

- Published the second edition of our newsletter, *His Hands and Feet*, to highlight deaf ministry activities. They were mailed to nurture/outreach leaders, Christian educators, and those who support deaf ministry with their gifts and placed in the March issue of *Missions Alive!* They were also distributed at Harvest of Blessings. Check out our display at the Terrace Hotel for a copy and other resources.
- Continue to be a source of information concerning d/Deaf/hh issues for our churches and members in both their church and daily lives, ministering to the whole person.
- Were actively involved as a board in the preparation and planning for a large educational deaf ministry weekend of workshops, or a "show and tell," for our conference in May of this year. Designed for pastors, Christian educators, interpreters, and other leaders who are working or wish to work with d/Deaf/hh, this event, "Visualize Deaf Ministry: Ministering to People with Hearing Loss," was a celebration of ministry made visible. Led by deaf ministry pastors and leadership from across the country, it truly was a wonderful weekend of celebration, as we trained attendees in how to reach out to North American's most un-reached, least-visible group of people.
- Worked on an international level by working with a team and sending an interpreter to reach deaf children in Nakuru, Kenya, Africa.

We wish to thank all the wonderful churches, individuals, and organizations that continue to faithfully support deaf ministry. You keep our hearts encouraged and our spirits blessed.

If anyone has questions concerning deaf ministry, has need for resource information, or would like to give a gift to deaf ministry, please send your correspondence to: WNCC UMC Deaf Ministry, P.O. Box 5644, Asheville, NC 28813, or phone 828-734-9154 (V or text), or see www.wnccumc.org/hhs/deafministry.htm.

Kay C. Free, *Director*

COUNCIL ON LAITY

The Council on Laity continues to work throughout this conference for the transformation of individuals, congregations, and communities. We advocate for partnership in ministry with our clergy in churches of all sizes, locations, and cultural memberships. Our focus has been to strengthen the spiritual disciplines of laity and clergy through participation in covenant groups.

The Council on Laity is made up of the resident bishop; the 14 district lay leaders; the conference presidents of United Methodist Men and United Methodist Women; the vice-chair of the Council on Youth Ministries; the chair, treasurer, and registrar of the Gathering of Laity; the chair of the Conference Ministries Advisory Council; the conference director of lay speaking; the director of the Laity Service Award; the conference prayer advocate; the conference Scouting coordinator; and 12 members at large. We are served by a representative from the Cabinet and a representative of the conference staff. We meet four times a year in various locations across our conference. Our first meeting of the year is held in conjunction with the Gathering of Laity in August at Lake Junaluska. Our subsequent meetings were on November 18, at St. Paul Church, Winston-Salem; on February 17, at Williamson's Chapel Church, Mooresville; and on May 18, at Milford Hills Church, Salisbury. It is always an enriching experience to worship with fellow United Methodist and share in our great diversity.

The Council on Laity sponsors the Gathering of Laity each year. The 43rd annual gathering is scheduled for August 15-17, 2008, at Lake Junaluska, with the theme, "Laity Transforming the World." Keynote speakers include Dr. John Ed Mathison, recently retired senior pastor of Frazer Memorial Church, Montgomery, Alabama; Dr. Maxie Dunham, former president of Asbury Theological Seminary and widely published author from the Kentucky Annual Conference; Angela A. Pleasants, pastor of own Central Church, Charlotte; and Lyn Powell, president of the Southeastern Jurisdiction Association of Annual Conference Lay Leaders, who will give the same Laity Address given to the 2008 General Conference in Ft. Worth, Texas, entitled, "Disciples Transforming the World." The Junaluska Singers, directed by Dr. Glenn Draper, will be in concert on Saturday afternoon.

The Council on Laity appreciates the devoted guidance and leadership we have received from Bishop J. Lawrence McCleskey, Lynne B. Caldwell, and Mark L. Barden this past quadrennium. We recognize the call from all areas of our church for deepening of our spiritual disciplines. We are committed to the Christian principles given in Bishop Rueben P. Job's book, *Three Simple Rules: A Wesleyan Way of Living*. We recommend this little book to all. In it, you will find a way of living which can truly transform the world: Do no harm. Do Good. Stay in love with God. May it be so!

Betty Jo C. Hardy, *President and Conference Lay Leader*

UNITED METHODIST MEN

We are excited in the Western North Carolina conference. All of our district-president positions are filled, and the districts are reaching out and organizing new fellowships. Our executive committee continues to meet quarterly in various locations throughout the annual conference. We are planning for our 2008 annual UMMen Rally, to be held at Lake Junaluska during the last weekend of April. For this rally, we are making an effort to reach out to young men and youth by having events which we believe will in-

terest them. These include a mission project, evangelistic boat rides around the lake, and a hamburger/hot dog cookout being done in connection with the Boy Scouts who are meeting at Lake Junaluska for the weekend.

We have been talking up and making presentations about the "No Man Left Behind" training event sponsored by Man In The Mirror in partnership with the General Commission on United Methodist Men (GCUMM), seeking to build up enough interest to have an event in our area. We have been in contact with the Man in the Mirror UMMen representatives for literature and advice.

GCUMM has at long last published the requirements and curricula for the position of men's ministry specialist. Brochures and forms are available on the GCUMM website. A number of men in our annual conference have expressed interest in certification as an MMS. This certification is for laity and for clergy. The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) is certifying the program and providing CEU credits to those interested.

Our Charlotte District has been doing some innovative clustering of UMMen units in churches in the district. Hank Dozier, the Charlotte District president, will be visiting GCUMM in early March to present and discuss this program with GCUMM staff.

We have been in communication with GCUMM about creating one or more training programs for UMMen's use at the district level. GCUMM has endorsed this idea and has created a linkage with the General Board of Discipleship (GBOD), with the idea that such a course may be offered either as a lay speaking ministry course or as a stand-alone UMMen course. We are involved with the creation of the first course.

The Western North Carolina Annual Conference recently met in a called session to approve a reorganization plan. The formation of a new district in the Charlotte-Statesville region was approved and is in the process of being implemented. This new Lake Norman District is in a high-growth area of North Carolina and will help focus better United Methodist resources in the area. We will be looking for a new district president for this district after annual conference in June.

Information about our programs and initiatives may be found on our UMM website, www.wnccumm.org, and on our conference website, www.wnccumc.org.

Richard W. Strachan, *President*

UNITED METHODIST WOMEN

The United Methodist Women of the Western North Carolina Conference experienced an extremely rewarding year in 2007 of being in mission to women, children, and youth around the world.

We continue to excel in the area of our giving. The local units again exceeded the \$1-million dollar mark by giving \$1,093,853.22, an increase of \$16,137.34 over 2006. Giving to Women's Division totaled \$961,861.84: \$840,595 in undesignated Mission Giving funds and \$121,266.84 in designated funds. Not only did we meet our pledge to mission of \$810,000, we overpaid our pledge by \$30,595! And, for the **seventh consecutive year**, Western North Carolina Conference UMWomen were **Number One in the nation** in mission giving!

All conference events were well attended. District officers came together in March for a "Resurrection Women" retreat, held at the Catholic Retreat Center in Hickory. "Faith, Fears and Dandelions" was the theme for the Spiritual Growth Retreat, where 1,138 UMWomen came together for a time "to know God." The School of Christian Mission, attended by 335 UMWomen, helped us to "expand our concepts of mission" as we studied Music and Mission, Israel/Palestine, and Globalization. United Methodist Women also brought approximately 1,800 school kits for the Bethlehem Centers in Charlotte and Winston-Salem as their hands-on mission project. "Through the Eyes of a Child" was our theme for Annual Meeting in September, which was attended by 657 UMWomen. Officer training was held in October, with 179 UMWomen in attendance.

Sherry Sink and Tonya Lanier represented the Western North Carolina Conference UMWomen at the National Seminar in Nashville, Tennessee. "For Christ's Sake, Turn the World Upside Down" was the theme for this event, where several social justice issues were studied. Out of this seminar has evolved our conference's public-education Initiative, which is our conference priority for 2008. All local units are asked to make a difference in their communities by becoming involved in public education.

In the area of membership, we rejoiced with the chartering of Grace UMWomen in the Asheville District. Our conference is one of 10 conferences participating in a teen- and college-age resource program with Women's Division.

The scholarship program continues to give aid to persons seeking church-related careers. These recipients are enrolled at Pfeiffer University, Greensboro College, and Bennett College for Women.

The *Conference Gram* and district newsletters are published four times each year to keep the local woman informed of events and projects. The conference UMWomen website and listserv are also available to post the latest information.

We also celebrated two major milestones in the life of mission institutions located within the bounds of our conference: Bethlehem Center in Winston-Salem celebrated 80 years of service to the community in September, and Brooks-Howell Home in Asheville celebrated 50 years of service to our retired mission personnel in October.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the local unit officers and members. YOU are the ones who make mission possible with your prayers, your giving, and the many ways in which you are in

mission. It is my prayer that God will bless each of you as you continue to give of your time and talents as you serve in His name through UMWomen.

Amy L. Johnson, *President*

UNITED METHODIST YOUTH

Youth ministry in our conference has continued to grow, not only in numbers, but also in support and importance. At conference-wide events, youth and adults are gathering to hear motivating speakers, experience inspiring worship, relate to creative drama, and simply enjoy spending time with friends. There were record numbers at events this year. Summit, the winter event in Boone, has grown to over 1,600 participants. Choose to Share Christ encouraged over 200 high-school youth and adults to share their faith with others. Kaleidoscope welcomed over 400 middle-school students. And, finally, SpiritUs, our summer retreat, held over two weekends, has skyrocketed to around 1,700 youth and adults attending. Besides these events, the Office of Ministries with Young People hosts the annual Bishop's Confirmation Celebration, which introduces confirmation classes to our conference and explains many options students have for experiencing Christ and growing in their faith.

Adults were encouraged as well to grow in their leadership abilities in youth ministry through three training events. A weekly e-mail is sent to youth workers offering support and resources. We are strongly encouraging young adults to grow through training events and weekly e-mails. The conference Resource Center is "stocking up" on resources to enable ministry with young adults in our conference, not only to exist, but to flourish. We are creating a "Culture of Call," a new focus in conjunction with the Board of Ordained Ministry. Resources and training for local churches and campus ministries is being made available to encourage pastors and congregations to identify gifts for ministry in young adults and to encourage them to consider ministry as a vocation.

Our conference Council on Youth Ministry supports missions and projects of our local churches. This year, over \$10,000 was awarded through Youth Service Fund (YSF) grants to 26 churches and agencies to do mission with youth, for youth, and by youth. This year alone, YSF money will reach across the globe to Washington, DC; New York City; Cambodia; Haiti; the Bahamas; Costa Rica; Guatemala; Belize; and Puerto Rico. We are excited that youth can help spread God's love by the simple donations our conference youth have made over the year.

For the past year, staff leadership for our work has been provided by Kimberly T. Ingram, serving as a one-year interim coordinator. We appreciate all that she has done for us, and we wish her luck with her new job as conference secretary. We are looking forward to having someone to fill the position more permanently as ministry with youth and young adults in the Western North Carolina Conference persists in growth.

Chris Grimmitt, *President*

BOARD OF ORDAINED MINISTRY

The Board of Ordained Ministry consists of clergy and laity from the annual conference, nominated by the bishop. These fifty-one persons have the primary responsibility for the recruitment of men and women to serve as elders and deacons in the church; for the examination of their calls to ministry, their skills in teaching and preaching, and their adherence to the doctrines of our tradition; and for the evaluation of their effectiveness and character. These responsibilities require a balance of support and accountability, grace and judgment. We also continue to work our way through the implications of the changes in the meaning of the two orders of ministry, deacon and elder, over the past 12 years.

A number of initiatives comprise the work of the board; some are formational, while others are in response to current trends and issues. The Residency in Ordained Ministry (RIOM) process continues to bring together commissioned clergy to "support the practice and work of their ministry as servant leaders, to contemplate the grounding of ordained ministry, and to understand covenant ministry in the life of the conference" (*The Book of Discipline*, ¶ 326). The board sponsored a sexual ethics training session in August and September 2007. The board also met with the conference Cabinet in September 2007. Our board served as the host of the Southeastern Jurisdictional Board of Ordained Ministry meeting in Charlotte. District boards of ministry were trained by members of the board in three different locations (Asheville, Charlotte, Winston-Salem) during the fall. Our fall meeting on October 23, 2007, was held at Greensboro College and included a discussion of possible restructuring for the board and the formation of a Proclamation Committee which combines the work of preaching and service in ministry committees. The board ensures that background checks are conducted on entering clergy, so that patterns of behavior that might be obstacles to effective ministry might be identified. Candidates also receive psychological evaluations, and we encourage sponsoring congregations to help men and women called to ministry with this expense. Three retreats for probationary clergy will be held in 2008 on the themes of call and disciplined life, preaching, and theology and doctrine.

There is a great need for compassionate, committed, and competent leadership in the church. We are grateful to local congregations across the conference that help in identification of those who might be called to full-time Christian service. The board encourages clergy in their lifelong education and provides