



Western North Carolina

"There is a real love for United Methodist Women," Ms. Kizer said. "Our officers do a good job in telling the mission story in creative ways."

Vice President Lynne Gilbert agreed:

"We have a long history of being intentional about telling the mission story. We continue to build on the work of past leadership."

Officers seek to strengthen local units through leading by example. Every officer is expected to be a mission interpreter. Key is stressing that undesignated giving is the foundation on which United Methodist Women can reach out to those most in need, Ms. Kizer said.

"We all have our pet projects but we work on those after we have met our pledge to undesignated funding," she said.

Amy Johnson, conference United Methodist Women treasurer, reported 2002 undesignated giving from local units in the conference increased more than \$6,500 over 2001, and total giving for the fifth year surpassed the \$1 million mark. She believes mission interpretation is a critical component to giving.

"I think when people see the results of where their money goes then they will work more diligently," she said.

When asked about differences in giving between small- and large-membership units, Ms. Kizer smiled:

"Regardless of the local unit size, it's the dedication of the women. That is important for people to know."

Western North Carolina Conference has 1,137 churches. Approximately 63 percent have less than 200 members.

Connie Takamine, Women's Division treasurer, applauded the conference's efforts.

"United Methodist Women in Western North Carolina Conference have an outstanding giving record. They have been great supporters of mission who make mission possible around the world."

Ministries abound

Financial giving dovetails with active involvement. Western North Carolina United Methodist Women members live mission. They are actively involved in the full program of United Methodist Women, including leadership development; forming teen circles; Mission Today — an emphasis connecting local units with mission through study, prayer, resources, deployed volunteers and social-justice issues; and a wide range of district and conference programs that provide mission-education opportunities.

Participation in the conference's annual School of Christian mission is steady. Members and friends envelop themselves in mission study, worship, focus groups and fellowship at the schools.

Hands-on mission projects at the schools involve members in mission. This summer, the school collected school supplies and arts and crafts materials for the two Bethlehem Centers that are located within the conference.

As volunteers sorted the items, they were reminded this mission project meets one of 17 criteria for becoming a Mission Today unit. Achieving Mission Today recognition means meeting at least eight of the criteria.

Participation at leadership training, district meetings and annual meetings continues to increase. Organizers are planning for more than 1,000 women to attend the annual meeting of the conference

Strong. Dedicated. Giving.

The list goes on in describing United Methodist Women of the Western North Carolina Conference. Close to 40,000 strong and counting, these women have committed themselves to fully supporting Christ's Church. They excel in financial interpretation undergirded by communication, leadership development and mission education.

For the second consecutive year, the Western North Carolina women have ranked No. 1 in undesignated giving and total giving. As they celebrate this distinction, they are equally proud of their grassroots ministry flourishing throughout the conference.

Leadership matters

Gifted leadership is essential to their success. The core leadership team consists of 11 elected officers, 14 district presidents, and other appointed positions and committees. Working with local units, the leadership team's primary task is to promote the organization's emphasis on mission.

Mary Kizer, president of the conference United Methodist Women, said the conference's strength in financial giving is grounded in dedication.

Dawn M. Hand is director of communication for Western North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Women Model Mission Giving

by DAWN M. HAND

United Methodist Women in early September.

The hands-on-mission project at annual meetings is sending "Gift to Mission" and "Gift in Memory" cards. Women give \$5 or more to undesignated giving with each card. The cards are sent to friends and family in their honor or in memory of loved ones. Gift to Mission cards can be sent for birthdays, special events, new babies, as thank yous and congratulations, and just to say "I'm thinking of you." Gift in Memory cards can be sent when people die or at anytime to remember those who have died.

Western North Carolina Conference United Methodist Women annually sponsors a spiritual-enrichment retreat. Nearly 1,600 women attended two sessions during a weekend in June for a time of spiritual renewal through listening to preachers and speakers, participating in praise services and quiet reflection.

Communication is another essential component of the women's mission outreach. *The Conference Gram*, the newsletter of the conference United Methodist Women, highlights retreats, leadership development, local units, program resources, mission updates and opportunities available through the Women's Division. A website — www.gbgm-umc.org/wncumw — provides conference and General Church United Methodist Women news.

Local units engaged

District mission teams are a primary source of communication and education. They work hand-in-hand with local units and pastors. Ms. Kizer emphasized pastors can play a significant role in developing and maintaining strong units:

"The feeling of the pastor toward United Methodist Women makes a difference. We rely on pastors to be supportive."

This approach seems to be working. In the past two years, the conference has chartered six new local units. The newest is Capilla de Cristo United Methodist Women, a Hispanic mission chartered in January 2003 in Lexington, N.C.

With more than 900 local units, ranging in size from four or five members to more than 400 members, the women are eager to learn more about the organization of United Methodist Women.

"The backbone of the United Methodist Women organization is the local unit," Ms. Johnson said. District mission teams participate in Local Unit Visitation where team members travel throughout their districts providing programs, resources and support to local units. Ms. Gilbert explained:

"We believe every woman counts, and it begins with the local unit."

A focus on involving younger women and teens in the organization that began a few years ago continues. This is best achieved through mentors in local units who give significant time in educating and informing the young women about the Purpose of United Methodist Women, Ms. Gilbert said.

The number of teen circles is increasing. District and conference programs include segments to appeal to younger women. At the annual meeting, "Late Night" offers an opportunity for *karaoke*. In past years, the school of Christian mission offered an all-day class for teens. This summer, the teens transitioned to regular classes and helped in the closing worship. The leadership team is quick to point

out that younger women and teens have a heart for hands-on mission.

Setting and achieving goals

The conference mission team sets annual goals. In 2003, those goals include increasing giving through the Gift-in-Memory channel by 10 percent, increasing Mission Today units by 60 percent, and increasing Local Unit Visitation by 10 percent.

Last year, the women exceeded their goals. After an evaluation period, leaders decided women in the conference could do more.

The final 2003 goal is to make the Purpose of United Methodist



Brian Gomsak

Above, Linda Preston, a member of United Methodist Women at St. Andrews United Methodist Church in Charlotte, N.C., talks with Will Yokeley at Bethlehem Center in Charlotte. Opposite page, Jean Hunter, also a member of United Methodist Women at St. Andrews, right, and Mahogney Harris read together at the center.

Women come alive. Leaders agree that teamwork, local units and love for the organization are making it happen. ■