



# THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

## Dakotas-Minnesota Area

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March 2017

Dear Members and Friends of Dakotas United Methodist Churches:

Grace and peace to you as we continue our journey toward the cross and the Easter celebration.

Plans are well underway for the 24<sup>th</sup> session of the Dakotas Annual Conference. Our theme for this conference is *Encounter the Spirit: Live Expectantly*. Rev. Junius Dotson, General Secretary of Discipleship Ministries, will be with us to preach and teach as we explore the “why” and “how” of our Spirit-initiated evangelistic task.

As one expression of our Spirit-led yearning to live expectantly, we will receive, again this year, a Miracle Offering. The offering will be received on Friday, June 9, during our morning worship. I invite each of our congregations to begin praying and preparing to participate in yet another miraculous expression of God’s love in action,

**The 2017 Miracle Offering—Kids Count will be for the children of North and South Dakota, specifically to initiate or support church-school partnerships, and to help our newest congregations send the children in their target communities to church camp.** Jesus called the children to him and forever changed the world’s perception of their place in the Kingdom of God. I am urging every United Methodist congregation in the Dakotas Conference to develop a long-term partnership with a school in its community. The conference’s Extending Missional Impact Link is launching a grant program that will provide funding to individual congregations to help them develop such partnerships.

There are children in all Dakotas Conference communities who lack food, school supplies, winter clothes, books and/or positive role models. The Casey Foundation reports that over 100,000 children throughout North and South Dakota are living well below the poverty line. Over seventy percent of the children ages 5-13 are in a home where all parents in the household are working outside the home.

After assessing needs that exist in their communities, churches can apply for funding to help them form or expand an ongoing relationship with a school. There are many possibilities for partnerships, including supplying backpacks, clothing, or weekend meals; tutoring or mentoring students; opening up the church to school gatherings or after-school programs; offering parenting, ESL or literacy classes; praying for teachers and students.

Effective church--partnerships need volunteers. Please consider how you can volunteer in your community, as a church body, to improve the lives of children and families. Your time can provide a child the living example of a Spirit-filled life.

Our newest or forming congregations are reaching out to unchurched families, children and youth in their communities. Church camp provides an exceptional way to build these relationships and disciple these children.



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The **Kids Count Miracle Offering** will have two parts. A cash offering and a pledge to volunteer our lives in service to the children in our communities.

**I am asking that we set a goal of \$100,000 for Kids Count 2017 Miracle Offering.** Eighty percent (80%) of the offering will go to support church-school partnerships and twenty percent (20%) will go to help our new churches send children and youth to camp.

Additionally, I am asking that we set a goal of **10,000 volunteer hours pledged for Kids Count Miracle Offering.** Churches will be asked to report on their volunteer efforts throughout the next year.

Obviously, the capacity of our congregations varies greatly; some will do much more and others will do less. However, if every one of our 250 congregations raises \$500, we will exceed our goal. Paul's words to the church at Corinth are instructive to us as we prepare for the Holy Spirit to work through our offering to change the lives of our children

*God has the power to provide you with more than enough of every kind of grace. That way you will have everything you need always and in everything to provide more than enough for every kind of good work.*

~ II Corinthians 9:8 (CEB)

But, I am most intrigued by the verse that precedes verse 8. Paul writes:

*Everyone should give whatever they have decided in their heart. They shouldn't give with hesitation or because of pressure. God loves a cheerful giver.*

~II Corinthians 9:7 (CEB)

For Paul, generous giving is unleashed when we give with **no hesitation** and **no pressure**, but with a joyful, cheerful, grateful, expectant heart.

You are receiving this packet of information regarding our 2017 Annual Conference Session and the **Kids Count Miracle Offering** as a resource to your church's effort to make the miracle happen. You can also visit the Dakotas Conference website at [www.dakotasumc.org](http://www.dakotasumc.org) and click on the 2017 Annual Conference link and the Miracle Offering link. The packet and website will provide resources to assist you in preparing to participate in the **Kids Count Miracle Offering** for our children.

Thank you for your extravagant, joyful stewardship, for your obedience to the Holy Spirit's leading, and for embracing our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Yours in Christ's love,

Bruce R. Ough, Resident Bishop  
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Enclosures