

e-HUM NEWS

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Hoosier United Methodists establish new Indiana Annual Conference

By Matthew Oates and Daniel R. Gangler*

INDIANAPOLIS – More than 2,000 Hoosier United Methodist conference members and guests from across Indiana, established a new annual conference and legally dissolve the two former conferences during a joint special session of both conferences at the Indiana State Fairgrounds on Saturday afternoon, Oct. 4.

Indiana Area Bishop Michael J. Coyner convened the North and South Indiana Annual Conferences in the Toyota Blue Ribbon Pavilion.

"We gather as sheep following our shepherd in the sheep barn," he commented. The session conducted its business in an atmosphere of worship led by Chuck Scott of Fort Wayne. More than 30 singers and musicians led the session in song.

Coyner shared several greetings from both Indiana U.S. Senators Richard Lugar, who is a United Methodist, and Evan Bayh, as well as greetings from other bishops and annual conferences.

Ike Randolph, executive director of the Indiana State Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, extended greetings from Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels on behalf of the State of Indiana. Randolph said Hoosiers are appreciative of the rich contributions made by United Methodists.

"You were here before the State of Indiana was chartered and have been an active partner with state and local governments in all 92 counties," he said.

Randolph thanked United Methodists for their involvement with disaster relief, legislation for the betterment of society and for serving as a moral compass to the state. "You and you're related institutions are interwoven into the fabric of this state."

Remembering

The Rev. Richard Hamilton, a retired South Indiana pastor, recalled 200-plus years of Indiana Methodism, as well as some famous Hoosiers and their links to the church, beginning with Abraham Lincoln, who lived in Indiana during the early 1800s.

"All of these people were nourished in the pews of the Methodist Church," said Hamilton. "I just want to remember people. It's their faces and faithfulness who brought us here today."

Rev. Phil Klinger, a retired North Indiana pastor, said, "We are all heirs of a tradition that we did not make."

Klinger shared thoughts on those who have been leaders in various conferences and joint ministries throughout the churches 200 years in Indiana.

"Today the baton is being passed. Don't drop it. Pass it on," he said.

The vote

The Rev. Cindy Reynolds, chair of the 13-member Transition Team and superintendent of the Warsaw District, introduced six recommendations and a series of resolutions which brought the new conference into being.

Coyner called for separate votes on the resolutions from each of the two conferences by a show-of-cards of the 1,688 voting members present. The resolutions were overwhelmingly approved at 2:22 p.m. establishing the new conference. Afterwards, members and guests stood and applauded the formation of the new Indiana Conference.

The votes concluded more than two years by various task forces and committees studying the possibility of creating a new conference. This past spring, South Indiana Conference members voted 616 to 185 (or 77 to 23 percent), while North Indiana Conference members voted 730 to 192 (or 79 to 21 percent) to create a new conference. In July, the North Central Jurisdiction of The United Methodist Church affirmed the two conferences' votes and granted permission for the unification of the two conferences.

The new Indiana Conference represents more than 225,000 United Methodist members, 40,000 children and 1,200 congregations in all 92 counties. The largest Protestant denomination in Indiana, the church is related to three hospital systems, three universities, three children's homes, six residence facilities for older adults, one half-way house, seven retreat/camps and numerous community ministries.

Features of the new annual conference include:

- Forming clergy into covenant groups and all 1,200 congregations into ministry clusters of four to nine congregations for support, outreach to their communities and accountability to the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world;
- Dissolving the current 18 districts across Indiana and establishing five resource centers to support the work of 10 districts; and
- Creating a new conference structure including a Conference Leaders Team and establishing a new conference center in Indianapolis. The team will be chaired by the bishop and includes representatives from all aspects of the conference at the same table.

The inaugural Indiana Annual Conference will officially convene its first annual conference session at Ball State University in Muncie, June 25-28, 2009.

Can these bones live?

In his first sermon to the new conference, Bishop Michael J. Coyner asked members, "Can these bones live?" based on Ezekiel 37:1-14.

"That's not an organizational question, it's a spiritual question. Can this new Indiana Annual Conference be alive? The answer is found in the question of Ezekiel," said Coyner. "The answer is yes, by God's spirit. That's our answer today."

Coyner emphasized two aspects of the new conference. He encouraged congregations to join a ministry cluster to work together, as well as continue development of clergy cluster groups which already are springing up across the state.

Other goals he emphasized included streamlining leadership and transforming members and congregations to re-focus more clearly to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of Indiana and the world.

“Yes, God wants this new conference to be an effective tool for God’s ministry. It’s up to us – but it’s not all up to us. The answer is yes, by God’s spirit,” said Coyner. “The gentle spirit of God will make us into the Indiana Conference of The United Methodist Church.”

Following his sermon, Coyner led in the ritual of Holy Communion, which concluded the session.

New officers

Members of the new conference approved these officers:

- Conference Trustees: Al Brothers, William Clippinger, Rev. Mark Dickens, Patricia Klockow, Nancy Leonard, Rev. L. Wayne Smith, Stacy Stevens, Rev. Vickie Van Nevel, Brian Williams, John York, Susan Kirkpatrick and Tom Ream.
- Council on Finance and Administration: Rev. Kent Millard (chair), Rev. Dennis Alstott, Rev. Paul Arnold, Rev. Brian Beeks, Rev. Dave Byrum, Jack Dwiggin, Ronald Frieden, Jane Halper-Alport, Donna Howell, Rev. Jared Jennette, April Largent, Rev. Karen Ottjes, Rev. Beverly Perry, Robert Pimlott, Rev. George Purnell, Larna Spearman, Don Spence, Roger Summers and Ethelenor Washhum.

These interim committees and members were approved:

- Annual Conference Sessions: Rev. Karen Devaisher (co-chair), Rev. Mary Hubbard (co-chair), Rev. Karen Altergott, Rev. James Bushfield, Rev. Betty Ann Garret, Rev. Mark Gough, Elsie Miller, Kayc Mykrantz, Ruth Ellen Needler, Rev. Jennifer Pollard, Rev. Lynn Renne, Charles (Chuck) Scott and Ike Williams.
- Nominations: Rev. Curtis Hurley, Brian Jarman, Rev. Karen Koelsch, Kayc Mykrantz, Vickie Newkirk, Jeanie Park, Rev. Rob Seewald, Rev. Lisa Schubert, Martha Scott, James Shaw, Rev. Bob Vale, Ike Williams and Rev. Jean Wilson.
- Rules and Structure: Rev. LaMont Bonath, Rev. Taylor Burton-Edwards, Rev. Greig Crowder, Rosie Jordan, Rev. Robert Land and Carolyn Marshall.
- Human Resources: Sam Odle (chair), Jacqueline Blackwell, Jerry Moore, Greg Morgan, Ambry Morley, Rev. David Schrader, Pennye Siefert, Rev. Jeff Smith, Charles Young and Joseph Easley.

Other persons elected and appointed by the special session included:

- Director of Financial Services and Conference Treasurer: Jennifer Gallagher
- Director of Administrative Services and Conference Statistician: Brent Williams
- Director of Connectional Ministries: Rev. Jim Bushfield
- Director of Communication: Rev. Dan Gangler
- Director of Church Development; Rev. Mark Gough
- Conference secretary: Carolyn Johnson

Other business

Representatives of the North Indiana, South Indiana and Indiana Area foundations provided an update on the process of merging all of the various foundations' resources into one foundation. A report will be provided at the next annual conference session in June 2009.

The Rev. Russ Alley appealed to members to support the Central Conference Pension Initiative. "How will we be known? I offer you this challenge today and I pray that we will be known as people who live beyond ourselves as members of the Indiana Annual Conference."

The Rev. Mary Hubbard and the Rev. Karen Devaisher, co-chairs of the newly elected sessions committee, announced the dates of annual conference June 25-28. Sessions will be Thursday and Friday; Saturday will be a mission outreach day to the Muncie community. Sunday will be the day of the ordination/consecration service.

Ingathering

In preparation for the special session, Hoosier United Methodists were encouraged to bring flood bucket clean-up and health (personal hygiene) kits to contribute to the Midwest Mission Distribution Center near Springfield, Ill., a ministry of the Illinois Great Rivers Conferences.

According to Gary Peterson, of Fort Wayne and disaster response coordinator of the North Indiana Conference, the ingathering was overwhelming. Members brought 430 flood buckets, more than 1,000 health kits and school items to the Indiana Area-based Operation Classroom for schools in Sierra Leone and Liberia.

Hoosier United Methodists complete filled a 35-foot truck from the Illinois center. Flood buckets which could not fit into the truck were divided among Calumet District people who were taking the kits to one of the two United Way Volunteer Response Centers in Munster and Portage in northwest Indiana, to assist flood survivors recovering from mid-September flood damage.

Prayer theme days

During their presentation, the 13-members of the Imagine Indiana Transition Team encouraged Hoosier United Methodists to pray through aspects of ministry in the new conference by focusing on a particular part of the conference's ministry each day of the week beginning with Oct. 5. Those prayers are:

Sunday, Oct. 5, Passionate Worship

Lord, we pray that United Methodist Churches across the globe would have an awesome encounter of worshipping you in Spirit and in truth today (John 4:24). We pray that the Churches of the Indiana Conference are filled with passionate worship.

Monday, Oct. 6, Calling Young People into Ministry

Lord, we pray that you would raise up laborers for the harvest (Matthew 9:37-39). And, specifically, we ask you to call 2,000 young clergy into the ordained ministry of The United Methodist Church in America. We ask you to call 50 young clergy leaders in the Indiana Conference.

Tuesday, Oct. 7, New Churches

Lord, we pray that you would raise up 400 new United Methodist churches in America

in places where there is no vibrant witness for the Gospel right now (Romans 15:20). We ask you to establish 10 new congregations in the Indiana Conference.

Wednesday, Oct. 8, Ministry to the Poor

Lord, we pray that you would use United Methodist churches to alleviate poverty, stamp out malaria and HIV/AIDS, and minister to the less fortunate and overlooked in the name of Jesus (Matthew 25:40). We pray the churches of the Indiana Conference will engage in risk taking mission and ministry.

Thursday, Oct. 9, Renewed Vitality of the UMC

Lord, we pray that you would bring renewed vitality to The United Methodist Church (Ezekiel 37) and that you would daily add to your church through professions of faith (Acts 2:47). We pray that our congregations will be so equipped to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world through the new Indiana Conference.

Friday, Oct. 10, Unity

Lord, we pray for a healthy unity across The United Methodist Church such that the unbelieving world may see and believe in you (John 17:20-21). We pray that the Indiana Conference will be a unified voice with a vision for the transformation of the world.

Saturday, Oct. 11, The Word

Lord, we pray that as the Word of God is preached in our church and other United Methodist churches tomorrow that you would bear fruit that will last forever (Isaiah 55:10-11). We pray for the Holy Spirit to empower our preachers to speak God's word and our members to respond to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

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