



**OKLAHOMA
CONFERENCE
QUARTERLY
BULLETIN**

January, 2005

OKLAHOMA - TIME TO BE *Born Again in Every Place*

The Oklahoma United Methodist Rural Fellowship adopted this statement from the Action Plan for the implementation of the National Town and Country Plan for our purpose call to our sisters and brothers in Oklahoma rural churches and communities. This newsletter is the first of four that will be sent to the membership and the leadership of our annual Conference this year. It is time for not only our voice but our faith to be heard and seen. Gary D. Moody, Your President.

An Action Plan for Born Again in Every Place

A challenge to the church:

Are we tired of viewing town and country churches as a problem?
Do we dream of energized, faithful, effective congregations in every place?
Do we yearn for the renewal of ministry to communities in every possible place?
Can we envision thousands of United Methodist disciples serving in town and country settings, motivated by the love of God to take up the cross of self-denial, freed for joyful obedience, committed to making disciples and to making a difference in their communities, so as to rekindle the historic fires of holiness of heart and life?

If we can dream in faith it can happen!

An invitation to the Church:

Across the rural United States, many United Methodist town and country congregations effectively make disciples for Jesus Christ and creatively minister to their local communities and the world beyond. Imagine what will happen when these more than 25,000 churches renew and enlarge their visions of ministry, are supported and resourced for such work, and are affirmed in their importance to the church and its transformative work for the Kingdom of God.

Imagine what will happen when these congregations, their districts, the annual conferences, and The United Methodist Church as a whole catch **FIRE**:

- * *Moving* their **Focus** from a survival mentality to self-sacrificing Servanthood.
- * Taking **Initiative** for Christ's ministry in their own community by no longer waiting to be "rescued," but rather by activating themselves for service and witness.
- * *Recognizing* and using the **Resources** available to them, replacing notions of scarcity and inadequacy, and embracing the abundance of God's gifts to them.
- * *Releasing* the **Energy** sometimes used to maintain a timid vision of God's call to ministry, letting it loose for empowerment and promise.

This Action Plan for the National Comprehensive Plan for Town and Country Ministry of The United Methodist Church invites the town and country congregations and the church as a whole to catch the FIRE of God's spirit, to be "born again in every place," and thus transformed for renewed and effective ministry in the places God has called us to live and to serve.

**OKLAHOMA - THIS IS OUR CALL TO YOU!
IT IS TIME FOR THE RURAL CHURCH TO BE "BORN AGAIN IN EVERY PLACE.!"**



President's Corner

It is great to live in the country. By country, I mean almost anywhere besides the large cities that are almost everywhere in our land. I am a city boy who has learned to love the country setting. We raised our children in the city, were both raised in the city ourselves, and never really considered anything else as young adults. What a mistake.

Life is entirely different in the places Linda and I have lived since being in ministry in the town and country churches of Oklahoma.

The reason I am writing this particular article is because I had the opportunity this week to stop and reflect on just what my life is about at this point in my life. I have been to a National Rural Fellowship meeting this recently and our President asked us all to share about something this summer that was special in our lives. The only thing I could think of was the fact that I love being here in Kay County and my two churches. Think about these words from Psalm 121. "I will lift up my eyes to the mountains; From where shall my help come? My help comes from the LORD, Who made heaven and earth." (Psalms 121:1-2, NASB).

One of the things I remember is that in the city, I could seldom see the sky at night much less be reminded about God and His marvelous care for me. I knew that He wanted to care me but we humans sometimes are too visually oriented. I also learned that one of the things I am grateful for is the fact that on the land are the things that can nourish our body as well as provide great scenery. I just took a jar of Apple Butter we made from apples in our own back yard - right next to the wheat field next door. Life happens all around in the country rather than just pavement. Thank God for my home on the prairie.

I guess what I want to say is that your UMRF officers want to be about bringing the FIRE to our rural communities and churches all across Oklahoma. Get on board, folks - there is a lot to do.

Be blessed on the land!

Gary Moody, President

Thriving Small Churches

Twenty-four lay and clergy folk met in McAlester, Oklahoma to discuss the components of a "thriving church." Three basic issues were lifted up as being key components. First, a "passionate faith" was the motivating factor. Secondly, a concise understanding and acceptance of the mission of the church provides the framework for the action that faith motivates. Thirdly, procedures need to be established and reviewed in order to make sure that

the mission is being done as fully as possible.

A Thriving Small Church hears and seeks to answer the call of Christ, within a local community. Our faith in Christ motivates us to "Make Disciples." The spectrum of disciple-making spans from reaching the unchurched, to the point at which a disciple recognizes his or her place in helping another grow in their faith. Our church procedures must take seriously our responsibility to; engage the unchurched, welcome the seeker, aid in commitment of the life to Christ, and nurture those growing in grace. A thriving church reaches for this ideal as Christ allows in a specific location. Convener Jim Hollifield said, "A thriving church does not let issues of size cloud the call of Christ to serve in the community environment in which we find ourselves. If Christ sent out folks 2 by 2, our Redeemer can use us."

Rev. Jim Hollifield, Newkirk, Oklahoma

LET'S JUST CLOSE THE RURAL CHURCH!!!

I hope that I have your attention with that headline. When I hear people make comments like this, my heart beats faster and my blood begins to boil. Back in the 1980's, I was told that our small, rural church in northern Kansas should close and not take up the time of a pastor because there were simply not enough people. This statement was made by a lay member of a large Texas church. Is there any purpose for the rural church remaining open? I say a resounding YES.

The Bible tells us of the Great Commission of taking the Gospel message into the whole world. That means everyone, not just the larger cities or places of large population. I always tell people that converts come to Christ one at a time. Why do we give so much time and effort to large populations and such little attention to small population areas? Yes, the potential for more converts is greater but each person as an individual is very important to God. Jesus spent a lot of his 3 year ministry with just 12 in his teaching time. There were even times that he spent his greatest spiritual times with just 3 disciples. My point is not to get hung up on the lack of numbers to work with but to make the most of your time working with those around you to bring them to Christ, to mature their relationship with Christ, and show others the love of Christ. Do the ministry in the area that you are in for the Glory of God, He is the one that changes people's hearts.

The call to ministry that was sent out for the people called Methodist in the early years of this nation was to preach the gospel message to all and to start a church wherever people were gathered. I find it hard to imagine Francis Asbury telling his preachers to bypass the rural areas because there were not enough people there to start and maintain a church. The rural church had a purpose then as it does today,

to preach the gospel message and show people God's love for them.

In my experience of worshiping in rural churches, I have found that all too often we are our own worst enemy. We get pulled into thinking that we have to be so big to be an effective church, that a certain number of people have to attend before we can have vibrant worship, that we are too old to continue to do ministry in our community or we do not have enough money to pay the salary and apportionments. This is simply not true. We are called to be faithful to our Lord and to serve Him fully. That has no bearing on numbers, size, age or financial status!

I do believe that the rural church needs to refocus its attention within the church and community. Far too often we have turned inside ourselves and have lost our vision for taking the gospel message out into the community. What is it that your church is doing in the community that the community identifies specifically with your church? Or asked another way, what would your community be missing if you were not there? A place of worship does not always count because there are multiple places to worship. I am thinking about what the church body does in the community not the community doing in the church. Start out with a small project and then let it grow. Remember, one person at a time!!

Rural ministry is needed and it does have its place. You are very important in the Kingdom of God. Take the emphasis off of yourself and place it on serving others within the community you serve and watch God do the rest. You will be blest when you serve Him faithfully.

So, let's close the rural church? No way! There is still too much to be done and others yet to give their life to Christ for us to close. One person at a time.

Rev. Lyle Shipley, Aline, Oklahoma

ARTICLE FOR UMRF - Frankly Speaking

I want to thank everyone who helped and gave me support for the fifteen (15) years, that I served as president of the Oklahoma United Methodist Rural Fellowship Chapter. I want to thank Rev. Gary Moody for accepting the presidency.

We organized at the 1989 Annual Conference at Tulsa, with a breakfast at First United Methodist Church, Tulsa. Rev. Mel West of Columbia, Mo. was our guest speaker and helped us get organized.

The Oklahoma chapter has sponsored contests since 1990 Annual Conference. The first contest was for 5th and 6th graders in our small rural churches. We asked them to make posters of their ideas of rural communities. We hung the posters in the foyer of St. Lukes U. M. C., Oklahoma City. We asked some people to judge these for us and named the winners on the conference floor.

Starting in 1991, we asked churches in communities of 50,000 or less population to fill out

the contest entry form and send it in by March 15th of most years. The last several years the contest has been broken down by average attendance and with five (5) questions. The average attendance has changed at different times and we have tried to come up with better questions for the contest. The present contest is for churches of 40 or less, 41-101, and 101-150. We named winners and presented plaques and certificates to them on the floor of Annual Conference for several years. They are now presented at the Annual meeting and luncheon and has always been a highlight of Annual Conference. We thank the judges who have worked so diligently through the years to select the winners. It has been a difficult task for them because all of the entries were so good.

We hope and pray that this year of 2004-2005 will be the best year for having the highest number of entries in our Outstanding Small membership contest.

Reflections about General Conference 2004

I was privileged to attend our United Methodist Church General Conference of 2004 in Pittsburgh PA. These are my observations which carried me back home in memory to the open plains of North Dakota where I grew up and brought back many reflections of my life over these past forty years. I found new friends visiting and sharing very similar stories of faith journeys. I visited with brothers and sisters from the Philippine Islands where my father fought in WWII. I met many wonderful people from Colorado, Oregon, California, Iowa, Wisconsin, the Virginias, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Kansas, Missouri, North and South Dakota, Michigan, Nebraska, and several other states I cannot recall at this time.

This was my first General Conference and a long way from Oklahoma. I learned that people rejoice over sinners finding faith in Jesus Christ in all these settings; rural urban, urban, suburban, and very remote islands in the Pacific Ocean. I learned that people share and break bread together in these wonderful settings much the same as I do.

I learned they struggle with youth placing their faith in Jesus Christ, as we did forty years ago. I learned that young people still come to faith in the struggle of self over serving God, and they do love Jesus Christ with their whole heart, body, mind and soul. I learned that people still eat, sleep, yawn, hurt, and rejoice as the body of Jesus Christ, The Church, His church, called to make disciples for Him in a world that is not always accepting of The Good News. We may be excited, enthused, and energized, but that does not make or meet faith for our friends and neighbors back home. We could conference for an entire year, but that doesn't bring people closer to the kingdom of God. Oh yes it does help us order our lives together and meet challenges after we arrive home.

My objective in this article is that we all need the Love of Jesus in our lives and we all need that place

to serve giving back to God in Jesus Christ as our first love dedicated with our hearts and lives. We all need purpose for our existence and for our living. Here are some of those for me; Walking with a close friend when their wife is killed in an accident and his son is spared with a few abrasions; Walking with a parent when their teen is delinquent and doing jail time and community service; Walking with a friend when crops fail and markets post prices so low there is nothing but negative balance sheets in your business; Walking with a friend as they go to bankruptcy court.

YET the great fulfillment comes in purpose when we can; Walk beside a friend when the cotton crop made good and they can purchase that new pickup truck; Walk beside a friend as their teenager finds faith firmly planted and revitalized in Jesus Christ because some one in the church truly cared; Walk beside a widower who grieves and finds comfort in attending church, knowing his church family and friends care; Walk beside a mother and father after the birth of a premature baby and be able to baptize that child in the presence of a tear-filled congregation because prayers were answered; walk beside a mother and children after a fathers near death accident and his slow painful recovery.

Yes, General Conference may be able to order our lives, but it cannot live our lives. These places of reality I listed previously are the places you and I are the incarnational love of God in Jesus Christ as we walk beside, pray for, empathize with, and care for these whom we all can identify in our lives, some who need us and some we depend upon for our spiritual lives. I believe there are thousands of people who daily inspire others to serve Jesus Christ because of their faithfulness. It doesn't matter if it's on a county road in Oklahoma, a farm sale in Kansas, the highlands of Mexico, or the beach of the Philippine Islands. We are all God's children loved by the same God and given purpose as we live out our lives faithfully serving Jesus Christ daily.

General Conference was great to attend, but two weeks is a long time. I learned a great deal about the inner work of the church, but I believe our purpose as we returned home is to love God, love our neighbor, and faithfully serve Jesus Christ in our relationships to family, friends, and our communities; including our world community.

Rev David Karges,

Pastor, First United Methodist Church of Jenks
OK. Chair of the Town and Rural Development
Committee.

NOTICE TO OUR MEMBERS !!!
WE NEED ARTICLES FOR THIS
NEWSLETTER FROM YOUR RURAL
CHURCHES. SEND TO: Rev/ Gary D. Moody,
P.O. Box 244, Braman, OK 74632 or e-mail to:
him at circuitrider@kanokla.net . THANKS!

The Rural Majority

Sometimes you can feel lonely, in a town that may seem small - in churches with few members, and a steeple that's not so tall. The work is overwhelming, you want to cry but why not smile. Relax and take a deep breath, read this poem and rest a while.

Large churches in big cities, they undeniably have their place
But it's in our rural settings, you more quickly see God's face.

No traffic jams to deal with, or shoving crowds, oh what a pity
Recall how they treated Jesus, when He last visited, a big city!

You're just like the Circuit Riders, in this nation's early years
Sent to where the people live, blessing babies and drying tears.
You bring God's saving Gospel, telling people why Jesus came
If two are more are gathered, you lift high the cross and flame.

In percentage of our population, rural folks are just one in five
But without these holy people, will Christ's Body, still be alive?
And in the Methodist tradition, as our Bishops start the vetting
You're a majority of our churches, six of ten, in a rural setting.

When, your Conference gathers, and city churches take the lead
Don't frown or feel offended, know you're filling a special need.
Yes pride can be a deadly sin, but stand tall with heads up high
If not for your rural appointment, Wesley's vision is sure to die.

So know that you are honored, when you're sent to a rural post
Survival of our denomination, well it depends on YOU the most.
I applaud all rural churches, and rural shepherds of our Master
You each have a sacred calling, for Jesus too, was a rural pastor.

Written for the United Methodist Rural Fellowship

Mike Mahaffey, 2005. New conference Chair of the Fellowship of Local Pastors and Associate Members in Oklahoma.

*Statistics taken from an article by Donna Alberts in the National Fellowship of Associate Members and Local Pastors publication *The Source*, dated January, 2005.

MINUTES FOR THE OKLAHOMA UNITED METHODIST RURAL FELLOWSHIP NETWORK

10 December 2004

A. A meeting of the Oklahoma United Methodist Rural Fellowship Network was held at the headquarters building of the Oklahoma Conference at 1501 NW 24th in Oklahoma City OK on 10 December 2004. Chair was GARY MOODY.

B. ATTENDANCE

NAME LOCATION

Robert Hayes, Jr. Resident Bishop, David Karges Jenks J. Frank Mitchell Olustee, Gary Moody Braman, David Severe Conference Office, Gary O. Wilburn Seminole

C. GARY MOODY, serving as chair, called the meeting to order. BISHOP HAYES was asked to lead the group in prayer.

D. The group expressed its appreciation that BISHOP HAYES was attending our meeting. He was invited to share remarks - especially regarding rural ministry.

D 1. The BISHOP commented that the heart and soul of a conference is usually in its smaller churches.

D 2. A need for the Oklahoma Conference is Evangelism and Stewardship.

D 3. Stewardship is to be a main thrust for the coming year, with evangelism being the main thrust the following year.

D 4. The Oklahoma Conference has many good ministries. They need to be endowed.

D 5. Stewardship has little to do with money. Stewardship has to do with one's relationship with Jesus Christ.

D 6. The Oklahoma Conference has the means and the muscle.

D 7. Our Conference is one of the larger conferences within the denomination.

D 8. There will soon be a Task Force to look at the feasibility of a year long capital campaign.

D 9. There will soon be a "Lay" Cabinet, comprised of the District Lay Leader from each district within the conference. These 12 will meet with Conference Lay Leader, Judy Benson, three to four times per year.

D 10. Another Task Force will study the need to continue with the same number - or to change the number - of Districts within the Conference. Currently, that number is 12.

D 11. An important component of Evangelism is revitalizing the older churches.

D 12. The BISHOP asks for our ideas. He does return telephone calls.

E. After the BISHOP left, the meeting resumed.

E 1. GARY MOODY shared with the group a handout entitled "A Call to the Oklahoma Rural Church."

E 2. The acronym FIRE was used. F = Focus. I = Initiative. R = Resources. E = Energy.

E 3. It was the consensus of the group that we approve the F-I-R-E message.

F 1. DAVID SEVERE of the Conference Office presented a video presentation highlighting statistics of the Oklahoma Annual Conference. The following notes are an example of some of those statistics.

F 2. In the last 10 years our membership has declined by 22%. F 3. In the last 10 years worship attendance has declined by 18%. F 4. Our ratio of worship attendance to

membership is 25%, one of the lowest of any conference. The national United Methodist ratio is 40%.

F 5. Sunday School attendance declined from 39,520 in 1994 to 33,800 in 2003 - a decline of 14%. F 6. There has been a decline in most categories the past 10 years.

F 7. Membership in churches with a membership from 0-100 declined by 28%; those with a membership of 101-200 declined by 23%; those with a membership of 201-300 declined by 14%. There were some more pieces to this pie graph. F 8. 46% of our churches have an average attendance of 50 or less in worship. One-half of that 46% has an average attendance of below 25. Once a church's average attendance falls below 25 it is quite difficult to maintain that church. 135 of our churches are currently in the 51-100 range, about 25%; 16% are in the 101-200 range. F 9. No more than 15 of our churches have averaged over 500 - and that includes the mega churches.

F 10. Some data from 2003: the Conference received 7013 new members: 2679 were Profession of Faith or restored, 38%; 2383 were church transfers, 34%; and 1951 were other denomination transfers, 28%. F 11. Compared to the 7013 New Members in 2003, there was a loss of 9215: 3236 by action of Charge Conference, 800 withdrawn, 1853 United Methodist transfers, and 842 other denomination, and 2484 by death.

F 12. DAVID asked us to be aware of a myth. According to some we are losing more members by transfers to other denominations than we are gaining. Last year's [2003] numbers show that 842 transferred OUT of the denomination while 1951 transferred IN. F 13. Last year 206 of our churches (38%) has NO Professions of Faith. F 14. The membership loss in recent years: 2000 - 635; 2001 - 236; 2002 - 2851; 2003- 2202.

F 15. The number of Baptisms in recent years: 2000 - 2863; 2001- 2474; 2002 - 2379; 2003 - 2368. F 16. 343 of our churches (63%) had NO confirmation classes this past year while 198 (37%) did. F 17. 379 of our churches (70%) have 25 or fewer children. 81% have 25 or less youth. 18% said they had NONE. F 18. The video shows other information. The preceding were some of the highlights.

G. The minutes of the 10 September 2004 meeting were presented by GARY O. WILBURN. J. FRANK MITCHELL moved and the second was made by DAVID KARGES that the minutes be accepted.

H. GARY O WILBURN has made contact with Rev. LARRY WILSON from Congregational Development. Larry stated that Gary was invited to attend one of their meetings as a representative of United Methodist Rural Fellowship.

I. DAVID KARGES was asked if he could be present at the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference. Would DAVID WILSON of OIMC appoint someone to be on the UMR Executive Committee? The Fall Meeting of the UMR Executive Committee is scheduled to be in Oklahoma City.

J. Comments regarding the Rural Ministry Book.

J 1. LYLE SHIPLEY of Aline is working on this. He forwarded an outline.

K. GARY MOODY is requesting articles from ministers of rural churches for the newsletter.

L. Discussion on Town & Rural Awards.

L 1. New categories are: 40 & under/41-100/ & 101-150. L 2. Send forms to the DS' by 1st of February. L 3. Have a member of this group check on Display Tables

for Annual Conference. J. FRANK MITCHELL will check with a caterer, whose price will influence our price. Logistics of the Award Presentations were discussed. Perhaps, the announcement of the awards can be made during our presentation at Annual Conference with the actual awarding of awards at the luncheon. Invite JUDY BENSON to the meeting. TERRY KOEHN of Marlow is to be working on "Praise and Worship" for our annual luncheon meeting.

M. Local Church Leaders Workshops

M 1. Discussion on visibility of UMRF at these meetings. M 2. Ask each DS for a district representative to UMRF.

N. DAVID KARGES & Rural Development.

N 1. Budget this year was \$1000. N 2. Discussion on an appropriate spending of any budgeted monies remaining. N 3. DK discussed some of the personnel changes at Oklahoma Conference of Churches. N 4. There is to be some training via the OCC, probably at an OSU site.

P. The next meeting is scheduled at this same location on Friday, 28 January 2005 and the meeting after that scheduled for 08 April. Both to begin at 10 A.M.

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