

Wondering how to condense three full days of worship, celebration, learning, and conference business into a succinct report you can bring back to members of your congregation? Here are some highlights to consider sharing:

Theme: The theme of this year's annual conference was "God's Vision, Our Mission—Unleashed." We celebrated the ways in which we are answering God's call to heal a broken world and we were inspired to go out into our mission fields and find new ways to share God's love with our neighbors.

Bishop's Episcopal Address: "It is time to take and pass the final exam—it is time to do something." That was the key message from Bishop Ough's Episcopal Address. He said the question Jesus said would be put to us in the final judgment is haunting: "When was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not care for you?" (Matthew 25:44). "The final exam is whether you and I will fully, sacrificially, extravagantly engage in Christ's mission to transform the world," Ough said. "The final exam question will not be about what we professed but what we did when we saw the least of these hungry, thirsty, naked, a stranger, sick, or in prison." God is calling us to build bridges out of poverty, to be externally focused, and to heal a broken world. ([Click here](#) to see video of Episcopal Address.)

Miracle Offering: On June 8, 2015, the Miracle Offering totaled \$63,999.25 for Imagine No Malaria. Throughout the session attendees had the opportunity to participate in several activities to raise funds for the Miracle Offering. "Beat the Bishop Hoop Shoot" was held during the Mission Festival with 20 people beating Bishop Ough's best making 8 out of 10 baskets. A "selfie" contest was held throughout the three days in Fargo. Attendees could choose to have their photos taken with a life-size cardboard cut out of Bishop Ough or John Wesley. The winner is---Bishop Ough, he had the most "selfies." The hottest competition to raise funds for Imagine No Malaria was the "Change War." Each day we gathered money in containers by districts. Thursday nickels and pennies were collected, Friday dimes and quarters and Saturday dollars and checks. The goal was to see which district could collect the most cash however, the totals each day could be sabotaged by putting "undesignated" coins into the opponents containers. For example if a quarter was put into the container on Thursday—the day for pennies and nickels then twenty-five cents was deducted. After the first day every district had a negative balance. By Saturday, we saw the winners emerge with Sakakawea District coming in first, Glacial Lakes second, Prairie Hills third and Eastern Sunrise fourth. The total for the Miracle Offering is expected to grow. *Note: If you have not sent in your contribution yet send it to JoAnn Schlimgen at Dakotas UMC, PO Box 460, Mitchell, SD 57301.*

Jorge Acevedo on faithfulness and fruitfulness: Faithfulness precedes fruitfulness, said Rev. Jorge Acevedo, lead pastor at multi-site Grace Church in Southwest Florida. "Our lack of fruitfulness is the direct result of our lack of faithfulness," he said. "You cannot give what you do not have." He said faithfulness requires rich, authentic relationships with other Christ-followers; training to be Christian (instead of simply trying to be Christian) through daily devotions and other practices that connect us with Jesus; and pruning—cutting things in life that keep us from fruitfulness. Then to be fruitful, we must find a niche that works in our own ministry setting (Grace's niche is special needs ministries) and use it to connect with new people who we can then help connect to God. As we do good works in our communities, it's critical to tell people *why* we're doing them and connect them to our mission as churches. "There are 7.3 billion people on this planet who are crazy about Jesus, and about 5 billion of them don't know it yet," Acevedo said.

2015 Missional Report: We learned that the Dakotas Conference is living out God's Mission, Our Vision—Unleashed. That's the message that Rev. Ray Baker, chair of the Common Table and Rev. Rebecca Trefz, Director of Ministries gave to members of the 22nd Annual Conference Session. The message was carried throughout the day as the Common Table reported on the progress that has been made and highlighted the 2014-2015 Missional Report. Conference attendees learned how local churches have unleashed the power of God's love in their communities. We learned how the Dakotas Conference is one of the largest contributors of mission kits to UMCOR depot west and collect thousands of dollars for mission events each year at fall mission events. We learned that the churches in the Fargo area impacted 50,000 lives in one day through an event called Hands4Serving. We learned that the Minot area churches sew up lots of love and feed the hungry. We learned that Mitchell Area First UMC has spread love to their community through a warm meal served at the church or delivered to your door through Love Feast. We

learned that the People Against Child Hunger (PACH) program started with a few in the First United Methodist Church in Watertown serving 80 kids each weekend to serving over 500 children per week. ([Watch this year's missional report video to learn more about these projects.](#))

Mission Festival: On Thursday evening, we were invited to a mission festival to celebrate and learn more about conference and denominational missions. Nets were made fashionable with the guidance of Char Ough and the district fashion design teams. Each district superintendent gathered a team and were instructed by Ough to "design a costume that uses the materials in your box and displays the true spirit of Imagine No Malaria campaign." Several activities encouraged donations to Imagine No Malaria: the opportunity to get your photo taken with a flat John Wesley or flat Bishop Ough, a "Beat Bishop Ough" hoop shoot, a change war challenge and of course voting for our favorite fashion model.

Thrive—Strength for Today, Hope for Tomorrow: A capital campaign was launched to fund a seven-year congregational development plan. The \$3.6 million plan has three key parts; starting new churches, strengthening existing churches and developing and equipping leaders. That money will be used to start seven new churches across the Dakotas, enable over 70 churches to go through transformational processes to position them for vitality, and expand internship and leadership development opportunities. Many individual donors and roughly \$2.2 million have thus far made pledges. (Watch a [video](#) to learn more about what we all can do.)

Recognizing clergy: On Thursday evening at a Celebration of Life in Ministry, we remembered United Methodist friends and colleagues who have died over the past year, honored clergy who are retiring, and celebrated those who were commissioned and ordained. We remembered eight clergy and seven clergy spouses that passed away this year. We held a special remembrance for Bishop Rueben Job who grew up near Jamestown, North Dakotas and was ordained in the Dakotas Conference. We honored seven retiring clergy and we celebrated seven clergy who were commissioned and five who were ordained. The commissioning and ordination class is the biggest since 2012. Thanks be to God for this new group of dedicated leaders!

Legislation: On Saturday, we discussed, debated and passed the 2016 Budget totaling \$4,365,000. We elected delegates for the 2016 General Conference in Portland, Oregon and delegates to the 2016 North Central Jurisdictional Conference to be held in Peoria, Illinois. Delegates to the 2016 General Conference are: Jodi Cataldo, lay delegate, Matthew Bader, alternate lay delegate, Rev. Rebecca Trefz, clergy delegate, and Rev. Roger Spahr, alternate lay delegate. Delegates to the North Central Jurisdictional Conference will be; Jodi Cataldo, lay, Matthew Bader, lay, Rev. Rebecca Trefz, clergy, Rev. Roger Spahr, clergy. Alternate delegates will be: Marilyn Stroh, lay, Emma McKirdy, lay, Marshall Lovrien, lay, Rev. Randy Cross, clergy, Rev. Karl Kroger, clergy and Rev. Kermit Culver, clergy.

Additional resources:

Missional report: [Click here](#) to view (and print) a missional report that highlights key conference initiatives from the past year and celebrate some of the Holy Spirit breakthroughs in our midst.

Articles: [Click here](#) to read all the articles about key news and events during annual conference.

Videos: [Click here](#) to view videos shown throughout annual conference.