

WESTERN ASSOCIATION ANNUAL MEETING
MISSOURI MID-SOUTH CONFERENCE - UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
April 18, 2009
Bethel UCC, Concordia

The Western Association Annual Meeting was held on April 18, 2009, at Bethel UCC in Concordia, Missouri. Registration began at 9:00 a.m. with refreshments provided by Bethel UCC in the Fellowship Hall and Sanctuary.

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 9:30 AM by Jerry Cundiff, Chair. A motion with second (Stephen Redman/Anne Lennington) to accept the Agenda passed. All five Clusters of the Association and the following 29 churches were represented:

Central Cluster: California UCC, California; Columbia UCC, Columbia; Evangelical UCC, Boonville; First Congregational UCC, Lebanon; Immanuel UCC, New Franklin; Immanuel UCC, Sedalia; Peace UCC, Hartsburg; and Salem UCC (McGirk), California.

Kansas City Cluster: Bethel UCC, N. Kansas City; Congregational Christian Church of Samoa, Independence; Country Club Congregational UCC, Kansas City; Ivanhoe UCC, Raytown; St. Luke's UCC, Independence; St. Marks Union UCC, Kansas City; St. Peters UCC, Kansas City; and Southwood UCC, Raytown.

Lafayette Cluster: Bethel UCC, Concordia; Ebenezer UCC, Levasy; St. John UCC, Emma; St. Luke UCC, Grand Pass; St. Paul UCC, Blackburn; Salem UCC, Higginsville; Trinity UCC, Lexington; and Zion UCC, Mayview.

Ozark Cluster: St. John's Chapel UCC, Springfield; and St. Peter's UCC, Billings.

St Joseph Cluster: Hope UCC, Cosby; and Zion UCC, St Joseph.

Non-Aligned: Grace Community Church, West Plains.

Welcome and Recognition of Guests: Rev. Alan Gatewood, Pastor of Bethel UCC, Concordia welcomed the more than 100 delegates, clergy, and laity in attendance. Guests included: Rev. Jeff Whitman, MMS Conference Minister; Rev. Dr. David Greenhaw, President of Eden Seminary; and Bernice Crown, Dana Fleming, Jan and Dale Rickert, members of Grace Community Church, West Plains.

Opening Worship: Rev. Dr. David Greenhaw led worship and dealt with the theme, "*Treasure in Earthen Vessels: Embracing Hope in Change and Challenge*" (2 Cor. 4:5-12), by considering the story of the woman with an issue of blood from Mark 5:25-34. No matter what the nature of our brokenness, we still have a treasure granted and sustained by the God of hope.

Introduction of Association Business: The 2008 Annual Meeting Minutes were presented. A correction was made: under Business Session II, the motion was made by Joe "Schroeder" of Columbia UCC. With this correction, the minutes were approved by consensus.

The proposed Bylaw changes were introduced by Bob Atkinson, Secretary/Treasurer, with lots of questions and discussion. The Bylaw changes will be considered after lunch.

Linda Stenger, Vice-Chair, then introduced the Nominating Report with elections also to be held after lunch.

Martha Hawthorne announced that Festival of Sharing Packets are available at the registration desk.

Keynote Presentation by David Greenhaw: David talked about growing up in Kansas City and his background in the UCC. Despite deep UCC roots, he, like many of us, is still perplexed regarding current times, culture, and the church.

Beginning in 1964, church giving and membership began to decline. Every single year, the UCC has lost members and churches; from 2.4 million to 1.2 million members. David suggested three reasons for this decline: 1) Other churches ask more and demand, expect it; 2) We don't make enough babies (William McKinney's theory); and 3) we now live in cities and suburbs rather than in rural or country areas (David's theory). In 1900, 86% lived in rural or country areas and 15% lived in cities. In 2000, 78% live in cities or suburbs and the rest in the country. The people no longer live where we built our churches, and we have not built churches where the people moved.

Yet we remain committed to our "Holy Space"; our churches with their lack of elevators, air conditioning, bad paint, ecological and asbestos hazards, etc. So it becomes an either/or proposition: either a pastor, or the building, but we can't have both. But, although perplexed, we are not driven to despair.

We must remember that the Treasure is not ours, it is God's. The Treasure is a God who is real and creating; who notices you, knows you, and loves you. God is doing great things, but still uses us; with us and through us (in spite of us?).

What we can do: 1) remember the remarkable things that God is doing; 2) the many UCC contributions – ordained the first woman, etc.; and 3) encourage and support alternative ways of being the church.

We are not separate, but part of a larger whole. We must work together, and recognize that God is not done with us yet. There is more to do, and we must leave behind the "we've never done it that way before" attitude. **"There may be other ways to do this and still be the church." God is still speaking!**

Lunch: Alan Gatewood offered a prayer, and a wonderful lunch was served by the Bethel UCC Inner Life Committee.

Business Session: Jeff Whitman, Conference Minister, talked about partnership as meeting at the point of greatest or deepest need, and about the concept of UBUMTU ("I am because you are, you are because we are") before sharing information about partnerships with the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Jamaica. He also talked about "Ready, Set, Grow" and the Habakkuk Project with its examination of Conference structure, staffing, and the strategic plan.

Jeff then dealt with: Camp MoVal and Shannondale Sundays with a suggested donation of \$3.00 per member; the Search and Call process; Caring for Pastors and Congregations; the upcoming Persons in Ministry Retreat; the Biennial Meeting with Global Ministry representation on Oct. 30-Nov. 1; and General Synod 27 in Grand Rapids, MI, June 25-30. Dale Parson, Associate Conference Minister, also announced

that Judith Bartell will be the Honored Lay Woman from the Western Association at General Synod 27.

Jeff and Dale recognized 5 for 5 and Covenant Keeper Churches, and presented certificates.

Jerry Cundiff gave the Chair's Report and was thanked for five years of very faithful service to the Association. He was presented a gift on behalf of the Association by Dale Parson and Linda Stenger.

The Church & Ministry Report was presented by Ron Wendle, Chair, and Leora Bremer, Secretary.

Consideration of Bylaw Changes was presented by Bob Atkinson. After many questions and much discussion, a motion with second (Linda Stenger/Dennis Zeller) was made to, "accept the changes as presented." Motion passed. A subsequent motion with second (Becky Hebert/John Sellers) was made regarding Article II, Section 4, Paragraph 3, that, "This be an undetermined amount for this year and as soon as possible receive a budget from the Western Association Council so representatives can more accurately present this to churches." After discussion, the motion passed.

Linda Stenger presented the Nomination slate. A motion with second was made to accept the slate as presented – motion passed. Those elected were: Chair, Linda Stenger; Vice-Chair, Pat Glover; Secretary, Robert Atkinson; Treasurer, Joyce Meyer; Committee On Ministry, Class of 2012 – Leora Bremer, Collette Jones, Ron Wendle, Stephen Redman; Representative to Planning Ministry – Jerry Cundiff; Representatives to Nominating Ministry - Wayne Gadt and Karen Redman; and Representative to Administrating Ministry - Clairnel Nervik. Those elected, along with previously elected representatives, were installed by Rev. Dale Parson, Associate Conference Minister.

Closing Worship: Alan Gatewood and Dale Parson led the closing worship and all celebrated Holy Communion.

Adjourn: The meeting adjourned at 3:20 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Robert Atkinson, Secretary
Interim Pastor at Zion UCC, Mayview