

Council proposes 2.64% 2005 budget increase

The Southwest Texas Conference finance agency is proposing a 2.64 percent budget increase for mission and ministry in 2005.

The Council on Finance and Administration voted April 2 to send the \$8.19 million spending plan—and the apportionments to fund it—to the June 2-5 annual conference session in Corpus Christi for consideration.

"It's the lowest percentage increase I can ever remember going to conference with," said the Rev. David A. Seilheimer, conference treasurer since 1984.

Details of the budget are in the pre-conference report mailed in April to clergy and laity representative of the region's 348 congregations.

The apportionment for Pension and Health Insurance seeks no increase in 2005 over 2004 amounts, Seilheimer noted.

Concerns about spiraling clergy healthcare costs last year had promoted the finance council to freeze program budgets for 2004. That move helped offset rising medical fees.

Biggest increases in the proposed 2005 budget are found in the Administration Fund (up 14.21 percent) and

Proposed 2005 apportionments		
World Service & Conf. Benevolences	\$2.24 million	-0.47%
Africa University	\$0.04 million	+0.26%
New Churches	\$0.39 million	+3.00%
Higher Education & Campus Ministries	\$1.06 million	+0.60%
Ecumenical Causes	\$0.05 million	+1.38%
Administration Fund	\$0.75 million	+14.21%
Pensions & Health Insurance	\$2.00 million	+0.00%
Connectional Fund	\$1.54 million	+9.10%
Ethnic Ministries	\$0.11 million	-15.41%
TOTAL:	\$8.19 million	+2.64%

Connectional Funds (up 9.1 percent).

While the general Administrative Fund figure is down 2 percent for 2005, the bottom line includes:

- A new \$21,000 line item to cover audits of district accounts.
- \$6,000 more than in 2004 for journal production.
- \$43,000 more than in 2004 for the salary reserve account.

The major change in the Connectional Fund covers a \$51,000 increase over 2004 for equitable salaries and

moving expenses for pastors.

The 2001 conference session shifted clergy relocation costs from receiving congregations to the conference starting this year.

Biggest decrease in the 2005 budget comes in Ethnic Ministries. The finance council shifted a \$20,000 asking for United Methodist-related Huston-Tillotson College in Austin from that fund to the Higher Education and Campus Ministries budget under World Service and Conference Benevolences.

The Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministries had agreed to accept oversight of the Huston-Tillotson asking.

The World Service figure in the proposed 2005 budget is preliminary, noted the Rev. Warren G. Hornung, chair of the Council on Finance and Administration.

"We will be informed of the national church requests after General Conference" (which meets April 27 to May 7 in Pittsburgh), he said. Apportionments approved by the denomination's top policy-making body automatically become part of the conference World Service fund.

Lyford UM elected to policy-making board for Women's Division at mission agency

A member of First UMC, Lyford, was elected last month in San Antonio as a director of the Women's Division of the United Methodist mission board.

Inelda "Nellie" Gonzalez is to help oversee policy-making for the 1-million-member United Methodist Women mission-auxiliary organization from 2005 through 2008. The division has a \$20-million a year budget for mission work and UMW leadership development.

Gonzalez is also to be a director for the General Board of Global Ministries.

A former Southwest Texas Conference and McAllen District UMW officer, Gonzalez was one of eight Women's Division directors elected during the March 12-14 South Central

Jurisdiction UMW meeting. More than 1,100 women from eight states attended the session at the Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center in downtown San Antonio.

Other elected directors for the next four years were:

- Hazel Steely, Kansas East Conference.
- Josephine Deere, Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference.
- Kathleen Carter Conrad, Louisiana Conference.
- Judith Ball, Missouri Conference.
- Teressa Navarro, Rio Grande Conference.
- Marilyn Zehring, Nebraska Conference.
- Rita Arni, Missouri Conference.

Missionaries to visit supporting churches

Two full-time UM missionaries from Southwest Texas began visiting their supporting congregations in March.

Bill and Diana Upchurch, members of Coker UMC, San Antonio, went to 14 congregations between March 21 and April 1. They hope to stop at nearly 80 congregations in six states before July. They also plan to attend the June 2-5 Southwest Texas Annual Conference session in Corpus Christi.

The Upchurches, commissioned missionaries since 1989, have served in Guyana since July 1994. Before that, they were missionaries in Africa for four years.

San Antonio UMs honor 3 individuals, 1 group

San Antonio District United Methodists honored three individuals and one group March 9 for meritorious service in the cause of Christ.

The four honors were presented during the district's annual award celebration for laity and clergy. The gathering at Northern Hills UMC, San Antonio, attracted 325 people from 22 congregations.

Bill and Darlene Bennett, Universal City UMC, received the 2004 Bishop's Exemplar Award for the San Antonio District.

Earline Phillips, Windcrest UMC, earned the Ted Caravantes Christian Service Award.

Robert Davidson, Parita UMC, took home the first Youth Ventures in Ministry Award from District Superintendent Virgilio Vazquez-Garza.

The Mobile Loaves and Fishes feeding program at Travis Park UMC, San Antonio, was given the District Superintendent's New Ventures in Ministry Award.

Bishop Joel N. Martinez presents the Exemplar Award annually to laypeople picked by each district board of laity "for witness, commitment and service after the example

of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The Bennetts were selected from 16 nominees representing 12 congregations.

The Bennetts were described in the Exemplar Award nomination as Universal City's "Energizer bunnies" that just keep going and going. They have filled numerous leadership roles over the years.

The couple has been instrumental in preparing meals and building attendance for Wednesday night suppers at the 612-member congregation.

Phillips was one of nine nominees for the third Carvantes Christian service award. Established by Coker UMC in 2002, the award recognizes church leaders who demonstrate their faith by helping the needy. It was named for a former district president of United Methodist Men.

Phillips founded The Agape Ministries, an ecumenical outreach facility for northeast San Antonio, in 1998 with nine participating congregations and a handful of volunteers. The ministry served 1,978 families its first year.

During 2003 Agape served 5,583 families, and involved 115 volunteers

from 25 participating congregations.

Davidson was one of five nominees for the first youth ministry award. The 22-year-old was singled out for moving from disciple to discipler.

As a teen, Davidson had lots of pent up anger. He would regularly get into fights. But after several disciples at Parita UMC took him under their wings, he began to change.

Davidson began working in the church food pantry, devoting his energies to helping others. Involvement in additional mission outreach opened new doors to helping others. Then he publicly rededicated his life to Christ.

Travis Park's Mobile Loaves & Fishes was one of 10 nominees for the sixth New Ventures in Ministry Award. It recognizes outstanding ministries developed and carried out by small groups, such as Sunday school classes, youth groups and choirs, during the past two years.

The Travis Park initiative is a joint venture with St. Mark's the Evangelist Roman Catholic Church that feeds homeless people. Travis Park prepares hot meals Monday through Friday. Volunteers from St. Mark's deliver them.

Austin UMs march to heal racial split

More than 100 Austin-area United Methodists took part March 20 in a public effort to heal a 140-year-old racial split.

They marched through downtown Austin and worshiped on the original site of Wesley UMC. That historically black congregation was formed in 1867 by freed slaves who left 10th Street Methodist Episcopal Church, South. That congregation became First UMC.

The Austin event was done in response to a call for local acts of repentance and reconciliation issued during the 2002 annual conference session.

Keep doing good, leadership guru says

God's call to ministry is a gift and channel of divine grace, a church leadership expert told Southwest Texas Conference pastors March 15 in Kerrville.

"Never grow weary in doing good," the Rev. Lovett H. Weems Jr. said, "because in good season you shall indeed reap."

Weems, distinguished professor of church leadership at United Methodist-related Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C., was featured speaker for the March 15-16 Bishop's Convocation at Mount Wesley Conference Center.

Theme was "Leadership: Channel of God's Grace."

More than 150 Southwest Texas Conference clerics—elders, deacons, probationary members, associate

members and licensed local pastors—gathered at Mount Wesley Conference Center for the 12th annual session with the bishop.

Clergy members listened, prayed, worshiped, played, renewed relationships with colleagues and recharged their spirits for another year of ministry.

Weems, author of several books on church leadership, challenged clergy members to ask the right questions in their places of ministry.

"Leaders don't need to have the right answers but must have the right questions," he said. "Ask yourselves, who are we? What is our mission? Who are the people? Who are our neighbors? And what are their needs? What is it that we discern to be God's vision for the church?"