

Pacific Northwest Annual Conference Profile - 2008

The United Methodist Church

Geographical Location and Description: 267 United Methodist churches in Washington and northern Idaho in partnership with a wide variety of related institutions and extension ministries make up the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference. This region of oceans, mountains deserts, wheat fields, orchards, lakes and rivers was first home to Native American people. European settlers began to immigrate during the 19th century. Immigration continued and continues today to bring people to the northwest from around the world. Today the northwest is home to a widely diverse population including Native Americans, Euro Americans, African Americans, Asians Americans, Pacific Islanders and Hispanics, including recent immigrants from many language groups. The United Methodist churches of the region strive to reflect the diversity of the population but fall short. Many area churches do not adequately reflect or serve the variety of ethnic persons in their communities, nor do they effectively engage younger generations. There are some congregations who effectively are engaging their communities in vital ministry and are thriving.

While the population has grown consistently for decades, most United Methodist Churches have experienced decline in participation over the past 30 years. The conference developed an innovative program of training capable laypersons to lead small churches in areas of declining population. The northwest is known historically for its low rate of church religious affiliation compared with other regions of the country. Still, theologically conservative churches have been planted and flourished during this same period at a much higher rate than United Methodists churches have.

The United Methodist Church in the northwest is theologically diverse, socially progressive, yet spiritually expressive. There is a lively spirit of ecumenical and interfaith cooperation in the region, both at the grass roots and among denominational leaders.

Demographics:

Clergy Members:

Active elders	230
Active deacons	11
Probationers	15
Licensed Local Pastors	21
Lay Members	465
Churches	267

Conference Mission Statement: The mission of the church is to make disciples for Jesus Christ. Consistent with this mission, the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference “is called to be a community, diverse and united in God’s saving love, engaged in vital ministry for Jesus Christ.” The purpose of the Annual Conference “is to make disciples for Jesus Christ by equipping local churches for ministry and by providing a connection for ministry beyond the local church, all to the glory of God.

Political/Social Makeup: Broad multi-cultural mission opportunities, rapid population growth, church decline and the Council on Finance and Administration report to the 2001 Annual Conference Session speaking to increasing costs making it difficult for local churches to remain full time, combine to produce anxiety among clergy and laity. Congregations need to change rapidly to respond to changing circumstances and reconnect to their communities. Pastors are asked to lead in ways for which they often do not feel equipped and supported. Conflicting definitions of the “problem” prescribe widely varying solutions. Inherited, unwritten rules about clergy deployment fail to serve current needs but new practices and experimentation contribute to a sense of uncertainty and lack of confidence in the appointment process. In addition, as is common anymore, the membership of many local churches is reflecting more and more a diverse denominational background. Persons from other Christian faith traditions are freely becoming United Methodist without familiarity of the history of the United Methodist way of ministry. An exciting event in our area has been the establishment of the Philippine UMC in British Columbia. Very creative, certainly “out of the box” thinking about church starts. There continues to be small growth in the number of Reconciling Congregations, with Sedro Woolley being the first Western WA church north of King County. A richness of our area certainly is the diversity of cultures, including a diversity of faiths. The potential for interfaith understanding is rich here.

Financial Status: Recent years have shown a notable turnaround in the prior trend of declining payments of apportionments. The past two years have shown significant and steady increase in the level of apportionments paid and the number of churches paying 100% of their apportionments. That being stated, there is still significant room for improvement in this arena of connectional support. Conference leadership is working diligently to continue this trend toward a stronger payment of apportionments. Recently relocated, the conference office is more efficient and less expensive. Intentional management maintains a healthy conference budget in spite of the less than full payment of apportionments.

Issues:

- Clergy – Aging clergy population with corresponding need to be more intentional about recruitment of clergy of all ages. Clergy morale is slightly improved but still is an issue for consultation/consideration. Clergy work very hard in difficult ministry settings and expectations. There are many very capable clergy serving very well in such circumstances.
- Laity – Laity remain central to the leadership of our conference. Many give significant time and energy to the management of existing ministries and programs and sustain a deep sense of spiritual grounding. Laity are looking for continued training in order to continue their roles in leading both the local church and the districts and the conference.

- Conference Strengths – Slight resurgence of “clergy cluster” support groups and sharing of ministry concerns and opportunities. Creating “missional church” mentality. New interest is local churches partnering in ministry projects/settings. Multi-cultural character of the conference continues to strengthen. Conference strengths include an openness to looking at new ways of doing ministry, a bishop and cabinet open to change, an awareness of the potential of this area of “non-church but spiritual” populations.
- **Areas for Improvement** – Each of the areas listed above could still be improved upon. We face a quickly changing culture in search of spiritual stability. As a denomination we have every opportunity to offer spiritual stability to our principally non-churched environment. We must learn to do so at the local church level with a willingness to engage in new forms of worship expression while maintaining the central function of ministry, which is reconciliation and restoration of health both within the church and the communities where we serve. Strengthening our commitment to BOTH the Personal Gospel and the Social Gospel will be much of our work in the years to come.

Conference Episcopal Leader Expectations:

For the quadrennium 2008-2012 the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference needs the following qualities in its Episcopal leader.

- Proven ability as an administrator in finance and personnel
- A visionary leader capable of motivating the Annual Conference around a vision of ministry.
- A commitment to inclusiveness
- A advocate for social justice
- A commitment to ecumenical cooperation and collegiality
- A willingness to know constituents and be known by them.
- An ability to recognize strong team members and work with them effectively
- An ability to take risks and lead an organization through change
- An ability to lead the conference in developing multicultural and ethnic ministries.
- Ability and commitment to oversee both the PNW Conference and the Alaska Missionary Conference.
- Advocate for the recruitment of young clergy.

Nine Elements of the Jurisdictional Vision Statement:

On a scale of 1 to 5 (1= mastered; 2=doing much of the time; 3=mixed results; 4=needs work; 5=no work begun;) what is your conference level of accomplishment in fulfilling the:

 3 1. A multicultural, inclusive church

- 2 2. Churches engaged in life of the community
- 2 3. Confident, effective leadership
- 4 4. Congregations forming disciples
- 2 5. Diverse ministry settings
- 2 6. Congregations living as global citizens
- 1 7. A church that thinks and acts regionally
- 4 8. Fully accessible churches
- 3 9. Ministry enhanced by technology