

## PENSACOLA DISTRICT REPORT OF 2008

In 2008, the Pensacola District CORE (Connecting Our Resources and Empowerment) team began the year seeking the answer to the question of “Where do we go from here?” As we shared of the many exciting things happening for the Kingdom in our district, we moved our focus to evaluating the effectiveness and sharing the benefit of the ministries and resources God has poured out in our district in the present time. Let’s utilize our connectional system by taking what we do well and share it with others.

Through “Renew and Revive” the CORE team provided opportunities for district-wide renewal and training. Services of celebration and worship were held January 13 in Pensacola and January 14 in Niceville. Dr. Bill Ury, Professor at Wesley Biblical Seminary, passionately reminded us of our Wesleyan heritage and how the same Holy Spirit moves in us today. Training workshops, conducted in the areas of children’s ministry, evangelism, becoming a financial leader, lay leadership, missions, Pastor-Parish and Staff-Parish relations, youth ministry, and being a trustee were offered on January 15 in Pensacola and January 17 in Mary Esther. The backbone of the events rested in the laity who provided outstanding leadership, and we are grateful for the partnership between the laity and the clergy in our district.

Lay speakers lined up to “do whatever it takes” to bring the good news of Jesus to others. Nearly 70% of our district lay speakers are directly involved in all aspects of worship, leadership, and discipleship. You will find our lay speakers serving on local church, district, and conference committees! Some are pursuing the call into ordained ministry. Our district lay speakers take the heart of Christ in service to the community as volunteers in hospitals, hospice, nursing homes, the Council on Aging, prison ministries, Gideon’s International, and Bikers for Christ motorcycle ministries. Because people are answering God’s call and using the gifts and talents He has given them, this exciting, dynamic ministry is growing in leaps and bounds. Lay speaking training events are scheduled twice per year under the directorship of Kurt Burgess.

Under the leadership of John Johnson, Pensacola District UMM has been working toward increasing our awareness of God and the centrality of God in our lives through improved training and closer ties of brothers in Christ. UMM were trained in “No Man Left Behind,” helped the needy, assisted with construction of the North Okaloosa County Sharing and Caring building, and served with Habitat for Humanity. Aside from serving in these areas, connection in relationships will come through District and county gatherings and the UMM advance at Blue Lake. The hope is to connect the men of our district.

Without any major storms, Disaster Preparedness and Response might have taken a back seat in our concerns of 2008. Rev Alan Gantzhorn continues to attend training and provide leadership in this area and, in this season of rebuilding from previous storms, Alan encourages us to remain intentional in reviewing and developing our personal and local church disaster plans. We are thankful 2008 was not a year we had to utilize the disaster plans he has assisted us in developing!

Developing Hispanic ministries received a boost as Martha Ravira, from the conference office, provided her services in consultation. As part of the national Hispanic Ministries efforts, individuals in our district have participated in Module 1 and Module 2 training. With financial support from several churches and the District Board of Methodist Missions, the district hired the Rev. Francisco Castillo to assist us in establishing new Hispanic congregations and to be available as a resource for Hispanic Ministries throughout the district.

Pensacola United Methodist Community Ministries (PUMCM) has grown into a multifaceted ministry. To meet the physical, spiritual, and psychological needs of the needy and disenfranchised in the area, PUMCM incorporates several agencies and departments who provide support through food, clothing, addiction counseling, educational programs, and prison ministries. This was a banner year in that the PUMCM received tax-exempt status as a faith-based organization as well as a handicap accessible van for transporting patients to medical appointments. Under the leadership of Rev Joe Mullen, PUMCM now has about 2000 client visits per month! Through the gifts of local churches and Gideons International, hundreds of Bibles (in English and Spanish) were distributed. Because of Pensacola District UMW, hundreds of needy children in our area receive multi-vitamins and parental nutritional counseling. As you can see, PUMCM is sustained through the generosity and support of the Pensacola District and the Alabama-West Florida Conference.

Beyond local missions, Rev Carl Dickerson (Pensacola District Missions Coordinator) reports that we sent representatives from 21 churches on mission trips to Nigeria, Russia, the United Kingdom, Ecuador, Panama, Nicaragua, Peru, Belize, Costa Rica, Honduras, El Salvador, Brazil, Mexico, Guatemala, and the Bahamas. Nine churches also sent mission teams to Louisiana, Kentucky, and Alabama. In Central America, team members delivered Spanish language textbooks, libraries to orphanages, and wheelchairs to handicapped children and adults. Members at home participated by sorting books, gathering donations, preparing packing crates and pallets for shipping, and raising funds. A highlight of the summer was the establishing of a partnership between the Pensacola District and Alabama Honduran Missions. This partnership provided new Spanish children's books for 29 schools and an orphanage, computers for schools, and beds for the Honduran families.

This has been a year through which disciples have been nurtured, congregational life has been enhanced, and people have been touched by the hands and heart of Christ. As we look to 2009, the district CORE team will seek creative ways to revise and refine the ministries in our district, that all may have the privilege to serve in and share of the work of the Kingdom in our midst.