



2007

Lay Member Summary

This year's Florida Annual Conference Event placed a strong emphasis on the future. From the involvement of a first-ever youth delegation to voting for delegates to upcoming denominational and jurisdictional conferences, much of the business, worship and activities was devoted to how Florida United Methodists can strengthen the ministry of the church into the future.

From generation to generation: More than 1,700 laity and clergy gathered June 6-9 under the theme "From Generation to Generation," reflecting the church's focus to be in ministry to and with people of all generations.

Making a place for the next generations: According to the 2001 U.S. Congregational Life Survey, "worshippers nationwide are aging, but the population of United Methodist congregations is already gray." The survey of more than 300,000 worshippers of all denominations showed the largest percentage of United Methodist churchgoers is 45 and older and for every United Methodist under age 25 "there are six senior citizens." Thanks to a mandate from the 2006 annual conference to involve younger members in more significant ways, a first-ever youth delegation of more than 100 youth and young adults representing each of the conference's nine districts attended the conference session. Their attendance gave them a greater voice than ever before in the business of the church and older leaders had a chance to hear younger members' ideas for the church's future. Three youth addressed the conference June 9, focusing their comments on ways to pass the Christian faith from generation to generation.

Voting for delegates: After four days of voting from among more than 150 clergy and lay nominees, members elected 13 clergy and 13 lay delegates to represent the Florida Conference at the 2008 General and Southeastern Jurisdictional conferences. Of that number three delegates are younger than 30. An additional 13 clergy and 13 lay delegates were elected to round out the conference's delegation to jurisdictional conference. A list of those elected will be available on the conference Web site at <http://www.flumc2.org/page.asp?PKValue=1163>.

Being the church "The Methodist Way": This year's event actually began June 5 when more than 600 members and guests attended a series of workshops to learn how to better fulfill the challenge of reaching all generations. The Florida Conference's Office of Congregational Transformation offered classes on each of the five practices of The Methodist Way: passionate worship, radical hospitality, intentional discipling, "salty" service and extravagant generosity. The five practices are considered the core principles by which the Methodist movement has spread and fundamental to church health and vitality.

Putting people resources in place for transformation: Members of the annual conference approved the Office of Congregational Transformation's proposal to hire a director to focus on coordinating the ReFocus Network across the conference, which currently includes 27 trained facilitators, 13 networks and 118 congregations. ReFocus is for churches not yet ready to begin the Natural Church Development transformation process. The two-year program helps churches rediscover their vision through spiritual growth exercises. The Rev. Liana Perez-Feliz, the new Hispanic director of Congregational Transformation, was introduced. She will begin her work July 1, helping the conference's 50 to 60 Hispanic congregations with their transformation efforts.

Laity committed to transforming ministry: The featured speaker during the laity session June 6 was Lyn Powell, lay leader of the North Georgia Conference and laity speaker at the 2008 General Conference. Powell stressed the importance of clergy and laity working together, emphasizing that the task of transforming The United Methodist Church should be a shared goal between the two. She grappled with a number of weighty topics: the nature of the calling of laity and clergy, how the two callings intersect, how laity can live out our their calling, and how lay ministry today differs from its role during the first 150 years of Methodism.

Strengthening ministries: Churches gave an offering that will support the ministry of two conference initiatives: 80 percent will go toward continuing efforts with the East Angola/Florida Partnership, and 20 percent will help the conference task force on the Council of Bishops' Initiative on Children and Poverty/Children's Harvest provide back packs and school supplies to at-risk children and youth in Florida. A portion of the funds will support sending a clergy couple, the Rev. Armando and Icel Rodriguez, to Angola as missionaries as a part of the East Angola/Florida Partnership. Both were recognized at the conference event.

Celebrating ongoing ministries: Members celebrated the 10th anniversary of the Cuba-Florida Covenant and more than a century of shared ministry with the island nation. The relationship between the Florida Conference and The Methodist Church of Cuba is a long one, beginning in 1873 when the Florida Conference sent a missionary to Key West to start a ministry among Cuban refugees living there. From 1883 to 1968 one bishop served both conferences.

Caring for the next generation: Members approved a proposal from the Conference Table on Social Witness task team calling all conference churches to work together in a common social witness to address the issues affecting children. Members agreed to meet the specific goal of ending hunger among Florida's children. With every church working to address the issues it is hoped the conference as a whole can make a significant difference in the lives of children.

Considering the health of our conference:

- o The conference statistician reported overall membership in the Florida Conference in 2006 was 317,716, a decline of 4,133 or 1 percent. Average weekly worship attendance was 155,181, a decline of 1,622 or 1 percent. Professions of faith totaled 7,693, a decline of 58 or 1 percent.
- o Delegates celebrated new life and past ministries. New Church Development reported 86 new churches have begun since 1995, 56 percent of which are racial, ethnic or language new starts. Nine new churches launched in 2006. The goal for June 2007 to June 2008 is 23 — 10 have launched so far this year. Members also celebrated the faithful ministry of five churches that were discontinued and two that merged with other churches.
- o The conference's Council on Finance and Administration reported the conference ended 2006 financially solid. Apportionment giving totaled more than \$16.7 million, decreasing slightly, from 89.7 percent in 2005 to 87.2 percent in 2006, or \$83,000. Property and casualty premiums increased from \$9.3 million in 2005 to nearly \$15 million in 2006. The amount paid to date for hurricane claims is \$40 million. Conference members approved a 2008 budget of a little more than \$17.3 million — more than \$1.1 million, or 6.15 percent, less than the 2007 budget. The Florida Conference continues to lead in giving to the general church, with 45.3 percent of the 2008 budget designated for connectional giving.

Celebrating partners in ministry: Conference members celebrated the 25th and 50th anniversaries of 34 clergy and the retirement of 27 clergy. A total of 46 people were licensed, commissioned and ordained.