

Florida Annual Conference Event 2008
Lay Member Report by: Vaughan Harshman and Brian Lacina

The Florida Annual Conference Event took place May 29-31 at the Lakeland Center in Lakeland, Florida. More than 1,600 lay and clergy members of the Annual Conference and guests attended the gathering. Harvest was especially well-represented at the event with our clergy Catherine Fluck-Price and Steve Price, lay members Brian Lacina and Vaughan Harshman, District youth and young adult members Scott and Lainie Harris, Alix Bair, Brad Baten, and Marshall Emmett. Our summer interns Katie McNichols and Whitney Kinsey were also present for the opening day.

The theme for the Event was “Living the United Methodist Way”. Speakers included Florida Conference Bishop Timothy Whitaker, Dr. Randy Maddox of Duke Divinity School, and Bishop Hee-Soo Jung of the Northern Illinois Conference. Their messages focused attendees on the five practices of The United Methodist Way:

- Radical Hospitality
- Passionate Worship
- Intentional Discipling
- Salty Service
- Extravagant Generosity.

These practices are a modern expression of the practices John and Charles Wesley considered fundamental to reaching and making disciples. We were encouraged to apply these practices specifically to four Areas of Focus that the Council of Bishops has identified as priorities for the United Methodist Church. These areas are:

1. Developing principled Christian leaders for the church and the world
2. Creating new places for new people by starting congregations and renewing existing ones
3. Engaging in ministry with the poor
4. Stamping out killer diseases by improving global health

In yet another example of God’s movement within God’s church, in January Harvest’s Ministry Council began working on a new vision statement for Harvest. Without yet knowing these Areas of Focus, the keywords and draft versions of the statement embodied these four areas. Another example of a “God thing” at Harvest!

Since 2008 marks in the United Methodist Church the end of one quadrennium (a four year period) and the beginning of another, there were a number of leadership transitions which took place at the Annual Conference Event. There was much appreciation expressed for the service of those who were leaving leadership positions along with celebration of their ministries, and much encouragement was expressed to the new leaders. One major leadership transition was the ending of the term of service for the Conference Lay Leader, Bill Walker and the election of Sharon Luther of Fort Myers as

his successor. Of particular interest to us at Harvest was the election of Catherine Fluck Price as the Chairperson of the Conference Board of Ordained Ministry and the election of Steve Price as the Chairperson of the Conference Ministry Protection Committee. In addition to these new conference roles Steve continues as Chairperson of the East Angola Partnership Task Force.

The Harvest delegation delivered our contribution to the Annual Conference Offering. The total Annual Conference offering was \$70,143 of which 60% will be directed to the East Angola/Florida Partnership, 20% will support legal immigration counseling ministry in Central Florida, and 20% will support children's ministries in Florida through the Bishop's Initiative on Children and Poverty.

Some facts and figures that were presented at the Event:

- 17 new churches and missions have been started in Florida from 2005 to 2007
- There is a goal to start 35 new churches and missions in 2008 and 2009
- Of \$1 million in funding for new churches and missions, 75% is for ethnic congregations – Hispanic, Haitian, Korean, and Chinese
- The Florida United Methodist Children's Home celebrated 100 years of ministry as did United Methodist Men's Ministry.
- The Advance for Christ and His Church celebrated 60 years of ministry. More than \$1.3 billion has been channeled to ministries around the world in those 60 years. Because administration of the Advance is supported by regular connectional giving, 100% of all funds donated through Advance go directly to ministry.
- 22 youth and 41 young adults attended this Annual Conference Event.
- 46 persons joined the clergy of the Florida Conference through licensing, commissioning, ordination, or recognition of orders.

We were informed that the 2012 General Conference (the once every four years gathering of the Global United Methodist Church) will be held at the Tampa Convention Center. The Florida Annual Conference is usually held in Lakeland, home of the Florida Conference offices and our United Methodist affiliated Florida Southern College or in Daytona Beach, home of our United Methodist affiliated Bethune-Cookman University. The conference decided, however, to give Tampa a "test run" by holding the Florida Annual Conference Event in Tampa in 2011. Tampa Bay area churches (that includes us Harvest!) will be called upon to support both events. Next year's Annual Conference will be held at Bethune-Cookman University in Daytona.

It is good to be reminded of our connection to other United Methodist Christians around Florida and around the world through the Annual Conference Event. Ten years ago Harvest was a brand new church start, started and supported by the Florida Annual Conference. Now a short ten years later Harvest is providing leadership and example to new and transforming congregations throughout Florida and our ministry extends around the world. May our churches continue to work with each other and learn from each other.

May God continue to use us to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.