



2010

Lay Member Summary

Nearly 1.4 billion people lived on less than \$1.25 a day in 2005. In Florida, 13.3 percent of the state's population — nearly 2.5 million — lived below the federal poverty line in 2009.* Florida United Methodists gathered at the Lakeland Center June 9-12 to learn how to change that reality. At this year's Florida Annual Conference Event, nearly 1,800 lay and clergy members considered the business of the conference, but also focused on ways to put their discipleship into action to solve the problems of extreme poverty at home and abroad.

Putting faith into action:

- Addressing the laity during their session June 10, Florida Gov. **Charlie Crist** thanked them for their ministry in Florida. As a life-long United Methodist and member at First United Methodist Church in St. Petersburg, Crist said the lessons of his church and family "have stuck with me through all these years." That includes doing what's right and putting people first. "We have a duty and an obligation to help other people," Crist said, when asked what can be done to end extreme poverty. He says that belief has guided his actions throughout his career, despite criticism for some of his decisions. "That's OK ... people can judge," he said. "I know who's the ultimate judge."
- The **Rev. David Beckmann** told members during the opening session June 10 that eradicating extreme poverty is possible. "It takes a political push," the Bread for the World president said — in the form of churches, individuals and groups changing policies that enable hunger to persist. Bread for the World helps facilitate those efforts, Beckmann said, and they're making a difference worldwide. The number of people living in poverty has dropped 500 million since the early 1980s, and 42 million more children in Africa are in school now than in 1990. Just as the apostle Paul used his Roman citizenship to advance God's purposes, Beckmann said, people of faith must use their citizenship to eliminate poverty. Members put that belief into practice by preparing letters to their U.S. Representatives, asking them to urge Congress to fully fund the international affairs budget, which provides funding for hunger-, poverty- and disease-prevention programs abroad. "God will use our little steps," he said, "to end extreme poverty."
- **Stan Doerr** told members he never wants a child to die of hunger because he doesn't have the resources to help. As president and chief executive officer of ECHO (Educational Concerns for Hunger Organization) in North Ft. Myers, he does. From teaching rice farmers in Cambodia how to produce a better yield to providing nutrient-rich powder to hungry children, ECHO provides missionaries and indigenous people around the world with the tools they need to produce high yield crops and maximize their potential to address hunger locally. ECHO's great challenge, Doerr said, is building the capacity of the organization to meet the growing need. "Not for our sake," he said, "but because we want to get the resources in the hands of people who can use them. ... God has called each of us to be a tool in his hand."

Addressing the four areas of focus: The Florida Conference supports four denomination-wide areas of emphasis — developing principled Christian leaders, starting new congregations and revitalizing existing ones, engaging in ministry with the poor, and fighting diseases of poverty, such as malaria and HIV/AIDS — by:

- **Helping congregations remain vital:** Members approved changing the Office of Congregational Transformation's name to Center for Congregational Excellence to better reflect its role in supporting the missional health of all churches. The center's staff will work with churches in four key areas — developing authentic disciples, empowering "kingdom leaders," cultivating effective congregations and building excellent administrations — and tailor resources and assistance to district and local church needs.
- **Launching new communities of faith:** New Church Development (NCD) reported that nine new United Methodist congregations launched during the last conference year. This year, the goal is 13 new churches. Members approved a budget of slightly more than \$1.2 million to support that goal. NCD also reported it will not fill its vacant director of Hispanic New Church Development position in response to a request from the Florida Conference Council on Finance and Administration (CF&A) that it and the Center for Congregational Excellence reduce their budgets by \$50,000. Instead, the Rev. Dr. Juan Feliciano, director of Hispanic Congregational Excellence, will assume the position's responsibilities in addition to his own until future funding is available.
- **Nurturing new leaders:** More than 100 college students serving on the 2009 Florida Conference summer camp team gained ministry experience leading nearly 4,000 children and youth during conference summer camp programs. Another 12 college students served with Florida outreach ministries through the summer mission intern program

coordinated by the conference's justice and outreach and camps and retreat ministries. Hundreds of young adults and college students participated in "SCREAM: Get Ready for the Ride" and "Reclaim," events sponsored by conference ministries that helped youth and young adults discern their call to ministry and strengthen their faith.

- **Working to end childhood hunger:** Forty-three Florida United Methodist and African Methodist Episcopal churches served as summer meal sites in 2009 so students would not go hungry during the summer. About 75 members of both churches teamed up again to meet with Florida legislators in Tallahassee in April, urging them to ensure all funds intended for the food stamp program would be used for that purpose and support a federal act that would give all states funding to provide nutritious meals — not just snacks — in after-school programs. Conference leaders urged members to do even more: have their churches serve as summer meal and food stamp enrollment sites, call 800-815-3740 now to ask Congress to reauthorize federal child nutrition programs, let people in need know about existing meal sites (<http://www.summerfoodflorida.org>) and volunteer at those sites. Hungry people "are dying — dying in every one of our communities," said the Rev. Pam Cahoon, director of Christians Reaching Out To Society in Lake Worth. "What would Jesus have us do? We know what Jesus did. Do something. We can do it."
- **Eradicating malaria:** During the time it took members to watch a short video on the effects of malaria, five children died of the disease, the Rev. Audrey Warren told members June 11. Warren, senior pastor at Branches United Methodist Mission in Florida City, is leading the Florida task force for Imagine No Malaria, a denomination-wide initiative to eradicate malaria as a major source of death and suffering in Africa by 2015 through bed net distribution, vaccines, improved access to health care and education. The public launch of the campaign was World Malaria Day April 25. During the session, Warren asked members to give a \$10 donation to the campaign through a cell phone text. Ways to donate and get involved are also available at <http://www.imagenomalaria.org>.

Strengthening partnerships: Conference churches have given \$96,000 toward the offering collected during the communion service June 10. Eighty percent will go to The Methodist Church of Haiti to help the country recover from the Jan. 12 earthquake and multiple storm systems. The remaining 20 percent will go to Florida Impact for the Partnership to End Childhood Hunger in Florida. To date, Florida Conference churches have contributed at least \$1.5 million for Haiti relief.

Considering the health of the conference:

- Members approved the formation of the Key Leader Connection, a group of leaders representing all conference ministries that will work to better facilitate input, feedback, coordination and communication among the ministries, and the Strategic Leadership Team, which will include 10 members chosen by the bishop in consultation with the director of Connectional Ministries and conference lay leader who will clarify and implement the vision of the conference. The Key Leader Connection will provide advice and feedback to the Strategic Leadership Team.
- The conference treasurer reported that local church membership was 294,935 in 2009, down 7,562 or 3 percent from 2008, but average weekly worship attendance was up 2,706 or 2 percent at 146,855. Professions of faith were down 169 or 3 percent at 6,514.
- Ministry Protection reported property insurance premiums have decreased nearly \$7 million since 2007 and now total 12.4 million. Loss prevention reserves have increased nearly \$7 million, from a negative of \$900,000 in 2005 to \$5.7 million in 2009, with \$1.6 million added last year.
- CF&A reported the number of churches paying apportionments at 100 percent was down from 407 in 2008 to 366 in 2009; the percentage paid was 80.3 percent in 2008, compared to 79.1 percent in 2009. Meanwhile, investments used to fund future pension and health benefits reached an all-time high of \$35.8 million. In 2008, expenses exceeded revenue by \$10.7 million. In 2009, revenue totaling \$57.9 million exceeded expenses of \$49.4 million.
- CF&A cut \$525,000 from the 2011 budget request; the General Council on Finance and Administration reduced the conference's general church apportionments by \$348,000. As a result, the budget approved by members was slightly more than \$17.5 million — \$873,378 or 4.74 percent less than the 2010 budget.

Celebrating partners in ministry: Members celebrated the:

- Ordination, licensing and commissioning of 46 individuals;
- 150th anniversaries of four churches and the significant anniversaries of 33 other churches; and
- Ministries of nine churches that were discontinued and six that merged to form three new congregations.

Complete coverage of this year's annual conference event is available through e-Review Florida United Methodist News Service at <http://www.flumc.info>. Full ministry reports are included in the 2010 Workbook at <http://www.flumc2.org/page.asp?PKValue=1660>.