast

Jan. 18

Human Relations Day Sunday

Jan. 19

Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Jan. 20-22

New Church Planter Incubator,
Lincoln, Nebraska

Jan. 21-22

Orders and Fellowship,
Lincoln, Nebraska

Jan. 28-Feb. 7

Holy Land tour with Bishop Jones

Feb. 8-9

Kansas LEAF, Topeka, Kansas

Feb. 14

Bishop's Confirmation Rally,
Lincoln, Nebraska

Feb. 14

Nebraska Ecumenical Legislative Day,
Lincoln, Nebraska

Feb. 16-17

Great Preaching for the Great Plains,
Wichita, Kansas

Feb. 21

Next Steps Phase One training webcast

Feb. 27

Response Team training,
Lincoln, Nebraska

Feb. 28

Volunteers in Mission (VIM) training,
Gothenburg, Nebraska

Feb. 28

Response Team training,
Topeka, Kansas

March 3

Boundary Trainer training,
Lincoln, Nebraska

March 7

Bishop's Confirmation Rally,
Camp Comeca, Cozad, Nebraska

March 7

Volunteers in Mission (VIM) training,
Conway Springs, Kansas

March 14

Next Steps Phase One training webcast

March 15

One Great Hour of Sharing Sunday

March 20-21

Connecting Council meeting,
Wichita, Kansas

March 26-27

New Church Planter Incubator,
Leawood, Kansas

March 28

Bishop's Confirmation Rally,
Wichita, Kansas

2015 Annual Conference Session

The 2015 Great Plains Annual Conference Session is scheduled for June 10-13, and will be held at the Century II Performing Arts and Convention Center (225 W. Douglas Ave., Wichita, KS 67202). The theme, "Though Many, One," will focus on unity in the midst of controversy and change. The guest speaker, Ms. Stephanie Anna Hixon, is the executive director of JustPeace. The JustPeace Center was created to assist United Methodist congregations resolve conflicts in ways that lead to the building of community.

Bishop Bruce Ough, bishop of the Dakotas-Minnesota Episcopal Area and president-elect of the Council of Bishops, will be the guest preacher for the memorial and ordination worship services. His ministry, through his writing and teaching, has encouraged congregations to work together to lead others to vibrant faith.

The 2015 conference agenda will include voting for delegates for the 2016 General Conference and the 2016 Southcentral Jurisdictional Conference. General and

Delegate profiles may be submitted starting Jan. 1, with a deadline of March 1. Profiles may be submitted online, by mail or email. Please check the Annual Conference Session page on the conference website on or after Jan. 1, if you plan to submit a profile. Blank profiles will be mailed to all lay members for whom we have no email address on file by Jan. 6.

Petitions (to send to General Conference) and resolutions (for action by the Great Plains Conference) may be submitted to gpsecretary@greatplainsumc.org. They may also be mailed to 3333 Landmark Circle, Lincoln, NE 68504. A strict deadline of March 13, is in place to ensure organization and clarity. Guidelines for submission of petitions and resolutions can be found at greatplainsumc.org/petitionsandresolutions.

Many hotel rooms are set aside for this large event

at several surrounding hotels. A discounted group rate is negotiated for the "United Methodist Conference." Reservations must be made by May 8, to receive the discounted rate.



Photo provided by Dakotas-Minnesota Area.
Bishop Bruce Ough



Photo provided by JustPeace.
Stephanie Anna Hixon



Jurisdictional Conferences are held every four years and are important parts of being United Methodist. General Conference will be held in Portland, Oregon, on May 10-20, 2016. The Great Plains Conference will host the 2016 Southcentral Jurisdictional Conference in Wichita, Kansas, on July 13-16, 2016, with the theme, "Rejoice in the Harvest."

Clergy and lay members of annual conference do not need to be nominated to be considered as a delegate to General Conference, but can add their names as person interested by submitting a profile. Additionally, names can be added at the annual conference without prior submission of a profile. The voting process approved by the Connecting Council is posted at greatplainsumc.org/electionprocess.

Connect online
www.greatplainsumc.org



To view a listing of hotels, guidelines to submit petitions and resolutions, voting procedure and more visit greatplainsumc.org/annualconference.

Lincoln First UMC consecrates refurbished organ



PHOTO PROVIDED BY LINCOLN FIRST UMC

Resurrection – could this have turned out any better?

By REV. LARRY MOFFET,
First UMC, Lincoln, Nebraska

The newly refurbished organ at Lincoln First UMC, was consecrated on Sunday, Oct. 12, at a powerful worship service starting at 5 p.m., that lasted 45-minutes, with nearly 500 people in attendance.

“Could this have turned out any better?” Bill Noble asked with a huge smile earlier this week. When you take a moment to think about it, it’s hard not to be overwhelmed. Carpenters, electricians, structural engineers, dry wallers, plasterers, painters, sound experts, structural engineers and architects coordinated all their skills with volunteers and with the organ builders, installers, and tonal finishers. Together the congregation collected enough money in one year to cover three-fourths of the cost of the whole project.

That’s part of the story. What is utterly overwhelming is the beauty of the sound of the finished instrument, voiced perfectly for our beautiful sanctuary. “I feel like I am in a great church in Europe,” said Kay Lutes after hearing and seeing the finished organ and chancel reconfiguration.

“The organ helps me worship the majesty of God,” said Connie Geist in an information forum with one of the Schantz Organ tonal finishers. “Your acoustics are superb now, with great reverberation, but not a harsh ‘bounce,’” said Chris Chavanaugh, sound consultant.

Yes, and more. What happened, from organ building engineers to volunteer painters in the upper organ chambers, was allowing God to use the congregation to show the power of resurrection.

Organ builders brought new life to 2000 pipes and a dozen wind chests. They completely cleaned, refinished, and re-voiced all the old pipes. Some are smaller than a pencil. Some are 16 feet long. Then they added new pipes, new connections, a new wind generator and a new console (where the organist plays the instrument). The result: new life. Now the tender beauty of the soft flute pipes can be heard. Four different families of gentle, lush string sounds emanate from the organ. The powerful diapasons are voiced to not overpower the organ’s tender sounds. Their role is to add a strong foundation for congregational singing. When there is need for “firepower,”

you’ll hear brass pipes (called “reed pipes” by organ builders because the trumpet-sounding organ pipes contain a reed).

The 500 new pipes add depth and brightness to the instrument. First UMC now has festival trumpet pipes, a warm oboe sound and a rich English horn. There are two octaves of chimes. Each group of sounds has its place. Individually and together they help bring a deeper level of recognition of the creativity of God and God’s passion for diversity.

The finished project is a powerful example of how God works on all levels, from the mundane to the majestic, constantly bringing resurrection power. Resurrection did not happen just one time when Jesus left the tomb. God brings resurrection with every new day and every new breath. Take time to marvel at all the ways God brings new life out of old pain and struggles. God brings good out of even the most challenging circumstances. Please join in saying, “Thank you, God. Could this have turned out any better?”

View First UMC’s Facebook page, [facebook.com/firstchurchlincoln](https://www.facebook.com/firstchurchlincoln), for more images of the rededication.

NUMB 2015 route announced

The Nebraska United Methodist Bike Ride for Hunger (NUMB) is heading out west, June 27–July 1, 2015. The United Methodist churches in Ogallala, Sidney and Imperial, Nebraska, will be joined by the Haxtun, Colorado United Methodist Church as NUMB hosts.

“We are excited for a return trip to Ogallala as a NUMB host. This will be our second time in the past five years we have stayed in Ogallala,” said the Rev. Bill Ritter, tour director. “We will head counter clockwise and spend our first night in Sidney before we cross over into Colorado for an overnight stay in Haxtun. Our last night will be in Imperial before we head for home base in Ogallala.”

“Route Director Greg Bakewell has laid out another interesting and enjoyable trek for our riders. It will be fun to say we spent almost two days

in Colorado while on a bike ride across Nebraska,” Ritter added.

Registration for NUMB 2015 will open Jan. 19, 2015. Riders may register at www.numbride.org or download a registration form and mail it in. To receive email updates for NUMB 2015, register at www.numbride.org, and be the first to hear when registration opens. NUMB is limited to 150 riders taken on a first come, first serve basis. Register early because the ride has filled up and closed for the last several years. If the ride has already closed you will be placed on a waiting list and moved on to the active list when vacancies arise.

The NUMB ride was started in 1996. Since then, the ride has donated more than \$716,000 for world hunger projects.



Nebraska United Methodist
Bike Ride for Hunger
www.numbride.org

Great Plains United Methodist Women

Looking back ... looking forward

The final days of 2014 and our first year as the Great Plains Conference United Methodist Women are now behind us. What a year it has been!



It has indeed been a year of getting to know each other and we have done that as we've participated in Assembly, our Conference Mission u's, and most recently at our first Great Plains Conference Annual Meeting and Celebration. And did you hear we brought or contributed supplies for 3200 birthing kits? Our mission giving

has been strong. These are only a few of things we have done and/or participated in. There is much to celebrate.

As we move into 2015, one of our continuing challenges is the huge geography of our conference. We will all need to get used to traveling and make the extra effort and set aside the extra time to meet together, however it is worth it. Our programs have been excellent. So come be inspired and share in our sisterhood of grace.

Make preparations for a busy 2015 — we already have many events scheduled so be sure to mark your calendars and make plans to attend and invite a friend to come with you. I'm looking forward to seeing/meeting you in 2015, as together we put faith, hope and love in action in our Great Plains Conference and around the world.

Hope you remembered to take time to celebrate Advent and Christmas. May your holidays be blessed with all that is special to you, especially the gift of Jesus in our lives.

Join me on the journey as God's women seeking to be faithful.

Esther Hay, Great Plains Conference UMW, president

Calendar of events

Jan. 23-24, 2015

Conference Leadership Team Meeting, North Platte, Nebraska

Feb. 8-9, 2015

Kansas LEAF Legislative Day, Topeka, Kansas

Feb. 14, 2015

Nebraska Ecumenical Legislative Day, Lincoln, Nebraska

May 29-June 7, 2015

ME Tour to Southeastern US

June 10, 2015

UMW Dinner at Great Plains Annual Conference, Wichita, Kansas

July 10-12, 2015

Mission u, Topeka, Kansas

July 19-23, 2015

Mission u, Salina, Kansas

July 31-August 2, 2015

Mission u, Kearney, Nebraska

Oct. 16-17, 2015

Great Plains Conference UMW Annual Meeting, Wichita, Kansas

Place Faith.Hope.Love In Action by attending a Legislative Day

Be informed. Stand up. Speak out. Let your voice be heard. The Great Plains UMW has two legislative days available to educate members of the faith community on issues that are being addressed within the state legislatures. The purpose of the legislative days are to provide a forum of education on justice issues, create a context for how the issues intersect with faith and prompt ways that the faith community can respond in advocacy. Both events are ecumenical.

A variety of workshops are available at both Legislative Days. For more information on topics and workshops visit www.greatplainsumc.org/2015LegislativeDays.

Kansas LEAF: Feb. 8-9, 2015, First UMC, Topeka, Kansas

Nebraska Ecumenical Legislative Day: Feb. 14, 2015, Christ UMC, Lincoln, Nebraska

For more information, visit the Great Plains UMW website greatplainsumc.org/umw

Paid for by Great Plains United Methodist Women. Contact Lisa Maupin at lisamumw@gmail.com.

Conference offers summer internship opportunities



This summer there are several opportunities for young adults to spend a summer internship in hands-on ministry in the Great Plains Conference. Interested young adults (18 or older) should check out these opportunities on how to make a difference, explore leadership and spend a “summer of service” that will be remembered for a lifetime.

Visit greatplainsumc.org/internships for more details. Applications are being accepted until March 8 at greatplainsumc.org/internapply.

Micah Corps

Connect faith with social justice and practice leadership skills by visiting, researching and presenting key social justice topics throughout the Great Plains.

Vacation Bible school

Lead vacation Bible school, paint a house, visit the elderly in a new community every week, while experiencing life-changing, faith-deepening opportunities.

Youth interns

Explore youth ministry in a local church by being mentored and assisting leadership of a youth ministry throughout the summer.

Hispanic ministry

Explore leadership in the dynamic landscape of Hispanic ministry. Work with local churches who bridge cultural, linguistic and generational gaps. Come alongside other young leaders through “HYLA” (Hispanic Youth Leadership Academy).

Camp counselors

Spend the summer guiding students in an intentional community and throughout camp creation. Students range from first grade through high school seniors. Choose to spend the summer at one of six camps.

- Camp Chippewa (Ottawa, Kansas)
- Camp Comeca (Cozad, Nebraska)
- Camp Fontanelle (Nickerson, Nebraska)
- Camp Horizon (Arkansas City, Kansas)
- Camp Norwesca (Chadron, Nebraska)
- Camp Lakeside (Scott City, Kansas)

If you have questions, or would like more information, contact the Rev. Nicole Conard, coordinator of young leadership, at nconard@greatplainsumc.org.

Small Wonders 2015

SAVE THE DATE

Oct. 2-3, 2015

The topic for the conference will be related to worship in small membership congregations and will feature the Rev. Dottie Escobedo-Frank, South District superintendent in the Desert Southwest Annual Conference as the keynote speaker. Small Wonders 2015 will be held in Nebraska with the exact location, yet to be determined.

Like Small Membership Church Ministries at facebook.com/smallmembershipchurchministries and visit greatplainsumc.org/smallwonders for more details closer to the conference.

TiM: equipping future church leaders

By SAID VELAZQUEZ, *communications intern*

The TiM (Transition into Ministry) program has changed the lives of nine clergy members in the Great Plains Episcopal Area since 2012, when the first Lilly grant was received. The TiM program is made possible through the Lilly Endowment. The Lilly Endowment strengthens pastoral leadership by funding a variety of projects that test new ways for helping new pastors move through the transition from student to pastor.

"The TiM program is an initiative for targeted leadership development for a specific group of young clergy (under the age of 35) that has relevance for all clergy and churches in the Great Plains Conference of the United Methodist Church," said Ashlee Alley, program director. "It is an opportunity to have a laboratory for learning and mentoring."

TiM is an opportunity to think about how to best equip and prepare a church for new clergy persons in the midst of transitions. According to Alley, "Transition into Ministry is a program that enables individuals to grow both spiritually and develop their leadership skills in a congregation."

Pastor Emily Cannon (pictured above) is currently serving as a TiM associate pastor at Saint Paul UMC in Lincoln, Nebraska (2013-2015). She shared the impact TiM has made in her life through ministry. During her earlier college years, Cannon received the calling to become a pastor through her volunteer work at a church. "While I was in college, I won a school sermon contest and that helped affirm my call." Cannon added, "I loved doing ministry in my congregation, I enjoyed being there and helping my community. When my calling happened I couldn't think of

a better way of spending 40-plus hours in a church, which was already happening at the time."

The Rev. Bill Gepford is the associate pastor at Colby UMC in Colby, Kansas. "Transition into Ministry has been a great experience for me; I get to learn from an experienced pastor and learn from a healthy and vibrant congregation, which has shaped and molded the way in which I do ministry," said Gepford.

Seminary prepared Gepford for the intellectual aspects of ministry like handling questions of systematic theology and Biblical hermeneutics that reside at the core of ministry. Once Gepford graduated, however, he discovered he had more to learn about ministry that could not be taught in the classroom.

Gepford credits studying under an "excellent mentor" for his learning to take intellectual knowledge gained in seminary and convictions about the love of God and apply them to the real world. He can take difficult concepts and make them accessible and transform what was predominately cerebral into what is imminently practical.

Gepford is enjoying his time in the TiM program and is looking forward to the future. "I'm looking forward to new learning experiences, new challenges and new opportunities to continue to develop the call to ministry that God has put into my life," said Gepford. "I am so thankful for the Great Plains Conference and its leadership for making this opportunity possible, and I would encourage all incoming young clergy to consider applying for TiM."

See TiM on page 12

PHOTO BY SAID VELAZQUEZ

Pastor Emily Cannon shares her experiences at Saint Paul UMC in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Connect online
www.greatplainsumc.org



Find out more about the TiM program at greatplainsumc.org/abouttheprogram. You can also view more photos and videos about the TiM program at greatplainsumc.org/timnews.

Preparing licensed local pastors for ministry

The Clergy Excellence Team of the Great Plains Conference is committed to developing clergy leaders. Licensing School is one pathway clergy can serve a local church as a local pastor. Licensing School is an intensive course designed to prepare those called to serve in pastoral ministry and also fulfills the requirements of the "Book of Discipline."

After completion, participants who are certified candidates are approved for license as a local pastor and can be appointed to serve in local churches as

licensed local pastors. Licensing School focuses especially on the pastoral behaviors, practices and theological framework necessary to enable clergy to thrive as pastoral leaders under appointment in The United Methodist Church.

Licensing School by the Great Plains Conference is generally offered in two, one-week segments. In January 2015, about 10 future clergy will take part in week one of the school. A second week one will be offered in

See **Local pastors** on page 14



PHOTO PROVIDED BY CHARLES MURITHI

The deans for the 2015 Licensing School. From left Charles Murithi, Cynthia Meyer, and Kathy Symes.

Great Preaching in the Great Plains



PHOTO BY KATHRYN WITTE

Attendees of the 2013/2014 Great Preaching Studio partake in an exercise. About 45-50 clergy attended the 2013/2014 Great Preaching studio in Lincoln, Nebraska.

By **RACHEL MOSER**,
communications coordinator

The 2014/2015 studio features five sessions — three two-day retreats in Wichita, Kansas, and two two-day regional gatherings. The regional gatherings, new for the second year of Great Preaching for the Great Plains, offer a small group of participants and one facilitator to work on specific preaching skills. These

regional gatherings allows for more peer interaction. Attendees have one regional gathering, Jan. 12-13, and one retreat, Feb. 16-17, remaining.

"The purpose of Great Preaching in the Great Plains is to give clergy the opportunity to begin to implement new skills in sermon preparation so the sermons can be more engaging and relevant to each congregation," said Nancy Lambert, director of

Clergy Excellence for the Great Plains Conference.

This 2014/2015 studio features Dr. Alyce McKenzie, LeVan professor of preaching and worship, Altshuler Distinguished Teaching Professor, Perkins School of Theology; and Dr. Richard F. Ward, Fred B. Craddock professor of preaching and worship at Phillips Theological Seminary, as the faculty for the second year of the Great Preaching Studio.

"The thing I appreciate so much about the course is the exposure to a variety of unique voices and perspectives that are all working together to help me keep my approach to preaching fresh," said one attendee. "This comes through the texts, the presenters and the interaction with passionate, talented clergy colleagues."

McKenzie and Ward have been teaching the attendees ways to create a solid opening and closing for sermons; how to make reading of the scripture more expressive and emotional so the sermons can employ more of the senses; how to make effective transitions between thoughts; and how to deliver a sermon without notes.

"We share a common goal of learning

See **Great Preaching** on page 14

Education Partnership continues



PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE REV. BARB CLINGER

Members of Trinity UMC in Ottawa, Kansas, volunteer at a nearby elementary school. Church members spruced up the playground, cleaned the gym, created goodie bags and more in alignment with the Great Plains Education Partnership.

Blisters for Jesus

By REV. BARB CLINGER,
Trinity UMC in Ottawa, Kansas

As it turned out, it was a perfect fit for the Great Plains UMC Education Initiative. But it was and remains much more than that. On Sunday, Oct. 2, Trinity UMC in Ottawa, Kansas, held an “unplugged” and unusually short worship service. It was the final Sunday of a six-part sermon series titled, “Journey to a Generous Life.” The final Sunday challenged us to “serve.”

There was no bulletin. During worship there was no music. Most everyone had on jeans or work clothes. It felt very different. It was an empowering Spirit-filled worship. We prayed and listened to Philippians 2: 1-8. I offered a very brief reflection on what the sermon would have been had there been a sermon.

We shared the sacrament of Holy Communion. We celebrated the reality

that it was World Communion Sunday and we remembered Jesus and his love and his work. We asked God’s blessing on the bread and the cup so we might be the body of Christ. We humbly asked to be made one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world.

After 28 minutes, we were leaving the sanctuary and heading out on our mission trip to do just that. Our destination was less than two miles away. We piled into cars and headed to our nearby elementary school. Two staff members were waiting for us. We arrived to do what the staff suggested be done.

Sixteen workers spent more than an hour raking and shoveling the playground mulch so it was under the equipment once again. Another eight to 10 volunteers disinfected the gym mats. Mopping, drying, flipping and then starting over on the backs.

Another handful of volunteers went to work for the art teacher removing small tile from a mat which meant soaking the tiles in warm water and then stripping the tile off the backing. Still others worked on book orders and math games while yet another group created goodie bags and wrote thank you notes to the 60 staff members.

When we finished we gathered for pictures and prayer. We prayed for the staff and the children and the parents of the children. We thanked God for this place where the children of North Ottawa come to learn. We loaded up and headed back to the church. Other workers had stayed there to prepare a meal for us.

Mission trips always are times of transformation, even when you only travel two miles. We did not talk about serving. We served. We earned “blisters for Jesus.”

We were blessed.

More than \$17,000 in grants awarded

Great Plains Conference Public Education Partnership Grants have been awarded to the following recipients:

Each of these churches is providing matching funds for their public education partnership. A total of \$17,515 has been awarded to 20 recipients.

- **Colby UMC (Kansas):** \$1,000 for a comprehensive partnership which includes after school tutoring, support for a Kansas Day program, and teacher appreciation lunches.
- **Dighton UMC (Kansas):** \$500 for a program to assist teachers in obtaining classroom supplies.
- **Leon UMC (Kansas):** \$1,000 for a backpack food program.
- **Lyons UMC (Kansas):** \$1,000 for a Fifth Quarter program in the church education building.
- **Moran UMC (Kansas):** \$1,000 to provide audio-visual equipment to enrich an existing Fifth Quarter program.
- **Ogden Friendship House of Hope (Ogden, Kansas):** \$1,000 for a program to provide grade appropriate books for reading with parents at home.
- **Burlington UMC (Kansas):** \$400 for a reading program.
- **Caldwell UMC (Kansas):** \$500 to help start a partnership with school to help make sure homework gets done.
- **Calvary UMC (Wichita, Kansas):** \$1,000 to help fine tune motor skills for preschoolers.
- **Corbin UMC (Kansas):** \$665 to help improve continue existing program and partnership with Wichita State FCA.
- **East Heights UMC (Wichita, Kansas):** \$1,000 to plant a community garden for third graders.
- **Edgerton UMC (Kansas):** \$800 to help with additional programs like Thursday Power Hour.
- **First UMC (Lincoln, Nebraska):** \$1,000 for new cooking program.
- **First UMC (Norfolk, Nebraska):** \$1,000 for a partnership with elementary school.
- **Goddard UMC (Kansas):** \$750 for food assistance and mentors.
- **Halstead UMC (Kansas):** \$1,000 for a Fifth Quarter program in partnership with school.
- **Kingman UMC (Kansas):** \$400 to enhance Fifth Quarter program.
- **St. Mark's UMC (Lincoln, Nebraska):** \$500 for literacy backpack program.
- **Valley View UMC (Overland Park, Kansas):** \$500 for BackSnack program and sneakers for gym class.
- **Wesley UMC (Parsons, Kansas):** \$500 for equipment during football and basketball seasons.

Building bright futures

By SAID VELAZQUEZ, *communications intern*

St. Luke's UMC in Omaha, Nebraska, is making a difference in the lives of hundreds of high school students on the road to academic and personal success. The congregation's partnership with Burke High School has a seven-year history of student engagement. The students that apply to be part of the after-school support program, housed at St. Luke's UMC and often called the teen center, are eager to take part in diverse study groups and activities ranging from tutoring to recreational activities. The following two components are the main core of the school partnership:

1. Power hour study time. Burke teachers and community volunteers are available for academic assistance. In addition, students have access to school supplies, schoolbooks, computers and printing. An incentive program is also in place to encourage good grades, complete homework and to achieve positive test scores.
2. Seminars, recreation and peer time. After the students complete their homework they get to participate in several fun and educational activities. Activities include senior seminar, sports science, curtain call, cooking matters, stand and deliver, louder than a bomb and channeling your career. These activities are intended for students to discover and pursue their potential while working towards self-sufficiency.

"The teen center has been a big part of my life — before and after graduating from high school," said Sierra, a 2013 Burke graduate. "This place is my home away from home and I am a member of this big family." Sierra is one of the several alumni volunteers that gives their share to the program. Sierra is now attending college with a full-ride scholarship for the criminal justice program at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

"This is a place for them to focus on their studying and a safe space to get tutoring from many volunteers from local universities and Burke High School faculty," said Abbey Jackson the teen center director. "Many of the youth that are part of this program come from low-income communities and/or are first generation immigrants."

The teen center recently hosted a question and answer presentation by a representative of Heartland Family Service. The main topics that were discussed included domestic violence, healthy relationships and illegal substance abuse.

The partnership between Burke High School and St. Luke UMC has changed the life of hundreds of teenagers in the West Omaha area. Many seniors said they wanted to go to college and make genuine contributions to their community.

If you would like more information about the teen center, contact Abbey Jackson, center director, at abbey@stlukeumc.com or 402-333-6886 ext. 328.

Connect online
www.greatplainsumc.org



View Education Partnership case studies, grant information and more at greatplainsumc.org/education.

TiM continued from page 8

Michelle Byerly is the associate pastor at First UMC in Emporia, Kansas. "I found out about TiM through fellow seminary students who were already in the program," said Byerly. "I had the opportunity to talk with them about what they had learned and was excited about the opportunity to be in ministry in a place where I would also have good feedback and mentoring."

To Byerly, TiM has meant a building of foundations in ministry. She knows this time will give her the tools and confidence needed to serve as an excellent clergy in the Great Plains Conference. "I have had a chance to learn and grow both in the church as well as understanding how important it is to attend to the work of God in myself as well so that I am better equipped to serve others," said Byerly.

TiM has encouraged Byerly to grow in her leadership and pastoral role. She believes that for the long term, this experience will be something she is able to continually draw on. TiM has also impacted Byerly's congregation. They have a strong sense of purpose as a teaching congregation and have grown in their discipleship. The congregation now has a stronger sense of connection with the United Methodist connection. "We are seeing a great desire for growth and I am excited to see where they are able to go in the time that I serve here," said Byerly.



**"Crowell,
a Wonderful Place
to Call Home!"**

A Leader in
Quality Care Since 1905

Private Rooms
Medicare/Medicaid
Rehab Therapists

Fun Activities
Beautiful Chapel with Chaplain
Assisted Living & Independent Apts.

www.crowellhome.com

Crowell Home

242 S. 22nd St Blair, NE 68008
T-402-426-2177

View more about all of the Great
Plains Conference mission partnerships at
greatplainsumc.org/missionpartnerships

Bishop from Nigeria travels through Great Plains

Nigerian Bishop John Wesley Yohanna and his wife Asmau Yohanna spent time in Iowa, Nebraska and Kansas on their way to the Council of Bishop's meeting in Oklahoma City. While in Lincoln they met with members of the Nigeria Partnership team and were dinner guests at the Lincoln home of Bishop Scott Jones and Mary Lou Reece. The Yohannas were also dinner guests at the episcopal home in Wichita where they were joined by members of the Mercy and Justice Team and other staff members.

Bishop Yohanna expressed gratitude for the support for the orphanage which recently promoted its first graduating class. Topics discussed with the teams included sustainability, new resources and programming possibilities.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE REV. JIM MILLER

During their time in the Great Plains Conference, Bishop John Wesley Yohanna and his wife, Asmau, were able to visit the Henry Doorly Zoo in Omaha, Nebraska.

Connect online
www.greatplainsumc.org



View a message of thanks from Bishop Yohanna, photos from a conference mission trip last February, and more at greatplainsumc.org/nigeriapartnership.

Hispanic ministry celebrates 100 Partners

More than 100 leaders have renewed their commitment as Partners for United Methodist ministry with Hispanic/Latinos in the Great Plains Conference. These leaders expressed their desire to become partners during the 2014 Annual Conference Session and then again this fall during regional prayer breakfasts held in Madison, Nebraska; Lincoln, Nebraska; Topeka, Kansas; Wichita, Kansas; and Garden City, Kansas. The group shares a vision to become more intentional in connection and collaboration which will open doors, shorten paths and accelerate processes for Hispanic ministry.

Partners are asked to make a written pledge which covers the following four areas; 1. PRAY regularly for the leaders of the Great Plains Hispanic Ministries, 2. GIVE their time, talent and treasure to the development of Hispanic ministry, 3. ATTEND regional and conference gatherings of Partners for Hispanic Ministry, and 4. INVITE (at least) one other leader to this partnership journey.

The work of Partners is timely for hundreds of churches across the conference. "With nearly 500,000 Hispanics within our conference bounds (Kansas and Nebraska), we must come together with renewed energy and creativity in order to become more fruitful," said Corey Godbey, Hispanic ministry coordinator. From 1990 to 2010, the number of counties in the Great Plains Conference with more than 1,000 Hispanics grew from 25 to 44. Combined, the projected Hispanic

population of Kansas City, Omaha and Wichita will be more than 215,000 by the year 2018.

"While the Hispanic population has boomed, our ministry efforts have also grown," said Godbey. Currently, there are 17 UM Hispanic congregations and more than a dozen churches in the conference who are doing intentional outreach with their Hispanic neighbors. "Partners exists to support the work of these ministries and many more that will emerge over the coming years," said Godbey. "We are letting Colossians 1:9-12 guide us in our prayers for one another. That each would; know God's will, do God's will, be productive, have a growing relationship with God, have power in their lives and have a right attitude."

Partners are Hispanic and non-Hispanic pastors, district superintendents, lay leaders, college students, youth and community leaders. If you are called to join the Partners movement, send in the completed response card found at greatplainsumc.org/hispanicministry.

If you would like to discuss questions or ideas related to Partners or Hispanic ministry in general, contact Godbey at cgodbey@greatplainsumc.org.

In 2015, there will be opportunities for both regional and conference gatherings of Partners. More information will be announced soon regarding these gatherings of Partners.

"My intercessor is my friend as my eyes pour out tears to God; on behalf of a man he pleads with God as one pleads for a friend." - Job 16:20-21



**2015
Church
Growth
Leadership
Summit**

**April 13-14, 2015
Lincoln, Nebraska**

**Featuring:
Anna Carter Florence
Will Willamon
Bill Tenny Britton**

**Alternative Worship by
Darkwood Brew
Hebrews 2:11**

**All Denominations
Welcome!**

**Brought to you by:
The Quad Presbyteries
Of Central Nebraska,
Homestead,
Missouri River Valley
And Prospect Hill**

**Hosted at:
Westminster Presbyterian
Church, Lincoln Nebraska**

**Cost:
\$75 Earlybird by March 15;
\$95 March.16 - April 11
& at the door
More Info or Register:
friendlypresbyterianchurches.org**



Death notices

Kathryn Baker, 92, widow of a clergy member, died Nov. 15, 2014. She was preceded in death by her husband, the Rev. John Baker. Survivors include her children, John Baker, Charles Baker, David Baker, Dan Baker, Mary Nelson and Ruth Ann Fischer. Memorial contributions may be made to the United Methodist Church; KSDS Inc., Assistance Dogs; or to the donor's choice, and may be sent in care of Ward Funeral Home, Washington, Kansas.

The Rev. Robert L. Hopkins, 94, a retired clergy member, died Sept. 19, 2014. He was preceded in death by his wife, Virginia; and son, Robert. Survivors include children: Kenny Hopkins, Larry Hopkins, Herman Kaemmerling, Alice Buschkamp and Billy Kaemmerling.

Arlene Jensen, 92, the widow of a clergy member, passed away Oct. 15, 2014. She was preceded in death by her husband, the Rev. Harold Jensen; and son Gary Charles. Survivors include son, James Albert Jensen; daughters, Lois Marie Jensen and Ruth Ann Jensen. Memorial contributions may be to Memorial UMC in Grace, Kansas.

Shirley Wynne Lathan, 93, the widow of a clergy member, died Dec. 12, 2014. She was preceded in death by her husband, the Rev. A. Wylie Lathan; twin daughters; and son, James. Survivors include children John Lathan, Bill Lathan, Debra Lathan, Steve Lathan and daughter-in-law Christine Lathan. Memorials may be sent to the Grace United Methodist Church Memorial Fund, 11485 Ridgeview Rd, Olathe, Kansas.

The Rev. Ross Andrew Olson, 72, a retired clergy member, died Sept. 14, 2014. Survivors include his wife Cher; and children, Ezra Olson, Spencer Olson, Michelle Green and Mark Olson. Memorial contributions may be made to Dwight UMC or Masonic Lodge #374, PO Box 24, Dwight Kansas, 66849, which will benefit Masonic/Eastern Star Scholarship.

The Rev. William H. "Bill" Post, 94, a retired clergy member, died Oct. 25, 2014. He was preceded in death by his first wife Doree, his second wife Orvalee, and son Jon. Survivors include daughter in-law Kathy Post; and stepsons, Larry Pritchett, Craig Pritchett and Monte Pritchett. Memorial contributions may be made to the Mt. Hope Geuda Springs UMC, 1550 E. 180th St., So., Geuda Springs, Kansas 67051.


Merrietta Jo Wolfe, 74, the spouse of a clergy member, died Nov. 4, 2014. Survivors include her husband, the Rev. Roland Wolfe, Jr.; and sons, Roland L. Wolfe III, David H. Wolfe and Russell M. Wolfe. Memorial contributions may be made to a charity of the donor's choice.

Great Preaching continued from page 9

to be more effective preachers that help transform lives," said one attendee. "(This time), we particularly focused on ways to encounter the scriptures during this session that will bring freshness to our preparation and delivery of scripture in our worship services."

"I've been studying preaching for three years, reading every book I can on the subject. However, I have learned way more in the short time of being in the preaching studio," said an attendee. "Since I've been going to the preaching studio, reading the books and applying what I've learned, I have gotten way more compliments on my preaching. I have always loved preaching but I really enjoy it and have more confidence now. Thanks so much for making things like this possible for us."

Thank you,
Great Plains Conference
For supporting our students and graduates.



Saint Paul School of Theology
Educating leaders to make disciples for Jesus Christ, renew the Church, and transform the world.

www.spst.edu

Local pastors continued from page 9

June with at least 15-20 students expected. All participants in the January or June week one will also participate in a week two session in July.

"In the first week of licensing school, we are trying to give new clergy the basic tools needed to lead worship, officiate at the sacraments, maintain appropriate boundaries and minister at times of congregational crisis," said Karen Jeffcoat, registrar for the Board of Ordained Ministry. "In the second week, these skills are further developed. With our unique split-week format, students have the opportunity to be in ministry in the local church and bring in "real church" examples and questions.

Deans for the 2015 Licensing School are Cynthia Meyer, Charles Murithi and Kathy Symes. Questions about Licensing School may be addressed to Jeffcoat, at registrar@greatplainsumc.org.

Continuing compassion for the hungry

By CINDY KELLY

communications coordinator

"Following Jesus is a way of life. When Jesus says, 'Love God with everything you've got,' that means all of your talent, all of your money, all of your time and all of the resources you have need to be focused on following Jesus, doing God's will and living your life in such a way that you're giving glory to God in every possible way." With these words Bishop Scott Jones exhorted those who gathered for the 37th annual Bishop's Round-up Against Hunger on Nov. 15, 2014, at the Douglas County Fairgrounds in Lawrence, Kansas. The Great Plains United Methodists listening to the bishop, gripped cups of hot chocolate and nodded in agreement. They had been busy for months, collecting food, health kits, layettes, diapers, maternity clothes, bedding, HUGS (hats, underwear, gloves and socks) and school kits to bring to the Round-up.

Jones may have crafted his message with the youth in mind. More than 100 youth came to help with unloading, counting and organizing the donations, then later in the morning loading the items onto trucks for distribution. The youth lock-in the evening before the Round-up is a highlight of the event every year. First UMC in Lawrence hosted the event with plenty of fellowship, fun, food and youth-led worship. They even squeezed in a few hours of sleep.

The temperature stayed below freezing all morning as vehicles filed into a barn, hauling their bounty. As a car or truck entered the barn, youth swarmed around and then sorted the donations into appropriate piles.

After worship, fellowship and refreshments, workers loaded trucks from 17 agencies with amazing speed. Matt Johnson coordinated the crews.



PHOTO BY CINDY KELLY

Volunteers organize and count donated items at the Bishop's Round-up Against Hunger in Lawrence, Kansas. More than \$332,000 in money and supplies were donated for the event.

"We're loading truck number seven. We need 50 food boxes for number seven." Working like a bucket brigade, the line of youth would snake through the barn, each person handing the cargo on to the one next to them as the boxes made their way from the pile to the truck. These 17 agencies will deliver the donations to people in need across the Great Plains Conference, addressing the root causes of hunger. All cash donations are split 40 percent to Mexico, 40 percent to Haiti and 20 percent to local agencies within the Great Plains Conference.

Early estimates indicate more than \$322,000 in combined money and donated supplies have been received so far. The final total will be announced later. One reason for the delay is the Bishop's Round-up Against Hunger tracks what churches are doing locally to fight hunger in their communities. Reports are due by the end of the calendar year.

During the short worship time, Jones read Colossians 3:12 and then explained, "When Paul says, 'Clothe yourselves with compassion,' he's not talking about the shirt you wear. He's really talking about your heart, your character, who you are as a person. You want to grow up to be the kind of person who is full of compassion."

Compassion prompts us to respond to the suffering of others because "we love God with everything we've got and the God we meet in the Bible is somebody who loves everybody," said Jones. "God is doing amazing things out in the world. God is feeding the hungry. God is providing clothes to those in need. God is at work in Haiti, in Mexico and all over Kansas and Nebraska, making a difference in people's lives. Do you want to be a part of that blessing? Do you want to clothe yourselves with compassion? Do you want to follow Jesus? That's what we're doing here today."

Connect online
www.greatplainsumc.org



View more information and photos from the Bishop's Round-up Against Hunger at greatplainsumc.org/brh.

Read about the camps in the Great Plains Conference, at greatplainsumc.org/camps



PHOTO PROVIDED BY CAMP NORWESCA

Katelin Gosser has been named the new site director for Camp Norwesca, near Chadron, Nebraska. Gosser, from Shreveport, Louisiana, will complete her bachelor's degree in outdoor recreation at Chadron State College while at Camp Norwesca. Camp Norwesca is still in the rebuilding stage after a fire destroyed much of the camp in August of 2012.

GPconnect, news and information for Great Plains United Methodist.



Great Plains United Methodist Conference
3333 Landmark Circle
Lincoln, NE 68504

800-435-6107
www.greatplainsumc.org

Nonprofit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Lincoln, NE
Permit No. 75

Dated material
Please do not delay

Camp Norwesca names new site director

The Camp Norwesca site council is pleased to announce a new site director for the camp.

Katelin Gosser has been hired as the site director for Camp Norwesca, near Chadron, Nebraska. She succeeds Valerie Rahrs, who served the camp for several years before her resignation in June.

Gosser comes to the camp from Shreveport, Louisiana, but she has extensive camping experience in Kansas. She plans to complete her bachelor's degree at Chadron State College in outdoor recreation once she gets settled in the Chadron area. She is excited by the prospect of being named the new director of the camp.

"I'm excited for a new opportunity to make a difference in the lives of our youth," Gosser said. "I look forward to getting involved and building relationships with Chadron State and the community of Chadron as well as surrounding communities. I am looking forward to working with the site council to help Norwesca rebuild."

Gosser was one of 20 applicants from the nationwide search for a new director.

"I am so excited to have Katelin on site," said the Rev. Dr. Mark Crist, pastor of Chadron UMC and site council chairperson for Norwesca. "When we met with Katelin she really wowed us with her plans to take Norwesca in the

direction the site council has felt the camp needs to go. I, personally, cannot wait to see where she takes things."

Crist added that Gosser not only understands the importance of the camp to the Great Plains United Methodists, but she also understands the importance of building relationships between the camp, the ecumenical community and local businesses. The council hoped for someone who could build up the summer camping possibilities for children and also be someone who wanted to strengthen the capacity of the camp to develop its potential to host retreats.

Gosser said her first goal is to help the camp get more involved with the community. She also has plans to implement a ropes course so the camp can provide team-building exercises for campers as well as organizations. In addition, Gosser plans to improve the camp's social media pages, website and lines of communication with potential campers, camping groups, churches and donors.

"I really would like to see the camp host an open house for the community. I have a number of other ideas to help the camp become more inviting," said Gosser.

Keep up to date with Camp Norwesca on Facebook at facebook.com/norwesca.