

**REPORT TO THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE
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2010 IOWA ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

Bishop Trimble, lay and clergy members of the Iowa Annual Conference the year 2009 has been an interesting voyage for those of us working with the financial and administrative affairs of the conference. Since we last met the economy has been like a misfired rocket ship going to the stratosphere and tumbling back to earth, keeping everyone guessing as to what is next. However, we no longer need to guess at the impact the volatile economy has had on our pension and other benefits. As it has been reported in various communications, the need to fund current and past clergy pensions has impacted every aspect of the budget for 2011. Complicating that impact is the recent health care legislation which may provide great change starting in 2011 and beyond. Thus it seems the Board of Pensions is on a “five year mission: to explore strange new worlds; to seek out new life and new civilizations; to boldly go where no one has gone before.”

Since we met last year, the staff of Administrative Services has also explored strange new worlds and sought out new life forms and new civilizations—some others would call this same thing “soft ware conversion”. Our software has been patched but not updated since sometime in the early 1990’s. Our system handles about 1,000,000 transactions a year. Knowing that, the data supporting those transactions include phone numbers, e-mail addresses, spouses names, snail mail address, individual links to volunteer local congregation’s offices, membership to local churches, district, conference agencies and other attributes, multiple budget processes, the conversion was a major undertaking and of course has not occurred without some glitches. Of course, a major frustration is that when one area is fixed it causes something else to go astray.

Yet considering the volume data to be converted it has gone more smoothly than anticipated with the one exception, our direct bill for pensions and health insurance. One of the attributing factors to the direct bill issues was either incorrect information or no information provided to us regarding clergy compensation forms and clergy enrollment in our various health insurance plans for 2010. I want to thank you for the patience it has required as our staff has continued to do their daily tasks as well as assisting in the conversion.

The theme for this year’s Annual Conference is Radical Hospitality –Offering God’s Love. When I think of offering, I think of a gift given, a contribution or something that is presented in an act of worship. We are here because we have accepted the gift of Christ offered to us from God. We are here because we want to offer that same gift of Christ to others. Let me now list for you some of the statistics that we can use as a measure of how we are doing in receiving God’s offered love to us and offering that same love to others.

The membership of the United Methodist Church in Iowa as of December 31, 2009 was 184,376. This is a 1.6 % decrease in membership from 2008. In 2009, our Conference had 810 congregations. Out of those congregations, 243 increased their membership. Our smallest congregations have two members, our largest has 2,574 members. The average membership is 228; however, a better measure of our congregations is the median number (meaning as many congregations smaller and larger) which is 133.

This past year we received 2,809 new Christians. Those are the ones who have been offered and accepted God's love by their profession of faith. Out of our 810 congregations in Iowa in 2009, 413 of them have received at least one member by profession of faith. The most any one congregation has received by profession of faith this year is 75.

This past year, 515 of our 810 congregations baptized new people into the faith, for a total of 2,482. The most baptisms in any one congregation were 57. Unfortunately, I must also report some congregations did not fulfill the charge Jesus gave his followers in Matthew 28 to make disciples and baptize. 238 of our congregations received no one by profession of faith, and did not participate in the sacrament of baptism for the year 2009.

Average worship attendance for the past year was 60,715. This is a 2.2% decrease; however, 251 congregations had an increase in average worship attendance this last year. The congregation with the highest average attendance was 1,022 and the lowest was 5. The average for all congregations was 75 and the median was 45.

The value of our church owned land and building is \$912,638,533 and the value of other assets is \$110,006,928. Even in this volatile economic climate our assets grew by \$24,049,294. Let us just pause for a moment and reflect on what this means. Our combined assets are \$1,022,645,461. As congregations we are blessed and have many resources that we can offer to others as we share God's love.

In 2009, the grand total spent by all of our congregations for all causes was \$102,472,204. Last year the amount was \$99,746,414, an increase from last year of 2.73%. This means that in 2009 our congregations spent an average of \$555.80 per member or \$1,687.75 per average worship attendee for all causes.

In 2009, our congregations reported income for all causes of \$106,913,206. In 2008 that amount was \$98,150,843 which is an increase of 8.92%. God never ceases to amaze me; because given all the talk of recession, job losses and poor economy, I would have expected these amounts to be less than in 2008. Our income for 2009 average per member was \$579.89 and \$1,760.90 per average worship attendee.

I will be the first to admit that these numbers really surprise me because as I traveled around the Conference this year I heard a lot of 'poor me' talk. Enough that one would think the churches of Iowa are near bankruptcy. That fact may be true for some; but what these numbers tell me is that God has offered us enough resources that we can

accomplish any type of mission and ministry we really want to do as we offer God's love to others.

The question becomes, how much of what we received and how much of what we spent in local congregations was shared beyond the local church with United Methodists in Iowa and around the world. In 2009, 525 congregations had paid 100% of their apportionments by January 8; another 36 congregations paid 100% since that date. In addition, another 51 congregations ended the year by paying 80% or more of their apportionments.

Apportionment receipts for 2009 were \$13,695,288 a 0.43% increase from 2008. Of that amount, \$2,248,829 passed to the General Church as the Iowa Conference paid 100% of the General Church apportionment assigned to local congregations. This left \$11,446,459 to be used by the churches of Iowa for supporting the total ministry and mission of the Iowa Annual Conference.

Let's put these numbers in another way. Out of every one dollar paid by congregations for everything, 11.2 cents came to the Conference for its mission and ministry; 2.2 cents went to fund General Church apportionments, and the rest, 86.6 cents was left to use by the local congregation at its discretion for their ministry.

In my teenage years and early twenties, a popular folk singer sang "the times they are a changin'". I think that is even more true today. With the volatile economy, the change in population demographics, the aging of baby boomers, political climate, health insurance reform, and other programs undergoing major changes it really is a time when we are exploring strange new worlds; seeking out new life and boldly (rather maybe) boldly going where no one has gone before. However, I am certain of one thing. Wherever, we go and whatever we decide to do God will be with us—offering us God's love and expecting us to offer that same love to others. Amen