



Case for Giving Briefing



GENERAL BOARD OF PENSION AND HEALTH BENEFITS
OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Caring For Those Who Serve



“Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

(Galatians 6:2)

Reverend Joseph Sunday

On most afternoons in Liberia, you can find the Rev. Joseph Sunday lifting spirits and changing lives. Now retired after 30 years of active ministry, Rev. Sunday chooses to continue his vocation by serving as the chaplain at the local prison and praying with its residents, helping them understand our call to be followers of Christ so that they may one day successfully reenter society.

“It’s not for the money,” Sunday says. “I can bring others to Jesus Christ, and this gives me joy because the greatest service one can render is service to humanity.” As a retired pastor in Liberia, Rev. Sunday occasionally received a pension of \$20 per quarter. A month’s supply of rice for his family cost \$35.

How does one get by on such a paltry amount? “Well, with God all things are possible,” Sunday says. “God will make a way. It is what I feel; it is what I believe.”



Erna Kunstimees

As the widow of a retired pastor in Estonia, Erna Kunstimees receives no financial support from the church.

“I think wives of our pastors, wives who for years and years were faithful for their husbands, also deserve help and support,” she says.

Historically, church-paid pensions in Estonia have ended with the death of the clergyperson, with no further benefit available for the surviving spouse.



Reverend Kenneth Shamu

In Zimbabwe, selling little balls of “Cockroach Kill” is the only means by which Rev. Kenneth Shamu has provided food for his family since retiring as pastor in 1995. Pension funds for retired pastors or surviving spouses in Zimbabwe ran out last year.

“I am a good gardener. I grow my vegetables and sometimes I have enough to sell. I am trying to survive and be independent, although I am not making ends meet.”

— Reverend Kenneth Shamu



Minerva Kekeh

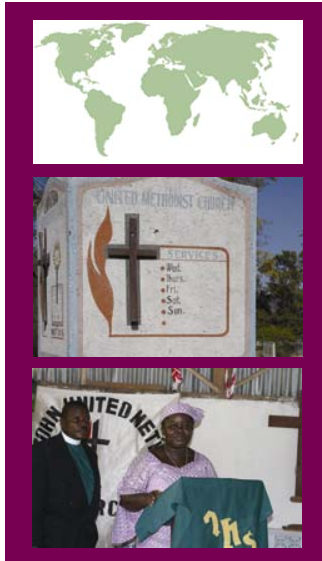
Minerva Kekeh’s pleasant smile belies a life of hardship, dislocation and fear.

She has survived war, poverty and the loss of her spouse, a United Methodist pastor in Liberia, who died, she says, from the stress of ministry under war conditions.

Her family was forced to flee their house three times as “war came to meet us,” she says. “The guns ran me out. They were shooting, so we ran away to save our lives.”

Today, Kekeh lives in a rented house in Monrovia, the capital city of the war-torn nation. She is afraid to return home and has no money to repair her house anyway. She lives on the small income she receives from her share of her husband’s retirement contribution and income from her children who live with her.

Kekeh’s income of \$35 is not enough to buy a bag of rice at today’s prices. Rice is the staple food of Liberia and the measure by which many people assess their economic purchasing power. Still, Kekeh is grateful. “What we’re getting, it’s small, but I thank God. But we have got to have more. What we’re getting, you can’t afford to buy a bag of rice.”



The United Methodist Church—a Global Reach

In Europe, Africa, North America, Asia and beyond, Methodist movements have taken shape and established congregations and other ministries in every corner of the world.

The churches of the central conferences—comprised of the annual conferences outside the United States—have nearly tripled their membership over the last decade, establishing United Methodist churches around the world—from Angola to Zimbabwe, from Russia to Liberia.

In many corners of our world-wide connection, the courageous men and women who serve The United Methodist Church do so in spite of the dire local conditions marked by rampant poverty, political instability and threats of violence. In partnership with these leaders, faithful people across the globe are called to pray together and to pool resources to assure that the witness of the people of The United Methodist Church continues and increases.

Pensions—a United Methodist Tradition

For the people called Methodists, care for others is always understood as an expression of our Christian stewardship. Scripture and tradition make plain that all gifts belong to and come from God and we are privileged to share from this abundance with each other.

Under Wesley's influence, the early Methodists mounted efforts to address the needs of the Church's aging ministers. As early as 1774, a portion of the annual Easter offering was earmarked to "relieve preachers in want." Ten years later, this seasonal effort was given official standing through the creation of the Preacher's Fund. Coverage was widened to include not only "worn-out preachers" but also the widows and children of "those that are dead." The practice continued in 1796, with the establishment of the Chartered Fund—from which the earnings are distributed to this day to annual conferences in the United States every year. Over time, these funds evolved into what are now the pension plans of The United Methodist Church, providing a secure future for many devoted workers when their full-time service ends.



Central Conference Pensions—a Matter of Justice

Annual conferences and local churches in several developing countries struggle to achieve financial security to cover just the minimum of daily living requirements for their pastors. The clergy shepherding these congregations often find it challenging to assure stable futures for their families. Until now, the General Church has not had a plan to provide a system of pension benefits similar to what is available in the United States.

For the important mission to make disciples for the transformation of the world to thrive in the name of The United Methodist Church on every continent, there remains a critical need for enthusiastic, capable, and trained full-time Church leaders. A lack of competent Church leadership will limit future growth and effectiveness.

We see signs of generosity, sacrifice, and faithfulness on the part of current and retired pastors in so many locales. For our Church to fail to provide for their well-being and secure futures is a tragic outcome in an otherwise faithful and bold tradition of supporting all who give themselves to Christ's ministries through The United Methodist Church.



But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

1 Corinthians
12:24-26

Central Conference Pensions—a Solution

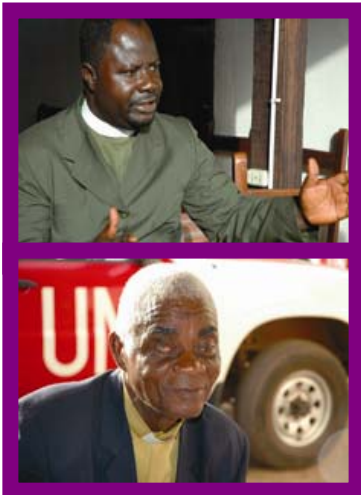
The Central Conference Pension Initiative (CCPI) is designed to become a long-term solution—a foundation for retirement security for those who would otherwise have little or nothing after years of devoted service. CCPI intends to change lives for the better and give new hope to Christ's servants who serve, call, teach and support the people in their communities.

Success in the Central Conference Pension Initiative means sacrifice and sharing, welcoming and receiving, covenant and commitment. Already this effort has been a model of cooperation and commitment within our Church. Many individuals, groups, agencies, and committees have invested significant resources, both time and money, to assist in addressing this critical need.

Likewise, reliable pension systems in these developing countries will require a shared partnership between local leaders and other resources from the world-wide United Methodist Church.

The United Methodist Central Conferences

- The central conferences are those in countries other than the United States.
- Currently there are 7 central conferences in three regions (Asia, Africa, and Europe) composed of 66 annual and provisional annual conferences.
- The central conferences are comprised of more than 6,900 organized churches including more than 3,500,000 lay members.
- More than 9,300 clergy members minister to this rapidly increasing population in our Church.

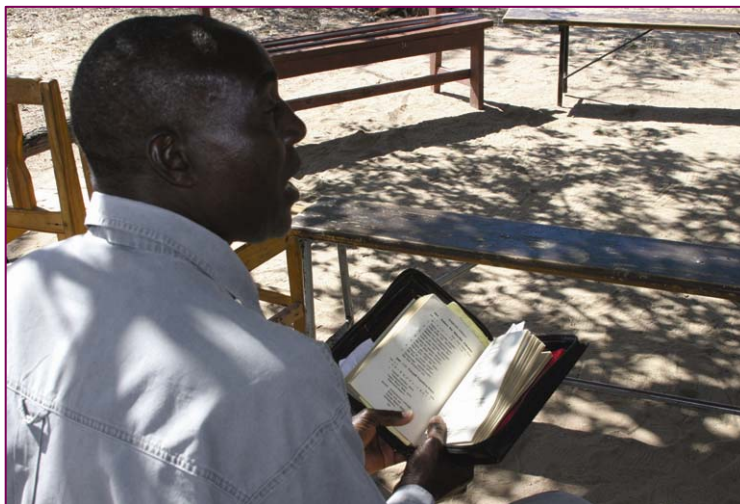


Liberia—a Pilot Project

With local input, and assistance from the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits, a system has been established and tested for reliable distribution of retirement funds to clergy or their surviving spouses.

In January 2007, retired clergy or their surviving spouses began to receive a pension of \$55 per quarter. This pension amount is determined on a scale according to clergy status at retirement. Distribution is difficult and requires local cooperation, but every benefit amount released to date has been documented through written receipts ensuring the appropriate pension funds are being received by the intended participants.

A key to the success of the program to date has been the active participation and contribution of the annual conference in Liberia. Local church leaders update and maintain the list of retired clergy and surviving spouses, participate in the distribution of funds, and financially contribute to the pension program. Without their support, the Central Conference Pension Initiative would be unable to provide the resources necessary to sustain a meaningful program there.





What You Can Do to Support CCPI

The creation of pension programs like this to support the central conferences requires a minimum financial investment of \$20,000,000. Participation across The United Methodist Church is absolutely necessary to meet this need.

The Central Conference Pension Initiative has undertaken a campaign to give every Church organization the opportunity to participate in this meaningful and just endeavor. For generations, our Wesleyan tradition has proven that mutual interdependence and shared concern connect and unite us in ways that bear witness to the grace of God at work in the world. This unique sense of community and connection focuses our attention on the needs and resources, strengths and weaknesses, hopes and fears of every conference, local church, congregation and individual member.

The campaign to support the Central Conference Pension Initiative represents an opportunity to strengthen our connection on a global scale as worldwide members of the body of Christ—The United Methodist Church. We invite your participation—volunteer time and personal contributions—to make a difference in the lives of thousands of our retired clergy and surviving spouses in developing countries. Your commitment will sustain and encourage these church leaders as they continue their important ministries and bring hope and renewal to God's people in every place.





“Christ, from whom all blessings flow,
perfecting the saints below,
hear us, who thy nature share,
who thy mystic body are.
Sweetly may we all agree,
Touched with softest sympathy;
Kindly for each other care,
Every member feel its share.
Wounded by the grief of one,
Now let all the members groan;
Honoured if one member is,
All partake the common bliss.”

– Charles Wesley

