

Study:

Clergy changes parallel membership decline

The number of elders in The United Methodist Church dropped 2.25 percent from 2000 to 2005, even as the number of local pastors and deacons increased, according to a new study by the United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry.

An analysis of church membership numbers and clergy data shows 754 fewer elders, while the number of deacons increased 28 percent from 964 to 1,237, and the number of local pastors rose 31 percent from 5,088 to 6,660.

Total annual conference clergy membership increased from 44,118 in 2000 to 45,148 in 2005, or 2.3 percent. Nearly 15 percent of all annual conference members in 2005 were full-time or part-time local pastors. Of the 1,572 new local pastors, nearly half were in the Southeastern Jurisdiction and 22 percent were in the South Central Jurisdiction.

If local pastors are excluded, the number of clergy who are annual conference members actually declined from 39,030 to 38,488, or 1 percent.

United Methodists pray for Korean hostages

(UMNS) — United Methodists are offering prayers and expressing concern about the South Korean Christians being held hostage in Afghanistan. The Taliban kidnapped 23 members of a medical volunteer mission trip July 19 in Ghazni province, southwest of the capital city of Kabul. The group's leader, the Rev. Bae Hyung-kyu, was shot to death, and another man, Shim Sung-min, also was executed by the Taliban, which is threatening to kill the remainder of the group unless jailed comrades are released. Eighteen of the Korean Christians being held are women.

The Taliban has said that many of the remaining hostages are sick and two of the women are seriously ill, according to an Aug. 2 report from

Reuters. An Aug. 1 statement from directors and staff of the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries offered a "fervent prayer for the safety and quick release" of the hostages. (See related "Commentary" on page 2.)

General Conference petitions lost through e-mail

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (UMNS) — General Conference petitions sent via e-mail before noon on July 27 need to be resubmitted due to technical problems, according to officials with the 2008 General Conference. The petitions were not delivered because of problems with the e-mail address petitions@umpublishing.org. Petitions submitted by U.S. mail to the petitions secretary, as well as petitions submitted through the General Conference Web site, are not affected, however.

For future submission, anyone who does not receive an acknowledgement of the receipt of a petition within three weeks should contact the office of the Rev. Gary Graves, petitions secretary, at (270) 274-4590. Oct. 26 is the deadline for organizations, clergy members and lay members of The United Methodist Church to submit a petition to the denomination's top legislative body. The worldwide United Methodist gathering will be April 23 to May 2 in Fort Worth, Texas.

Methodists offer prayers in slaying of family

GROVE CITY, Pa. (UMNS) — Mourners offered prayers and posted messages of condolence for the Rev. Richard and Marybelle Hawke at a prayer wall set up at the United Methodist Western Pennsylvania Conference's Cooperative School of Christian Mission. The couple's daughter, Jennifer Hawke-Petit, 48, and two granddaughters, Hayley, 17, and Michaela, 11, were murdered June 23 in a home invasion in Cheshire, Conn. Her husband, William Petit, an endocrinologist, was beaten and hospitalized. Hawke served as the first male clergy dean of the conference's school of mission and as a district superintendent in Pittsburgh.

Restorative justice advocate Harmon Wray dies

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (UMNS) — A memorial service for Harmon L. Wray, 60, a United Methodist and leading advocate for restorative and criminal justice, was held July 28 at Belmont United Methodist Church, led by retired Bishop Kenneth Carder. Wray died July 24 of a massive brain hemorrhage. He served as executive director of Restorative Justice Ministries

from 1999 through 2001 for the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries and worked with various organizations in Tennessee, including the Southern Prison Ministry and the Tennessee Coalition to Abolish State Killings. He developed a course called "Theology and Politics of Crime and Justice in America" at Vanderbilt Divinity School that since 2003 has brought together students and inmates at Riverbend Maximum Security Prison in Nashville.

Holston member named treasurer for church agency

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — John Lesesne, a 20-year member of First United Methodist Church of Oak Ridge, Tenn., has been named treasurer and chief financial officer of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. The appointment was effective Aug. 6.

For the past 20 years, Lesesne has worked for Oak Ridge Associated Universities, a non-profit educational institution in Oak Ridge, Tenn. He has served the past 15 years as director of financial operations. He received an M.A. and M.E.M. from Duke University and his B.S. degree from Wake Forest University. Lesesne will provide oversight to the administrative, financial, human resources, and information technology systems functions of the Board.

Fund invites congregations to apply for grants

ATLANTA (UMNS) — To help congregations identify and nurture the next generation of leaders for the church, The Fund for Theological Education (FTE) is offering competitive grants ranging from \$5,000 to \$12,000 for grassroots programs that cultivate a sense of Christian vocation and the call to ministry among youth. Church-related organizations are also eligible to apply if their project is focused on building a 'culture of call' within congregations.

FTE will award \$200,000 in grants over three years. The next deadline for grant applications is Oct. 15. Application forms are available at http://www.thefund.org/programs/congregations_grants.phtml. The grants are awarded through the Fund's Calling Congregations initiative, a national, ecumenical effort to encourage and equip churches to play a leading role in the vocational discernment of young men and women—and to increase the number of gifted young people considering ordained ministry as a profession. Lilly Endowment Inc. funds the initiative. ■