

## **2009 DISTRICT REPORTS**

### **CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS DISTRICT**

A good deal of the work and responsibility of a district superintendent does not change much from year to year. One-on-One meetings with pastors and church conferences consume most of my time in the summer, fall and early winter and the appointment process is my focus during the late winter and spring.

Annual church conferences provide me with the opportunity to become acquainted with congregations in the District. The “business” of the church conference – setting and reviewing goals, evaluating the mission and ministry of the local congregation, receiving reports, electing officers, setting pastoral compensation, etc – the “business” of the church conference, while important, is really just a vehicle for me to develop relationships with congregations in order that I may more adequately support, equip, connect and encourage congregations as they make disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.. It is a blessing for me to share the joys and concerns of congregations, to observe growth in ministry and mission, to share in worship and to lead worship from time to time.

During the past year, the District has hosted vital and varied training events and workshops for clergy and laity. We have trained lay speakers, encouraged and celebrated laity in mission and nurtured those on the path to licensed and ordained ministry. I have been working on the connection between pastoral leadership and the local church. I have supported and encouraged healthy church pastor-relationships and strategic appointments, through learning opportunities and the use of our conference Consultants. This past year we used Conference resources to respond to critical situations in some local churches and to support needed but otherwise unaffordable pastoral leadership. Strategic grants and equitable compensation were offered to support clergy salaries and programs in a few local churches.

We celebrate the growth and vitality of congregations in Acton, Natick, Needham Sudbury, Westborough, Westford and Wilmington and continue to be encouraged by the multi-cultural ministries at the Wesley and Aldersgate Churches in Worcester. We give thanks to God two new faith communities in Worcester; the Zimbabwean Fellowship and Faith Church, a new Vietnamese congregation. Several congregations have sponsored mission trips to the gulf coast, South Carolina, Maine and Nicaragua, and many others are involved in outreach among the poor in their own communities. We celebrate these efforts all of which remind us our relationship to Christ and each other.

While we are excited about these new developments, we recognize that more than half of the sixty six churches in the District are fragile: worship attendance in many of them is stagnant or in decline, stewardship of time and financial resources are a huge and constant issue, members are fearful, defensive and fragmenting, and ministry is understood as getting people “in the door”, not as reaching out to offer hope and invitation in the name of Christ. Our communities desperately need a word of grace and hope. We need to embrace the idea that we must become a “missionary church in our own setting if we are to survive. But as Christ’s Church, we must not yearn merely to survive, since none of us came to faith in Christ Jesus, because we were excited about institutional maintenance; we must rather yearn for our work to have lasting meaning, not just for ourselves, but for the blessing of all. To God be glory, honor and praise.

Ron Wilson, Superintendent.

### **CONNECTICUT/WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS 2009**

I continue to celebrate and give God all the glory for the many ways I see the Holy Spirit at work throughout this district. I am thankful for the dedicated leadership of our Lay Leaders, David Dunham and David Bolster; for George Button’s leadership of our District Ministry Team; and the many laity and clergy serving on our district committees. Together we are a team! I believe this “spirit-led team concept” is the building block for future growth in our local churches, clusters/regional ministries and our district. We have some amazing testimonies on this district as to the power of reaching beyond ourselves to strengthen and transform our witness for Christ.

A few examples come to mind. First UMC in Greenfield has transformed from a church with serious financial struggles to a church that has doubled its attendance and paid off all debt with the work of a “mutual ministry team” under the leadership of the Rev. Bruce Arbour as their pastor of record. Hope UMC in Belchertown, where Bruce serves full-time, has also been empowered by this experience in helping a sister church in need. They have faithfully supported Greenfield through prayer, and hands-on help when needed. First UMC in North Adams is another faith story of “transformed by the Holy Spirit!” They had some tough

decisions to make – a small congregation in a very large stone building (sanctuary seats 1000) that needed extensive repairs. Through a “viability/possibility study” a shared team ministry between First UMC in Williamstown and First UMC in North Adams was developed...and a wonderful relationship began.

Thanksgiving Sunday 2008, was the last Sunday First UMC in North Adams worshipped in their building. They made the prayerful decision to leave the building, put the building up for sale and live the words “the church is not a building, the church is not a steeple, the church is not a resting place, the church is a people.” Today, they too have doubled in worship attendance, are active in hands-on ministry in their community and are exploring with First UMC in Williamstown the possibilities of a shared ministry. A mutual ministry team is also at work in Baltic, CT with Lee Memorial UMC in Norwich under the leadership of the Rev. Ho-Soon Han. Many fruits are also being experienced out of this new evolving relationship. Four churches in southeastern CT are also currently exploring cooperative ministry.

In the Springfield area, New Hope United Methodist Regional Ministry – a new regional urban ministry is set to begin July 1, 2009 under the direction of the Rev. Louise Dumas. I was blessed to walk with the New Hope UMC (formally Chicopee Falls UMC and Liberty Street UMC) as they discerned how best to honor the Lord and their passion for mission and ministry in their vote to disband as a local church, and turn the assets over to provide the funding for a new regional ministry. It was a holy and sacred journey to witness their wrestling and faith in making this decision.

One highlight of the year on this district for many was our first “Alleluia Sunday” – a district rally held on World Communion Sunday in 2008. Over 200 came; we celebrated our diversity on this district through music as we recognized district leadership and welcomed new pastors. The District Ministry team coordinated two Lay Leadership Academies this past year, and once again made the commitment to travel with me to every charge conference.

Many churches are participating in NCD, and seeking ways to experience/live out “passionate spirituality.” The economic struggle we find ourselves in as a country, seems to have empowered some churches to go back to their spiritual roots – deep prayer, seeking to be more intentional in mission in the community, reaching out to help those in need nationally and globally as well through mission trips and special sacrificial offerings.

Once again I traveled throughout the district offering a healing service each Sunday night during Lent which was well received. Our theme this year was “From Anguish to Alleluia.” We are in the process of forming a district healing team, and will continue to listen for ways this ministry will help congregations move forward on their journey as the Body of Christ.

I look forward to seeing what “the new thing” the Lord might have waiting for all of us as we journey together, seeking to listen for ways our collective gifts and graces can be multiplied in service to our Lord in the coming year.

Heidi N. Chamberland, District Superintendent

## **METRO BOSTON HOPE OVERVIEW**

It is with pleasure that I write my first Metro Boston Hope District Overview. I first want to publicly thank my predecessor Aida Fernandez for passing on a house that was in order. Because of Aida’s consistent efforts, my task was made easier. Gracias mi amiga!

During this initial year, God has “showed out”, specifically, God has showered the District with blessings! Several of the District churches have envisioned new approaches to making disciples for Jesus Christ. This has been accomplished through; programmatic changes, revitalizing worship, and extending radical welcome to potential disciples. Moreover, several churches have increased their support of and outreach to their local church communities. A sample of outreach initiatives include; a community lobster dinner, a music and poetry centered “coffee house” and a “jazz in the church” series of concerts.

The Metro Boston Hope District has experienced great growth in the number of young clergy who now serve our churches. Currently, there are five pastors under the age of 30 serving in visionary leadership in the District. Also, our laity continues to serve in amazing capacities. This year, our District Lay Academy conducted Spanish language training for the Basic Lay Speakers course. Additionally, the Lay Leadership team has welcomed new visionary team members who have committed to using their God given gifts to serve the District and beyond.

On a personal note, I have experienced great support and nurturing from the District Committee on the Superintendency. Their witness and caring nature has fueled my commitment to provide excellent leadership. I have also been tremendously blessed by the exceptional support of Co-District Lay Leaders Wendy Millar-Page and Ruby Blake. They understand sacrifice, service and spirited leadership. The District Covenant

Leaders have been an amazing blessing in the ministry of leadership and collegiality as the year unfolded. The District Committees have been a rich source of energy and vitality led by faithful and spirit filled leaders; Rick McKinley, Sam Johnson, Ruth Oduor, Glen Mortimer, Larry Wimmer, Maria Coleman, and Donna Costa. District Administrative Assistant Josephine Sierra has rounded out the team with faithful, cheerful and God directed support in this inaugural year of my superintendency.

Lastly, I remain thankful for the amazing diversity embodied in the Metro Boston Hope District. We are theologically, ethnically, and racially diverse. However, we remain connected at the level ground found at the "foot of the cross."

I look forward to the transformational work that God will accomplish in this new conference year as we seek to make disciples for Jesus Christ.

All my prayers, Martin McLee, District Superintendent

### **MID-MAINE 2009**

The Mid Maine District experienced many changes during this year. Not only were there 19 Charges or 21 local churches receiving new pastors in July 2008, but the district said good-bye to David Svenson after eight years as District Superintendent and to Elizabeth Bailey Mitchell after many years as the Administrative Assistant. Lori Umberhind is the new and very capable voice at the other end of the telephone and the amazing presence in the District Office as the new Administrative Assistant. Together she and I have been finding our way into the complicated territory of the District Superintendency in Mid Maine.

Lest we should get settled in too quickly, in February of this year the District Office moved from the Parsonage to the Mission Building at Camp Mechuwana. As noted in David's report from last year, this was in some sense a coming home as the Maine Conference Office was located here in the past. Our monthly District Ministry Days continue to provide a great way for pastors to connect on a regular basis, engage in continuing education and sharing with each other and share a time of worship together. This helps to affirm our connectional ministry and sense of collegiality.

The difficult economic conditions are a challenge to all the churches and to our communities and churches are trying to make faith-filled responses to the many concerns that are arising locally, regionally, nationally, and globally. Many of our churches have continued to struggle with diminished attendance and declining finances and during this appointment year several churches made the difficult decision to move from full time to half time pastoral leadership. This year, the painful decision was made for the Phillips Shared Ministry to leave behind the Methodist Church building and continue their ministry in the other church building owned by them.

At the same time, there are exciting things happening in many of our churches regardless of their size. Lives are being transformed and churches are reaching out to the community and the wider area not only to meet the needs around them, but especially to find ways to share the love of Christ. The Holy Spirit is alive and moving in Mid Maine and congregations and pastors are responding to the promptings and leadings of God.

It has been a year of excitement, of challenge, of building and strengthening relationships and of much learning. I want to extend my personal thanks to the pastors and members of congregations who have helped to make this first year together a good one. I look forward to the future as we continue to work and grow together walking in the path where God is leading.

Blessings, Beverly E Stenmark, District Superintendent

### **NEW HAMPSHIRE DISTRICT**

The New Hampshire District churches just continue in their unique and wonderful ways to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. New exciting ministries in the district churches continue to catch the imagination of members as they seek to reach out into their communities and beyond to make a difference in the lives of others.

For the first time in several years we celebrate the birth of a new child in a parsonage family. Virginia Fryer and her husband Brian Stevener welcomed Kate Anabelle Stevener into their family on June 22. She is a delight! Virg is certainly doing everything she possibly can to grow the nursery and Sunday School in the Lebanon UMC.

Last year in this report I shared the concern I have for the number of aging buildings we have on this district as churches and parsonages. I am happy to report that the Plymouth Church has moved into their brand new facility this year after selling their aging building to Plymouth State University. If you haven't yet had the opportunity to see it, please do so in the near future. They love showing off their new building and it is a great model for what can happen when a church decides to take the risk and move on. I also want to mention that Grace UMC in Keene has voted to sell their building and has temporarily moved their services into the Odd Fellows Hall in Keene. I am aware of two other congregations that are giving serious consideration to moving out of their buildings as well. As churches continue to worship in these outdated buildings we find ourselves re-aligning the focus of the church into a different direction. Rather than looking out at ways we can be in mission to our community we find ourselves looking inward at all that needs to be done to maintain, preserve and sustain the property we have.

At our District Day with Bishop Weaver this year we heard him explain how the day will soon be upon us when our churches will experience new configurations of ministerial assignments. There will be more multiple-point charges and other creative ways of providing services in our local churches. Once again New Hampshire is out in front. Not only do we have a large number of multiple-point charges, but we also now have more than 17% of the churches on this district with pastoral care being provided at least partly by lay persons. There are now 14 lay persons in this district that are leading worship in local churches on a regular basis.

Speaking again of Bishop Weaver, the Contoocook UMC is thankful that he came in June to baptize those waiting to be immersed in the Contoocook River!

Churches throughout the district have continued to organize and have participated in Volunteer in Mission trips to make a difference in Slidell/New Orleans, LA, Down East Maine Ministries, in Jacksonville, ME and the United Methodist Economic Ministry in Salem, ME. During the Church Conference Season last fall New Hampshire District Churches contributed nearly \$8,000 to the Salem Economic Ministry through one of several programs that they offer there. Additionally, more than 200 flood buckets were prepared and delivered to Mission Central.

With sadness I report that the effort to re-vitalize the East Lempster Congregation has not been the success we had hoped it would be. Many of the area clergy worked tirelessly and there is still a Bible Study continuing in the community, but the numbers of persons attending worship simply does not justify keeping that building operating.

I can't finish the record of this year of activity on the District without mentioning the fact that this district has won the Penny Challenge at the annual conference session in every category for the last quadrennium. That is four years in a row! As you know this means that the youth of our annual conference are the winners. Your pennies support the youth work in this conference and you have every right to be justly proud!

I am convinced that God is moving in our midst. As we continue to remain faithful, pray for wisdom and discernment, and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, we will be led to make disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

John Blackadar - Superintendent

## **NORTHERN MAINE - 2009**

This has been my first year on the Northern Maine District, and it has been a real pleasure to see the faithfulness and courage of the people of God called United Methodist in this corner of our Conference. On the Northern Maine district we have some great good news. We have churches which are actively doing mission and ministry in their communities, churches which are growing with new people coming to worship and to faith. We have churches which are stretching their resources in order to create new ministries to meet needs in their communities, including three new youth pastor positions and a variety of creative responses to the heating crisis of last winter. We have churches which are reaching out to the world, through UMCOR and Heifer International and the Nicaragua and West Angola covenants and others. We have churches which are working hard to meet their budgets and their connectional mission shares, and trying to find ways to do that without completely spending down endowments. We have churches and clusters which are seeking out new ways to be in ministry together in cooperative and connectional ways.

It is also true that on the Northern Maine District, we have had some real struggles. There are churches which have been contemplating whether they have the resources to continue in ministry, and if so how to do that, including three churches which participated in Viability/ "Possibility" studies. By the grace of God, there have been no church closings in Northern Maine this year. There are churches struggling to find ways to pay old mission shares or health insurance or pension bills in a difficult economic time. There are churches which have had to reduce their ministry time in order to stabilize their financial situation. The Orono UMC went from full-time to ½ time; the Baileyville UMC went from full-time to ½ time. Howland UMC was well served by a Mutual Ministry Team from the First UMC of Lincoln and saw some wonderful growth through this year. They will begin

with a new ¼ time appointment on July 1st. The Ripley UMC, Pembroke UMC, and West Lubec UMC will be working with Ministry Teams led by “Pastors of Record” for the coming year. Brownville Junction UMC stepped out in faith and went from ¼ time to ½ time.

At Annual Conference this year, the statistician reported that 3 of the 4 poorest counties in the conference are in the Northern Maine district. This high poverty rate affects the ministry of our churches. Churches are burdened by old buildings and high expenses. We have many committed laity and quality clergy, and the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are often discouraged. Of the 51 appointments in 64 churches in NME, 14 are currently full-time. The other 37 pastors serve faithfully at ½ time or less. In spite of the challenges, 36 churches paid 100% of mission shares in 2008, and 4 have already done so for 2009.

Last fall, Julia Wallace gave three workshops around the district on Cooperative or Shared Ministry options. Several churches are now creatively exploring different possibilities in shared ministry. This spring we held a workshop at six locations in the district on Book of Discipline changes and on Certified Lay Ministry. There are currently six candidates for CLM in our district.

We have a new District Ministry Team and District Lay Speaking Committee, both of which have been hard at work this year. With three new regional District Lay Leaders, and other emerging District committees, we look forward to a greater sense of cohesiveness in Northern Maine. Technology plays a part, as we experiment with conference calling and Skype to give access to meetings without excessive travel. A goal on our district is to move our churches from a sense of isolation and fear to a place of warmed heart for mission and ministry.

Pat MacHugh, District Superintendent

### **RHODE ISLAND AND SOUTHEASTERN MASSACHUSETTS (RIM July 2008-June 2009)**

I am thankful to God for the steadfast faithfulness and love that the people of the RISEM District continue to show in all matters of Gospel. As is typical for any given year there have been places and actions that have challenged the churches as well as places and actions where the church has challenged the culture. Into this tension, we are called by Jesus, into this tension we are called to be a witness to the world, into this tension we demonstrate the relevancy of faith and the body of Christ.

There were several church changes in the District. The Cooperative Parish on Martha’s Vineyard dissolved and as a result Chilmark Community Church has developed a ministry plan to the up island community and the three down island churches (Edgartown, Christ and Trinity) have merged into United Methodist Church on Martha’s Vineyard with an ongoing plan to provide ministry and mission to the down island communities. The churches in Providence continue to be in dialogue as well as look toward a future of hope. Provincetown and Open Table of Christ became reconciling congregations. The District was recognized in the statisticians report at Annual Conference as having the greatest number of professions of faith within the conference and a close second in worship attendance.

At Annual Conference, we recognized new local pastors Barry Burdick (Westerly) and Thomas Demers (Chartley); Federico Carmona (Open Table of Christ; Providence) was commissioned a provisional member, Jinwoo Chun (Cornerstone of Faith, Coventry, RI) was ordained an elder and Paul O’Neil (Acushnet-Wesley) was received as a full elder in the UMC. Phil Viall continues to provide leadership as the District Lay Leader and Kim Whynacht has become the District Director of Lay Speaking. The District Committee on Ministry has met with twelve new candidates for ministry which represent a variety of theological and cultural backgrounds. Larry Snow, a retired pastor from the NY Conference serving Wellfleet passed away.

Within the district there continues to be concern for immigration and gaming. Both Rhode Island and Massachusetts have had significant pressure to engage in casino gambling as a way to balance local and state budgets. So far, citizens of each state have shown their disapproval for these venues; however, as finances tighten, the temptation will grow larger. Throughout the district, and in particular Rhode Island, persecution and concern over immigration has raised consciousness and action by local churches and the Rhode Island State Council of Churches. The Rhode Island State Council of Churches has also worked hard to mobilize churches around human trafficking and to eliminate legalized prostitution in the state.

My gratitude continues for the excellent work that Susan Leatherwood provides for the District as well as the work of the various committees and boards. It continues to be a joy to serve as Superintendent and my initial goal of being the first RISEM DS since 1980 to serve a full term as DS has been accomplished. I am hopeful that this upcoming year will provide the opportunity to proclaim the Gospel, as well as the faithful to live boldly in the name and because of Jesus.

Gary Shaw, District Superintendent

## **TRI-STATE REPORT JUNE 2009**

The Tri-State District includes 74 churches in 3 states: Maine, New Hampshire and Massachusetts. The district covers coastal New Hampshire, the north shore area of Massachusetts, and coastal Maine extending just north of Portland. The churches are in rural, urban, small town, and suburban settings. They are served by full time and part time pastors.

Our congregations have shown incredible faith, determination and grit as they've weathered storms within and without, taken risks for the Gospel, explored new avenues of stewardship and sought to reach their communities with the good news of Jesus Christ in word and deed. We were particularly challenged this year by the economic downturn. Congregations found creative ways to deal with the situation. Even though most churches worked hard to keep up with mission shares, we experienced a decrease in what was paid.

New life and growth is evident around the district. Many of our churches now have coaches to help guide them through Natural Church Development. We celebrate with Chestnut/New Light UMC in Portland, ME on the consecration of their new facility in June. The Hispanic ministry at Christ Church in Lawrence started a new faith community in Lynn, MA. We ask for prayers for the new faith community being planned in Haverhill, MA. Imagine what could happen if each of our churches committed to starting a new faith community!

We are grateful for the many dedicated pastors and laity who have responded to the call to serve the church on the district level. The District Committee on Ministry, Board of Church Location and Building, District Superintendency Committee, Committee on Leadership, Lay Speaking and Mission Share Review Committee have all been active and functioning effectively.

Our District Ministry Team has done excellent work. Last fall, a member of the DMT attended each church conference with the superintendent. They shared a brief program about creative ministries already happening on the district and encouraged churches to use their God-given passions to reach outside their walls with the Gospel. This coming year, they will once again participate at each church conference. The next emphasis is on mission.

District events were well attended and received. Marcia McFee's workshop on worship was highly reviewed. We appreciate the collegiality and support seen among the clergy and laity.

God's renewing Spirit is alive in Tri-State. May we continue to pray and support one another as we seek to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world!

Revs. Janice & Michael Davis, Co-Superintendents