

Kane District

Golden Sneaker Competition/Mission Meditation

Walk to Colombia

We recommend the following program as a way to organize as a church/charge to:

1. Participate in the Conference Golden Sneaker competition.
2. Create a sense of participation in the current mission to Colombia, and an important sense of awareness of other missions and ministries in the United States and Latin America.

Faith and Fitness: Jesus said, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). We all agree that, when Jesus said this, he was not teaching about a physical fitness program. It was about everlasting life. But it is also true that the “abundant life” Jesus offers has always included physical well-being. The gospels repeatedly tell us that, wherever Jesus went, he worked miracles of physical healing. The presence of God in the lives of Moses, Samson, and Elijah was made evident in their health and physical strength (Deuteronomy 34:7; Judges 14-16; I Kings 18-46). Paul many times used references to athletic discipline to describe the disciplines of Christian life (Galatians 2:2; II Timothy 4:7-8; Hebrews 12:1-3).

Discipline and devotion go hand in hand in our Golden Sneaker competitions. As individuals, we focus on personal health and recreation. As congregations, the success of our “Walks” depends on the spirit of cooperation in the church, as we add our mileage together to reach the goal. The goal often has a devotional tone – either liturgical, as in the walks to Jerusalem or Bethlehem; or they are missional, as in the walk to Zimbabwe or now, Colombia.

The method of calculating miles is standard in all the Golden Sneaker competitions. The count of actual miles walked or run is given. Many other activities, such as work-outs, swimming, dance class or team sports are calculated on a formula 20 minutes = 1 mile. The 12 weeks of the walk provide the span of time to add the mileage of all participants and complete the walk to the goal.

Why a “Walk to Colombia”? In March of 2011, a VIM team from our Conference is planning to go to Colombia to build a new church for the Methodist congregation at Malambo. Kane District has a unique interest in this mission. Of the 12 volunteers from our Conference, 5 are from Kane District. Hopefully, we feel an ownership for a mission that has had significant leadership from our District. Those of us who are going on the mission will certainly appreciate your “walking” with us, praying with us, and feeling kinship with our efforts.

This mission project was adopted by the Conference Committee on Encounter with Christ in Latin America and the Caribbean after Mrs. Magaly

Johnson, a Colombian immigrant and member of Evans Memorial UM Church, visited her native Colombia. After having contacted the Bishop of Colombia, she was introduced to the congregation at Malambo. These folks have been worshiping on a vacant lot, hoping one day to have a church building to worship in. VIM leaders in the United States informed us of the growth and Spirit of the Methodist Church of Colombia. After years of political and drug wars the people of Colombia are war-weary and looking to God in a new way. In this environment, the Methodist Church has been growing in Colombia, and has come to the place that many new houses of worship will need to be built.

Your involvement in this mission is important, and greatly appreciated. There are several things you can do!

1. Please pray for this mission, especially March 8 to 17.
2. Please give to this mission, via the Conference-approved Advance Special #SS005100CSA.
3. "Walk" with us to Colombia, using this guide.

The Two "Tracks"

I. The Easter Track

Traditionally, these Walks have been planned as a preparation for Easter, using the 12 prior weeks for discipline and devotion. Those who wish to use this track should begin on Sunday, January 30.

II. The Ski Track

Because Easter comes so late this year, following the traditional, Easter Track would involve throwing away January, when many of us stand to rack up many miles with winter sports. Also, following this track will bring us closer to the time table of the actual mission to Colombia. On this track, churches would begin on January 2 and conclude on March 27, just after the mission is completed.

Reporting

The District office has always received the mileage totals for churches. If individual churches are unsure if they can meet the goal, perhaps they would like to combine miles for the walk.

The Route for the Walk to Colombia

The Kane District Parsonage. How appropriate to picture ourselves assembling at the District Parsonage to receive the Superintendent's blessing as we set out on this journey of mission and devotion.

The Conference Center. 125 miles takes us to the Conference Center. We contemplate the many ministries that are created and supported here. We pray for our Conference and all its member congregations.

Wheeling. Only 65 miles to the heart of our current Bishop's background. This is a good moment to contemplate our "Imagine No Malaria" campaign. We should offer some prayer to support this worthy drive.

Charleston, W.VA. As we pass over the next 180 miles through the heart of West Virginia, it is only right to consider the extreme poverty of this Appalachian region, and pray for ministries like Heart and Hand and House of the Carpenter, that serve some of the nation's poorest people.

Red Bird Mission. 250 miles over hill and dale places us in Harlan County, Kentucky. The Church has maintained outstanding ministries in education, agriculture, social services, employment opportunities, and, of course, Christian ministry for some years. Red Bird Mission is one of the best known and beloved of missions in all Appalachia.

Nashville. Another 250 miles brings us to this traditional center of United Methodist ministries. From the Cokesbury Center to the offices of the General Board of Discipleship, generations of ministry have been created here.

New Orleans. 525 more miles places us in New Orleans. Since Hurricane Katrina, hundreds of VIM teams from all over the country, including many from our Conference, have served here. May the Lord continue to raise hopes in this place.

San Antonio. We become aware of how large our western states are as it takes us 540 miles to reach San Antonio. We notice that many churches in this region have Spanish names, or feature a Spanish language service. Not all of those who attend these services are recent immigrants, but we are pleased to see that the churches are meeting this ethnic and language need.

Monterrey, Mexico. Another 300 miles takes us across the Rio Grande and well into Mexico. In Monterrey, we meet with Ron and Bonnie Hipwell, missionaries from our Conference who teach in the Methodist College there. Because of the news reports of the terrible violence of the drug cartels in this area, we recognize that this mission operates in a very dangerous environment. We pray for our friends, and the work of Jesus here.

Mexico City. One of the longest segments of our journey, 975 miles, takes us to Mexico City. We worship in the largest church, el Gante, in the central part of the city, with a congregation of about 1,000 people. The pastor and his Superintendent show us some ministry centers for community outreach that fascinates us, and we stay over at the Seminary – one of Latin America's finest. We are inspired by what we see and hear.

Puebla. Only 100 miles brings us to one of the most exciting ministry training centers in all of Mexico. Laity come here for special training in agricultural

methods, health promotion, children's work, broadcast and music. To create such a center in a rural area, purely to serve the Lord, is remarkable. We are blessed just to be here.

San Cristóbal de Las Casas. Another long trek, 800 miles, brings us to the last large city of southeastern Mexico. In these remote areas, the government of Mexico is very unpopular with the tribal people, but the Methodist Church has had great success with missions here.

Antigua, Guatemala. 200 miles take us to Guatemala's oldest city and former capitol. Guatemala is Latin America's first Protestant-majority country, and the Methodist Church has been very involved in the outstanding growth in numbers. The Health Promoter's Program, so important to the Global Health Initiative of the United Methodist Church, was originally developed in this country, and exported to third world countries around the globe. This definitely includes Zimbabwe, the country where we have our new Conference Covenant, and the other African countries we are helping with our "Imagine No Malaria" program.

San Salvador. 100 more miles brings us to San Salvador. It is hard to believe that, as we see this prosperous city, there was such violence here during the 1980's. We visit the Roman Catholic cathedral where the famous Archbishop Oscar Romero was assassinated by his government for defending the rights of the poor of his country. A great deal of effort has gone into peace and reconciliation on the part of Christian leaders of various denominations. They are an inspiration.

Sulaco, Honduras. 150 more miles brings us to Sulaco; not a very big or important place, but affected, like all the other towns, by the ravages of Hurricane Mitch. We remember how much international effort there was, on the part of churches and rescue agencies. This charity is the beautiful part of disaster.

Jinotega, Nicaragua. After 160 miles, we arrive at Jinotega, and stop by the Fuente de Paz Church. This is the church with which we formed a covenant during the Contra War of the 1980's. For 20 years, we worked on many missions together. A VIM team just visited there this past November, to renew our fellowship.

Chacocente, Nicaragua. Only 75 miles brings us to the Chacocente settlement community. This is the project that resettles people from the municipal dump in the capitol city. Having property of their own and a chance to work the land is a new lease on life for these people. Evidently, a work of Jesus!

San Jose, Costa Rica. Traditionally, Costa Rica is the great center for Methodist mission activity in Central America. 200 miles brings us to San Jose, where the Church has maintained the great Language School for generations. People who want to work anywhere in Latin America come here to improve their

Spanish before they go to their mission location. We are proud to think that our Church has given such leadership.

The Panama Canal. After 350 miles, we are about to cross over the Panama Canal. We are close to our journey's goal, as we leave Central America for South America. This is a monumental place, and we have a strong sense of God's presence as we step onto another continent.

Malambo, Colombia. The last 275 miles of our journey are so fascinating! The Andes Mountains appear to the south, and the beauty of this country reminds us that we are walking with God. As we approach Malambo, we feel the love of the congregation with whom we have been building a new church building. Our Conference VIM team has labored here March 8 to 17, and the foundation and walls of the church reflect all of our efforts to build something for Jesus. There is more yet to build, but we have made a beginning. By the grace of God, we have walked to Colombia!

Total Mileage

The total mileage of this "Walk to Colombia" is 5,620 miles. We hope you have enjoyed both the mission walk and the activity and recreation you have actually pursued.

May the Lord bless you.