



CCP Update

Retired Pastor Recounts Life During, After Communist Rule

“Promote the welfare of the city”
-Jeremiah 29:7

The call from Jeremiah to promote the welfare of the city serves as a life motto for the now-retired Hungarian United Methodist pastor István Csernák. Rev. Csernák’s service spanned more than four decades, until his retirement in 2016. In that time, he saw his country transition out of communism and toward a representative democracy. At the same time, his Church transitioned from one of reclusive worship to one able to openly share the Gospel of Christ.

Rev. Csernák’s service began when he was 18. A friend invited him to travel by bus—Sunday after Sunday—to the outskirts of the small town of Alsózsolca in Northern Hungary where he volunteered to teach Sunday school to the small United Methodist congregation in the Roma neighborhood. There was no church building, but they met in the homes of the Roma church members and read the Bible, sang hymns, played soccer and partook in each other’s lives.

What he thought had been a simple invitation to teach Sunday school, became a life changing experience.

Rev. Csernák was shaken to his core when he encountered the extreme poverty and discrimination experienced by the marginalized Roma community. It was here that he first felt the call to full-time ministry.



István Csernák (back row, fifth from right) is pictured in the Roma neighborhood of Alsózsolca, a small town in Northern Hungary, in 1978. Csernák volunteered to teach Sunday school to the small United Methodist congregation in the Roma neighborhood.

He began his theological studies in Budapest, but soon the desperate shortage of pastors in Hungary forced the church to call him into full-time ministry at the Miskolc church where he served while continuing his theological studies part time. This church is where he also met his most important partner in ministry, his wife Eva.

Rev. Csernák was ordained in 1984 and served in a number of churches until the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989.

CCP Financials as of 4/30/2021

\$27,247,975

Total donations received
Inception to date

\$668,617

Donations received
Year to date

\$899,351

Emergency grants
2006–2012

\$12,076,391

Pension funds distributed
(01/01/2007 to date)

\$637,383

Pension distributions
Year to date



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The Reverend István Csernák (right) with his wife Eva.

Previously, the communist government had forced the church to work in isolation and seclusion. While they were now free to openly share the Gospel, the transition was not easy.

“We were not prepared for the new freedom that came with the dramatic and sudden change,” Rev.

Csernák said in a Zoom call from his home in Veresegyház near Budapest. His wife served as the interpreter. “We were overwhelmed and needed time to change our own mentality and grasp the opportunities,” Rev. Csernák continued.

So, when Rev. Csernák was elected superintendent in 1996, he and Bishop Heinrich Bolleter, who was based in Switzerland, led the church through a time of transformation.

The United Methodist Church in Hungary started to evangelize outside the church. It formed new faith communities, built churches, visited prisoners and even started a home for the elderly.

In the Hungary church, family summer camps became a hallmark. The whole Csernák family played a role, seizing on the new opportunities to teach young families Christian values.

Another highlight for the Csernák family was when Eva was invited to join a task force led by the late Bishop Rüdiger Minor, who had just started his episcopacy in Moscow. The task force was called to explore opportunities for Methodist mission and ministry across the former Soviet Union member states. Rev. Csernák retired in 2016 after having served for 44 years. He is immensely grateful for the support of the Central Conference Pension fund. This CCP pension allows Rev. Csernák and his family to live a life full of dignity, without having to work in retirement to survive. For Rev. Csernák, the CCP is a God-sent gift.

“For us, receiving from the CCP is a great source of relief and peace of mind,” he said.

To read more about Rev. Csernak: Visit wespath.org, click “About Wespath,” choose “Central Conference Pensions (CCP)” from the drop-down menu, and then select “Newsletter.”

Work Underway to Answer Important Question About Pension Plans

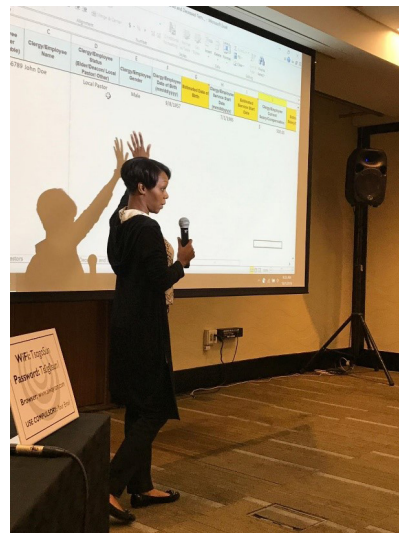
Actuarial valuations are underway that will provide a snapshot of the plans of the central conferences’ long-term financial health. These valuations use complex analyses that seek to answer a simple, but important, question: Given the amount of money coming into the plan, is it on track to pay the long-term benefits that have been promised?

Michelle Robinson of Wespath’s CCP team has been busy gathering participant data and plan information from each central conference. She is working with our partners at Willis Towers Watson (WTW) to produce the actuarial valuations. Three key considerations for this work include:

- How much does the fund have in assets?
- How long are participants expected to live?
- How much money will participants receive in retirement?

Answers to these questions, and others, help determine the “funded ratios” for the plans of the central conferences. For example, will the plans have enough funding to cover 100% of the benefits promised, or only 60%? Or somewhere in between?

Wespath conducts these valuations every two years—conducting valuations on a regular basis is vital to understanding where individual plans lie on their paths to becoming self-sustaining. This year’s analyses are expected to be complete in the fall. The results will be delivered electronically to central conference benefits officers and other leaders, along with an invitation to discuss the findings with Wespath.



Michelle Robinson presents to the central conference benefit officers, at the 2019 Forum in Johannesburg, on the format required for participant data in order to create the valuations.



Widow of Bishop Who Championed CCP Remains Loyal Advocate



Joye Chamness

Joye Chamness' generosity is an inspiration.

At the 2007 Central Texas Annual Conference meeting, Joye Chamness celebrated her wedding anniversary to Bishop Ben Chamness by purchasing 47 mosquito nets—one for every year she and the Bishop had been married—for Nothing But Nets,

the forerunner to the Imagine No Malaria initiative. Moved by her gift, Annual Conference attendees donated an additional \$100,000 to the cause.

The Central Conference Pensions (CCP) are another cause that have benefited from the Chamness' leadership and benevolent stewardship. Bishop Chamness, who died in 2018, led a fundraising campaign that raised \$25 million for CCP over 10 years. Joye Chamness donates to the program to this day.

"Early on in our married life, Ben, along with the churches that we served, began contributing to the pension fund of, at that time, the Methodist Church," said Joye Chamness, adding, "As a widow, I've experienced the benefits of that fund. Of course, the CCP program has helped those who served the church faithfully, as my husband did, but they didn't receive any benefits from their service. And so I feel like God has blessed me, and I feel that it's important to pass a portion of those gifts onto others."

Ben Chamness rose to a position of prominence in the Church, serving as bishop of the Central Texas Conference from 2000-2008. He was the Board Chair of the United Methodist Board of Pension and Health Benefits (now Wespeth Benefits and Investments) from 2004--2008. Throughout his work within the Church, he remained committed to helping others.

"He saw the disparities, I think, in the world with the pension program for all [U.S.] clergy as an example," Joye Chamness said. "And he wanted to help those suffering to meet life's everyday needs. He wanted to make a difference in the world."

While the CCP fundraiser achieved its goal of raising \$25 million in October 2013, Joye Chamness believes it is important to continue to donate.

"Such a small amount can buy food or medicine, help their children in their education, just everyday things," said Joye Chamness, adding, "The need will always be there."

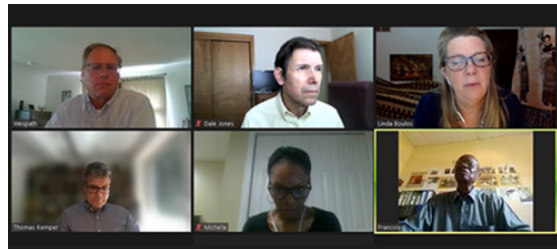
Board That Oversees CCP Adds Members From Central Conferences

The Overseas Pension Corporation Board is a subsidiary of Wespeth's Board of Directors with responsibility for oversight of the Central Conference Pensions (CCP) program and CCP funds. Recently, this small subsidiary board expanded its membership to include two members who live in the central conferences.

Moss Kapumha of Zimbabwe and Liz Mariano of the Philippines were elected to the Overseas Pension Corporation (OPC) Board on December 14, 2020. The OPC Board grew from three to five members with their addition.

Kapumha and Mariano joined the existing OPC Board of U.S.-based Bishop Paul Leeland, OPC Board Chair; Rev. Tracy Bass, Recording Secretary of the Wespeth Board; and Barbara Boigegrain, Wespeth's General Secretary and Chief Executive Officer.

What Has CCP Learned Via Zoom Calls?



Benefits Officer Rev. Francois Lushima Wembo describes to Wespeth's CCP team and interpreter Linda Boulos how the East Congo Episcopal Area has sought to sustain its pension program in the face of devastating floods, Ebola outbreaks, violent armed rebel attacks and a volcano eruption—all of which have occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic.













To donate: Visit wespeth.org, click "About Wespeth," choose "Central Conference Pensions (CCP)" from the drop-down menu, and then select "Donate Now."












Central Conference Facts:

The central conferences are located outside the United States and include annual conferences in Africa, the Philippines and Eurasia. Within the central conferences there are 79 provisional and annual conferences (of which 69 are assisted by CCP) with 5.4 million members.

Statistics:

Country	Active clergy	Retirees receiving payments	Surviving spouses/beneficiaries receiving payments
Cote d'Ivoire 	233	4	30
Liberia 	1,162	190	539
Mozambique 	220	40	45
West Angola 	89	74	75
East Angola 	80	24	20
Sierra Leone 	85	19	16
Zimbabwe 	375	42	55
Russia 	70	22	0
Philippines 	1,582	200	205
Nigeria 	350	41	85

Country	Active clergy	Retirees receiving payments	Surviving spouses/beneficiaries receiving payments
East Africa 	705	164	149
East Congo 	396	81	82
Central Congo 	346	205	111
South Congo 	721	92	195
North Katanga 	917	264	239
South Africa 	8	3	2
Southern and Central Europe 	94	24	11
Lithuania 	4	0	0
Latvia 	11	2	0

Total CCP Statistics

- Active pastors covered—**7,448**
- Retirees and Surviving spouses receiving support—**3,350**
- Total of all pension support funds released to date—**\$ 12,975,742***

**Total of emergency grants and pension funds distributed*

Questions?

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Make checks payable to:
Wespath Benefits and Investments
Add "CCP" on the "memo" line