**Let’s Get Fired Up…Moving Forward**

**By Paul Black**

**PEORIA –** The Illinois Great Rivers Annual Conference gathered around the theme*, Let’s Get Fired Up: Moving Forward,* June 7-9, 2018, at the Peoria Civic Center.

A fairly light legislative agenda enabled conferees to focus a great deal of time on the Our Conference, Our Kids campaign for the spiritual care programs of the five child welfare agencies – The Baby Fold, Chaddock, Cunningham Children’s Home, Lessie Bates Davis Neighborhood House and Spero Family Services. The campaign’s chair, the Rev. Dr. J. Keith Zimmerman and the chaplains and staff responsible for spiritual life at each agency told stories of children being impacted by this vital ministry.

An offering of $51,906.21 was collected during Friday’s Morning Manna, pushing the campaign to nearly $400,000 of its $2.5 million goal. The campaign was approved by the 2016 Annual Conference session and officially launched at the 2017 Annual Conference.

Other special offerings included: $6,396.69 by conference laity for the John Kofi Asmah School in West Point, Liberia; $7,165.24 for the Tom Brown Scholarship at Wiley College; and $8,113.79 for the Bishop’s Ordinand Trip to England that will benefit 2017 and 2018 ordinands embarking on a Wesley Heritage pilgrimage.

The General Board of Global Ministries presented two awards to the Conference. The IGRC was in the Top 10 in two categories -- giving for missionary support in 2017 and giving for international disaster response.

A Mission Fair was held on Friday evening following the conclusion of business, spotlighting the missions and ministries of the annual conference with several interactive activities.

Legislatively, the conference approved an increase in the health insurance allowance paid to full-time pastors from $15,000 to $17,500 to help offset premium increases projected for 2019. In addition, the conference set minimum clergy salaries for 2019 at $43,382 for clergy in full connection, associate members and provisional elders; and $39,809 for full-time local pastors.

It was reported that all three conference pension funds are fully funded and no increase was needed in the Clergy Retirement Security Program (CRSP) contribution for 2019 due to good financial returns. No change was also needed for the defined benefits portion of the CRSP plan, which stands at $5,700 per year for full-time pastors; $4,275 for ¾ time pastors; $2,850 for ½ time pastors. Pastors at ¼ time are not eligible.

Retirees under the pre-1982 pension plan will see a 2 percent increase to $778 per active year for 2019.

The 2019 budget of $12,141,878 was approved – a decrease of $94,897 or 0.78 percent.

The conference approved the discontinuance of six congregations – Bath UMC; Cisne UMC; Clay’s Prairie UMC; Hamburg UMC; Jacksonville Brooklyn UMC; and Nye Chapel UMC – with a combined 893 years of ministry.

Four elders and a deacon were ordained. Seven provisional elders and one provisional deacon were commissioned.

A total of 30 pastors with a combined 933 years of service retired.

Membership stands at 122,522 in 2017, down 1,288 from 2016. Worship attendance is 53,295, down 265. Church school attendance stands at 17,034, up 191. Attendance in other small groups and ongoing clases are at 2,636, up 91. Professions or reaffirmations of faith for 2017 is 3,464, up 2.

The 2019 annual conference session will be held June 6-8, 2019, at the Peoria Civic Center in Peoria, Ill.