

**REPORT ON THE 2008 ANNUAL SESSION
OF THE BALTIMORE-WASHINGTON CONFERENCE**
Submitted to Church Council on July 15, 2008
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The 224th Annual Session of the Baltimore-Washington Conference of the United Methodist Church met from May 22-24, 2008. The theme this year was “Poured Out: Serve Like Christ” with a consistent visual of water flowing through hands of different colors, flowing from one to the other in a steady stream. This theme was played out by speakers, worship, and music that flowed throughout the meeting during decision making about essential aspects of conference management, decisions that could have been contentious but were contextualized by the return to the love of God that we are called to pass to one another.

In each section of this report I have included ideas for consideration within Foundry’s new organizational and collaborative structure. In this coming year of change, we can learn from the Conference. As in each new Council a researcher is charged with bringing from other sources ideas for Foundry, this report begins that model of operating from a knowledge base of the practices and ideas of others.

Practicing “Extreme Discipleship”

Bishop John Schol’s state of the church address identified four basic problems around the globe: spiritual emptiness, unprincipled leaders, extreme poverty, and endemic diseases. To address these problems Bishop Schol encouraged us to adopt the denomination’s four new areas of focus: developing principled leaders for the church and the world, creating new spaces with new and renewed congregations, ministering to the poor, and stamping out diseases like malaria, HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis.

Schol identified seven paths that churches can take that speak to the problems of the world: (1) eliminate poverty, (2) eliminate racism, (3) reach young people, (4) teach the Wesleyan way of discipleship (The Wesley mantra to do no harm, do good, and stay in love with God was echoed throughout the conference.), (5) start new congregations, (6) reenergize existing congregations, and (7) strengthen lay leadership. Schol lifted up examples of churches in our Conference involved in each of these ways.

In calling for faith, fire, and fruit, Bishop Schol asked us to be of one heart, to follow the Wesley call for recognizing difference of opinion but practicing unity of affection.

When I heard the term “extreme discipleship,” my mind immediately went to “ultimate frisbee.” My son’s friend who plays ultimate frisbee says that players have to be dedicated, practice often to stay in shape, play with enthusiasm and skill, and take both defeat and winning as occasions that point to future play. Schol’s paths for addressing the massive problems he identified assure that we have to be intentional in our choices of where Foundry puts its energy and dedication, we have to be prepared through the challenging study that our new statement of call identifies, we must identify and dedicate our talents, and we need to realize that sometimes we will succeed and sometimes fail on the way to solving problems and addressing issues.

The term “extreme discipleship” is one that our new Discipleship Council might want to adopt as its goal for members of Foundry.

If any Foundry group wants to adopt the consideration of Schol’s state of the church address for its challenging study called for in our new statement of call, a five-session study guide that explores the address is available on the conference Web site at www.bwcumc.org/stateofthechurch.

Establishing Biblically-based Goals and Actions

In its new plan of organization, coordination, and communication, Foundry has looked to the Bible for foundations. The Conference has done that, too. Notice that for each category of our (our meaning the Conference’s) work several Biblical sources provide a context.

Our calling/focus: To make and engage disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Matthew 28:18-20; Matthew 22:34-40

Our vision: To become like Christ

I Corinthians 12:27; Philippians 2:4-8

Our mission: To call, equip, send and support spiritual leaders to make disciples and grow Acts 2 congregations

Mark 1:17; Luke 9:1-6; Ephesians 4:11-13

Our focus: The congregations of the Baltimore Washington Conference

I Corinthians 12: 27; Ephesians 3:10

Our big holy adventurous goal: Grow at least 600 Acts 2 congregations by 2012

Acts 2:1-4, 37-38, and 41-17

Each of Foundry’s new Councils and even ministry teams may choose Biblical foundations that undergird and direct their work. The Conference choices might be sources that Councils could consider. The Worship Council might explore how to help Worship leaders within each Council to guide councils in discussing what Biblical bases are foundational for their work.

Learning from Conference Decisions Based on Needs and Established Processes

The following decisions were made at Conference:

1. The Conference moved from nine to eight districts as of July 1, 2008. Each district will have four regions of approximately the same number of churches. Reasons for the change included addressing capacity issues, building relationships, and not increasing the conference budget. I noted that the Conference continues to look at its own structure in light of its capacities and

goals, something Foundry has been doing in its reorganization and will continue to do in the future.

2. As explained to Foundry's delegation which discussed apportionments with Conference leaders this spring, a Connectional Giving Committee will examine the apportionment formula and recommend changes, if warranted. Foundry has supplied the Committee with suggestions that we hope will be considered. 47% of churches surveyed recently felt like Foundry that the current apportionment formula needs to be examined and revised. A report is expected this fall to outline a plan for equitable apportionments. Foundry's Resources Council will want to follow the progress of this conference committee.
3. Through a multi-ballot process, the Baltimore-Washington Conference nominated a candidate for a Bishop who will be elected at the next Jurisdictional Conference, at which Foundry member Ralph Williams is a voting delegate. Rev. Peggy Johnson, who was recommended to the Conference by the 36-member General and Jurisdictional Conference delegation, was elected after others were nominated from the floor and spoke on behalf of their own candidacies. A series of ballots led to her selection. Johnson, pastor of Christ United Methodist Church of the Deaf in Baltimore, committed herself to "model the outrageous love of Christ to people in the margins."

I was alert to the way in which the recommendation to the full body at the Conference by a group that had gone through a full discernment process in making its recommendation was challenged by a call for allowing additional nominations from the floor. As Foundry looks to a Connectional Table that will receive carefully crafted recommendations from its Councils, we will need a process at the Connectional Table for challenges to such recommendations and a clear process for negotiating suggested changes or alternatives. The Congregational Council, which is responsible for meetings of the Connectional Table, will want to establish the draft of such a process for consideration by other Councils before the first Connectional Table meeting in 2009.

Welcoming Undocumented and Documented Immigrants

In a moving opening worship service Bishop Minerva Carcano, leader of the Desert Southwest Area, punctuated each part of her preaching with the words "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. There is just something about that name." I was struck by her words concerning the marginalized, "like the undocumented immigrants who are pouring into the United States, especially in Arizona where they are crossing the desert and the Rio Grande River, many of them dying of thirst or drowning before touching the U.S. soil." Carcano said, "The immigrants are coming here to survive. We are called to help and exclude no one."

Jana Meyer was one of two church leaders mentioned by Bishop Schol in another session as leading us in the Baltimore Washington Conference to include immigrants in our churches. Foundry's ministry with day laborers, recently recognized with the

DC Jobs with Justice “I’ll Be There” award, fits Carcano’s call that we help and exclude no one.

How can Foundry in its expression of its commitment for inclusion highlight our welcome for immigrants as much as we highlight our welcome for LGBT persons? Although our work is expanding, I wonder how many Foundry members personally claim the commitment to help immigrants and day laborers and see this commitment as part of the inclusion that we advertise as central to the values of this church. How is the congregation involved in deciding the next ways in which we can serve and involve those on the periphery of economic and social life in the US? The Fellowship Council, Mission Council, and Congregational Council might jointly explore congregational commitments on this matter.

Expanding Methodist Federation of Social Action Awards

“God’s Foolish One” awards, given to people who have acted on their passion for social justice, were presented to two people, including Foundry’s senior pastor, Dean Snyder. Dean was commended for his leadership in the expansion of ministries with LGBT persons at Foundry and in the larger United Methodist Church.

Although awards often single out individuals, those individuals invariably credit the communities in which they work. I wonder if Foundry might sponsor an award through the Methodist Federation of Social Action for groups or teams of persons, i.e. “God’s Foolish Ones.” Although groups have been nominated for a Foolish One award, a new award would spotlight the importance of collaborative groups and enable an individual also to continue to be recognized through the current award. For example, I can imagine nominating WIN for such an award sometime in the future. Foundry’s Mission Council might think about working with the Federation to initiate such an award for presentation beginning at next year’s Annual Conference.

Supporting the Hope Fund

After an innovative calendar prompt elicited significant giving from Foundry members leading up to the 2007 Annual Conference, Foundry did not concentrate on giving for the Hope Fund as much during the past year. The Conference has a goal for \$1 million dollars by next year: it currently has collected \$650,000. In order to help the Conference, of which Foundry is a part, make its goal, Foundry may want to devise another innovative approach, or perhaps a reprise of the calendar, to stimulate giving in the next year. The Mission Council might take up this challenge to raise monies which will benefit ministries in Zimbabwe, the Global AIDS fund, and rebuilding of churches along the Gulf Coast in the US.

For anyone interested in learning more about the work of the Annual Conference, in Foundry’s library are the pre-conference booklet that includes all the reports from various groups within the Conference and the multiple recommendations and resolutions acted on by the Conference, the May 23 and 24 issues of the daily newsletter printed during the Conference, and the June 4, 2008 issue of *UM Connection* that includes a full text of Bishop Schol’s state of the church address and short reports on multiple aspects of the Conference.