

2013 DISTRICT REPORTS

CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS DISTRICT

The Movers and Shakers District

During the past year, the meaning of the words which Mordecai told his cousin, Esther, has gained a new meaning for me. In the middle of a national crisis which sought to exterminate the Jews, Mordecai challenges Queen Esther's apathetic attitude with the words "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"

Without a doubt, this reminds me of an old quote by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. When you read it, you will also be reminded, as I was, that a leader must be a leader always; and that Esther, in order to save her people, she needed to put it all on the line. Dr King said, "The ultimate measure of a man (or a woman) is not where he stands in moments of comfort, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy."

In reflection of this passage, I have concluded that leadership is not just about making good things happen; but also about staying strong and committed in difficult times. For the Central Massachusetts District, this year has been a year filled with challenges. We are strong and committed and even up to the challenge, but the numbers of our churches continue to go down. During this past year, the following churches have closed:

Grace United Methodist Church in Hopkinton

Iglesia Metodista Unida El Buen Pastor in Lowell

North Grafton United Methodist Church in N. Grafton

Each of these churches was faithful; and even as they ceased to exist, the resources they leave behind will give new hope and new life to a new generation. For instance, Grace UMC left a vacant plot of land. When sold, the proceeds of that will go for a new church start in the CMA district. North Grafton UMC left enough funds and property for us to start a new congregation in the Grafton area. As a district we are committed to making this happen, soon.

Beyond that, two of our churches, Maynard UMC and Covenant-St. Andrew's, went from ½ to ¼ in pastoral appointment. We also celebrate that the Korean UMC in Worcester will be going from ¼ to ½ starting July 1, 2013. This is a turn of events and a great hope for the church. Otherwise, many of our churches continue to be strong and faithful. This district still has the largest church in the NE Annual Conference; and other churches which seem to be catching up to it.

We are committed to the work of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. We want to live into becoming movers and shakers for the sake of God's kingdom on earth and in heaven. As we move forward into next year, we have plans of starting two new ministries in Worcester and one new church in Grafton. We are movers and shakers but are unmovable and unshakable, and we will continue to do our best to remain faithful to our vision. I truly believe we are becoming well-equipped to turn our district around, and our hope is that although we may see one or two more churches close in the future, we will soon begin to grow, in spirit and in number.

Until next year! Amen!

Rene A. Perez, District Superintendent
CMA District Chief Missional Strategist

CONNECTICUT/WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS

God is good...all the time! And all the time....God is good! It's hard to imagine I'm finishing my seventh year and will be starting my last year on the district. It's been a privilege to journey with all of the churches/clergy on the district.

Some of the highlights for the 2012/2013 appointment year on the district include:

- Alleluia Sunday, our annual district gathering on World Communion Sunday with well over 200 in attendance. This was the first time for many to meet our new Bishop. Music was shared from around the district, new clergy were introduced, missions were celebrated and district leadership elected.
- Healing Services. This year we were blessed to invite Rev. Michael Ferris to share his "Journey to the Potter's House" presentation – which was a transformative healing experience for the over 300 people who attended the various services throughout the district.

- Leadership Academy was held this year at Christ UMC in Northampton. The theme was “Spiritual Renewal and Recovery.” Several classes were offered, and the Rev. Catharine Cummings (Wesley UMC in Springfield) delivered a powerful message at mid-day worship....”Stoking the Light.”
- New Hope UM Regional Ministry (Rev. Gary Richards, Director) continues to make progress in developing partnerships in the greater Springfield area. They have been a vital presence in helping area UM churches come together for the “Rebuilding Together Springfield” project in April. Over 100 volunteers from area UMC’s participated in the April event working together to help rebuild Springfield neighborhoods torn apart during the tornado a few years ago. The New Hope UM Regional Board and Trinity UMC donated \$10,000 each towards the rebuilding. The New Hope UM Regional Board also sponsored in partnership with Trinity UMC the birth of JFON (Justice for our Neighbors) in October 2012. This ministry has been experiencing growing numbers of people coming for services/support each month.
- Wesley UMC, Springfield. The Monroe House located next to the church building was the district mission project this year. They are grateful for all the volunteers who came to share their time, talent and gifts to help get this house ready for a new missional ministry. Wesley is experiencing spiritual revival – alleluia!

A Possibility Study was completed at New London UMC. A new ministry team is being appointed effective July 1, 2013. Rev. Jim Hensley will serve as “coordinating pastor” for the team...and the Rev. Ho-Soon Han will serve as the “discernment leader.” The church will spend the next full year discerning God’s call. Possibility studies in Portland and Glastonbury will be held during next year.

Special thanks to JoAnn Watson, our district Admin. Asst., for the many ways she keeps things going smoothly at the district office; and special thanks to David Dunham and Pearl Wilkinson (district Lay Leaders) and all the clergy and laity on the district that seek to be faith-filled, spirit-led disciples of our Lord.

Together in Ministry,
Heidi Chamberland, District Superintendent

MID-MAINE

It has been my pleasure to be in ministry with the people of the Mid-Maine District. There are times that are challenging; times that are exciting; times that cause one to want to run away and times when loud praise to God is the only possible response.

This year we are blessed and excited to rejoice with three of our pastors who were among the final graduation class from Bangor Seminary. We also rejoice with those who have discerned calls to ministry, been recently licensed as local pastors, and in one case ordained as an Elder at Annual Conference.

We continue to try to find ways for our bi-vocational pastors to be able to connect with others in the district. A new mentoring group primarily of bi-vocational local pastors is beginning to meet some of that need. We are also continuing to explore ways to connect churches that have similar interests or needs. We hope to begin some affinity groups that relate to some of the diverse demographics of the district. We plan to offer groups for those churches that experience significant changes based on the seasons of the year, churches in urban settings, and churches in small towns or rural settings.

We recognize that change is one of the few constants in our world and we were able to bring Sarai Rice from the Alban Institute here for a resource day focusing on “Adaptive Change – it’s easier than you think.” While Sarai didn’t provide the magic answers that so many hope for, she helped us see the reality that there are no magic answers and that sometimes the need is to really ask the right questions and to think outside of the box rather than to run to quick solutions.

Unexpected change occurred in several places in our district this year. One of these involved changes in the staffing at the United Methodist Economic Ministry in Salem, Maine. In October, we said good-bye to Kay Webb our executive director and in June, to Crystal Cook our operations manager. Both served faithfully for many years ministering among areas of poverty in rural Maine. As we transition and reorganize, we are grateful to our board and to our interim executive director.

In addition to celebrating the incredible work of the Economic Ministry, we are also privileged to celebrate the ministries of Camp Mechuwana and the Methodist Conference Home (MCH).

There have been several pastors who have experienced significant health issues this year and churches that have had serious building challenges. When changes happen that are out of our control, we once again realize how important it is for us to work together and to rely upon God for our guidance, strength, and peace.

In times of struggle and declining membership, we always look for signs of vitality. Often these signs are best observed through stories but sometimes numbers also bear witness. In at least two of our churches this year there was great celebration as more than 25 persons were baptized or received into membership through various means. It is interesting to me to note that these two churches are both pastored by persons who serve half-time. There are many other churches that can share stories of vital and exciting things happening as people become more connected with God and grow in discipleship.

The face of ministry continues to change in our district as does the way we organize for ministry. There are as many churches that are led by a ministry team of some sort (11) as there are full time appointments led by one pastor not serving another church or ministry. 40 of our 69 churches are either served by more than one pastor or share their pastor with one or more churches.

All of this means that both ministry and life are changing in Mid-Maine and we are constantly seeking to be open to the new thing that God is doing in our midst and responding, "Here I am, Lord, send me." It is a privilege and a joy to be serving among the people in this region.

In Christ's Service,
Beverly E Stenmark, District Superintendent

METRO-BOSTON HOPE DISTRICT

What a joy and privilege it has been to serve the laity and pastors on the Metro Boston Hope (MBH) District. I have enjoyed traveling the District to see the tremendous ministry that is taking place from shore to shore. We are the most diverse District in the Conference, and that diversity allows us to demonstrate the fullness of the Imago Dei. During my installation sermon I shared God's call to draw the circle wide, and that is exactly what we have been doing.

Churches on the MBH District have been demonstrating Christ's love through mission trips to Nicaragua, offering free health care, providing after school programs for marginalized and GLBTQ youth, assisting impoverished families, providing summer youth programs and so much more. The Cooper Community Center, the only mission site within the NEUMC, continues to thrive and offer critical services to generations of children. We also celebrate that Whitman UMC raised \$2,121.00 for the Miles for Mission walk/run at this year's Annual Conference! We are doing our part to combat malaria and save lives, one step at a time.

The District also drew the circle wide to care for the community after the tragic Boston Marathon bombing. A little more than twenty-four hours after bombs ripped through the streets of Boston, Old West Church, United Methodist, opened its doors for a service of prayer and healing for the greater Boston community. Along with Bishop Devadhar, clergy from across the conference joined together to pray for one another, the victims and their families, a marathon participant, and the city as a whole. We then had the opportunity to join President Barack Obama in an ecumenical service calling for peace and unity. We are a faith-filled, prayerful, and resilient community striving to offer grace and model discipleship.

For almost a decade, several Boston-area churches have united to hold a Seven Last Words of Christ service on Good Friday. The service is always well attended, and calls the community to a full and authentic Lenten/Easter experience by remembering the Passion of our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. The night is filled with insightful preaching, inspiring worship, and moving songs.

The Hope Academy Team (HAT) worked diligently to revive the Lay Leadership Academy. The first Academy in four years was held at Grace UMC in Lynn, MA. Participation was over-whelming, evidencing a strong desire by the laity to delve deeper into mission and ministry. Our hats are off to the HAT members who are already planning the first Lay Servant Ministry Academy and the next Leadership series. On the MBH District both laity and clergy seek to Glow more brightly, be the Glue that binds hearts together in Christian love, and Glorify God in all that we do.

As we look forward into the next conference year, we are excited about our potential and new opportunities. Both Heritage UMC in Braintree, and Holbrook UMC in Holbrook, increased their appointments from one-quarter to one-half time. Our Hispanic and Latino/a ministries are thriving at Iglesia Metodista Unida Nueva Vida, and Family UMC, Brazilian Ministry. Both are welcoming new members, new leaders, and planting new mission sites within the District. Boston

University School of Theology continues to strengthen its relationship with the District, and support our servant leaders in new and dynamic ways.

While all of God's people have hope, we are the District whose very name embodies Hope. We know that with God and together, all things are possible. We also know the plans that God has for us, plans to prosper us and not to harm us. Plans to give us a future filled with HOPE. We will continue to draw the circle wide as we serve God and our communities. I am grateful for the opportunity to partner with such committed servants of God. To God be the glory!

LaTrelle Easterling,
District Superintendent

NEW HAMPSHIRE DISTRICT

"For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven" (3:1) writes the author of Ecclesiastes. As I reflect over the past year here on the New Hampshire District, the words that follow the beginning of chapter 3 do indeed ring true for us.

"A time to be born, and a time to die"

On October 14th, we mourned and celebrated the end of 206 year ministry of the Conway UMC. Even though as Christians we should not fear death, this was not an easy decision or service for those present. However, in Easter people style, the congregation chose to be a Legacy church which meant that they committed their remaining resources to support of existing UMC transformational ministries and possible new church starts in the Mt. Washington Valley Area.

We also celebrate the birthing of a new faith community "Centering Place.Monadnock" based in the Monadnock area of New Hampshire. It is a missional church model ministry. Its goal is to be present, seeking to develop relationships, offer healing, and provide a place within the area where all can find wholeness through Jesus Christ.

One of the challenges within our district is the opportunity for our pastors to spend time together. In May 2013 we held a clergy retreat asking who was the pastor serving in the community next to us. Led by Rev. Melissa Bailey-Kirk, almost half of the district pastors gathered at Geneva Point and shared parts of who we are and why we are in ministry. It was a time to relax, build relationships, tighten the weave of shared ministry and reflect on God in our lives. To date there have been viable results from this time of moving from lone ranger style ministry to sharing in the one body of Christ.

"A time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted"

We celebrated as a district the highest level of giving, both total and percentage, to our Mission Share asking in the last four years. Even as churches struggled financially, many were able to maintain their support at 100% while others were able to give more than in previous years. We celebrate being part of a larger community that will plant new schools, medical facilities, missionaries, water supplies, lay servant ministers, and more!

In addition to the planting of a new faith community in the Monadnock area, we are also in the very beginning stages of exploring a new community in the Claremont area. Still in its infancy, this gathering of folks hopes to provide love and acceptance to those whom they encounter.

In October of 2012 our district held their first Hallelujah Sunday where the many ministries of the NHD churches were celebrated. Held at the Bow Mills UMC and organized by a team of laity and clergy, the service included times when folks could share what God was doing in their churches. It was a great time to celebrate the plentiful harvest of God's presence while at the same time acknowledging we still have more work to do to share the grace and love of Christ in our communities through our prayers, presents, gifts, service, and witness. We have plans for our second such celebration in September of 2013.

We held our third annual March training event with the focus this year on "sowing seeds" with Rick McKinley, Director of Congregational Development and Alexx Wood, Communications Director for the NEUMC as our main speakers. We also had workshops on a variety of topics that focused on being a presence in our local and global neighborhoods. Those who were not held back by a late snowfall were blessed and are looking forward to March 2014.

"A time to tear, and a time to sew"

As a district, and individually as churches, we realize that things can't continue as they have in the past, and so we are trying to create new opportunities and tools for our faith communities to share within, and beyond their walls. We continue to seek ways to minister together as well as being the living presence of Christ where people are, instead of expecting them to come into our sanctuaries and worship like we do. This is a great challenge and fear to many

congregations but as the choice between mere survival and full life becomes clearer, congregations are beginning to take discerned risks in the name and love of Jesus Christ.

Last fall we held a youth leader training program that sought to bring together leaders of youth groups to share ideas and information and to begin to create a network upon which they could call for ideas, support, and encouragement. We hope to have a youth event where youth and leaders from across the district can gather in the coming year.

"A time to love, and a time to Hate"

I use this image of hate not in the destructive action against another but rather as a time to stand up and find unacceptable those things that cause pain, suffering, and agony in our communities. We have congregations that represent many different thoughts and theologies and each works to find a way to welcome God's children into their ministries and missions. I am grateful that as they gather for various reasons, the focus is on the love of Christ and sharing God's grace with the communities they serve instead of trying to convince each other of one thing or another. It is not perfect but it does provide an example of all coming to the table and sharing in the revelation of Christ through the breaking of bread.

We also celebrate the differing degrees; throughout the district there are churches involved in social justice issues on the local and state level including the fight against casinos, the struggle of the homeless, and the disparity of resources throughout our state. They rely on the love of Christ in their lives to offer that same love to their neighbors around them.

"A time to reflect on the past and a time to look forward" (Anonymous)

As we celebrate the year that was, we look forward with great excitement to additional gathering times for laity and clergy through our resourcing days. The challenge remains for us to commit even more of ourselves as God directs to the exciting ministries and missions that are supported through our Mission Share asking and as we seek to find new communities, in whatever form God calls, where we can meet people in their place and through our words, actions, and attitudes, be the living and loving presence of Christ.

David Abbott, District Superintendent

TRI-STATE DISTRICT

Our district consists of three states which are consistently among the most "unchurched" in the nation. While these are troubling statistics, they also point to a large mission field with many opportunities to connect people to Jesus. There isn't a place in the district that does not need a vibrant, loving faith community.

Our churches have been experimenting with new ways to connect with new people, from "Change the World Day" to new and different worship services to new faith communities. We are grateful for those willing to step out in faith in this new day.

Rising costs, aging buildings and older congregations continue to be of significant concern. Congregations have had to make difficult decisions about budgets and pastoral coverage. We struggle to reach children, youth and young adults. Yet once again, we can report that no church closed this past year, although several churches needed to reduce the time of pastoral support.

Our mission to Guatemala has been well received. Four teams traveled to Camanchaj and the surrounding area to work at Salud Y Paz. They did construction work and provided medical care in area villages. As a district, we have been working to open the clinic in Cunen to provide health care for 30,000 people. So far we have raised over \$15,000 which will allow the clinic to open. Several teams will be traveling down to Guatemala in the coming year.

We began one new faith community in the district this year, G.R.A.C.E., in the Falmouth, Maine region. G.R.A.C.E will develop a network of house churches. Two have already begun.

We are grateful for our eight years serving as your District Superintendents. The district is blessed with committed clergy and laity who seek to follow Jesus. We give thanks to God for our time together.

Janice & Michael Davis,
Co-Superintendents

VERMONT DISTRICT

God is at work in Vermont! With God's help our churches have reached out to help those in their neighborhood and beyond. They have fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and visited those in prison. United Methodists have worked with other denominations in many ways but two notable programs are the excellent camping opportunities at Covenant Hills which we share with the United Church of Christ and an ACA award winning program, Camp Agape, an ecumenical ministry of the UMC, the UCC and the Episcopal Diocese of VT, that reaches out to provide camping experiences for children whose parents are incarcerated. This past year the District gathered at Covenant Hills for our pre-conference meeting, worshipping, feasting, and then "Changing the World" by working together to help spruce up camp after the long winter.

This year saw the opening of our new mission site, MacKenzie House, which housed VIM teams that came to Vermont to help clean up after Hurricane Irene. In June a district Mission Day was held there and we formally dedicated the buildings. Several of the faithful former members were on hand to see their church repurposed for mission. This day we also shared the news of a new Mission Hub which has been formed at the Shelburne United Methodist Church. Here UMCOR kits will be made, collected, and verified before being delivered to Mission Central.

Our churches were involved in many other projects this year. One church has a "Church Has Left the Building" day whenever there is a fifth Sunday. They meet for a brief worship and then go out into the neighborhood to feed, to repair and to visit. Many churches are finding creative ways to join the Imagine No Malaria campaign. One church made mosquitoes to signify the number of lives saved, another youth group camped out on the front lawn of the church under nets to raise money for the cause. Many churches run, walk and bike for Crop Walk, local food shelves, and other programs to help their neighbors.

Vermont is getting more and more familiar with programs that the New England Conference offers. Clergy and laity have been to Rolling Ridge and to the School of Congregational Development. Congregations are involved in Natural Church Development. Grants have been received from the Trustees for handicapped accessibility and from the New England for wonderful new programs and stewardship education. The transition is over. We are fully integrated into the new New England Conference. Thanks be to God.

Brigid Farrell
District Superintendent

Evie Doyon
District Lay Leader & Administrative Assistant