

## ORDAINED, COMMISSIONED

Today at the 1 p.m. closing worship service, Bishop Gary E. Mueller will ordain the following persons in full connection to the Arkansas Annual Conference:

- Michael Blanchard, elder
- Donna Hendricks, deacon
- Katie Pearce, elder
- David Ruehr, elder
- Martha Taylor, deacon
- Garry Teeter, deacon

Bishop Mueller also will commission eight individuals as provisional members of the Annual Conference:

- Clark Atkins, elder track
- Bill Cato, elder track
- Blake Langston, elder track
- Kathleen McMurray, elder track
- Bill Sardin, elder track
- Todd Vick, elder track
- Michelle Whitfield, deacon track
- Dane Womack, elder track

## New benefits path approved

### *2015 budget adjusted to reflect changes*

The Annual Conference approved a significant change in retiree health benefits, which will result in a 0% net increase for churches in next year's budget.

During the morning session, the Conference approved a proposal from the Board of Pension and Health Benefits to remove retired Medicare-eligible clergy from the conference plan by the end of 2014. By enrolling retirees in Medicare Plan F and providing a premium gift, the Conference will save about

\$400,000 in premium liabilities next year.

"We consider this a win-win-win for all involved," Dennis Spence said. "Medicare Plan F is ideal as a supplement for the medical portion of Medicare Part A & B."

The Board also announced plans to explore eliminating the Conference insurance plan altogether at the end of 2015.

In part because of these changes, the Committee on Finance and Administration

announced in its afternoon report that the total conference support liabilities will remain at essentially the same level as 2014.

The annual conference budget will decrease from \$12.8 million to \$12.0 million next year. However, the decrease will be offset by the previously approved increase in direct billing for pensions.

The CFA also proposed releasing \$125,000 from reserve funds to ensure the zero net change in church payments.

## Acevedo preaches on love, faithfulness

In his two sermons as guest preacher at Annual Conference 2014, the Rev. Jorge Acevedo provided insight into ways churches can fulfill one of the elements of this year's Annual Conference theme: Love as Christ.

Using the parable of the Good Samaritan found in Luke 10, Acevedo on Thursday night shared three ways congregations can love their neighbors: by giving immediate aid ("Around our church we call it 'stopping the bleeding,'" he said), showing a lasting commitment to people and being advocates for the powerless and marginalized.

He shared stories from Grace Church, the multi-site Florida church where he is appointed, to reinforce each of

these points. Through the church's community center, which was set up to meet immediate needs, they have served 40,000 neighbors; prayed with over 3,000 of them; and seen 110 of them "yes" to Jesus. And it wasn't by pastors—Acevedo says they were led to Jesus by "t-shirt wearing lay folk who love the Lord."

One way Grace Church has shown a lasting commitment to people is by starting Exceptional Entrepreneurs Worm Farming, which employs high school students with special needs. He emphasized that any church can come up with a ministry that helps those who need ways to improve their lives, whether it be through helping them get a GED, job training, a job or some other



life-changing opportunity. "There isn't the smallest church in this Annual Conference that can't do something," he said.

He encouraged churches to think of what they can do to stand up and give voice to the voiceless, hope to the addicted or

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empower the powerless.

“Every church that stands alongside the poor has God standing with them,” he said.

He also posed a difficult question: whether most UMCs are failing “simply because we aren’t loving our neighbors?”

In his Friday night sermon, he named the church’s need for fruitfulness, and said that we must be faithful to God before we can produce fruit as Christ’s disciples.

“We don’t have time to sit around and play church,” he said. Our job is to change the world, even create a different world in Jesus’ name.

Acevedo emphasized that faithfulness must be lived in community with other Christ followers. For him, that means

an accountability coach, a counselor and small groups. In the words of Dallas Willard, it requires training to be Christian, not just trying. He said daily devotions help him remain faithful because they give him a chance to listen to God, they dethrone his ego, they often provide a relevant word he can share with someone else later in the day and they create space for innovation in his life and ministry.

He encouraged those present to be aware of their need for pruning, which we often think of as cutting away things that keep us from living a super-abundant life. But, he said, pruning also can be God’s grace and deliverance to make fruitfulness possible.

## And the award goes to...



The Rev. Dr. Gary L. Maskell, center, on Thursday received the 2014 Widow’s Mite Award from the Fellowship of Associate Members and Local Pastors. He is pictured here with the Rev. Mark Norman, Southeast District Superintendent, and the Rev. Lynn Strang, who presented the award. Maskell serves as pastor of First UMC Warren and is moving to Marvell UMC in July.

Rev. Fred Arnold on Friday morning received the Defender of the Faith award during the annual breakfast hosted by the Confessing Movement of Arkansas.

On Friday evening, Black Methodists for Church Renewal presented the Negail Riley Awards to:

Mary L. Hardin, Duncan UMC

Theresa Hoover (posthumous award)

Ruth Jones, Theresa Hoover UMC

Bishop Gary E. Mueller

## Monitoring report from the Commission on the Status and Role of Women and the Commission on Religion and Race

Arkansas Conference COSROW members have been monitoring worship, business and plenary sessions for balance in leadership that reflects the population of this body. We are paying attention to any patterns of disparity, to equal access to the floor during business sessions, and that responses are respectful. We are also listening for inclusive language in our sessions. More attention to a balance of inclusive language in music lyrics is desired in our worship sessions. The balance of gender, age, race, laity and clergy in prayer leaders is appreciated.

Both the Commission on Religion and Race (CORR) and COSROW want our monitoring responsibilities and accountability to be in line with the Bishop’s Mission Plan, as we advocate, educate and raise awareness of the need for fairness.

## Thankful for disaster response efforts

In recognition of the work done by Arkansas Conference Disaster Response and countless United Methodist churches and individuals following this spring’s tornado,



Bishop Mueller read a note of thanks from Mayflower UMC. Then the Rev. Nathan Kilbourne, left, pastor of Vilonia UMC, spoke: “April 27 was a day of pure chaos. The 28th was a day of pure chaos. But can I testify for a moment that we serve a God who brings order out of chaos, and calms the storms, and brings new life. And I know that because of you. Because of your generosity, your time, and your prayers. And on behalf of our church and our community, we say thank you. If everything was blown away and there was nothing left in our town of Vilonia, we would know that three things remain: faith, hope, and love. That’s because of you. Thank you, and by the grace of God may we continue in the power of the Spirit. Amen.”

## Find AC2014 resources online

Visit [www.arumc.org/ac2014](http://www.arumc.org/ac2014) for photos from Annual Conference via our Flickr page, worship bulletins, issues of the *Daily Digest*, and more.



*The Daily Digest* is a publication of the Arkansas Conference of the United Methodist Church. It is issued each morning during the Annual Conference session. It is distributed in print at Annual Conference, and also posted as a PDF at [www.arumc.org](http://www.arumc.org).

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