

CONFERENCE COMMUNICATIONS/ INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY UPDATE

Within the last several months the Conference Communications/Information Technology (IT) area has experienced a number of changes that you may, or may not, be aware of:

Staff changes occurred as Becky Guenther, our temp employee, moved on to other endeavors, and Patricia Falkner was hired as the new IT Comprehensive Support Specialist. Patricia (Pat) is currently helping to support the IT area.

As many of you know already the IT department is only staffed by two people, and because of this the quality of our service is nowhere near as good as it should be. We have put in place for the entire Conference the proper equipment needed to bring the Conference into the 21st century. There are no longer issues with equipment failing because of excessive heat.

We continue to help and assist the United Methodist Churches and United Methodist related organizations with everything from advice on buying new computers to helping with new volunteers building Churches websites with the free web hosting and email that we provide.

Ok, some of you are thinking, "Free" - well it is not really free. This is your apportionment dollars at work. Most of the time people never think of us unless there is a problem. While we can be slow to get back to you we always fix and correct the problem, so that you can continue with as little disruption as possible. Let me say that we are truly sorry that the communications system has let you down in the past and that the two of us are always striving to do preventive maintenance to keep as much as we can from going wrong.

By now you have seen the ongoing changes to the Conference web site. With the changes in the web site we have incorporate a new content management system that allows a Conference staff member to update their own part of the Conference web site. This is an ongoing process and hope to have it done in under 2 years. Let us know if the changes make it easier for you to use/navigate the web site.

As you all know the Conference email system has been through some great changes. The new system has experienced considerable growth. We are now hosting just under 1,800 email users. This has come a long way from the 700 or so email users in 2005. With the implementation of Barracuda Spam firewall we have brought Spam back under control. Since last March (2006) the Spam firewall had over five million messages hit our system. The Spam firewall only allowed just over four hundred thousand through. The four and a half million messages left over were completely Spam.

By the end of 2006 there were significant issues in the Sun Prairie Conference Center Building with network lines that feed different parts of the building. In the first part of 2007 estimates have been sent to the Episcopal Office for replacement of all network lines that need to be replaced.

The new Data Center space now has a dedicated air conditioning/ventilation system working 24/7 to provide the right environment for the equipment to function and almost not fail. The last need for the Data Center is an electrical generator to provide buffering/modulating of extreme power surges/failures (via a UPS system that we have in place now). The Data Center experiences an average of 4 power outages a year. These measures would continue to ensure good stewardship of the investment we have all made in our Conference communications system.

Thank you for your patience in the midst of all of the many changes and disruptions. If you have questions or comments about our Conference Communications please feel free to contact Joyce Rich, (262-742-3507, bethelumc@elknet.net or Allen Kahl, 888-240-7328.

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