

2014 DISTRICT REPORTS

CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS DISTRICT

The Movers and Shakers District

It has been a wonderfully challenging year. I thank God for the opportunity He gives me to serve the pastors, laity and churches of this district. This has been a year of great learning for me. After three years as a district superintendent I can no longer say I am new, although I still got a lot more to learn about the district area. I am grateful for the leaders that have stepped up to serve in the different district committees. I have been blessed to work with the most faithful and cooperative leaders I know. Everyone cares about what we are doing together. Everyone is interested in making some good change happen; and we are all willing to do what it takes to go there.

I am grateful for the many years Gail Duda served as an administrative assistant. She was an awesome instrument of God and I am so thankful to God for her being here when I arrived. She taught me a lot of things about running the district office. At the same time, I am looking forward to working with our new administrative assistant, Barbara Jean Moulton, who so far has been doing an amazing job. God is definitely up to something in the CMA district, and I am glad to be a part of it. I am also grateful to the members of the CMA District Superintendency committee who helped me with the interviews and advised me in making the right decision.

During my first year in the district, the Superintendency committee developed a vision and plan for the district. So far, we continue to move forward with it and are committed to listening to the churches in the district in order to provide the resources they need for us to remain faithful in our calling to making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. As part of our vision, we felt God was leading to begin planning for the starting of new churches/communities of faith. I am excited to say that, after much prayer, conversation and planning, this year alone we have started 2 new churches, one in Worcester and one in Grafton. We were able to fund the north Grafton church thanks to the folks of the previous North Grafton UMC, which closed last year, who left funds for this purpose. We are able to start the Brazilian Ministry in Worcester in partnership and with the help of the Brazilian ministry in Saugus.

I am also grateful to the members of the CMA District Congregational Development Team who led the efforts of starting these two ministries plus they worked so hard to make sure we had two awesome district resources days.

Added to our district-wide efforts (or maybe as a result of it) is the inspiring work that many of our churches are doing. They are looking for ways to grow in their relationship with God and one another through small groups; they are looking for ways to reach out into their communities and world, through Missional opportunities, the Imagine No Malaria effort, and food/clothing pantries, etc. Some of our churches have experienced a small yet magnificent growth in their worship attendance; others are making their very best to giving 100% to their mission shares. There are many vital signs in the district which give me hope and excitement. God is doing great things in this district. He is moving us and shaking us!

The downside of this part of ministry, however, is that in the same way that we are experiencing new life; we are also experiencing death and decline. This year, after much work, discernment and prayer, the folks of Maynard UMC, under the leadership of Pastor Brad Keefer, decided to close the church. I can honestly say that they did their best. They were as faithful as anyone could ever expect; and their decision was bathed in prayer. This same year, First UMC of Framingham made the difficult decision of going from a full-time appointment to a ½ time appointment. It wasn't an easy decision, but it was one which I understand and supported. I thank each of the people who were involved in these ministries and hope that God will give us the strength to keep the hope alive in the midst of difficult circumstances.

Although I am looking forward to a new year of ministry, and I am utterly excited about what could be possible, I am also concerned for the future of many of our churches, who seem to be having a difficult time staying open. I hope and pray that as we approach one more year together, we can do it with a God-given vision, an opened to change, a desire to grow closer to God and each other, and our commitment to excellence in leadership. We need to pray more, and ask God to pour down once again a new and fresh filling of the Holy Spirit.

Because of Jesus,

The Rev. Rene A. Perez, DS
CMA District Chief Missional Strategist

CONNECTICUT/WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS

“Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness! Morning by morning new mercies I see. All I have needed, thy hand hath provided; Great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me.”

Yes, the Lord truly has been faithful in providing everything I needed to serve these past eight years on the district! It’s been a privilege to journey with all of the churches/laity and clergy. Have there been challenges? Absolutely! But serving the Lord together side-by-side, listening for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we have seen how the Lord’s hand hath provided! Nothing is too complicated for God! Where there seems to be no way....God makes a way! I’ve seen it again and again. How many miles have I traveled praying for each of you, praying for your churches, praying for the Lord to give me the wisdom, words, and direction on my way to a meeting.....and praying again on the way home? Great is God’s faithfulness!

Once again this year, the district healing team offered healing services around the district during Lent. I believe the healing ministry, which began seven years ago, has greatly enriched the spiritual health of the district.

On Alleluia Sunday (October 2013), held at South UMC, we celebrated all the “alleluia’s” around the district through witness and music. I preached about being careful in what we feed....where we place our priorities in ministry. If we concentrate too much on “killing the weeds”....each time we apply “weed killer”....we kill more and more of the green grass! The Holy Spirit showed up and almost all in attendance came forward for a holy blessing!

Leadership Academy (March 2014) held at New Covenant UMC was also well attended. We shortened the time of each class from previous years, which allowed us to almost double the class offerings. “Aligning Faith with Action” was our theme this year. Well done District Ministry Team!

We have four new ministry teams beginning July 1, 2014 in Glastonbury, Moosup, Oneco and Dalton. I believe there is strength in team ministry; through empowering the laity, sharing gifts and graces- the church often experiences a new passion for ministry. I will continue to hold these new ministries in prayer.

With thanks to CODS, my heart is filled with gratitude for all the witnesses in testimony, song and dance at my “parting party” celebration on May 31 held at Trinity UMC in Springfield. “From dry bones to dancing” we had a revival!

As I prepare to leave the district, I want to give a 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.

To David Calhoun....May the Lord bless you and keep you as you meet your new brothers and sisters in Christ traveling around the CTWMA district! My prayers will be with you!!!! (Especially when I’m home at night during church conference season!

Great is God’s faithfulness!!! Thanks for the journey!
Together in Ministry,
Heidi N. Chamberland, District Superintendent

MID-MAINE

It is amazing to realize that I have been serving God through ministry in the Mid-Maine District for six years. Sometimes it seems like it was only yesterday that Bishop Weaver called me to talk about exploring this form of ministry. It has been a gift to work with both Bishop Weaver and Bishop Devadhar. I celebrate that in his discernment Bishop Devadhar has asked me to continue to serve in Mid-Maine during the next two years. As in a local parish there is a time of getting to know the people and the local history and climate, so that is also true on a district level. With each passing year, I feel as if I understand more about Mid-Maine and have a better sense of the challenges, needs, opportunities and possibilities of the churches, pastors, and congregations in Mid-Maine.

I am grateful for the opportunity and support from Bishop Devadhar, CF&A and the Annual Conference in providing funding to help bring significant resource persons into our Districts to provide educational events for the pastors and congregations. In June of last year, Sarai Rice from the Alban Institute came to share around Adaptive Change. In September, Bishop Devadhar met with clergy and laity of the district for a time of dialogue. In October, with funding from the Foundation, we experienced Cliff Christopher and his teachings about stewardship and financing. In May of this year, Rebekah Simon Peter came to share with us some of the things that church leaders need to know about how people in congregations and in all walks of life make decisions and respond to various approaches to leadership. We look forward to Rev. Dr. Brian Bauknight being with us in November to share more on stewardship and especially on preaching about stewardship. As a result of these opportunities some individuals and/or congregations are digging deeper in these areas or

with these individuals to deepen their experiences. I am excited that there are increasing numbers of opportunities within the conference for us to resource each other and for churches to be able to learn from and with each other.

Bishop Devadhar last year encouraged us to read some specific books during the year. One of them, *Power Surge*, became the focus of some clergy gatherings to discuss this book as well as a few churches using the book for small group study. One of the pastors reports some significant shifts in perspective among persons in the congregation after using material from this book for a period of time.

We are excited that the pleas of our Licensed Local Pastors have been heard and that beginning this fall, Course of Study courses will be offered in New England and at least initially specifically in Maine. This is a significant way forward for our bi-vocational local pastors who have had to travel long distances and use vacation time in order to pursue their educational requirements. We are also very pleased that work continues with Boston University to provide degree programs and courses that will be more accessible to people in the northern areas of our conference. These are important responses to what continues to be a changing landscape for doing and being in ministry especially in some of our more rural areas. Ministry teams and creative appointments continue to become more important as we work to respond to this changing landscape.

This year we experienced several deaths in our pastoral connection and in families of pastors. Congregations have reported an increasing number of funerals as well as saying goodbye to other individuals who have moved into nursing facilities or moved to other parts of the country either for employment or to be with family. Other pastors have struggled with significant health issues either of their own or family members. In the midst of grief, we continue to celebrate that we are people of the resurrection.

I am grateful to be able to share in ministry with amazing pastors and lay persons in the Mid-Maine District and look forward to continuing this work with you.

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

METRO-BOSTON HOPE DISTRICT

"I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." God has tremendously blessed us this year as a District, which continues to renew our hope and fuel our plans for the future. Through the generosity and dedication of the MBH faith communities, we have saved over 7,000 lives in the Imagine No Malaria Campaign! This testifies to the fact that we view the world as our parish. I am excited to share that we have already pledged to save thousands more as we continue to prioritize this ministry in the coming year. We are also saving and changing lives from Marblehead to Lexington, and Stoneham to Whitman by birthing new faith communities, engaging in exciting new ministry initiatives, and reaching out to our youth. We celebrate new faith communities in Weymouth and Peabody, and expanded services in Marshfield and Dorchester. The Family Brazilian Church of Weymouth began meeting in September, welcoming over 200 to their first service, and they are continuing to grow. While many of our churches offer wonderful youth programs, Connexion UMC in Somerville, Greenwood UMC in Dorchester, and Central and Pearl St. UMCs in Brockton, are providing superior scholastic and cultural enrichment opportunities for youth in their communities.

The District, in partnership with the Hope Academy Team (HAT), provided outstanding resourcing days as we continue our quest for excellence. On April 5, 2014, we welcomed Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber to the District as we engaged the topic, "Evangelism and Outreach: Being the Church in an Emerging World". This event, held at Lexington and St. John's Korean UMCs in Lexington, drew over 400 attendees from across the conference. We also hosted Marcia McFee at Union UMC, as we explored and participated in an innovative and inclusive worship workshop, and Clif Christopher at the United Parish of Brookline, who offered stewardship resources for the 21st century. Our HAT Leadership Academies continue to be well attended by our laity and clergy, demonstrating the hunger and thirst we have to not only serve the present age, but serve it well.

Another sign of tremendous hope is the number of leaders being formed for the continued work of the kin-dom. Both Nueva Vida in Chelsea, and Family Brazilian UMC in Saugus, have produced dozens of leaders for new mission and ministry throughout the District and the Conference. These ministries are especially significant as they provide opportunities for multi-lingual and multi-cultural faith immersion. We also have over 50 individuals who are pursuing

ministry as a vocation in our District. I am grateful that our parishes continue to help individuals answer their call and devote their lives to discipleship.

We experienced sadness together as a District as we witnessed the closure of Cambridge Welcoming Ministries (CWM), but we stood proud at Annual Conference as we recognized their groundbreaking ministry and their legacy, which continues to redound to us. Many men and women who are diligently serving God's kingdom answered their call at CWM. We were also saddened by the Korean Sewol ferry tragedy, which occurred on April 16. Through the leadership of Rev. Jung Sun Oh, we gathered on the steps of Marsh Chapel at BU School of Theology to pray, lament, and call those responsible to account.

God's plans for our district will continue to unfold in this new conference year. As always, we will pray diligently, serve faithfully, and work tirelessly to share the love and grace of God with all. It continues to be my joy and privilege to partner with you on this amazing journey. We are truly powered by prayer to service, and we know our future is bright with hope.

Blessings and peace,
LaTrelle Miller Easterling
Superintendent, Metro Boston Hope District

NEW HAMPSHIRE DISTRICT

The refrain to Edward Mote's hymn, which is found on page 368 of our United Methodist Hymnal, states "On Christ the solid rock I stand" and in New Hampshire, also known as the Granite state, we know figuratively and literally what it means to stand on solid rock. While the stone beneath our feet is found across the state and brings amazing beauty to this part of God's kingdom, this report celebrates the work of many in this district who stand on Christ in their personal and communal lives as the living presence of Christ to those around them. Since last we met at annual conference, God has moved in wonderful ways across the district.

We celebrate the ministry at First UMC in Manchester which, since July 2013, has welcomed 16 new members as well as held their first confirmation class in years. They are also in the process of expanding the ministry of their daycare to provide space for children with financial limitations!

- Christ UMC in Lancaster, NH made a commitment to meet their Mission Share asking and after 5 years of not feeling able to pay anything due to financial concerns, in 2013 made a partial payment and in 2014 have already paid 100% of their commitment! They are rejoicing in their new found abundance, feeling Mission Shares are an important part of who they are as United Methodists.
- The second Lay Missionary Planters Network for the entire conference was held "above the Notch" in the North Country of New Hampshire and at least 8 lay folks have completed the course and are ready to strengthen current ministries and launch new ones in one of the most struggling areas of our state and conference!
- Over 70 people from across the district came together in March for our annual Leadership Academy. Ken Sloane, Director of Stewardship at the General Board of Discipleship for the UMC, was the keynote speaker with many from within and beyond the district providing workshops on topics relevant and vital to our local churches.
- Whereas at the beginning of 2013 there was only one person interested in answering their call to be a Certified Lay Minister, at the time of annual conference 2014 there are as many as six others who are responding to God's voice in their life in this new and exciting ministry.
- Our annual Hallelujah Sunday celebration in the fall is a reminder of just how powerfully God is moving through the many faith communities in this district. Healing, new life, restoration, revival, affirmation, grace, and so much more is flowing over this solid rock!
- Many churches participated in the "Ripple Effect of Prayer" aspect of our 2013 Church Conferences with stories of individual and communal transformation. In one congregation though they chose a new name from the prayer bowl each week they continued to pray for the names they had chosen before. That is one congregation covered in prayer. In another congregation the prayer walks into the community resulted in a new awareness of how they were perceived as well as how they could truly impact the communities in which they lived.

These are just a few of the living Christ moments that we've had in the New Hampshire District over the past year! There are many more to share and not enough space here to do so.

We have found that over the past year, even in our times of sadness and grief, our hope is built on the fact that Christ is the solid rock upon which we stand.

- We mourn the closing of Grace UMC in Canaan, VT after 149 years of ministry. The decision was difficult but the hope is that something new will rise out of the ashes and this town will once again have a place for Christians to gather and worship each week.
- West Unity has decided to close their doors for a year to discern God's will and direction for them moving into the future. They have a vision of the doors opening to receive many who love Jesus and have chosen this time as an opportunity to listen. Praise God!
- In the clergy and laity who have died over the past year we acknowledge the empty places in our hearts but rejoice in the individuals whom God has raised up to carry on the ministry of such a great cloud of witnesses!

In the New Hampshire District we believe "Our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. We dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name." We all are anticipating with joy and hope what Christ will do in the NHD in this coming year!

Shalom,
David Abbott
District Superintendent – New Hampshire District

TRI-STATE DISTRICT

It is a privilege for me to report for the first time as superintendent of the Tri-State District. I am very grateful for the ministries of Mike and Jan Davis in this district since 2005. As I have said often, there have been two sets of "big shoes" to fill, and I am humbled in this. I am thankful for the vision, faithfulness, and gifts that Jan and Mike brought to this interesting superintending journey.

The biggest blessing of my first year has been in meeting so many gifted and committed pastors and laypersons in our churches. I knew much of this from my previous work and ministry in the Conference, but it has been powerful to encounter the depth of faithfulness and the common yearning for richer discipleship in Christ among many in Tri-State. In many places in our district, we are serious about "making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." Praise God!

I celebrate the response of many individuals and congregations for the Imagine No Malaria efforts. This wonderful outpouring of concern and generous giving are contributing to the United Methodist witness that has already cut the mortality rate from malaria in Africa by half. Praise God! My understanding is that this campaign continues until 2015, so there is still time for those who have not yet taken the opportunity to be part of this.

We continue to be blessed by the Guatemala Mission. The Cunen clinic opened in the first part of 2014, and Tri-State teams continue to accomplish important work with the peoples in Guatemala. The tremendous leadership of Linda Brewster and Mike Davis nurtures a collaborative effort involving scores of people from Tri-State and beyond.

Thank you to the pastors and congregations who have invited me to preach or lead conversations/workshops in your churches. It is especially important to me that we continue to raise the issues of our changing church and culture, and address these dynamics in our congregations and in our future together as God calls us forward.

Our questions for this moment, however, are not just about the continuation of individual churches but about how we all engage with our neighbors, in our communities, to serve, to bear witness for Christ, and to make disciples. Such ministries will involve the "renewing of our minds" as well as new skills, energies, and commitment.

Finally, we welcome Dennis Veilleux as our new District Lay Servant Ministries Director. Our District is blessed to have very gifted leadership in its committees and groups, in its Lay Leader, Rich Hughen, and in our Administrative Assistant, Henry Erelli. I am grateful for all of these persons – all of you – for your ministries among us and on our behalf.

James T. McPhee

VERMONT DISTRICT

All Vermont is our mission field and the harvest is ripe! Our churches continue to find new ways to reach out to their communities and to the world. Vermont churches fully embraced the Imagine No Malaria Campaign finding many

creative ways to save thousands of lives. One church which had been struggling to survive was transformed by their work to save lives. This is the first time in remembered history that they had done anything to reach outside their doors. Truly this challenge has touched many.

The Shelburne UMC continues to serve as a Mission Hub for Mission Central mission kits and they organized a team from the district to travel to Mission Central in PA to volunteer for a week at the kit distribution center. Youth in the district have participated in UM ARMY and Grace UMC in Bradford hosted a group last summer. Gretchen Wright, a youth from Underhill United Church, was supported by churches and groups in the district in order to participate in the 2014 Mission of Peace to South Africa.

Many of our churches continue to struggle to make ends meet. This was a long, cold winter, with high fuel costs. The East Haven United Methodist Church closed after 130 years in ministry in the Northeast Kingdom. Several churches are moving to part time. They will be exploring full-time ministry with part-time pastors and seeing what that means. We also have 2 new ministry teams serving small churches on both sides of the state. Some of our larger, stronger churches are working on ways to reach out and support smaller nearby local churches. We will continue to look for new ways to be the church throughout the district.

Several ministries in the District are under new leadership. The MacKenzie house mission site continues to house VIM teams helping in ongoing recovery efforts from Tropical Storm Irene. David and Judy Murphy have turned over the helm to a team of people as this endeavor continues. Many thanks to the Murphys for their vision and shepherding of this project. Covenant Hills Christian Camp also has new executive directors, Ashley and Jeffrey Dodson, who come with new energy, new vision and dreams for this truly unique Christian Camp. The Vermont District saw nine retirements this year and welcomed seven pastors either new to ministry or new to Vermont. Two pastors also moved out of the district. Last but not least in leadership changes in the district is our district lay leader. Evie Doyon has stepped down and Tricia Waldron has stepped up. Many thanks to Evie for her leadership over the last 8 years. She will be surely missed. Welcome to Tricia as she comes on board.

The fields are ripe for the harvest. Only God knows what awaits us as we follow God's lead.

Brigid Farrell
District Superintendent