

Cal-Pac UMC Annual Conference 2006  
Redlands CA  
Lay Delegate for St. Andrews By-the-Sea UMC: John Carretti  
Conference Report

I attended annual conference from Thursday morning June 22, through conclusion of plenary action on Saturday, June 24, to include action on non-consent calendar legislative session activities. The conference took place at its historically "usual" location, University of Redlands, California. It was hot! I returned to San Clemente on Saturday evening to be present for Mark Laycock's last Sunday leading the music program at St. Andrews.

The theme of the conference this year was "To be the cup overflowing" and included daily bible study at 9AM led by Marjorie Suchocki who gave a 40 minute or so "sermon"/Bible Study focused on three aspects of "the cup overflowing" via Grace, Compassion, and Justice (these three topics were the specific focus of each day's message). Additionally, music at the conference was led by Ken Medema, a wonderful Christian musician and performer.

The conference included a new aspect in that "leadership" circles were incorporated. This was an initiative to involve small-group interaction in the activity of the conference. The "conference" broke up into groups of 50 or so, both lay and clergy, who broke down into even smaller groups of 6 to contemplate 2 questions at each session, all designed to encourage reflection, sharing, and a greater sense of a "connectional" experience at conference rather than rote business. I believe the idea of the "circles" was a good one, but it needs further development to realize it's intended purpose, and to specifically draw out best practices from each others faith journey and church experiences.

During the conduct of the conference there were really only two issues at legislative session action that caused significant discussion and for which there was not clear "consensus".

1) What to do with the funds that exceed actuarial requirements of the pre-1982 clergy pension fund? The dynamics and discussion are far more complex than can be accounted for in this summary report, but the basic difference in point of view revolved around where to allocate these funds which have exceeded actuarial requirements mostly because of increases in the stock market since investment. The conference staff's proposed budget had a planned allocation of this "overfunding", which could only be applied to other pension line items in the budget. However, those allocations could then be used and as proposed, would include a reduction in the local church pension apportionment for 2007, and would also include the allocation of \$950,000.00 in a "strategic initiatives" category which included \$250,000.00 as a tithe to a central conference pension fund, and \$700,000.00 for "strategic initiatives" designed to support the Bishop's 1-2-3 plan designed to help the conference, district, and local churches with respect to appointed, congregational and future leadership initiatives. In the end, (my observation), there wasn't enough development or clarity in the 1-2-3 plan to present a compelling case, and it caused concern for allocation without enough analysis. The conference voted to approve the budget, with a couple of amendments: a) \$300,000.00 of the allocation

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would be directed to pay for 2007 retiree health care premiums to 100% vice 85%, and b) there would be no spending of the \$700,000.00 in “strategic initiatives” until voted on at the 2007 annual conference, and in the coming year a cross-functional team of all stakeholders would meet to come to consensus on the best way to allocate these funds, for presentation to the 2007 conference.

2) Sale of Camp Virginia. Though not as complex, this was an emotional issue, as this camp (near Julian) was set up for children, and served, among others, special-need, hearing-impaired children. Compelling arguments to sell the camp were made by the Director of Camping, and as well, those who had been served (and worked on) Camp Virginia over the years made counter arguments. The initiative intended to sell Camp Virginia, and buy property to add onto a nearby Camp (Camp Cedar Glen). One of the uses of the proceeds of Camp Virginia was proposed to pay down debt that has occurred as a result of camping operations, operating at a deficit. In the end, the initiative to sell Camp Virginia was approved with an amendment. The amendment stipulated that proceeds of the sale could only be used to buy other property (adjacent to Cedar Glen) in order to meet the intent for which Camp Virginia was established.

I attended the Memorial Service on Thursday evening; superbly done.

I also attended the District Gathering Thursday evening. Rev. Virginia Wheeler led the informal gathering that was essentially a hail and farewell of clergy staff of the Santa Ana District. I was introduced to the incoming Pastor (and his spouse) of the Pallasades, UMC, Capistrano Beach. The incoming pastor is Mark Huntington and he’s accompanied by his wife Marilyn, who works on the staff at Claremont. Friday morning I also met Martha Rowlett who was attending, as this conference is her connection. She indicated that she’ll be preaching at Rolling Hills for the next couple of Sundays. Always good to see Martha.

Also of note, the conference specifically raised up this year as the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of women being granted full clergy rights.

On Friday, June 23<sup>rd</sup>, there was a very moving presentation by Rev Chris Cumbest and Rev Sheila Cumbest regarding the energized support of all United Methodists, and with some specific reference to Cal-PAC United Methodists, in their support following Hurricane Katrina. The films and stories they presented regarding on-site support in the reconstruction was very moving and motivating, culminating in an offering at the Conference that I was led to believe was one of the more substantial efforts they’ve experienced. A good news story.

A very short presentation in the conference, but in my opinion one that needs further exploration, revolved around the issue of “congregational assessment”. Rev Cedrick Bridgeforth, and others, made a presentation on a body of work which they’ve been working on for some time which takes a compendium of church growth and health references (Schaller, Callahan, et al) and takes the best of all into a planning, assessment,

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and more importantly ...implementation plan. I believe this was an area of the conference to which more time and attention should have been paid, and for which we should explore potential application. The presenters made a point that it was not intended to side-track robust planning efforts that churches are engaged in (if they are), but could serve as either a stand alone planning resource, or to augment already existing processes. The assessment is a 12 part assessment, broken down into 7 areas: Worship & Sacraments, Evangelism & Outreach, Congregational Care, Education, Communication, Assessment, and Stewardship. It is a 3 year process: Year 1 (Assessment), Year 2 (Planning), Year 3 (Implementation). There will be classes on this process in the Santa Ana District Sep 16 and 24<sup>th</sup>. These classes will also unveil the new regional and community statistical data analysis tool. Bottom line, we need to be involved in that.

I attended the retirement service Friday night...it went more than 2 hours. It's such a great tribute to those who have put forward unselfish service. I also didn't miss the Ice Cream Social at University UMC after the service!

Saturday morning I attended a United Methodist Men's breakfast at First United Methodist Church in Redlands (Olive Street); very well done. The president, Larry Dozier, gave a good presentation on a "12 step" program on winning men to Christ by a method called "Relational Evangelism". Additionally, Rev. Stephanie Toon from Mesa Verde gave a presentation on her taking a youth work team to Mississippi for Hurricane relief. Very motivating.

For detailed notes of the conference, you may view the "United Methodist Daily", by day, in the box marked "Annual Conference" on the Cal Pac website, <http://cal-pac.org/>. I also have organized a binder that contains my daily hand-written notes, the 2006 schedule and preliminary report, and other correspondence distributed during the conference. I will also be available for any verbal presentations as requested.

Annual Conference is described as a number of things by different people...gathering, pilgrimage, worship, reunion, business, vacation... among the most used descriptors. It is a great thing to see so many United Methodists come together, and the real "gem" moments are often the meal gathering and other informal moments where folks share their experience and their journey.

Very Respectfully,

John Carretti  
Lay Delegate to Annual Conference from St. Andrews  
Lay Leader