



# United Methodist Arkansas

May 15, 2009

## VBS teaches kids to live on the EDGE

■ *Summer programs often are church's best evangelism tools*

By Heather Hahn

Not that long ago, most Vacation Bible School programs kept kids engaged with nothing more than plaster of Paris crafts, Autoharp sing-alongs and green Kool-Aid.

Now, VBS curriculum has become a truly multimedia affair with DVDs, Web sites, puppets, science experiments and crafts all along the same Scripturally inspired theme. And the summer Bible lessons aren't just for kids.

Preparations for United Methodist VBS programs across the state are now well under way. Many churches already have places to register on their Web site homepages.

Cokesbury, the United Methodist publisher, this year is asking its VBS participants — both young and old — to take a walk on the wild side at Camp E.D.G.E. — Experience + Discover God Everywhere.

Cecilia Kelly, the Arkansas Conference's minister of children and families, said the Cokesbury curriculum thinks the theme will provide many kids with a rare treat.

"Many children don't have the opportunity to have a camping experience," Kelly said. "And it's all about God's creation in the outdoors. I'm hoping it will strengthen people's relationship with God."

At Camp E.D.G.E., participants will take different trek each day to a biblical destination. They'll learn about how Joshua and the Israelites entered the Promised Land, travel with the Wise Men to see baby Jesus, join Jesus and His disciples in the Upper Room and voyage with Mary Magdalene to see the risen Christ in Galilee.

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## Church gets a jolt of caffeine



Walt Garrett pours himself a mug of coffee before the start of the 5:30 p.m. Sunday service at Argenta United Methodist Church. The church began worshipping weekly in March around the tables at the Starving Artists' Cafe in North Little Rock's revived downtown.

Photo by Heather Hahn

### ■ *United Methodists launch campaign to lure 18-34 demo*

By Heather Hahn

On a recent Sunday evening, a group of mostly 20- and 30-somethings stream into Starving Artists' Café in North Little Rock's trendy downtown Argenta neighborhood.

Some grab a mug of hot coffee and a cookie at the bar before heading off to sit at one of the café's tables. Others stand around and shoot the breeze with friends.

Paintings by local artists line the walls. A blue neon sign for Diamond

Bear Beer beams in the corner. Off to the side, two guitarists and a drummer warm up.

Then Will Choate, wearing a gray T-shirt and jeans, walks to the front of the gathering, and a hush falls over the room. The 27-year-old pastor welcomes those gathered, asks them all to stand and calls them to worship.

This is Argenta United Methodist Church, where there are no pews, no hymnals and no pulpit. The new church doesn't even have a large screen to flash PowerPoint slides of praise music.

What the church does have in its

See Rethink church, page 6



At the end of worship, Argenta UMC worshippers drop their bulletins in this basket near the entrance to be recycled.

Photo by Heather Hahn

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## Editor's Corner

### Time for some rethinking

The term "mainline Protestant" originated with the Pennsylvania Main Line, a group of wealthy suburban towns near Philadelphia, and the Main Line of the Pennsylvania Railroad that ran through the area.

Back in the late 19th century, the affluent residents around the Pennsylvania Main Line were considered the epitome of White Anglo-Saxon Protestant. They were the elite, and they attended churches widely seen as equally elite and culturally influential.

These august worshippers spent Sunday mornings in the company of their fellow Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Lutherans, Disciples of Christ, northern Baptists and, yes, Methodists.

Those denominations continued to dominate American faith well into the 1950s when the grateful World War II generation filled many mainline Protestant churches to bursting. Even Billy Graham's wife was a proud Presbyterian.

But today, all those denominations are dwindling, and their influence on public life has declined in equal measure.

It is perhaps telling that when President Barack Obama named his Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Community Partnerships in April, only two of the 25-member panel represent mainline Protestant traditions — Peg Chamberlin, the president-elect of the National Council of Churches, and Sharon Watkins, general minister and president of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

By now, the depressing statistics are well known. Mainline Protestant churches have lost millions of worshippers over the past 40 years. Since its formation in 1968, the United Methodist Church alone has seen its membership rolls plunge by nearly 3 million.

The denomination, with just under 8 million members, is still the third largest religious group in the country. But if current trends hold, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will likely surpass the United Methodist Church in about a decade.

The more rapidly shrinking Presbyterian Church (USA) — of which I'm a member — probably will see the Assemblies of God replace it as the



Heather Hahn

nation's ninth largest religious group by next year.

So what happened? How did the once dominant denominations of the postwar come to be seen as irrelevant and dated as *The Saturday Evening Post*?

Simply put, the 1960s happened. The culture changed. The vast majority of baby boomers went off to college or to Vietnam. They moved out of town and out of state, and many

never returned to the denominations of their elders.

Reared on TV commercials and shopping malls, boomers shopped around for faith communities the way their parents shopped around for cars. Suddenly, mainline Protestant churches had to compete in an open spiritual marketplace, and they failed to promote their brand.

These churches evolved theologically, but they remained complacent about reaching out to young adults. Many kept the same hymns, the same formal dress code and the view that the young folks should wait their turn before taking on leadership roles.

So some boomers found their spiritual home in the Jesus Movement and nascent evangelical congregations. Others — turned off by those group's conservative social views — left church altogether.

Since 2001, the United Methodist Church — to its immense credit — has been working to reverse this trend with its "Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors." campaign. This month, the denomination launched "Rethink Church," an evolution of that campaign specifically targeting unchurched 18- to 34-year-olds, the children (and in some cases, grandchildren) of boomers.

It is a campaign I truly hope succeeds. Much has been made of recent surveys that show increasing numbers of Americans who say they have no religious affiliation. And I must confess, at 34, I might be among them if I had not grown up within the openness of a mainline Protestant congregation.

The United Methodist Church, and other mainlines, are open to debate, open to learning new things about science, open to supporting women in leadership roles and most importantly, open to finding news ways to help others.

Church — it's not just for evangelicals anymore. That's a message more of my peers need to hear.

### Submission guidelines

The Arkansas United Methodist welcomes contributions of stories and photographs related to the denomination and submitted in a timely manner by local churches, groups and individuals. Information may be edited for brevity and clarity. Always include information on a contact person who may be reached in case of questions.

Photographs may be submitted in print or digital format. We cannot use instant developing (Polaroid) photos or digital photographs printed on plain or photographic paper. Digital photos must have a minimum resolution of 200 dpi and must be submitted electronically. We cannot guarantee that all photos submitted will be used.

Send stories, ideas and photos to: Arkansas United Methodist, 2 Trudie Kibbe Reed Dr., Little Rock, AR 72202, or e-mail to [hhahn@arumc.org](mailto:hhahn@arumc.org). For information, call (501) 324-8037. The next deadline is May 27.

## Donations for water wells will honor clergy spouses

Clergy spouses are a vital part of ministry. They are expected to work — without pay — to improve the life of the congregation.

They teach about spiritual matters, nutrition, childcare, hygiene and anything else that is needed. Because they represent the Church, they are often expected to share their homes and resources with those in need.

Clergy spouses in the North Katanga Annual Conference are essential "partners in ministry" in the growth and mission of the Church. The North Katanga Annual Conference in the Democratic Republic of Congo is an official partner conference with us in Arkansas.

Many churches and groups here have provided funds for water wells, a Wesley Foundation building, an orphanage, churches and buildings there. I hope that support will continue and grow.

To honor the clergy spouses, I hope you will join me in raising \$7,000 to provide a water well in their conference.

The North Katanga Clergy Spouses Water Well will provide potable water to a village in Congo, releasing some women and girls from the task of carrying water many miles each day.

Girls are assigned this task so that

boys can attend school. Providing accessible water will give more girls a chance at education and will provide this basic necessity of life to an entire village.

By providing a water well in honor of the hard-working spouses of the United Methodist clergy in that area, we can show appreciation for all they do to advance the Kingdom of God.

This summer Bishop Charles Crutchfield and I plan to be in Kamina, in the North Katanga conference, for about two weeks.

While Charles leads Bible study and classes on Wesleyan theology for the clergy, I will be meeting with the clergy spouses to discuss their essential role in the Congolese churches. It would be wonderful to share your support for them in the giving of the water well.

I invite you to make a contribution, to ask others to contribute, to be creative in raising money for this worthy project. Funds will be collected in May and June, including at the annual conference in Rogers.

You may send a contribution directly to the conference office, 2 Trudie Kibbe Reed Drive, Little Rock, AR 72202.

I will take the funds and personally present them to the wife of Bishop Ntambo Nkulu Ntanda, the "Mama Bishop" of North Katanga conference. I hope you will join me in this work of Christian love.

*Karen Crutchfield is the wife of Bishop Charles Crutchfield.*



Karen Crutchfield



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# Viewpoint

Dear Friends:

Annual Conference is coming. I hope you have taken careful notice that we are providing the pre-conference journal electronically. It will be important for you to have it in front of you.

The business of the conference will be challenging and the schedule will be full.

The normal business of finances has been colored by the current economic situation in our world.

How we balance ministry and money will be an interesting challenge. We will answer the question of how finances and faith interface for the Arkansas Annual Conference.

Additionally we will be voting on a long list of constitutional amendments. A sizable number are simply editorial but several are quite

## An Occasional Word from the Bishop



significant. I trust you will familiarize yourself with the amendments before arriving at the conference.

We will be reminded of the worldwide nature of the church by the presence of Dr. Ed Paup, our conference preacher.

Paup is general secretary of the General Board of Global Ministries.

His oversight of our largest general agency includes responsibility for our mission efforts worldwide, the work of the United Methodist Committee on Relief domestically and internationally, and the concern we all share in the area of global health. He is a wonderful

preacher and a person of great spiritual depth.

A very sacred moment will come on the night of June 16 with the ordination service. It has special meaning for any ordained pastor.

For me, this is the moment in the conference year when I silently renew my own vows of ordination. It is a special time.

Of course, the reading of appointments is another sacred and special moment.

The sending of pastors to a mis-



Charles Crutchfield

sion field is an awesome responsibility and opportunity. We have carefully bathed the decisions we have made in prayer.

It is my hope that the conference and all our churches will be in a season of prayer for the decisions we will make together, the people who will be ordained, the appointments to be made and the ministry of the whole church.

I believe prayer releases the work and power of the Holy Spirit. In such a time as this, we need all the help we can get.

To view the pre-conference journal, visit [www.arumc.org/pre-conferencejournal](http://www.arumc.org/pre-conferencejournal).

Faithfully,

*Charles Crutchfield*

## A few steps can help churches be ready when disaster strikes

There were 200 federally declared disaster days in Arkansas in 2008. So far in 2009 — with the January and Maundy Thursday tornados and spring flooding — we seem to be moving in the direction of 200 more federally declared disaster days.

While we have learned many lessons in the last few years about disaster response and long-term recovery, we seemed to be repeating the same mistakes. In other words, we continue to be in the remedial course as we fail to adequately prepare for disasters that are prone to happen in this state — tornados, fires and earthquakes.

### Safe and Secure

When you fly in an airplane, the safety instructions indicate that in the event of an emergency one should secure their own facemask first, and then assist others in securing theirs. The first task of anyone in disaster is to make certain that their family and community is secure before going off to help others.

When disaster strikes, pastors should first secure their family, survey their neighborhoods or communities and then contact their district superintendents with the following information:

- Status of the parsonage family
- Church building damage
- Community status, which may include number of households affected, power supply or status of community security, i.e. has a curfew been established).

At the same time that the district superintendents gather information about the various disaster sites across the state, the Conference Disaster Preparedness and Response Committee is beginning to gather supplies and teams to go to the affected areas.

The committee's coordinator sits on a statewide disaster agency called the



Maxine Allen

VOAD (Voluntary Organizations Assisting in Disaster). The coordinator is apprised by teleconference and email of Arkansas state and federal governmental assistance to be coordinated by the VOAD.

### No Lone Rangers

United Methodists like to think that United Methodist Committee on Relief and United Methodist Volunteers in Mission are the only groups assisting in disaster.

Recently Sister Mary Lou Stubbs of Catholic Charities posed the question: What do all these groups have in common?

She listed Arkansas Rice Depot, Arkansas Foodbank Network, Americorps, Catholic Charities, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, Congregation of the Mission, Daughters of Charity, FEMA, Ladies of Charity, VOAD, UMCOR, Presbyterian Church, St. Vincent dePaul Society, United Methodist Church, Arkansas Crisis Response Team and the Adventist Disaster Response.

"They are all responding to a disaster — the same disaster — the Holy Thursday tornados in Arkansas," Stubbs said.

United Methodists respond using "the 4 C's" of VOAD: cooperation, coordination, communication and collaboration with many other faith-based, nonprofit and governmental groups.

Presently in Arkansas, more than 40 agencies participate in some form in the Arkansas VOAD.

By coming together, we are stronger. We are not alone.

### What Can I Do?

■ **Give:** To give to UMCOR and Arkansas Disaster Funds, individuals can respond to local church appeals or for specific disasters, donate through the conference's Web site at [www.arumc.org](http://www.arumc.org).

To give blood, call (800) GIVE-LIFE to schedule a life-saving appointment or visit [www.bloodisneeded.org](http://www.bloodisneeded.org) to find local blood drives. Donors of all blood types are needed.

■ **Volunteer locally:** Your community is a great place to start. There are hundreds of organizations that provide direct social service support in your area and many of these have disaster components to prepare and support those in your area.

These same volunteers are often the first line of support in other areas when disaster strikes. You may contact Don Weeks, Arkansas Volunteers in Mission coordinator, at [dweeks@arumc.org](mailto:dweeks@arumc.org) or (501) 681-2909. You also can visit [www.1800volunteer.org](http://www.1800volunteer.org) to connect to a volunteer center in your community.

■ **Volunteer wisely:** In a community struggling to respond to and recover from a disaster, an influx of volunteers and donations — no matter how well-intentioned — can make the process even more difficult.

Before traveling to the disaster area to help, learn where and when your skills will be needed. Discuss with volunteer organizations how your needs for food, water and shelter will be met while you are volunteering.

■ **Be prepared:** Disasters strike with or without warning. Your congregation can get training by contacting Larry H. Gentry of the Disaster Preparedness and Response Committee at [larry-gentry@sbcglobal.net](mailto:larry-gentry@sbcglobal.net).

Do you and your family know how to respond? It is important to have an emergency supply kit and a communication plan. Visit [www.Ready.gov](http://www.Ready.gov) for more resources. Prepare flood buckets and health kits for the annual Ingathering. Directions for preparing kits can be found at the Web site [new.ghgm-umc.org/umcor/get-connected/supplies](http://new.ghgm-umc.org/umcor/get-connected/supplies).

George Santayana reminds us that "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

We can move from the remedial disaster class to one where each individual and congregation in Arkansas is prepared to respond to the disasters in the days ahead.

Maxine Allen is the Arkansas Conference's minister of mission and ethnic ministries. She can be reached by e-mail at [mallen@arumc.org](mailto:mallen@arumc.org)

### FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE By Mike Morgan





# Viewpoint

## A 'micro' vision for church's 'macro' future

Shane Claiborne has an answer to the church's problems. And it sounds nothing like what we're used to hearing.

Shane is a Gen X-er who grew up in a Methodist church in east Tennessee (though his comments about the Methodism of his youth aren't always complimentary). After attending Eastern College in suburban Philadelphia, Shane moved to the inner-city and helped found an intentional Christian community called The Simple Way.



Andrew Thompson

He traveled to Iraq before the 2003 U.S. invasion to witness to the nonviolent message of Jesus in the midst of that tense and dangerous situation. His 2006 book, *The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical*, part-memoir and part-call to action, has rocked many Gen X-ers to the core.

I went to hear Shane speak recently, eager to see if the man matched the message.

He's a curious guy, with a preference for homespun clothes and dark-rimmed glasses. His face is framed by dreadlocks and a scruffy goatee. He's tall and thin, and looks like he's always deep in thought.

In a presentation that included both lecture and Q&A time, Shane laid out his vision for the church. There was no grand church-growth theory or summons to a culture war. Instead, Shane called for an approach to discipleship that, if not small in numbers, is at least small-scale in vision.

Shane believes in people rather



## Gen-X Rising

By Andrew Thompson

than programs, yet he defies the clichéd sound of that statement. His spiritual hero is Mother Teresa, and he likes to tell of seeing her gnarled feet when he went to work with her organization in Calcutta.

One of the nuns told him that Mother Teresa kept giving away her good shoes and settling for ones that were too small. Over the years, wearing ill-fitting shoes had deformed her feet.

For Shane, that story sums up what it means to follow Jesus. Mother Teresa's Christian witness came out of the life she lived, making her the perfect example of expressing belief not through words but through a sacrificial pattern of life.

"We are not sent out to make believers," Shane said to his audience. "We are sent out to make disciples." In other words, we are charged with helping people grow into what it means to follow Jesus.

On the surface, this sounds like Sunday School 101. But Shane gently adds that most Christians fall short when it comes to living as Jesus calls us to live. Jesus has a lot to say about money, about violence and about loving the poor, for example, but we often gloss over those words. Shane won't let us.

"We're never going to have a church that cares for poor folks until we have poor folks at our dinner table," he says. And at The Simple Way community in Philly, Shane practices what he preaches.

He wants us to see the church as a place of real community, where God's

love and justice are embodied in authentic relationships with God and neighbor. In *The Irresistible Revolution*, he describes faithful Christians as "people who are building deep, genuine relationships with fellow strugglers along the way, and who actually know the faces of the people behind the issues they are concerned about."

Shane's "micro" vision isn't reflected in the church's typically "macro" approach to problem-solving. Big denominations look for big solutions; the United Methodist Church is a good example.

Faced with an aging population, a decline in numbers and a creaky bureaucracy, what do we do? We pass legislation at General Conference to create sweeping new programs through our general boards and agencies. We tweak our mission statement and baptismal vows. We fund multi-million-dollar advertising campaigns designed to enhance our reputation in the larger culture.

These strategies may work. They haven't yet, but they may. I'm just not holding my breath.

In the meantime, perhaps we should pay attention to Shane Claiborne's perspective on Christian discipleship. It looks more like Jesus than anything I've seen in a long time.

*Andrew C. Thompson, an elder in the Arkansas Conference, is a doctoral student at Duke Divinity School. He can be reached at andrew@mandatum.org.*

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## Letters to the Editor

### Learning from Episcopalians

One reason we study history is because if we aren't careful we will repeat it. The ongoing crisis in the Episcopal Church is church history unfolding before our eyes.

It is also important because we are dealing with virtually the same issue. It revolves around Christian sexuality and the proper interpretation of the Bible. The bishops of the Episcopal Church by some parliamentary maneuvering, ordained a self-avowed homosexual as a bishop. This caused a split in the U.S. Episcopal Church, and many leaders in the world Anglican Communion would like to boot the U.S. branch out.

We United Methodists seem to be following the same course. For 30 years we have had a raucous debate about Scripture and church tradition.

There is little doubt that the author of the Bible didn't approve of any sexual behavior outside of Holy Matrimony. There is no period of church history that approved of sexual behavior outside of marriage. Yet our liberal friends seem determined to push us outside the boundaries of Scripture and tradition.

The problem is if we are free to interpret the Bible in such a manner and write off 2000 years of church tradition, we are free to believe just about anything. If we breach the dam of sexual ethics, then the floodwater can go anywhere.

The Rev. Kevin G. Forrester has been elected Bishop by the Diocese of Northern Michigan of the Episcopal Church.

Bishop Forrester is significant for what he doesn't believe. He doesn't think that Satan exists; he doesn't believe that God sent his only-begotten Son to die for the sins of the whole world; he says the Koran is sacred; he had taken a Buddhist middle name; he teaches that many roads lead to the divine; and he has rewritten the Apostle's Creed.

If we United Methodists will just watch the unfolding Episcopal saga, we will be able to see the red flashing lights. Forrester was only following the House of Bishops' reasoning to its logical conclusion.

*Roger E. Glover, senior pastor  
Dardanelle First UMC*

### Thank you

Thanks to all of you who responded to my Feb. 6 letter for help for Dr. Odin Rock in Haiti.

There was enough for an examination table [for his clinic]. Again, thanks.

*Stan Reed  
Batesville*

## Changes coming to the Arkansas United Methodist in June

*Special to the Arkansas United Methodist*

The *Arkansas United Methodist*, the award-winning newspaper of the Arkansas Conference, is getting a new look and a new printing schedule.

Beginning June 5, the conference will publish the newspaper once per month. In July, the paper will start being printed in conjunction with the *United Methodist Reporter*, a national newspaper that covers United Methodist-related stories from across the United States and around the globe.

The Arkansas Conference also will publish four special-focus issues in the fall, winter, spring and summer for a total of 16 issues per year.

The shift will allow the *Arkansas United Methodist* to reduce expenses while delivering an improved product, said Martha Taylor, the conference's director of communications.

"In thinking creatively about ways we can continue to deliver news and information to our members during tough economic times, we discovered a unique opportunity," Taylor said.

Although the newspaper's publication will be less frequent, each issue will have more news and information that has an impact on the state's roughly 138,000 United Methodists.

The A section of the paper will be devoted entirely to Arkansas. The B section will have a national and international focus.

The *United Methodist Reporter* will print the *Arkansas United Methodist* using recycled paper and soy ink for less environmental impact. Still, the newspaper will have a crisper look, improved readability and sharper color definition.

The *United Methodist Reporter* at present partners with 21 other confer-

ence publications.

In March, the *United Methodist Reporter* received three national awards from the Religion Communications Council, including being named the "best religion newspaper in the country."

The *Arkansas United Methodist* will have more space, allowing editor Heather Hahn to increase coverage of the state's more than 700 United Methodist congregations.

In the coming months, Hahn also plans to expand the conference's online coverage.

Forthcoming issues will provide thorough reporting on the annual conference, profile some of Arkansas' future pastors and show where your stewardship dollars go.

To learn more about this change, e-mail Heather Hahn at [hhahn@arumc.org](mailto:hhahn@arumc.org) or call her at (501) 324-8037.



## Coming Up



Mount Carmel UMC, 2005 Arkansas 5, Benton, will celebrate its 120th anniversary with a two-day revival at 7 p.m. May 17 and 18. Chester Jones, district superintendent of the South Central District, will preach. Salem UMC Praise Team and the Nichols Family of Fordyce will provide music on May 17 and the Parkview UMC choir of Benton and Bob McCool of West Memphis will perform May 18. Refreshments will follow each service. This photo shows the church in 2007.

Photo courtesy of Mount Carmel United Methodist Church

**Trinity UMC**, 1101 N. Mississippi St., Little Rock, will honor its high school seniors at its 10:45 a.m. service May 17. To learn more, call the church at (501) 666-2813.

**Rock Springs UMC**, 819 Rock Springs Road, Rock Springs (near Monticello), will have an "Old-Fashioned Dinner and Gospel Quartet Concert" featuring Brothers in Christ of Monroe, La., on May 23. Dinner will be 5-6:30 p.m., and the concert will be at 7 p.m. The concert is part of the church's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration. Dinner is \$6 for adults and \$3 for children under 12. The concert is free. To learn more, call George Miller at (870) 367-1775.

**Western Hills UMC**, 4601 Western Hills Ave., Little Rock, will host a concert by the Southern gospel quartet Hallelujah Harmony at 6 p.m. May 31. A free-will offering will be taken. To learn more, call Carlton Finch at (501) 796-8817.

**Camp Aldersgate** will sponsor its first QualChoice Classic golf tournament on June 1 at Chenal Country Club, 10 Chenal Club Blvd., Little Rock. Registration, lunch and warm-up is at 11 a.m. Shotgun start will be at 1 p.m., and the awards ceremony will be at 4:30-6:30 p.m.

The cost is \$1,000 per foursome. Proceeds benefit the camp. For a registration form, call Camp Aldersgate at (501) 225-1444 or e-mail Dana Addison at daddison@Campaldersgate.net.

**Salem UMC** will have its annual camp meeting at 6:30 p.m. June 21-28 at its old campground, 1647 Salem Road, Saline County. Services will begin with Inspirational Performers under the Arbor. Kevin Lyons of Henderson UMC in Little Rock will be the evangelist. Chester

Jones, South Central District superintendent, will bring the memorial service to a close on June 28.

John Moore will be the song leader, and Kathleen Dockery of Oaklawn UMC in Hot Springs will be the pianist. Brenda Marshall, also known as "Flower the Power," will lead a children's crusade. To learn more, call Ezra Wingfield at (501) 316-0997.

**Just Communities of Central Arkansas** will have its annual Plowshares Community Conflict Resolution workshop from 9:15 a.m. to 5 p.m. Aug. 19 and 20 at the Darragh Center in the Central Arkansas Main Library, 100 Rock St., Little Rock. The training costs \$75 and includes lunch and the book *Peace Skills: Manual for Community Mediators*. One of the facilitators is fluent in Spanish. The session is limited to 40 participants, and applicants will be chosen to promote racial, gender, faith group, professional and geographic diversity. For an application, call Ruth Shepherd at (501) 372-5129.

*The deadline for the next edition of the Arkansas United Methodist is 5 p.m. May 27. Submissions must be typed or printed and include the street address and phone number for the church or event. Priority will be given to including events scheduled in the coming month. Mail submissions to editor Heather Hahn, Arkansas United Methodist, 2 Trudie Kibbe Reed Drive, Little Rock, AR, 72202, or e-mail information to hhahn@arumc.org.*

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## 2009 Worship Fair places focus on children's faith

*Special to the Arkansas United Methodist*

The Arkansas Chapter of the Fellowship of United Methodists in Music and Worship Arts will sponsor its annual Worship Fair on Aug. 7-8.

This event, which kicks off at 6 p.m. Aug. 7 will be held at Trinity United Methodist Church, 1101 Mississippi St. in Little Rock.

This year's theme will be "Children: Their Faith, Our Future." The clinicians will be Michael Bedford and James H. Ritchie Jr.

Bedford will perform an organ concert at 7 p.m. Aug. 7. He also will lead reading sessions using children's music as well as a workshop on working with children.

Bedford, a full-time church musician since 1973, currently serves as organist/choirmaster of St. John's Episcopal Church in Tulsa, Okla. There, he plays the organ and supervises a large choir program including three singing choirs, one handbell choir and a chamber ensemble.

He has held similar positions in Texas and Colorado.

"It has often been said that children and youth are the future of the church," Bedford said. "This is a true statement, but only if children and youth are the 'present' of the church as well. If they are not taught to serve in leadership capacities in the worship and daily life of today's church, there will be no future."

Ritchie will lead two workshops: "A Little Child Shall Lead Them: When

Kids Help Define Our Worship," and "Always in Rehearsal: A Multigenerational Worship Practicum."

Ritchie is a clergy member of the Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.

He leads Ritchie Faith Span Ministries, providing resources, consultation and training in the area of multi-generational ministries. From 1994 until 2002, he served Monroeville United Methodist Church in Pennsylvania as associate pastor and minister of Christian education.

He also has served as editor of children's curriculum at the United Methodist Publishing House and pastored Western Pennsylvania United Methodist churches in Bradford and Brush Valley.

He is the author of *Always in Rehearsal: The Practice of Worship and the Presence of Children* (Discipleship Resources), and his music has appeared for more than two decades in curriculum, choral and worship resources. He continues to be a freelance writer for the United Methodist Publishing House.

One-half continuing education unit will be offered for full participation in this event.

To learn more about Worship Fair 2009, including fees and registration, visit [www.arkansasfumwa.org](http://www.arkansasfumwa.org) or contact Robert Armstrong at 6006 McClure Road, Texarkana, AR 71854, (870) 772-4092 or email [ra1950@swbell.net](mailto:ra1950@swbell.net).

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At left, Argenta UMC musicians John Choate, on drum, Barret Baber, on guitar, and song leader Andy Sexton, also on the pastor's brother, wrote the music for the church's benediction, "Go in Peace." Above, fellowship at Argenta UMC also worship. At right, Will Choate — the church's pastor and associate pastor at First UMC in North Little Rock — style is interactive. He said interruptions from worshippers warm his heart because they mean his congregants are t

**Rethink church,** *continued from page 1*

coffeehouse worship space is a rare sight in many United Methodist sanctuaries — a flock of young adults eager to praise God.

"They don't feel like they are in Mom and Dad's church," Choate said. "They feel like this is their church, and they have a responsibility to show up and give."

This month, United Methodist Communications has launched "Rethink Church," an update of its "Open hearts" marketing campaign that specifically targets 18- to 34-year-olds. The initiative includes more than \$20 million in new advertising over the next four years on television, radio, print and the Web.

The ads showcase various opportunities for involvement within United Methodist congregations — from anti-hunger programs to basketball leagues. The campaign continually asks: "What if church was a verb?"

Only about 11 percent of active United Methodist participants are between the ages of 18 and 34, according to a survey of 1,855 United Methodist churches completed last fall.

That low percentage has consequences. At present, the United Methodist Church sees more of its older members die each year than new people join.

But a number of congregations in the Arkansas Conference already are working to attract the young adults and families the denomination needs to thrive — and they are seeing results.

Argenta UMC is one of them. The "church start" began worshipping monthly Nov. 16 inside Starving Artists' Café, and started weekly services on March 1. The church now averages about 55 people at each 5:30 p.m. Sunday service.

Argenta currently operates as a second

campus of First UMC in North Little Rock, where Choate also serves as associate pastor.

Guy Whitney, the senior pastor of First UMC-North Little Rock, said his church had declined in attendance in recent years and was looking to re-energize. After meetings in members' homes and a churchwide conference, the congregation approved a long-range plan that included planting a new congregation in the recently revitalized Argenta area.

"It is very seeker oriented, but it's also mission-oriented," Whitney said. "They're doing lots of stuff in the community to be a real presence down there."

The growing congregation participates in a mission project each month. Over Memorial Day weekend, Argenta worshippers will join in the "Greening of Riverfest."

At the suggestion of a church member on the Riverfest's planning committee, the congregation plans to sort recycling and distribute bags at the annual music festival.

Worship at Argenta is a blend of ancient tradition and contemporary informality.

Most worshippers, like Choate, attend in jeans and T-shirts. They sit at tables, and some will sip from coffee mugs or water glasses during the service.

When he preaches, Choate sits on a stool. His sermons are more like conversations than lectures. He will ask churchgoers for their thoughts and answer their questions in turn.

Choate said he rarely gets through the announcements without someone interrupting him to mention another forthcoming event.

"One of the things I want to keep

# RETHINK CHURCH RETHINK CHURCH

pushing is rethinking leadership and participation in the church," Choate said. "I emphasize the fact that you aren't coming here to be served. But you actually have responsibility. All these [elements in worship] add up to say, 'I'm not just a consumer of this. I'm a participant in this.'"

Still, he has retained many of the rituals of traditional Christian worship. There are readings from Scripture, prayers for the community and weekly Communion.

Much of the church's music also would be familiar to any cradle Methodist. On a recent Sunday, the Argenta musicians sledged the congregation in singing old hymns "Come Thou Font of Every Blessing" and "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee."

With the accompaniment of two guitars and a djembe, a type of a West African drum, the hymns had a backbeat and a more contemporary sound.

Choate got the idea to rent space at the café while eating there one night.

"For me the appeal of it is that you're right on Main Street," he said. "You have that glass front, and the trolley is going by and people are driving by. There is an openness to the world outside."

He also likes that the worship space allows him to blur the lines between the sacred and secular.

Ultimately, he said, the church plans to worship in the Argenta Community

Theater, which developers are constructing in a refurbished downtown building a couple doors down from the café.

Argenta UMC isn't the only Arkansas United Methodist congregation using innovative worship spaces to reach new people.

Pontiac Church, a second campus of First UMC in Springdale, also worships in a coffee house. The church, which started about a year ago, now has an average weekly attendance of about 140 people.

Wesley United Methodist Church in Russellville — which was founded at the Wesley Foundation of Arkansas Tech University about 50 years ago — plans to go back to its roots. Starting this fall, the church will rent space at Tech's Wesley Foundation for another Sunday morning worship service.

The target audience for the new service will be recent college graduates to those in their early 30s — specifically people who were involved in the Wesley Foundation as Tech students but have since dropped out of church life.

"What we're hoping to do is provide the next chapter for folks after it's time for them to leave the foundation so they can seamlessly join the life of the church," said Blake Bradford, Wesley UMC's senior pastor.

He said those who attend the services at the foundation would be invited to join Wesley UMC's small groups.





Choate, C takes place around the same cafe tables where congregants — sits on a cafe stool during his sermon. Choate's preaching taking responsibility for their worship experience.

Photos by Heather Hahn



Bradford, 34, acknowledged that it can be intimidating for recent college grads to walk into a new church.

"You don't know how things are supposed to work," he said. "This is familiar ground. A lot of the music and style will be similar."

Choate stressed that one of the keys to drawing young adults into church is allowing them to take on leadership roles. That includes empowering young clergy.

"I have people call me, and say, 'Will, how are you doing this? We need to do this at our church,'" Choate said. "I tell them there's no gimmick or trick. It's because that's where I am, and the special relationships I have. I don't anticipate being able to do this when I'm outside this [demographic]."

Many of the first people to attend Argenta are people Choate and his wife, Audra, have known since their high school or college days.

Among those friends was Jason

Pedigo, 28, whom Choate knew from their fraternity at Arkansas State University.

Pedigo, a financial adviser with Metropolitan Bank, was reared Southern Baptist but he said he never really felt comfortable at his family's church. At Choate's invitation, he started attending Argenta and also attended a four-week class on what United Methodists believe.

"I was just blown away by how open and forward-thinking the United Methodist Church as a whole is," Pedigo said. "They have adapted to the times. We're given the freedom to think for ourselves and to worship in a coffeehouse."

Choate said Pedigo has become one of the new church's most ardent evangelists. So far, Pedigo estimates he has invited about a dozen friends to join him at church.

Says Choate: "We're creating spaces for people to connect with God and one another."

## Welcoming young leadership helps church grow ministry

One night about four years ago, Dumetra Pearson invited all of the women of Caraway United Methodist Church to dinner at her house.

Pearson, a member of the east Arkansas congregation for about 40 years, announced that she and the other older women in the church had decided to hand the reigns of the church's youth ministry to the next generation.

"We've reached a time in our lives when it's time to pass the torch on to you," she told the 10 or so younger women in the room.

From now on, she said, the 20- to 40-somethings in the church would be in charge of the youth gatherings, fundraisers and Vacation Bible School.

Pearson's friend Gundel Martin also attended the gathering. The two were among a group of women called the Agape Circle who for decades had organized the Christmas bazaars, chili dinners and other events that funded the youth ministry.

"We told them if you want your kids taught, and if you want your kids raised right in the church, don't depend on someone else to do it — you are the leaders," Martin said.

"The other side of that coin is that we are going to be there behind you every minute. We're going to help you make chicken and dressing. We're going to help you get rags together for car washes. We're going to help you with Vacation Bible School. Whatever you want us to do, we'll be there."

That's exactly what has happened. The younger women formed their own group — the Circle of Sisters — and got immediately to work trying to grow the church's youth program.

One of the Circle of Sisters' first projects was the annual church Christmas program.

To promote the program, the women entered a float in Caraway's annual Christmas parade. They went up and down Main Street handing out fliers about the church. The fliers

announced that the church would host a citywide dinner after its pageant.

"The older part of me thought: This is never going to fly," Martin recalled. "That's too much to do in one night. But I backed off, and the 'we've-always-done-it-this-way feeling' passed."

Paula Hensley, one of the Circle of Sisters members, said she too was worried her church wouldn't pull it off.

Martin played the piano for the Christmas pageant. At one point, she turned around and saw men bringing in chairs. Altogether, 70 children participated in that year's drama. The church had to bring in extra tables and chairs for the post-program dinner as well.

Many of the families there were unchurched, Martin said.

Since that Christmas program, the Circle of Sisters has started a weekly Wednesday night gathering for youth called Kids for Christ. At their side have been members of the Agape Circle willing to help out in whatever way they're asked.

The Kids for Christ gatherings now draw about 40 youngsters a week.

So far, the booming Wednesday night attendance hasn't translated into fuller pews on Sunday morning. The church has an average weekly attendance of 45.

Church members are developing a contemporary Sunday service in hopes of enticing more of youth and their families to worship.

Hensley said the Agape Circle's passing of the baton has made her and her peers feel more a part of the church.

"You feel your opinion matters," she said. "But the big picture is everybody coming together for a common goal."

Casey Emery, another Circle of Sisters volunteer, agreed.

"We have some of the best guidance from the other generation," she said. "We couldn't ask for a better church family."

— Heather Hahn



Lauren Bennett, Lauren Taylor, Ashton Rainey, Lynsey Bennett and Iren Sustais participate in Vacation Bible School at Caraway UMC in northeastern Arkansas. A few years ago, older church members handed over the reigns of church leadership to the next generation. Since then, the church's young adults have helped grow the church's youth program to a weekly attendance of about 40.

Photo courtesy of Caraway United Methodist Church

### Media grants are available for church advertising

United Methodist Communications offers \$1 million in matching media grants annually to local churches, districts and conferences to help establish an advertising presence in their community.

Matching media funds can be used for placing television, radio, cinema, outdoor media or a combination of these media types.

Information about the guidelines and grants can be found at [www.umcom.org/rethinkchurch](http://www.umcom.org/rethinkchurch).

Grant applications are accepted

two times a year for media placed in coordination with the national advertising schedule: May 1 through June 1 for Back-to-School and Advent and November 1 through December 1 for Lent.

Assistance with deciding the best media to use in individual communities is provided free of charge through United Methodist Communications.

The denomination's communications agency can be contacted at (877) 281-6435 or by email at [IMmediaservices@umcom.org](mailto:IMmediaservices@umcom.org).



# Campaign offers a new tools to make disciples of Christ

Martha Taylor has served as the Arkansas Conference's director of communications since July 2006. In that role, she helps local churches gain free exposure in the Arkansas press, helps them develop media plans for paid advertising and trains congregations how to be more welcoming. Now, she is working to promote "Rethink Church" — the United Methodist Church's new campaign to draw more 18- to 34-year-olds into congregational life.



Martha Taylor

and young adults who are driving the change in a very positive way. It is they who are looking at the world differently, who have made the world a smaller place, began conversations across the globe where before there was no conversation.

The research done by United Methodist Communications shows that those between the ages of 18-34 have a strong desire to explore spiritual life. If we are about making disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, we need to live in the time and place, speak the language of those we want reach and use the tools they use to do so.

## How does Rethink Church relate to the "Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors." campaign?

Rethink Church is about doing. It asks the question of all of us: What if church wasn't about a place we go but something we do? This is a fundamental change from "Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors." Rethink Church asks us to consider using "Open" as a verb rather than an adjective, in our churches and in our personal lives.

## What media will be used to promote this campaign?

I've heard Rethink Church referred to as Open Hearts 2.0. I think it is much more than that.

Consider how the world has changed since September 2001 when the Open Hearts campaign debuted. Texting, blog-

ging, MySpace, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter were either in their infancy or had not yet been invented. In June 2008, Facebook had more than 132 million users.

There will be a strong online presence through Facebook and other social media, in addition to television, radio and outdoor media.

There is also a Web site, [www.10thousanddoors.org](http://www.10thousanddoors.org) that will be a port of entry for those looking for answers to their questions.

More than that, Rethink Church is about a movement, about people expanding their concept of church, taking church outside through random acts of kindness, mission work and other organized efforts.

## What are you doing to help local churches participate?

First, I'm recommending that local churches go to [www.rethinkchurch.org](http://www.rethinkchurch.org) to become familiar with all the resources available to them. This includes training, videos, Rethink Church materials, media grants and getting-started ideas.

Second, all local churches should update their Find-A-Church page on [www.umc.org](http://www.umc.org). It's a lot more than worship times and directions. Churches can now add upcoming events and mission projects to their Find-A-Church Web page. These features will be linked to [www.10thousanddoors.org](http://www.10thousanddoors.org), where people can sign up to volunteer or get more information.

The communications team is looking for local churches to host Rethink Church training for their districts. They can call me at (501) 324-8005 or toll free at (877) 646-1816. This training is

also available online at [www.rethinkchurch.org](http://www.rethinkchurch.org).

Local churches may order Rethink Church resources for little or no cost. These resources will also be available at Annual Conference in June as part of the local church communicator's toolkit that will be distributed at the conference display booth.

Every church in Arkansas is eligible to apply for a media grant from Rethink Church. To qualify for a media grant a local church needs to be certified as a Welcoming Congregation.

I can help with putting a media plan together, or the Rethink Church staff at United Methodist Communications can assist them as well.

## Will there be multilingual messages available?

Yes, there will be Spanish language materials available.

## Why is communications an important church ministry?

"And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?" — Romans 10:14

Communication is the vital element in sharing the Gospel and nurturing faith communities.

Whether one was walking the road discussing Jesus with friends, printing the Bible for common folk, preaching in public areas as John Wesley did or blogging on the Internet, without conversation there can be no sharing, no coming together, no understanding.

Communication is the foundation of our connection to one another.

Martha Taylor also can be reached at [mtaylor@arumc.org](mailto:mtaylor@arumc.org).

## Why "Rethink Church?"

The research done by United Methodist Communications showed that 100 million young adults saw themselves as "spiritual" but saw no role for church in their lives. According to the research, they believe "churches are indifferent or oblivious to the needs of the community."

Rethink Church is a challenge to churches to go out and express our faith by making good things happen in our communities in real, tangible ways.

The campaign seeks to show the church's involvement in the world. There are so many ways we are doing this — feeding the physically and spiritually hungry, sharing hope, saving lives in all parts of the world.

Equally important, it's an invitation to others who feel compelled to do good to share in these efforts.

## Why is it so important to reach 18- to 34-year-olds?

Who can deny that our world is different this year than it was last year? Who can predict what it will look like next year? Everything has changed and will continue to change.

And in many ways it is the youth



The Arkansas Conference staff gave a fresh coat of white paint to a Sunday School classroom and part of the nursery at North Pulaski UMC in Sherwood's Gravel Ridge community. The conference workday on May 6 was part of "This Olde Church," an ongoing Volunteers in Mission project in which teams help revitalize aging church buildings. Pictured from left are Annie Burns, administrative assistant; Martha Taylor, communications director; Roy Smith, director of conference ministries; Patrick Shownes, communications coordinator; and Rod Hocott, conference minister of youth and young adults.

Photo by Heather Hahn

## Volunteers in Mission

This Volunteer in Mission listing includes mission opportunities offered by local churches and districts. Often there are openings on these mission trips and room for additional volunteers from elsewhere to join the team. For more information on any of these projects, contact the individuals listed or Don Weeks, Arkansas Area Volunteers in Mission coordinator, 18 Montagne Court, Little Rock, AR 72223; (501) 868-9193 or 681-2909; [dweeks@arumc.org](mailto:dweeks@arumc.org).

May 22-29: Appalachian Trail Ministry, Bastian, Va., sponsored by South East District. Volunteers, cooks and drivers needed. John or Judith Shafer, (870) 628-1282 or [j2jshafer@yahoo.com](mailto:j2jshafer@yahoo.com)

May 23-31: Salud Y Paz, Guatemala, medical mission, sponsored by Pulaski Heights UMC, Little Rock. Doctors, nurses, dentists, pharmacists, anesthesiologists and other willing helpers needed. Nurses to work in surgery including pre, post op and operating room are urgently needed. Gwen Efirid, [gwenefirid@att.net](mailto:gwenefirid@att.net).

July 12-17: Mission United Methodist Church needs workers to serve at the Healing Hands Ranch, an aftercare ministry of Deaf Prison Ministries Network in Willis, Texas. Volunteers needed for construction, painting, grounds maintenance, electrical, general cleaning. Dee Mathes at (479) 430-6568 or U. Washington at (479) 782-0612.

Sept. 20-26: Texas Golden Triangle area, post-hurricane rebuilding, sponsored by St.



James UMC, Little Rock. Jenni Duncan, 501-217-6708 or [jenni@stjames-umc.org](mailto:jenni@stjames-umc.org).

Oct. 9-16: Shiprock, N.M., construction and community service, sponsored by St. James UMC, Little Rock. Glen Duncan, [duncan7400@sbc-global.net](mailto:duncan7400@sbc-global.net) or (501) 551-1951.

Oct. 17-31: Ghana, Africa. mission trip, sponsored by Jacksonville First UMC. John Clark, [jclark@brownjanitorsupply.com](mailto:jclark@brownjanitorsupply.com)

Ongoing: "This Olde Church" Volunteers in Mission project. Help restore and repair churches in the Arkansas Conference. Teams will be painting, weather-proofing, doing general repairs, landscaping and other jobs. Teams DO NOT do roofing, plumbing or electrical.

The church that asks for teams will provide housing, help prepare meals and provide showers. The teams will supply their food, the materials, tools and labor. Any church can apply for help through their District Superintendent. Teams can sign up by contacting Don Weeks at [dweeks@arumc.org](mailto:dweeks@arumc.org).





## Calendar

**MAY**

May 15-16: Conference UMW Spring Spiritual Growth Retreat, Camp Tanako.  
 May 16: "Strengthening the Family" workshop, Healing Place Ministries, First UMC, Pine Bluff; Edna Morgan, 870-535-0101.  
 May 28: Crossing Jordan Small Church Rural Training South Central District event at Wesley Chapel UMC, Brinkley. Maxine Allen at mallen@arumc.org.  
 May 29: Crossing Jordan Small Church Rural Training Central District event at Wesley Chapel UMC, Little Rock. Maxine Allen at mallen@arumc.org.

**JUNE**

June 5-7: Local Pastor Licensing School, Part A, Mount Eagle Christian Center.  
 June 7-10: Conference on Ecumenical Mission, Mount Sequoyah Conference & Retreat Center, Fayetteville.  
 June 14-17: Arkansas Annual Conference, Hammons Convention Center & Central UMC, Rogers.  
 June 21-28: CCYM Choir Tour, around the conference.  
 June 22-28: Arkansas Conference Council on Youth

**Ministries Youth Choir tour.**

June 24-27: Bishops' conference "Connecting Health and Faith ... Our Call to Action," Mount Sequoyah Conference & Retreat Center, Fayetteville.  
 June 24: District Superintendents' Seminar, Mount Sequoyah Conference & Retreat Center.  
 June 24 and June 25: Laity Seminar, Mount Sequoyah Conference & Retreat Center, Fayetteville.

**JULY**

July 13-17: SpiLiRa (Spiritual Life Rally), University of Missouri, Columbia, Mo.  
 July 14-17: Youth Harambee, Philander Smith College, [www.bmc.org](http://www.bmc.org).  
 July 21-24: Focus 2009 — Faithfully Forming Our Children, a conference for children's ministers, in Indianapolis, Ind. Pre-conference on July 20. More information at [www.gbod.org](http://www.gbod.org).  
 July 24-Aug. 1: Local Pastor Licensing School — Part B, Mount Eagle Christian Center.  
 July 25-28: Junior High Assembly, University of the Ozarks, Clarksville.  
 July 28-Aug. 1: Senior High Assembly, University of the Ozarks, Clarksville.



Black Community Developers celebrated the grand opening of the Nia Career and Computer Training Center at Theresa Hoover UMC in Little Rock. The center is designed to train youth and adults in professional writing, computer skills, job skills and social activism. Its first classes began on May 7 for youth and May 9 for adults. The center is made possible by funding from the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation and other support from the Little Rock School District. From left, John Turner, Black Community Developers board member; Corey Anderson of the Rockefeller Foundation and Karen Erren, a Black Community Developers board member join youth in a ribbon-cutting ceremony on April 29 at the Nia center.

Photo courtesy of Black Community Developers

# United Methodists host lesson in 'tree-hugger theology'

■ *Green Faith Alliance event has chemist, writer and rabbi*

By Scharmél Roussel

Personal responsibility, individual action and collective action were repeated messages from presenters at "For the Least of These, Our Brethren: Faith, Justice, and the Environment."

More than 118 clergy and laity from Arkansas and Texas attended the conference on May 2 at Pulaski Heights United Methodist Church in Little Rock. The Green Faith Alliance of Central Arkansas hosted the event.

Courtney Hatch, assistant professor of chemistry at Hendrix College in Conway, opened the conference with an explanation of how temperature measurements over the past 1,000 years indicate that hot gases trapped in the earth's atmosphere are causing overall global warming.

"It is like a car parked in the sun," Hatch told the group of United Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, Episcopalians, Jews and representatives of other groups.

"The sun comes in the window panes of glass, but hot gases can't go out the sealed windows. The inside becomes much hotter quickly."

Hatch further explained that since the earth is 75 percent water, the planet has a high capacity to absorb large amounts of heat with little temperature changes overall. However, sea life suffers. Eventually melting ice, rising sea levels, stronger storms, longer droughts and higher heat waves affect all of life.

"There is no scientific doubt," Hatch said. "The temperature is going up, and we are causing it. We can afford to do something about it, and we must. Acting boldly is a matter of faith and justice."

Dr. J. Matthew Sleeth, author of *Serve God, Save the Planet* and executive director of Blessed Earth, was one of the day's keynote speakers. He shared the story of how he became a Christian environmentalist.

Sleeth flunked out of high school and swore off religion as a youth. He went to



At the far left Roy Smith, director of conference ministries and assistant to the bishop, enjoys a meal with the speakers at a May 2 conference titled "For the Least of These, Our Brethren: Faith, Justice, and the Environment." The speakers were, from left, Rabbi Larry Troster, Dr. J. Matthew Sleeth and Bill Bradlee.

Photo by Scharmél Roussel

vocational school and became a carpenter. He later married a Jewish woman, graduated from college, went to medical school, practiced surgery and became a member of the major faith in the United States — "getting ahead."

His family lived on the coast of Maine. L.L. Bean shot photographs for its catalog in front of his picturesque home. Life was good, but it was about to change.

While on a beach vacation, his wife asked him to define the world's biggest problem.

"The world is dying," he answered. "There are no chestnuts on Chestnut Lane, no elms on Elm Street, no caribou in Caribou, Maine, and no buffalo in Buffalo, New York. When I started in medicine, one in 19 women in America got breast cancer. Now it is one in seven."

At the time, the family lived in a house with solar power, and they recycled.

"We did the carbon footprint thing to determine our impact on the planet," he told. "We were average ... not good compared to the world, but OK com-

pared to our neighbors."

As he thought more about the troubled earth, he also began thinking more about spiritual matters. He found the answers he sought in a Bible donated to his hospital by the Gideons.

He and his family moved to a house the size of their former garage and started going to church. He confessed that he was accused of practicing "tree-hugger theology."

"I started underlining everything in the Bible about creation — trees, limbs, leaves, bushes," Sleeth said. "Everywhere these things come up, something important is happening. The first page of the Bible has a tree. The first Psalm includes a tree. The last picture presented in Revelation is a huge tree of life. Jesus died on a tree."

Sleeth added that Jesus preached "on field trips."

"Important lessons are learned from stories that occur in the great outdoors," he said. "But indoors is a mixed bag."

He was eager to preach the importance of caring for God's creation. But his own

church wouldn't let him in the pulpit.

He said his first speaking engagements was at a synagogue. His second was at a Unitarian Universalist church. He and his wife now worship at a United Methodist church.

Mainline Protestants and evangelicals are now joining the environmental movement — a development Sleeth cheers.

Rabbi Larry Troster, director of the Fellowship Program for Green Faith and another keynote speaker, reminded the group that religious voices are stronger when together.

"Our moral systems are inadequate to deal with the power we now have because of modern technology that has progressed since the beginning of the industrial revolution," Troster said.

"Scientists and environmentalists are good at predicting disasters, but not so good on hope. We need to lift our traditions and worldwide voices on healing and hope for the planet. We can drive this message in a way scientists and environmentalists have not done."

Troster said we need to start asking ourselves questions about where everything comes from and where it goes. He tries to add one new lifestyle change every day that will affect climate change and the future of humanity.

He said he realizes that he will not finish the work but that he has to participate in the work so that future generations will not perish on the wasteland of what was creation.

The conference offered 14 breakout sessions and lunch from local farmers from the Argenta Market. Green Bibles were given to all presenters.

The day ended with a presentation by Bill Bradlee, a representative of Interfaith Power and Light. With chapters in many states, IPL works on two issues: global warming and energy.

"Our society is energy inefficient," Bradlee said. "We can improve. It is a moral issue. It has to be me. I can't expect the person next to me to do it."

Scharmél Roussel directs communications at Pulaski Heights UMC. She can be reached at [sroussel@phumc.com](mailto:sroussel@phumc.com).



# Little Rock church receives recognition for its hospitality

*Special to the Arkansas United Methodist*  
Primrose United Methodist Church in Little Rock, has joined eight other Arkansas churches in being recognized as an official "Welcoming Congregation."

"Welcoming Congregations" are a select group of United Methodist churches nationwide that meet criteria including embracing newcomers and providing opportunities in discipleship.

The recognition program is part of a larger effort launched in late 2000 by United Methodist Communications, the denomination's communications agency, to use modern technology and the common language of television to spread the Good News of Christ to a world in need.

"I am proud to be a part of this family of faith called Primrose United Methodist Church," Clayton Bulice, the church's pastor, said.

"The folks here consider the television ads, billboards and their Web site as mere starting points — conversation starters, if you please — for inviting people to experience the risen Christ at Primrose."

"Open hearts, open minds, open doors" is the theme of the denominational effort, the centerpiece which is a series of national cable TV advertising, supplemented by regional and local church participation.

The overall aim of the effort is to invite people, particularly those between 18-34 years old, to enter into connection with the Christian community as they seek meaning and purpose in their lives. Primrose United Methodist, founded in 1867, is at 3006 W. Dixon Road in Little Rock. The church reaches children in the community with its daycare and bus pick-up service offered on Sunday mornings.

Other Arkansas "Welcoming Congregations" include Dover, First-Harrison, Goddard in Fort Smith, Levy in North Little Rock, First-North Little Rock, Pulaski Heights in Little Rock, Salem in Benton and White Hall UMC.

To learn more about Primrose UMC, visit its Web site at [www.primroseumc.org](http://www.primroseumc.org).

To learn more about becoming a welcoming congregation, visit [www.rethinkchurch.org](http://www.rethinkchurch.org).

# Deaths

## BRADLEY

**JULIA FRANCES CRABTREE DODSON**, 67, the wife and stepmother of United Methodist ministers, passed away on April 23, 2009, in Bossier City, La. She had lived in Bradley.

She was born June 16, 1941, in Bradley to Brian Crabtree and Julia Riddle Crabtree.

She was a bank teller for 21 years. Her parents preceded her in death.

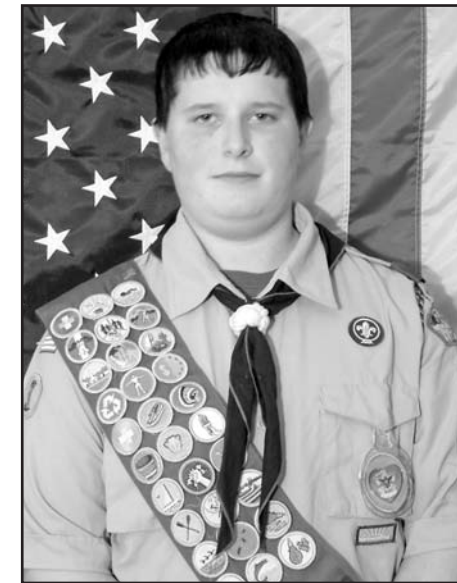
She is survived by her husband Royal Dodson of Bradley, a retired United Methodist pastor and three stepsons.

They are Kavan Dodson, campus minister for the Wesley Foundation at the University of Arkansas in Monticello, and his wife, Michelle; Keith Dodson, senior pastor of Ozark United Methodist Church, and his wife, Lori; and Kirk Dodson.

She also is survived by two grandchildren — Rebecca Dodson and Joshua Dodson.

Funeral services were held at April 25 at Bradley United Methodist Church with Spencer Plumley officiating. Burial was at Walnut Hill Cemetery under the direction of Smith Funeral Home in Stamps.

# People of Faith



Over two consecutive days, members of St. Paul United Methodist Church in Fort Smith received the highest honor awarded by the Boy Scouts of America. Daxton Boyd, shown above, achieved the rank of Eagle Scout on May 2. He is a member of Troop 110 in Fort Smith. The next day, Matthew Jones of Troop 2 in Fort Smith — shown at left — also was named an Eagle Scout. St. Paul UMC hosted both ceremonies.

Photos courtesy of St. Paul United Methodist Church in Fort Smith



Richard Goodman, a graduate of Osceola High School and member of First United Methodist Church in Osceola, is presented with the Donnie Johnson Memorial Scholarship Award and a gift from the church by Mary Ann Wilson. Wilson teaches a Sunday School class at First UMC that each year funds a Donnie Johnson scholarship for the senior at church with the highest grade point average.

Photo courtesy of First United Methodist Church in Osceola

**CHILDREN:  
THEIR  
FAITH. OUR  
FUTURE**

## Worship Fair 2009

### August 7-8

**Trinity  
United Methodist Church**  
1101 North Mississippi  
Little Rock, Arkansas 72207

**CLINICIANS**

**Michael Bedford**—Organist/Choirmaster at St. John's Episcopal Church, Tulsa, Oklahoma  
**James Ritchie**—Ritchie Faith Span Ministries, Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference

**SCHEDULE:**

<p>Friday, August 7</p> <p>6:00 p.m.—Registration</p> <p>7:00 p.m.—Organ Concert by Michael Bedford (free and open to the public; a freewill offering will be taken)</p> <p><b>RECEPTION TO FOLLOW</b></p> <p>Saturday, August 8</p> <p>8:30 a.m.—Registration</p> <p>9:00 a.m.—Opening Worship</p> <p>9:45 a.m.—Break</p> <p>10:00-11:30 a.m.—Class Session I Bedford—Reading Session Ritchie—"Always in Rehearsal"</p>	<p>Children's Activities for 3rd-6th grades—Drums, storytelling, Handchimes</p> <p>11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.—Business meeting, lunch and browsing</p> <p>12:30-2:00 p.m.—Class Session II Bedford—Demo with children Ritchie—"A Little Child Shall Lead Them"</p> <p>2:00-2:45 p.m.—Closing worship with children</p> <p>2:45 p.m.—Browsing (exhibits close at 3:30 p.m.)</p> <p>Exhibitors include <b>Cokesbury Bookstore</b> and <b>Choristers Guild</b>.</p>
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REGISTRATION — "Children: Their Faith, Our Future" (Worship Fair 2009)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Church \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_

<p>Fees for Fellowship Members:</p> <p>___ \$40 on or before June 20</p> <p>___ \$45 after June 20 &amp; on or before July 20</p> <p>___ \$60 after July 20</p> <p>Fees for Non-members:</p> <p>___ \$45 on or before June 20</p> <p>___ \$50 after June 20 &amp; on or before July 20</p> <p>___ \$65 after July 20</p> <p>Other fees:</p> <p>___ \$10 for reading session music packet (17 octavos)</p> <p>___ \$10 per child for all Saturday activities</p> <p>___ \$5 per child for just the Bedford session</p>	<p>___ I am applying for .5 CEU (available only to those who attend the entire event)</p> <p>Make checks payable to "Arkansas Chapter, The Fellowship" and mail to:                  Carol S. Goddard, 27 DeSoto Circle,                  North Little Rock, AR 72116</p> <p>Sponsored by the Arkansas Chapter, Fellowship of United Methodist in Music &amp; Worship Arts and the Arkansas Conference  <a href="http://www.arkansasfumwa.org">www.arkansasfumwa.org</a></p>
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# It Happened



In response to the "Rock Solid in Mission" Sunday School series, children in the kindergarten through fourth-grade at Mountain View First UMC decided to raise money for Heifer Project International. The children faithfully saved pennies and dimes and operated a lemonade stand at the Arkansas Folk Festival, raising a total of \$130. The children used the money to buy shares in many animals used by struggling farmers in the developing world. Pictured from left are Jessica Richie, Seth Richie, Natasha Akers, Josie Irvin, Bailey Sullivan, Ryan Wilcox, Ike Irvin, Drew Adams, Willow Reeves and Anna Caldwell.

Photo courtesy of Mountain View First United Methodist Church



David S. Williams, pastor of DeQueen First UMC, baptized MaggieJoe Tadlock, held by her mother, on Easter morning at the church. She is the daughter of Amy and Josh Tadlock. For the congregation, MaggieJoe offered proof of God's miraculous healing presence. The baby girl received a much-needed heart transplant on Nov. 29, 2008, at Arkansas Children's Hospital

Photo courtesy of DeQueen First United Methodist Church



Horseshoe Bend UMC held its inaugural seder meal on Holy Thursday. During the meal, a cast of 13 — pictured above — presented The Room Upstairs by John Carter. A total of 77 attended.

Photo courtesy of Horseshoe Bend United Methodist Church



Michael Bryan, a United Methodist pastor director of Noah's Ark — a ministry for visitors to Panama City Beach, Fla., was the featured speaker at Senior Sunday on April 21 at Sardis UMC in Bauxite. The church's youth have been guests at Bryan's church over the years. Pictured from left is David Carter, Sardis UMC's Joshua Praise Band director; Shelby Taylor; Bryan; Nick Villegas and Jeridan Green.

Photo courtesy of Sardis United Methodist Church

## WANTED: MUSIC DIRECTOR

Crossgates United Methodist Church in Brandon, Mississippi, is seeking a full-time Music Director responsible for overseeing the total music ministry of the church in a traditional setting.

**The Position:** The Music Director shall direct both the adult and youth choirs, direct both the adult and youth handbell choirs, oversee the children's choirs, coordinate activities with the Associate Pastor/Youth Minister and the Director of Children's Ministries, and collaborate with all staff members

**Qualifications and Responsibilities:** This individual must be a highly motivated Christian leader who possesses the following skills and characteristics: (1) FLEXIBILITY to work with a wide variety of age groups; (2) DILIGENCE to develop existing programs; (3) CREATIVITY to design and implement new programs; (4)

PLANNING ability to prepare for musical presentations as well as to assist the Senior Pastor, as directed, in planning morning worship services.

**Education and Experience:** A degree in music and a minimum of 2 years experience in church work are preferred.

**Salary:** Salary is negotiable based on education and experience.

**Our Church Community:** Many members of CUMC believe the warm, friendly attitude of the congregation is our strongest asset.

Our membership includes a total of 1011 people within a zip code area that includes 29,568 people who enjoy an excellent school system, a low unemployment rate, and a low crime rate.

**Contact:** To apply, please contact Rev. John Moore, Senior Pastor, sp@crossgate-sumc.org, (601) 825-8677.

## Classifieds

**PLACE YOUR CLASSIFIED** in the Arkansas United Methodist for 50 cents per word, no limit. Call (501) 324-8005, or mail to: Arkansas United Methodist, 2 Trudie Kibbe Reed Dr., Little Rock, AR 72202; or e-mail: mtaylor@arumc.org.

**FAIRFIELD BAY UMC** seeks to hire a Choir Director and a pianist. Both positions are open immediately. Compensation depends upon education and experience. Send Resume and salary requirements to: Fairfield Bay UMC, 765 Dave Creek Parkway, Fairfield Bay, AR. 72088.

**PINEY GROVE UMC** has an opening for a Director of Christian education. This is a full-time position in a church with over 200 children and adults in Sunday School. We are seeking a person with Christian education experience, a degree and who is able to make a long term commitment. Please email davidjones@cablelynx.com with your resume or mail it to David Jones, Piney Grove UMC, 2963 Airport Road, Hot Springs, AR 71913-9071.

**GREENWOOD UMC** is currently seeking a part-time (3/4) Youth Pastor to continue to grow a large and energetic youth ministry. The Youth Pastor must have the ability and heart-felt desire to love, nurture, minister and grow in faith with the young people and their families in the church and the community. We are seeking a strong Christian who is an energetic, well-organized, self-starter capable of developing new programs. The Youth Pastor will also provide outside activities for the youth. Housing is provided. A summer internship may be considered. Greenwood UMC staff works from a team perspective, and the successful candidate will have ongoing collegiality, support, and opportunities for continuing education. For more information or to send in your resume contact: David Hawkins at P.O. Box 548, Greenwood, AR 72936; at drhawkins05@yahoo.com or (479) 996-6397.

**COLLEGE DEGREE /Home Study.** Save \$\$\$ Christian Bible College, P.O. Box 8968, Rocky Mt., N.C. 27804; phone (252) 451-1031; www.christian-biblecollege.org



## The Confessing Movement of Arkansas

Invites you to BREAKFAST during Annual Conference

**Monday, June 15, 2009 at 6:45 A.M.**

Commerce Ballroom, Hammons Convention Center  
3303 Pinnacle Hills Parkway, Rogers

**Rev. Dr. James V. Heidinger II**  
**Guest Speaker**

Dr. Heidinger is the president and publisher of Good News, an evangelical renewal ministry within the United Methodist Church. He has been CEO of the ministry for 27 years. He is a member of the East Ohio Annual Conference.



Dr. Heidinger earned his Doctor of Ministry at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C. He is the author of several books including *Guarding the Gospel: Biblical Faith and the Future of United Methodism*.

Dr. Heidinger will be addressing the state of the church and the proposed constitutional amendments.

### Options for registering for the breakfast:

1. Use the registration form in the letter mailed to all lay and clergy delegates.
2. Register online at [www.arumc.org/annualconference](http://www.arumc.org/annualconference).
3. Email Carolyn Elias at [carolyneli@msn.com](mailto:carolyneli@msn.com). Deadline for email reservations **June 9**.
4. Call Carolyn Elias at 501.525.2944. Deadline for call-in reservations **June 9**.
5. Mail in the form below and payment (check or cash) below to: Carolyn Elias, 117 Long Island Bay 9C, Hot Springs, AR 71913.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
City: \_\_\_\_\_  
State/ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

**Tickets are \$15 each.**

Reservations for how many? \_\_\_\_\_

**Your reservations will be held at the door.**



Courtesy of Cokesbury

### VBS, continued from page 1

For youngsters, each VBS session opens with an assembly where they'll hear from the volunteer leader called Blaze, the camp director, and the puppet Sparx the Fox.

The program also includes camping-related crafts. Children can decorate and pack their own rucksack and make a sit-upon out of newspaper. Students can also make star Christmas ornaments to remind them of the star of Bethlehem and a God Gear Ark — a representation of the Ark of the Covenant — out of craft sticks.

The curriculum includes science activities and recreational ideas. There are also camping-themed snack ideas such as Promised Land Power Bars, Teamwork Trail Mix and, of course, S'mores.

Kelly said modern VBS programs have a variety of ways of learning. She is particularly fond of the music DVD included in Cokesbury's package.

The DVD depicts children in a camp setting singing and dancing along to the program's music. The rocking musical accompaniment will make the Autoharp a distant memory.

Kelly said the DVD allows the children in even small congregations to learn the music and motions from other children.

The United Methodist Church does not require congregations to use Cokesbury curriculum, but Kelly said she encourages churches to use the publisher. A portion of Cokesbury purchases goes to the denomination's pension fund for clergy and staff.

Many other churches also opt to use Cokesbury. When Kelly led a training session for some 100 volunteers in March, representatives from Baptist and Church of Christ congregations were among those in attendance.

Whenever Kelly visits churches, she always asks whether they have VBS.

"It's an evangelism tool," Kelly said. "It's a great way to get children to come in and get their names and then contact them throughout the year to invite them to things. If you truly do that, you'd be amazed at how many children you can get to come back on Sunday morning."

And if you reach the kids, you often reach their parents.

Carol Goddard hopes to do just that

with her church's July VBS program. Goddard is the senior pastor of North Pulaski United Methodist Church in Sherwood's Gravel Ridge community. The aging congregation with a weekly attendance of about 40 typically has four children or fewer at worship.

Goddard sees the potential for VBS to change that. Church members are already gathering together old Christmas trees, tents and other decorations to give the church an outdoorsy feel. Members of First UMC in Jacksonville also have volunteered to help North Pulaski UMC put on the VBS program.

Goddard collected the names of some 40 children North Pulaski UMC's Easter egg hunt this year. Goddard also has been putting up posters at daycares in the area.

"I hope they'll have a great time," Goddard said. "And maybe for some it will be an introduction to faith. I'm hoping we'll reach some unchurched kids."

Elm Springs UMC, a 177-year-old church in northwest Arkansas, was in a similar situation to North Pulaski UMC about six years ago. The church had an attendance in the mid-70s.

Now, the church averages a weekly attendance of about 225. Last year, the church dedicated an 18,000-square-foot new worship center and fellowship hall to accommodate its growing membership.

Carl Palmer, the church's senior pastor, said the congregation's VBS program along with a new contemporary service were among the changes that contributed to the church more than tripling its numbers.

When Palmer arrived at the church in 2003, Elm Springs UMC typically had about 30 kids in its VBS program.

"My wife, Denni, and I beat the pavement handing out fliers," Palmer said. "We went into neighborhoods all around the church. That year, we had about 60 kids show up. It gave us an early win."

Elm Springs, which uses Group Publishing for its VBS curriculum, now typically has about 100 to 150 at its summer program.

"A church that is alive," Kelly said, "has Vacation Bible School."

To learn more about Camp E.D.G.E., visit [www.cokesburyvbs.com](http://www.cokesburyvbs.com).