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'Extreme Mac-Over'



Above, the refurbished bedroom after volunteers from Henderson UMC in Little Rock remodeled the Ronald McDonald House apartment over a period of 10 days. Inset, how the bedroom looked before.

Above photo by Heather Hahn/ Inset provided by Henderson UMC in Little Rock

Church transforms Ronald McDonald House apartment

HEATHER HAHN
Editor

For a recent service project, a Little Rock United Methodist church took inspiration not just from the Gospels but also reality TV.

Over 10 days in late September, members of Henderson UMC completely remodeled the apartment for long-term cancer patients at the Ronald McDonald House near Arkansas Children's Hospital.

They replaced the floors, widened the kitchen, repainted walls, installed new countertops and set up new furniture — all with the hope of creating a more inviting “home away from home” for critically ill children and their families.

Church member Nancy Cassat, who spearheaded the project, dubbed the effort “Extreme Mac-Over.” And just like the team on ABC's hit *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, the church volunteers not only revitalized a place but also revived the spirits of those who stay there.

Cassat recalled the first night 10-year-old Iyana Major dropped by



Iyana Major, 10, and her mother, Kiatonyia, get their first view of their renovated bedroom at the Ronald McDonald House in Little Rock.

Photo courtesy of Henderson UMC

to see the progress on the renovation of the rooms where she and her mother had been staying for the past five months. The volunteers had just removed an oversized bar from the kitchen.

“Her eyes got as big as quarters,” Cassat said. “We were in roughest of roughest stages. But she said, ‘This looks like a home and not a Ronald McDonald House.’ And that made it all worthwhile.”

Iyana had come to Little Rock with her mother from their home in Magnolia to receive treatment for neuroblastoma, cancer of the nerve tissues. While volunteers renovated the apartment, the Majors stayed in another room in the Ronald McDonald House. But Iyana was eager to help the volunteers. She got especially excited when Cassat welcomed her to join in the painting.

“It was the first time I ever did that,” she said proudly. “I had fun, and I did good.”

Henderson UMC embarked on the project in preparation for Central Arkansas Cityfest with Luis Palau on Oct. 24-25 in North Little Rock. Palau, a Portland, Ore.-based evangelist, urges churches to participate in a “Season of Service”

[See MAC-OVER, page 11A]

Program helps ID potential disciples

BY HEATHER HAHN
Editor

As anyone who's ever seen the beginning of *The Music Man* knows, the key to good salesmanship is “You gotta know the territory.”

That's a lesson even pastors and other church leaders should take to heart, says Leon Gray, the conference's minister of demographics and church strategic planning.



Leon Gray

Whenever congregations consider adding a ministry to attract more worshippers, one place to start is by knowing about the neighborhoods around the church.

Who lives there? What are their needs? What are their interests? And can any of that be served by your church's current membership?

To help pastors answer these questions, the Arkansas Conference has recently joined the growing client list of MissionInsite, a system that provide demographical research and congregational analysis.

“You have to figure out which demographic you are going to key on and say, ‘This is the one,’” said Gray, who is also an associate pastor at First United Methodist Church in North Little Rock. “These people will come to our church and be happy. And we can build the Kingdom from there.”

This month, Gray will begin training representatives from each district on how to use the program. MissionInsite uses data from

[See DISCIPLES, page 16A]

Holiday reminds us that our plates heap with reasons to give thanks

DEENA MARIE HAMILTON
Special contributor

This is the time of year when most of us sit down with family and give thanks for all the blessings that God has given us throughout the year. Of course, Thanksgiving has become a holiday for enjoying oodles of great food, watching football games and cherishing the fellowship of family and friends.

My favorite part of Thanksgiving will always be the food. That's just a given because I love to eat. But I'm working on that. I must eat to live and not live to eat.

But the thought of smoked turkey from Sims' Bar-B-Que, honey glazed ham, smoked brisket, dressing with giblet gravy, yeast rolls, cornbread muffins, turnip greens, my Aunt Phyllis's potato salad, fresh garden salad, my Uncle John's famous chicken spaghetti, homemade macaroni and cheese, my Aunt Margie's Sock-It-To-Me cake, my daddy's made-from-scratch sweet potato pie (which I learned to make an all organic version that is just as good), pecan pie and my sister-in-law's decadent chocolate cake ... It can take gluttony to the next level.

We learned in school that the Pilgrims came on the Mayflower and settled on Plymouth Rock. The first year was dreadful, but they began communing with the Indians and the following fall they celebrated making it through the first winter and reaping the autumn harvest.

Well, according to the History Channel's Web site www.history.com, the celebration of "giving thanks" in the form of a fall harvest festival and feast was a practice that many of the Native Americans did.

This was not something new to them. It was actually in keeping with a long tradition of celebrating the harvest and giving thanks for a



Deena Marie Hamilton

dances and other celebrations of thanks for centuries before the arrival of Europeans in North America.

When I sit down and count my blessings, I actually wonder to myself: What am I truly thankful for? Of course there is good health, supportive family and friends, the means to support myself in troubled times and my daughter starting college and becoming a young adult.

And as I evolve through my Christian journey, I begin to sing thanks and praise in any and all situations. Believe me, this is an attitude that takes many Christians years to learn.

But once we are truly thankful no matter what, we have arrived and prepare to be blessed.

When I did my first Thanksgiving sermon at my current appointment, I was grappling with many personal issues that kept me from being grateful. Let me correct myself: I allowed for those personal issues to keep me from being grateful.

I know that sounds crazy, doesn't it? A pastor with an ungrateful attitude. It grieves my heart to even admit such a thing. God is unbelievably good! And I have the audacity to be ungrateful ... shame on me.

But sometimes that happens to even the best of the faithful when we allow circumstances to change the

successful bounty of crops. Native American groups throughout the Americas, including the Pueblo, Cherokee, Creek and many others organized harvest festivals, ceremonial

positioning of our gaze forward instead of upward. When we focus on how good God is the twist and turns of life are manageable.

So in times of uncertainty, I am reminded of what is said in Psalm 100.

"Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.

Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the Lord is God.

It is he who made us, and we are his;

we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.

His faithfulness continues through all generations."

Whether our circumstances allow for us to see how good God is, remember we are His people, and that his faithfulness continues through the ages.

That alone is enough to make any person see the brighter side of any situation.

So when you're feeling down, worship the Lord with gladness and with jubilant singing because when we do that, we will come to realize that Thanksgiving is not just a holiday that should be observed once a year.

Every day we are blessed to see the sunrise. Know, without a shadow of a doubt, that every day is a day of Thanksgiving.

Being grateful to God is the start of obtaining and having an abundant life in Christ.

Deena Marie Hamilton is the senior pastor of McCabe Chapel United Methodist Church in North Little Rock. She can be reached at [rev. deenamarie@gmail.com](mailto:deenamarie@gmail.com).



EDITOR'S CORNER

BY HEATHER HAHN

Talking turkey

I am about to confess something that may put my American citizenship into question.

Oh, I like Mom and apple pie just fine. I've even been keeping an eye on this year's World Series.

But there's one autumn ritual where I inevitably fall short. After years of Thanksgiving celebrations and even a few misguided cooking experiments, I can honestly say that despite my best efforts I've never developed a taste for the holiday's main course.

It doesn't matter whether it's dark or white meat. I just find the bird dry and altogether unpalatable. I am the one who always quickly passes the turkey plate to my neighbor, always hoping my tablemates won't notice that I took the smallest piece possible or have foregone the meat altogether. It's a very sneaky way to spend a holiday where we are supposed to boldly proclaim our thanks for God's bounty.

I know the turkey has always had its partisans. No less a luminary than Benjamin Franklin (him of the all-American "All About the Benjamins" fame) once called the turkey "a much more respectable Bird" than the national symbol, the bald eagle. But in all his praise for the fowl, Franklin never addresses whether it is in fact tasty.

As with so much about Thanksgiving ritual, the people to credit — or blame — for the turkey's vaunted place on the American dinner table are, of course, the Pilgrims. Plymouth Colony governor

William Bradford, in recounting the first Thanksgiving, mentioned "the great store of wild turkeys." Although most historians agree that the turkeys were more like the side dish on that historic day. Venison and fish were at the center of the celebration.

Personally, I think the Pilgrims had the right idea.

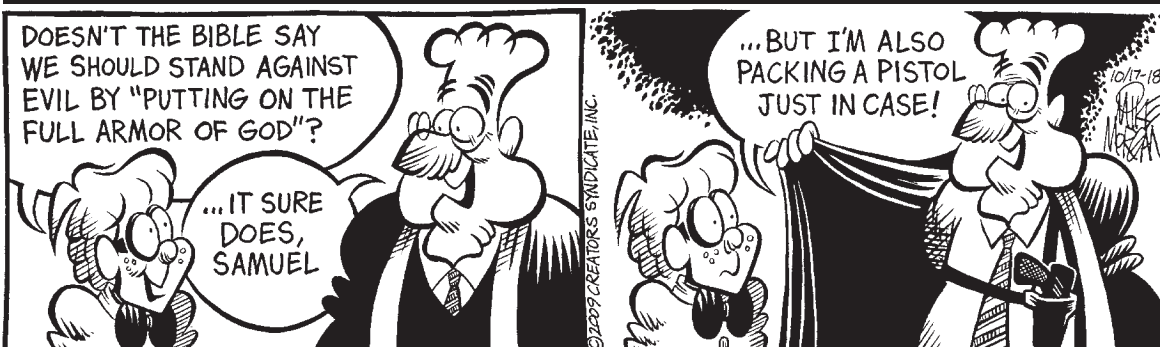
What does my mini-rant against Thanksgiving cuisine have to do with the Christian faith? Well, I must admit — not much aside from the fact that sometimes confession is good for the soul.

But it is perhaps worth noting that we are rapidly approaching the time of year when many Christians — particularly those hosting holiday gatherings — feel tremendous pressure to make sure that everything is perfect. We all should spend all November feeling thankful and December feeling cheery.

Of course we all will likely fall short of the standards we set for ourselves. We aren't perfect, and our holiday celebrations rarely match the images in Norman Rockwell illustrations. For one thing, I can almost guarantee I won't clean my plate.

But perhaps it is fitting that we are often at our most frazzled, most annoyed and most vulnerable as we prepare to celebrate the birth of the One who loves us so much. He came to earth in the most spectacularly humble way and took on our imperfections, our moments of impatience and ingratitude, with His grace.

FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE by Mike Morgan



Volume 156 • No. 27 November 6, 2009
Martha S. Taylor • Director of Communications
Heather Hahn • Editor
Patrick W. Shownes • Communications Coordinator
www.arumc.org

The Arkansas United Methodist is the newspaper of record for the Arkansas Conference of The United Methodist Church. It is published once monthly, on the first Fridays of each month, and four special issues throughout during the year for a total of 16 issues per year.

Send Correspondence & Change of Address to:
Arkansas United Methodist, 2 Trudie Kibbe Reed Dr., Little Rock, AR 72202; or e-mailed to Patrick.Shownes@arumc.org

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:
The United Methodist Reporter, PO Box 660275, Dallas, TX 75266-0275.

The United Methodist Reporter (USPS 954-500) is published weekly by UMR Communications, 1221 Profit Drive, Dallas, TX 75247. Periodicals Postage Paid at Dallas.



Arkansas Conference Communications
2 Trudie Kibbe Reed Drive
Little Rock, AR 72202-3770
www.arumc.org

Subscriptions
- \$15.00, 1 Year
- \$25.00, 2 Years
- Free, Online
For more information, visit www.arumc.org/aum or call 501.324.8000.

Advertising is welcomed. For a rate sheet or more information, contact Martha Taylor at 501.324.8005 or mtaylor@arumc.org. While all advertising is reviewed before acceptance, it should not be considered endorsed by this newspaper or the Church.

Submission Deadlines	
Issue Date	Submission Deadline
December 4, 2009	November 11, 2009
January 8, 2010	December 16, 2009
February 5, 2010	January 13, 2010
March 5, 2010	February 17, 2010



BY CHARLES CRUTCHFIELD

AN OCCASIONAL WORD from the Bishop

Dear Friends:

Did you know that the Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department indicates that there are 16,353 miles of state and federal highways in Arkansas? Recently I drove 325 miles (round trip) over some of those paved roads to attend a dinner in Texarkana honoring the work of United Methodist Men and our church in sponsoring Boy Scout troops. (The United Methodist Church is one of the largest sponsors of Boy Scout troops in America.)

I left for Texarkana in mid-afternoon, made a stop along the way, and arrived in plenty of time for the dinner. I drove home after the

program was finished. It was an easy trip. The roads were good with access to rest stops with plenty of gasoline if needed.

We are a state of 53,179 square miles with 16,353 miles of paved road. Interesting.

By contrast, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is a nation of 905,351 square miles. It has only 300 miles of paved roads. The DRC is about one-quarter the size of the United States. Amazing.

This is simply to illustrate the lack of infrastructure and to acknowledge the challenges that face the laity and clergy of our church in some areas of the world. It is daunting to think of a city of 300,000

people with no landline telephones, no citywide water system, no city sewage system, only two paved streets, no cable television, intermittent and unreliable electricity, two gas stations and a single dirt-strip airport. The city of Kamina, DRC, is such a place. It is Bishop Ntambo's episcopal headquarters.

One of the clergy leaders of the North Katanga Conference told me, when asked, that they fully expected to triple the size of the membership of the conference between 2008 and 2012. Let us remember, this is not growth by transfer from Baptist or Presbyterian or Roman Catholic churches. These are new Christians.

These are people coming into the church by profession of faith in Jesus Christ.

It seems to me that we have all the advantages in infrastructure and communications and resources, but they "fully expect" to grow the Kingdom of God.

We have a significant number of churches in the Arkansas Annual Conference that are doing wonderful work in making disciples of Jesus Christ.

We also have a number of churches that have not received a single person by profession of faith in a very long time. If you remove professions of faith coming from confirmation classes of youth, the

number grows significantly.

Are we afraid? Do we fear sharing with others that our faith is important to us? Do we fear rejection from our friends if we tell what Jesus has done for us? Do we fear placing faith in Christ at the top of our priorities for fear faith will demand we somehow change? Do we fear the growing pains that will occur if "new" Christians come into our midst? I don't like the idea of living with fear.

I prefer to live with expectation.

Faithfully,

Charles M. Crutchfield



Stained glass provides window on Congo mission

SCOTT MAPLE
Special Contributor

In God's creation, even things made by human hands can enjoy a second life.

That's true for the stained glass windows that light up services each week at Conway's Grace United Methodist Church.

The brilliant images of Christ and angels and children could have returned to dust, if left to the ravages of time when the United Methodist church in Luxora closed its doors in 1996. Instead, the church donated the stained glass to Grace for its new building in the 1990s.

Now, the 12 windows are focal points for the Conway church and a



Scott Maple

welcome reminder to Grace member Bill Patterson, a local eye doctor and professional photographer who is incorporating the windows into a mission project.

His goal: sell bookmarks and cards featuring the colorful windows, then use the proceeds to fund missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Patterson, you see, has an unusual connection to the stained glass windows — he grew up behind the Luxora church in northeastern Arkansas.

"I had gone to church there a few times with friends," he said. "But I remember even from those days how beautiful they were."

He confesses to being responsible for some of the wear and tear on the windows, having lined up soda cans in his backyard for target practice as a boy — which meant "a

few of the pings and dings were from me."

He didn't know about the connection between his hometown and Grace until he read about it in a newspaper article. Though he grew up in a different denomination, he found himself drawn to Grace, where the windows "made me feel at home."

In the years since, he's had "a yearning or leading to do something with the windows," he said. He settled on using them to illustrate blank cards that could be used for multiple purposes.

Proceeds from the sale of the cards and bookmarks go to the church's efforts to finance construction of a water well in the Congo.

His passion for helping the Congolese began when Jim Lenderman, former pastor at Grace, challenged the congregation to provide Bibles written in their native tongue — a rarity for most North Katanga Conference churches and their ministers at the time.

"When Jim gave his sermon on the Congo in general and the Swahili Bibles, it just struck me if you can't have a Bible, how are you going to learn the Word?" Patterson said.

He was also struck by the plight of young girls in the Katanga conference, who typically don't get the opportunity to go to college. Instead, they have to walk long distances to provide water for their

families.

"Some things we take for granted, like turning on the water and it's there in the spigot," he said.

He looks forward to seeing the images from his photographs spark interest among church members and anyone else with a mind for making missions happen.

Grace senior co-pastor Sara Pair, who works closely with the church's missions team, is also excited about the possibilities.

"Over the last year," she said, "the generosity of Grace members has resulted in scholarships for four young women to go to the ISP Teaching College so they can come back and educate fellow villagers. There was enough left over to pay for books for three other students.

"In addition, four orphans at the Methodist-supported Kamina Children's Home now have their basic needs met. I'm excited to think about what else God has in store through Grace and the people who are receiving our support to build their communities."

To learn more about the windows or the notecard and bookmark mission project, contact Patterson at bpatt@conwaycorp.net. The cost is \$10 for eight cards and \$1 for a bookmark.

Scott Maple is a member of Grace United Methodist Church in Conway. He can be reached at Scott.Maple@acxiom.com.



Photos above and at left show a book mark and greeting card that depict stained glass windows that once hung in the United Methodist Church in Luxora. Today, 12 of the windows illuminate Grace United Methodist Church in Conway. Bill Patterson, a member of the Conway church, took photos of the windows and designed the cards and bookmarks to help his congregation raise money for a water well in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Highland Valley UMC in Little Rock also has two Luxora windows.

Photos by Bill Patterson



Churches should emanate sweet smell of authenticity

In the October edition of the *Arkansas United Methodist*, I introduced three fragrances drawing the emerging generation to the church: warmth, authenticity and power.

The second of these aromas fights against an odor seeping beneath the doors of sanctuaries and saturating the carpets with its stench. This is the odor of the counterfeit.

As Christians, we appear different to the world because according to “God has set [us] above our companions by anointing [us] with the oil of joy” (Hebrews 1:9).

We’re not fraught with worry because we give our concerns to God and let “the peace of God, which transcends all understanding ... guard [our] hearts and [our] minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7).

Ideally, we’re supposed to tread on clouds, happy as clams in high tide.

Meanwhile, it often appears that our joy and our peace is ransacked by pain and

frustrations. It could be a child who failed his drug test again or a boss who just won’t leave things alone.

We don’t want to share our problems because we don’t want people to misconceive that we’re not right with God.

Or maybe we find our weakness embarrassing to God. Or maybe we’re supposed to be the strong one on whom everyone depends.

Whoever we are, this mask of sanity is counterfeit. Oxford English Dictionary defines counterfeit as “made in imitation of that which is genuine; ... made of inferior or base materials ... misshapen.”

When we try to imitate Christians, it’s like trying to paint a picture from memory rather than using a photograph, resulting in a misshapen glob. It may have the same coloring or nose as the original, but misses



**Mary Faith
“Zoe” Miles**

the mark entirely.

As the Beloved, we’re not to be imitators of Christians. We desire to have more than just the same coloring.

Brothers and Sisters, we are — as Ephesians 5:1 says — to be imitators of Christ!

The “oil of joy” and “the peace of God” are only available through God; thus when we’re trying to look like Christians, we cover ourselves with “inferior or base materials,” which melt away in heat leaving an empty canvas.

May Christ be the sole

model for painting our lives.

When visiting my grandparents in Hot Springs, my grandmother would make the best chocolate cake in the history of cakes.

When we’d walk through the door, we’d know that what we were

smelling wasn’t branded and manufactured love. We’d breathe authentic love in tasteable air.

When young people worship in a church where people are crying out for healing, expressing their sorrow and joy, and weeping for Jesus, we know that it is not a counterfeit odor.

That’s “the sweet fragrance of Christ” (II Corinthians 2:15), richer than the deepest chocolate.

This week, let’s be genuine. Let’s give honest answers when someone asks about our day because this is not a branded and manufactured religion.

It is a deep movement of the living God to transform us to smell like love.

Mary Faith “Zoe” Miles is a junior at Oklahoma City University in Oklahoma, a United Methodist institution. She can be reached at mmiles.stu1@my.okcu.edu.



The Gertrude Rimmel Butler Child Development Center at First UMC in downtown Little Rock, the state’s largest child-care center, celebrated its 40th anniversary on Oct. 9. The church’s Koinonia Sunday School Class initially established the program to provide subsidized day care. Today, the center offers preschool and after-school programs for more than 300 children. From left, prekindergartners Caitlyn DeWeese, Kandis Wiley and Riley Thayer sing “This is the Day that the Lord Has Made” at the center’s birthday celebration.

Photo by Heather Hahn

Getting beyond ‘us vs. them’ thinking

TROY L. THOMAS JR.

Special Contributor

“Can we as Christians believe what we believe without someone else trying to force their belief on us?”

I was asked this question by a layperson, and this is the main point for review. As Christians, I feel we must answer this question along with answering its reciprocal.

In other words, I think the extremes of all religions need to take another look at themselves (we all do; it’s called reflection, but you get my point).

From my small experience in the church the extremely conservative people and the extremely liberal people have got it in their minds that their view of God is most prevalent and clear. And, yes, you do have the right to make a free decision in how you worship your God.

But when humans begin taking upon themselves to impose their own idea of God on others with any amount of deprivation, the result is that they are claiming themselves to be God.

I would say this is a type of enslavement that has nothing to do with freedom. When asking ourselves any question about God’s truth we should explore how we define the words “their” and “us.” When you ask, “Can we as Christians



**Troy
Thomas Jr.**

believe what we believe without someone else trying to force their belief on us?” I would say the real question we should be asking ourselves is, “Can Christians believe without force?”

I think the answer to this question is “Yes.” And I also think the ways and means this can be accomplished is by better understanding how we define the words “their” and “us.”

What I believe is that all Christians should be willing to rethink and reflect upon God’s truths.

When our origination starts with God in the center, the meaning of these two words — their and us — are not so far apart, and we have less reason to fear their truth.

It is from this point that we see what is most important. It is from God’s truth we are empowered to ask ourselves the hard questions. When examining ourselves in comparison with God’s truth we are reminded that inflicting judgment, pain and injustice against each other is sin.

Our problem arises when we confuse God’s truth with our own truth. Our own truth usually is a

truth aligned with our own agenda that has nothing to do with God. Ego has a negative effect on God’s truth.

When we are saying “their,” what I think we are really saying is, “something other than us.”

So, anything other than “us” is our enemy (those who oppose what is just and are sinners). Our failure to love our enemies as ourselves is why we should all cry out to God for forgiveness.

I think God thinks in third person instead of first person. In my view the real definition of “us” came when God gave his only begotten Son for the sins of the entire world.

As Christians, we should be thorough in how we define other humans.

Being Christian is not only about setting ourselves apart from the world, but also walking in the world with the love of Christ.

I believe that if we begin becoming God-centered and remove ourselves from agnostic thinking, we can walk as Christ walked. This is what I call freedom. This freedom comes from aligning ourselves with the identity of Christ.

Troy L. Thomas Jr. is the senior pastor of Parker’s Chapel and Pleasant Grove United Methodist churches. He can be reached by e-mail at troythomas3716@msn.com.

Prayers for a holy harvest



BUD REEVES
Special Contributor

Recently I had the opportunity to preach at a community revival at the Bismarck United Methodist Church. On a rainy Tuesday night, the sanctuary was full. You could feel in the worship the love they had for the Lord and for their church.

One of the songs we sang was the old revival standard, "Bringing in the Sheaves":

*Sowing in the morning, sowing seeds of kindness,
Sowing in the noontide and the dewy eve;
Waiting for the harvest, and the time of reaping,
We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves.*

It spoke of a time when most of our country was rural and agricultural. Back then, everybody knew what it meant to "bring in the sheaves."

When I was growing up, I had never brought in a sheaf. I had heard Bible stories about shepherds, however, and I thought we were singing about "bringing in the sheeps." My wife, also growing up in rural Arkansas, had accompanied her mother to the outdoor clothesline enough times that she heard "bringing in the sheets," which is what they did when the bed sheets had been dried and fluffed in a fresh breeze. (Or they would be gathered quickly if a thundercloud approached.)

Singing that old hymn brought back memories and reminded me again of the need for a harvest. Most of us have lost the rhythm of the agricultural community that used to predominate our culture. But we

have not lost the need to hope for and work for the harvest and to celebrate when it comes.

It's harvest time right now. The farmers are trying to get their crops in. The churches are gathering supplies for our mission work through the annual Ingathering. We are emphasizing our stewardship and hoping we will gather enough financial support to end the year with a victory celebration. We should be praying for a great harvest on several levels:

A harvest of crops. Though most of us are not involved directly in farming any more, agriculture is important to everyone who eats. Especially in Arkansas, it is still a major industry and the lifeblood of many communities.

The deluge of rainfall all year has created a crisis situation for our farmers. We need to pray for them and their literal harvest this year.

A harvest of peace. Our country is entering the eighth year of armed hostilities in Afghanistan and is in our sixth year of war in Iraq with no end in sight. Lives are being lost and families are being disrupted on a daily basis.

I don't know enough foreign policy to guess how to end the war, but I worship a God of peace, and we need to pray that God's Spirit will teach the ways of peace to our national and world leaders.

A harvest of justice. Our God is just; thousands of years ago God's law prohibited harvesting the edges of the fields, providing for the poor to glean so that they might have food and survive.

That sense of justice is still an issue today. The debate on health care reform is too technical for me, but at base it is about justice. With



Bud Reeves

the resources to provide excellent health care, we have a moral obligation to see that as many people as possible receive it.

Issues about our stewardship of the environment, racial prejudice, and economic disparity continue to cry for justice. As Dr. King said, "Oppression anywhere is oppression everywhere," so we need to pray for God's justice to prevail.

A harvest of righteousness. In Scripture, the "harvest of righteousness" refers to situations where the Kingdom of God comes to fruition. In our churches, we pray for new life, strength, and growth in ministry.

As we "rethink church" in this rapidly changing culture, may God grant us wisdom to bring a harvest of souls into the Kingdom. Lost people need to be found. Apathetic Christians need to be energized. Faithful disciples need to be empowered for ministry.

Ultimately, the harvest takes more than prayer. It also takes work. The farmer doesn't pray his crops into the barn; he has to get on the tractor (or combine). Peace, justice and righteousness will not come to fruition unless prayerful people also work for the harvest. Remember the promise and the challenge of Jesus: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

"So," as St. Paul said, "let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up."

We labor in hope. The field belongs to the Master; God will bring the harvest. We believe in the victory to come. We can hear the songs of celebration as we bring in the sheaves for God's Kingdom.

William O. "Bud" Reeves is senior pastor of First UMC, Hot Springs. He can be reached at brobud@fumchs.com.

Taken to extreme, politics can be poisonous to faith

MICHAEL DANIEL
Special contributor

This morning's news brought more information about the tsunami in Samoa, an earthquake in Indonesia and a typhoon in Southeast Asia, each disaster claiming hundreds of lives and leveling entire villages.

The United States government is still embroiled in debates about health care, and Americans are still losing jobs by the thousands. So I ask readers the same thing I am asking myself right now: How much should I care about politics?

There is a young man who is currently incarcerated with whom I have been corresponding by mail, and he recently threw me a curve when, in a return letter, he posed the question to me that I had previously put to him: So, preacher, what excites you? What drives you? What stirs you up?

I could not simply put him off as I had so many others; it was time to face up to the one thing I can really get stirred up about, the one thing that can elevate my blood pressure and also give me a certain sense of satisfaction.

It is politics. I am passionate about politics. It is what excites and infuriates me. It is what depresses and enlivens me. Yet I have found myself trapped in a prison from which escape has become necessary for the sake of ministry. I spend much more time reading news than reading Scripture.

While real-world stuff is often useful in trying to make a theological point in a sermon, it can direct entirely too much attention and too much emphasis on political players and not nearly enough on the Lord. And during such challenging times as these, we need the Lord far more than we need politics or politicians.

We need spiritual leaders, not political leaders. It is time to make some adjustments.

How these adjustments might go from this point is anyone's guess because there are certain political realities that cannot be ignored, spiritually or

politically.

In light of such political realities within the realm of the theological, though, the question becomes: Who is the go-to? Within the political spectrum that is the health care debate, for instance, who are we as a nation relying on to provide for us or protect us? To whom do we go and direct our concerns, our fears and our anxieties?

Like abortion, this is a purely moral issue that has become political because the wrong players are involved.

Some have suggested that politics is my passion because the Lord is calling me to a career in public office. Such a notion might not be entirely false, but the fallacy of that argument can be found in something as obvious and as seemingly random as sexual attraction.

Just because we can be excited about sexual intimacy does not mean we were all created to be porn stars or that it is always appropriate. Just because we have a genuine passion for sports does not mean we are all meant to be star athletes. Passion certainly drives us, but doing what we love involves no personal sacrifice.

Within the theology of Christianity, personal sacrifice is intimately connected to the genuine spirit of "agape," that sure and certain love that puts self aside for the sake of something much greater. It has been said that if worship does not involve some sense of "work," then we are giving nothing of ourselves.

I will attempt to leave the political discussions to the TV talking heads and ambitious politicians.

As for me, I will "put away the foreign gods which are among [me], and incline [my] heart to the Lord God" (Joshua 24:23).

Michael Daniel is the senior pastor of Asbury UMC in Magnolia. He can be reached by e-mailing pastorlaumc@sbcglobal.net. His blog is at mpdaniel.blogspot.com.

Holiday Hills UMC in Greers Ferry donated these new and lightly worn shoes to the Soles4Souls organization. Soles4Souls seeks to impact as many lives as possible with the gift of shoes. The church is the first congregation in Arkansas to participate in this worldwide effort, although several retail stores are now partnering with Soles4Souls as collection sites.

Photo courtesy of Holiday Hills UMC



Letters To The Editor

I just want to express appreciation to Dr. David Bush for his generosity and energy on behalf of the retired pastors of Arkansas. David has provided a day of fellowship and good food each year for several years, and we do enjoy and look forward to it.

This year we were especially pleased and blessed to hear Dr. John Ed Mathison at our gathering in the Arkansas Governor's Mansion. He also preached and led an evangelism workshop at Stuttgart First United Methodist Church. The workshop centered in on how to preach and do the gospel of Christ in the 21st century.

Dr. Mathison has written: "... Evangelism is a priority. Social concerns, stewardship, education — all grow out of the results of evangelism." He also wrote in *Tried and True: Eleven Principles of Church Growth from Frazer Memorial United Methodist Church*, "Evangelism is the heart of the Church — every member of the Church is a part of the evangelistic task of the Church."

John Ed is not only motivational, but entertaining and uplifting as well.

Thanks again, David.

One of the old Geezers,
Fred Arnold, pastor
Alzheimer UMC

I was curled up in my easy chair

the other night reading *The Discipline* (as is my custom).

I happened across the Social Principles, paragraph 163 G. It said, "Gambling is a menace to society, deadly to the best interest of moral, social, economic and spiritual life and destructive of good government..."

We know from the study of gambling to pay for government in other states that with administrative costs usually at two-thirds of the take and colleges raising tuition, we will do well to break even. We also know that it has an addictive effect. The *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* told of a woman who won a small prize and put the money back into lottery tickets, which she then lost. Then she said, "This is addictive." Then the paper told of a man who said he was playing "to get out of poverty."

My biggest nightmare is the kind of influence the gaming industry will begin to have on our state politicians. The lieutenant governor represented the industry well in the last election. The speaker of the House tried to hide keno in the bill in the last legislative session.

It is already messing up the society I live in. The convenience store where I buy my gasoline and get a great little two-piece fish dinner is selling lottery tickets. I will miss that fish dinner. The bank I do business with is now the banker for the gambling industry. Could this

possibly affect political contributions in the future? The Lottery Commission has hired some very expensive help and so far has not shown too many signs of supervision.

So what has the United Methodist Church done about this issue lately? Nothing that I am aware of.

We need to set up a stand-alone committee to challenge the gaming industry in Arkansas. It is only a matter of time until they start promoting casinos. After all, that is where the real money is.

Roger E. Glover, pastor
Humnoke and Hamilton
United Methodist churches

As a lifelong member of the United Methodist Church, I am proud of our mission work, particularly our hunger-relief efforts.

Ingathering is a time during the harvest season when we can share our bounty while serving others.

While we as United Methodists participate in Ingathering, there are many hunger-relief efforts with which United Methodists are intimately involved every day: The Society of St. Andrew gleaning project; Potluck's pick up and delivery of fresh food.; and the numerous churches that feed their hungry neighbors in communities from Johnson to Jonesboro.

There are six food banks

statewide that make up the core membership of the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance. These food banks together distributed more than 18 million pounds of food and grocery products to 1,000 food pantries, soup kitchens and homeless shelters last year.

The Arkansas Foodbank Network, of which I am a board member, distributed 9.2 million of that amount.

All of these hunger-relief organizations serve an important role in helping to end hunger in Arkansas. Let's give a cheer for the thousands of people — United Methodists and others — who give their prayers, presence, gifts and service to help feed our hungry neighbors.

D. Trent Roberts
secretary/treasurer
Arkansas Foodbank Network
Member of Trinity UMC
in Little Rock

Thank you for giving the correct name for the Leachville United Methodist Church in the caption for the pictures and the article. Even though the church's sign for the garden indicated the Leachville Methodist Church, you correctly identified the congregation as United Methodist.

I was confirmed into

membership in the First Methodist Church of Fordyce in 1963. I was proud to say that I was a member of the First United Methodist Church of Fordyce in 1968.

Since then I have served as a lay member, local pastor, student local pastor, probationary member/deacon and full member/elder in United Methodist churches in Arkansas and Missouri during seminary.

It was a task to get some of those churches to change the name on their church signs to United Methodist Church.

But the most interesting situation came up in one church I served. The electricity went out, and I was going to call it in. The electric company did not have service to the United Methodist Church in that town. They did have service to the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (M E, South).

We have not been the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, since 1939.

Thank you for reminding us of our name and our heritage.

David E. Baker, pastor
Perryville UMC

The *Arkansas United Methodist* welcomes letters to the editor. Letters should include the address and phone number where the writer can be reached.



Madeleine Adkins, 8, searches for the perfect Halloween pumpkin at the Asbury UMC pumpkin patch in Little Rock. Madeleine and her grandmother, Elsie Adkins, are members of Asbury. The two had come out on Oct. 18 to the patch, which the Asbury youth organize to benefit missions and provide scholarships to conference youth activities.

Photo by Heather Hahn

VOLUNTEERS IN MISSION

This Volunteer in Mission listing includes mission opportunities offered by local churches and districts. Often there is room for additional volunteers 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.

Feb. 6-12, 2010: Rio Bravo, Mexico. Construction help needed to build a casita, a small house. Contact Larry Acton, lacton@ritternet.com or (870) 520.3969.

March 6-14, 2010: Costa Rica. Painting, flooring, Bible School. Larry Acton, lacton@ritternet.com or (870) 520.3969.

March 20-27, 2010: "River of Life Ministries," Belize. Grace Community UMC in Fort Smith needs about 20 people for a construction/ medical/language mission. Contact Ken Duncan, VIM Team Coordinator at Grace Community UMC, (479) 285-9600.

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.

Shoal Creek alumni celebrate camp's lasting impact

HEATHER HAHN
Editor

NEW BLAINE – Ken Bell took home more than memories from his summers at Shoal Creek Camp.

“I met the love of my life here,” he said, squeezing the hand of his wife of 41 years, the former Barbara Angeletti.

The Bells were among dozens of Shoal Creek alumni who returned to the western Arkansas campsite to reminisce, catch up with old friends and celebrate the 50th anniversary of a United Methodist institution where youngsters still come to encounter God's creation.

The 22-acre camp, which has capacity for 104, has served as a place of refuge for growing youth, for traveling college groups and in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, for 89 evacuees from the Gulf Coast.

During the open house on Oct. 17, alumni toured their old cabins, enjoyed a hot dog lunch in the dining hall and then toasted marshmallows and munched on s'mores around a cozy campfire.

The following night, 210 alumni and friends also attended a dinner and program to honor the camp at First United Methodist Church in Fort Smith. The program included a performance by the Reunion Hand-Chime Choir, recognition of the Kelley Family who donated the land for the camp and praise for two Eagle Scouts' projects at the site. Coach Frank Broyles, retired athletic director at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, delivered a keynote address about the passion that has made the camp possible for 50 years.

At both events, United Methodists exchanged recollections of cabin pranks, snipe hunts and silly camp songs. They also shared how Shoal Creek Camp guided their Christian walk.

Over the years, hundreds of young Christians have made their first profession of faith at the camp and several others have discerned their call to the professional ministry.

Betsy (formerly Freeman) Farris, a member of First UMC in Fort Smith, fondly remembers climbing atop the local landmark “Tater” Hill for a sunrise devotion on the last day of camp. She stills carries in her wallet a copy of a religious poem that was read during that morning meditation more than 40 years ago.

Talmadge Talkington, who attended the first week of camp in



Above, Betsy Farris holds the poem from a camp devotion she has kept in her wallet for more than 40 years.

Photo by Heather Hahn

July 1959, traveled from Grand Prairie, Texas, outside Dallas, to attend the anniversary festivities.

He had grown up at the Methodist Church in Lavaca where there were only three or four other youth his age. For him, the camp provided the fellowship of a church youth program, and he forged lifelong friendships in the summer heat.

Some memories weren't quite so wholesome, he admitted. With a chuckle, Talkington recounted an incident that downright stank.

He and a friend once tried to catch a skunk to put in the girls' cabin.

“Before we got the skunk, the skunk got us,” he said. “We smelled so bad, they wouldn't let us sleep in the cabin. We had to sleep outside.”

Shoal Creek also is where many teens have experienced their first crush and sometimes even have met their lasting love.

Barbara Bell was among the youth who attended a week-long camp during Shoal Creek's first summer. But it was a couple of years later when her time at camp overlapped with the young man she would ultimately marry. She was going into 10th grade, her first year at Fort Smith High School, and Ken Bell was entering 11th grade at the same school.

“The very first time I saw him he was down by the swimming hole,” she said. “He was sitting on a blanket with one of his guy friends and a ukelele.”

She had already heard his name dreamily mentioned by another girl at camp. But when Barbara first spotted Ken, she acknowledged she initially wasn't very impressed.

“I thought, ‘I don't know what's so hot about him,’” she recalled with a laugh. “But we sat there and talked a while. He had a big grin, and I thought, ‘You know, he really is cute.



David Fleming, chairman of the Outdoor Ministries Committee, toasts a marshmallow during the 50th anniversary open house at Shoal Creek Camp.

Photo by Heather Hahn

There's something about him.”

During the camp's early years, Herschel McClurkin Jr. — then the youth director at First UMC in Fort Smith — served as a Shoal Creek director. A half century and many moves as a pastor later, McClurkin again volunteers as co-director of the camp with his wife, Mardell.

“The camp has been such a meaningful experience for us that we want to keep sharing it with others,” Herschel McClurkin said.

He said the camp has seen some changes in its 50 years. The

bathhouses have been enlarged and central heating and cooling added to the dining hall.

Campers no longer refresh themselves in a swimming hole with a rope swing after the Arkansas Department of Health announced the water wasn't safe for swimming. In 1998, the camp added a swimming pool.

Shoal Creek also now faces more competition from secular summer activities such as band, cheer-leading and sports camps, McClurkin said.

“Once we get people there they

want to come back,” his wife said, “but we have to work extra hard contacting churches and individual families to get them to make that first visit.”

Today, Shoal Creek offers day camps for kindergartners through second-graders as well as overnight camps for older elementary school students and teenagers. Shoal Creek is also home to an annual music camp as well as one of the state's few sign-language camps for the deaf and hearing impaired. Mardell McClurkin takes particular joy in leading camps each summer on earth stewardship and the liturgical seasons of the Christian year.

One thing that hasn't changed in the past 50 years is Shoal Creek's mission.

“Having youth commit themselves to full-time Christian service was the motivator for starting the camp,” Herschel McClurkin said. “We strive to help young people understand their relationship to Christ.”

Ken and Barbara Bell, members of Greenwood United Methodist Church, both attest that Shoal Creek helped strengthen their faith and shape their values.

“Once you come here,” Barbara Bell said, “you always take a piece of it with you.”

Shoal Creek relies mainly on individual donations to offer its camps. Donations can be mailed to Shoal Creek Camp in care of West District Office, 4010 Grand Ave., Fort Smith, Ark. 72904.

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In Congo, bishop and his wife witness the c

STORY BY
HEATHER HAHN

PHOTOS BY
BISHOP CHARLES AND
KAREN CRUTCHFIELD

To reach their Annual Conference, many United Methodist pastors in the Democratic Republic of Congo must travel hundreds of miles over dusty, unpaved roads — by bicycle.

For one pastor, this summer marked the first time in five years he was able to make the journey to the annual meeting of Congo's North Katanga Conference in Kamina. He had come by bike from his home in northeastern Congo some 200 miles away where there has been brutal fighting in recent years. The region is more stable now. But shortly before the pastor left, his house was burned down and nearly everything he owned destroyed.

"All he had were the clothes on his back," Bishop Charles Crutchfield said. "But he came to Annual Conference, and he was delighted to be there. He was excited to be there. He just thought that was the greatest thing to be a part of that fellowship and to be a part of the movement of the church."

Crutchfield and his wife, Karen, met the pastor in late July when they traveled to Kamina in the more tranquil southern Congo to participate in the North Katanga Annual Conference.

The Arkansas bishop preached and taught at the gathering as part of the renewal leave the *Book of*



Bishop Charles Crutchfield stands with a United Methodist pastor from the wartorn northeastern Congo. The bishop gave one of his clerical shirts to the pastor, with the hope that a clergyman will be less of a target in the fighting.



Above, orphans watch in fascination as Bishop Charles Crutchfield uses his Blackberry. In Kamina, the wife of Bishop Ntambo works with the orphans and also helps with a feeding station. Below, Bishop Crutchfield lay the cornerstone for this open-air market when he visited Kamina in 2007. When he returned this summer, he was greeted with a procession.

Discipline requires bishops to take every four years. It was his second time in Congo after an earlier visit in 2007.

Karen Crutchfield, who was making her first trip to the country, delivered the funds that Arkansas United Methodists had given to dig wells and provide desperately needed clean drinking water. Altogether, she brought \$16,000 — enough for two wells to be built in honor of Congolese clergy spouses.

While in Kamina, the Crutchfields also learned that St. James United Methodist Church in Little Rock had raised an additional \$11,000 to put toward more wells.

After a two-and-a-half-week stay, they returned to Arkansas full of testimonies to the faith and work of Congolese United Methodists.

"My last thought when we left ... was that Jesus is very happy to worship in Kamina," Karen Crutchfield said. "They are so filled with love of the Lord."

The courage of the pastor from northeastern Congo, in particular, left a lasting impression on the bishop. The Crutchfields' interpreter gave the minister a Cross and Flame necklace to help keep him safe back home by making it easy for people to identify him as clergy.

"Well, I thought, 'I can help with



that too," Bishop Crutchfield said. "So I went and got a new clergy shirt that I had taken with me to the Congo and gave it to him. You would have thought I had given him a set of suits. Such a little thing meant so much.

"That is echoed across the conference. Oh, they've got problems and they struggle, but they are so committed, so filled with faith, so filled with joy."

A delayed conference

Still, the Crutchfields observed clergy and laity dealing with challenges in their ministry unlike any encountered in the United States.

Karen Crutchfield recalled a pastor who told them he was paid less than a dollar a month. His district superintendent verified that was indeed the case because that was all his congregation could afford to pay.

"But when we tried to help that

pastor, we were told that there were too many pastors in the exact same situation," she said.

Pastors survive and raise families on meager salaries, she said, by cultivating their own gardens. Local crops include cassava, corn, peanuts, cabbage, bananas, plantains, pineapples and avocados.

Even with these limited physical resources, she said, the pastors' spouses are still expected to help feed and clothe the orphans and widows in their midst.

Among the pastors' most pressing hardships, Bishop Crutchfield said, is a severe lack of infrastructure. Congo, which is nearly a quarter of the size of the United States, has only 300 miles of paved road and almost daily electrical failures. That makes reliable travel even on the country's railway system near impossible.

The centerpiece of the North Katanga gathering was supposed to be the arrival of 300 bicycles, a gift from the Indiana Conference to the Congolese pastors. A week before Annual Conference, two trucks carrying the bicycles set out from Lubumbashi, a city about 200 miles south of Kamina.

"On the day the conference was supposed to start, no one knew where the trucks were," Bishop Crutchfield said. "So Bishop Ntambo [Nkulu Ntanda] just delayed the start of conference. ... That's when I did most of my teaching. Four days later the trucks still hadn't arrived. Now we are 10 or 11 days into driving 200 miles."

He explained that the roads in Congo are so narrow that if a truck breaks down, another vehicle will get stuck behind it until the derelict truck is towed away, pushed into a side ditch or repaired.

After a four-day delay, Bishop Ntambo convened the conference under a tarp held aloft by poles and tree limbs. It was Congo's dry season so there was no fear of rain.

An electrical generator powered a string of lights and a sound system for the proceedings. But soon the meeting was winding down and the bikes were still missing in action.

To prolong the gathering a little longer, the African bishop encouraged visiting choirs to engage in a bit of friendly competition.

"We started on Sunday," Bishop Crutchfield said. "The trucks arrived mid-afternoon on Friday."

'Thank you, Methodist'

Even after the long wait, the clergymen and women rejoiced to see rows of new, sturdy bikes lined up outside the conference space.

Just as thrilling, the Crutchfields said, the North Katanga Conference for the first time was able to distribute funds from the United Methodist Church's Central Conference Pension Initiative.

The initiative, overseen by the denomination's General Board of Pension and Health Benefits, seeks to raise \$20 million to provide a pension for the roughly 2,000 retired United Methodist pastors, lay workers and surviving spouses in Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe. Arkansas congregations have been contributing to the effort.

Kamina has no banks, so at the North Katanga Annual Conference, every retiree or surviving received about \$60 in cash — enough to last a

Church's enduring strength

whole year.

The Crutchfields witnessed other examples of the United Methodist Church's impact.

When he last visited Kamina in 2007, he and other Arkansans on the trip encountered an unsavory marketplace where people sold food on the ground. Bishop Ntambo told the Arkansas delegation about his plans for a new, cleaner market with brick supports and corrugated tin roofing.

The Arkansans gave a donation to start the project, and Bishop Crutchfield laid the cornerstone for the new structure. This summer, the Crutchfields returned to see the completed market.

"When we got out of the car, someone at the market — a lady who helps to organize things — recognized me and got really excited," Bishop Crutchfield said. Her excitement proved contagious, and the Arkansas bishop was greeted like a foreign dignitary with a grand procession all around the market.

"It was really neat," he said. "But

what was more important was the realization that our church and our conference had been on the ground of making something really healthy and hopeful happen."

The United Methodist Church garners wide respect among the general Congolese public, he said.

Bishop Ntambo, in addition to his ecclesiastical duties, is a senator in his country's federal government and has been instrumental in moderating peace among rival factions.

The denomination has boosted local trade by building a bridge and providing a much-needed ferry across a major river. The church also operates a farm in Kamina to model more effective agricultural practices.

The farm not long ago introduced a more nutritious kind of cabbage, which has become known locally as "Thank You, Methodist" cabbage.

One thing Bishop Crutchfield stresses is that the Congolese know best how to use the funds and resources Arkansas United Methodists send their way.



Map Prepared by Patrick W. Shownes

"They know where the need is," he said. "When we give money for a water well, it's not important to say, 'Now I want that water well to go in Kamina, and I want my name put on it.' What's really important to do is to say, 'We want this water well to serve God's children and you put it where you want it.'"

To learn more about how to help the United Methodist Church in Congo, visit www.arumc.org/congo.



Karen Crutchfield pumps water from a well that Arkansas United Methodist churches helped build through the Congo Initiative. Each well costs \$8,000 to build.

Democratic Republic of Congo facts

- Population: 68.7 million (the 18th most populous country in the world).
- Area: Slightly less than one-fourth the size of the United States.
- GDP: \$11.59 billion as of 2008. By comparison, Arkansas' GDP was \$98 billion last year, according to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.
- Life expectancy at birth: A little more than 54 years.
- Religion: 50 percent Catholic, 20 percent Protestant.
- Literacy: 67.2 percent of those over 15 can read and write.

Source: CIA World Factbook

The advertisement is designed to look like an open book. On the left page, there is a photograph of a young boy sitting on the floor, looking thoughtful. Below it is a decorative initial 'M' and the text of a story about a boy named Mike who overcame a difficult childhood. On the right page, there is a photograph of a family (a man, a woman, and two children) smiling. Below it is a testimonial from Mike, now a 25-year-old Army combat engineer and father of two, who credits his success to the support he received at Methodist Family Health. At the bottom of the right page is the Methodist Family Health logo and tagline. A purple tassel is draped across the center of the book.

Mnce upon a time, a little 10-year-old boy named Mike was dealing with problems that weren't so little. Mom and Dad became addicted to drugs. They went to jail; Mike went to a home for abandoned kids. This happened three different times. The last time, Mike's mom died while his dad was in prison, and Mike got caught stealing money to care for his baby sister. The little boy was alone and confused. Then, he began a new chapter.

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“When I was referred to Methodist Family Health, I discovered structure and love for the first time,” says Mike, now a successful 25-year-old Army combat engineer and happily married father of two. “I connected to the teaching-parents there. They taught me responsibility, how to positively deal with my emotions, and how to treat others. What I learned there, I use now as a parent and husband. Methodist Family Health never stops making a difference.”

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OBITUARIES

KANSAS CITY, MO.

Bishop Eugene Maxwell

Frank, 101, who served as a bishop of the Arkansas Area from 1972 to '76, passed away Oct. 13 in Kansas City, Mo.

Frank was born December 11,



Bishop Eugene Frank

1907, in Cherryvale, Kan., to A.W. and Emma Maxwell Frank. He attended high school in Pittsburg, Kan., and continued his education at Pittsburg State University. While still in college, he

began serving churches in Bartlett and Chetopa, Kan. He married his high school sweetheart, Wilma Alice Sedoris, in June 1930 and began his seminary training the same year at what is now Garrett Theological Seminary in Evanston, Ill.

In 1933, he was ordained in the Methodist Episcopal Church, returning to Kansas and serving churches in Tonganoxie; Americus; Olathe; Kansas City, Kan., and Topeka. He was elected to the Episcopacy in 1956 while serving First Methodist Church in Topeka and was appointed to the Missouri Area where he served from 1956 until 1972.

While in Missouri, he oversaw the merger of three conferences into two and the merger of the African-American Southwest Missouri Conference with the predominately white Missouri conferences.

During his tenure as president of the Council of Bishops (1968-1969), the Evangelical United Brethren Church joined the Methodist Church to form the United Methodist Church, and the African-American Central Jurisdiction was dissolved. He also formed the Metropolitan Planning Commission in Kansas City to address racial equality and human rights. As a result, an urban ministry program was developed that crossed all racial lines.

In 1956, he helped establish St. Paul School of Theology in Kansas City, Mo., and served as president of the board until 1972. He loved young people and wanted

to see them well prepared for the ministry, continuing his involvement and support of the seminary throughout his ministry and life.

In 1972, he was appointed as bishop of the Little Rock and North Arkansas conferences where he continued working for racial equality in the church.

Frank was first and foremost a pastor who loved to preach and share his message of faith with his congregations. As bishop, he had great love and compassion for the ministers under his care, taking a personal interest in their families and supporting them by visiting and preaching in their churches on a regular basis.

After retiring in 1976, he taught for three years at Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta, leading seminars for and mentoring student pastors. In 1980, he returned to Kansas City, Mo., where he was bishop in residence at Central United Methodist Church for eight years, the first time a bishop had ever returned to serve on a church staff.

Throughout his ministry, he served on many national and international boards including twelve years on the Executive Committee of the World Methodist Council.

His travels took him to many parts of the world where he made friendships as close as those at home. He received honorary degrees from a number of universities.

Music played a large part in his life as he loved to sing, lead congregational singing and entertain the family by playing favorite songs on the piano by ear. His wonderful sense of humor is remembered fondly.

He always felt led by God in a spiritual journey and lived his life supported by abiding faith. The 23rd Psalm held special meaning for him. He remained a humble and compassionate servant throughout his life, dedicating his efforts to bringing the church together in Christian love and service.

He was preceded in death by his wife of 70 years, Wilma Alice. He is survived by his daughters and sons-in-law, Wilmagene and Lewis Noonan of Leawood, Kan., and

Susan and Mark Parsons of Ashbourne, England; a daughter, Gretchen Frank Bea of Knoxville, Tenn.; and son and daughter-in-law, Thomas E. Frank and Gail O'Day of Atlanta. He also leaves grandchildren, Ann Cleaver Noonan, Amy Noonan Danforth, Alicia Noonan Snead, Elizabeth Beal Murphy, Ellen Beal Davies, Mary Gretchen Beal Neary and Andrew J. Parsons; and 14 great-grandchildren. He also leaves his special friend and companion, Margaret Reichert of Kansas City, Mo.

A memorial service was held Oct. 17 at Central UMC in Kansas City, Mo., where he was affiliated for 33 years. Burial followed in Pittsburg, Kan.

The family requests that in lieu of flowers, contributions be made to the Eugene and Wilma Frank Scholarship Funds either at St. Paul School of Theology, 5123 E. Truman Road, Kansas City, MO 64127, or Candler School of Theology, Development Office, 1531 Dickey Drive, Atlanta, GA 30322.

MONTICELLO

Thelma Fish Giessen, 96, a Methodist missionary and wife of a United Methodist pastor, died Sept. 29 in Monticello.

Born Nov. 19, 1912, in



Thelma Giessen

Waterproof, La., she was the daughter of the late George Dudley Fish and Jessie Guice Hunter Fish.

After living five years in Idaho, she attended school in Monticello and graduated with honors from Monticello High School in 1930. She received an L.I. degree in 1932 and an Artium Baccalaureus degree in 1934 in the first four-year class at Arkansas A&M (now the University of Arkansas at Monticello). She taught at Drew Central High School in Monticello from 1934 to 1935.

She attended Scarritt College and received a master of arts degree from George Peabody College for Teachers in Nashville, Tenn., in 1938. From 1938 to 1940, she served as a missionary to Japan

under the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (now the United Methodist Church).

She taught foods and nutrition at Hiroshima College for Women until she was forced to return to the United States during World War II. The following three years she worked under the National Youth Administration in a U.S. government program for disadvantaged girls in 21 counties of southern Arkansas.

On Aug. 11, 1942, she married Charles H. Giessen, a Methodist pastor, in the First Methodist Church in Monticello. She was a partner in ministry with him in the Little Rock and Louisiana Conferences of the United Methodist Church until his death in 1972.

During these years they brought up three children, and she taught in public elementary schools in several Louisiana communities.

Always loving children and seeking a challenge, she volunteered as a "cross-over" teacher when schools in Louisiana were being integrated. Her last eight years of teaching were in a pilot kindergarten program in a Louisiana public school. She retired in 1980 and returned to her hometown of Monticello where she continued active participation in church and community activities.

In addition to her parents, her husband, Charles H. Giessen, and two brothers, Hunter Fish and Dudley E. Fish, precede her in death.

Survivors include three children and their spouses, Helen G. Guenter and husband, Joe, of Monticello; C. Henry Giessen Jr. and wife, Cathy, of Overland Park, Kan.; and Paul D. Giessen and wife Ruth of Tulsa, Okla.

She is also survived by seven grandchildren, Laura Burson Fernandes of Manhattan Beach, Calif.; Alicia Burson Riding of Aliso Viejo, Calif.; Marlene Giessen of Overland Park, Kan.; Rachel Giessen Heyduck of Waco, Texas; and Frances Giessen, Charles Giessen and Mary Claire Giessen of Tulsa, Okla.; and three great-grandchildren, Natasha Riding, Devon Fernandes, and Hudson Fernandes.

Survivors also include two sisters, Mary Fish McCauley of

Sherwood and JoAnne Fish Robbins of Hampton.

A memorial service was held Oct. 5 at First United Methodist Church, Monticello, with William A. Eason, senior pastor, officiating. In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to First United Methodist Church in Monticello or Heifer Project International.

BEE BRANCH

JoAnn Kerr, 65, wife of ordained elder Ed Kerr, passed away Sept. 25 after a courageous battle with cancer. She was born April 11, 1944, in Little Rock.

She was a steadfast Christian



JoAnn Kerr

Greenbrier.

She was preceded in death by her parents, Isaac P. and Ila M. Sellars; brother, Lonnie McKnight and sister, Geneva Sullivan.

Kerr is loved and will be missed by family and many friends including husband, Ed Kerr; son, Marcus; daughter in law, Laura Kerr and grandson, Ethan Kerr; three brothers, Thomas "Bud" McKnight, Edward McKnight and Jimmy Sellars; one twin sister, Betty Grumbles; and other relatives and many friends.

Funeral services were held Sept. 27 at the Greenbrier First United Methodist Church, with John Farthing, senior pastor, officiating. Burial followed at Blackwell Cemetery, Bee Branch.

Pallbearers were Kyle Cotton, Kendal Cotton, Glenn Kerr, Eddie Ray Shuffield, Kevin Norman, Neal McKnight.

Honorary pallbearers were the members of the Bill Hartwick Sunday School Class. Memorials may be made to Greenbrier First United Methodist Church food pantry.

Additional information and an online guest book can be found on the Roller-McNutt Funeral Home Web site at www.rollerfuneralhomes.com.

• MAC-OVER Continued from Page 1A

before he arrives in that community to lead a nondenominational, evangelistic festival complete with sports and Christian rock bands.

The Henderson congregation was among more than 200 Central Arkansas churches that joined in the service effort. Many of the participating congregations offered literacy classes or cleaned up school playgrounds.

Henderson UMC began a monthly feeding program and distribution of hygiene products for the homeless under the downtown bridge.

But Cassat, the congregation's missions chairwoman, was looking for an additional, more distinctive project that would involve her entire church, which has a weekly attendance of about 250.

Another church member suggested she check out the Ronald McDonald House Charities of Arkansas, which provides respite for the families of hospitalized children in 25 dormitory-style rooms as well as the apartment for those in long-term care. Last year, the Arkansas house served 965 families.

The charity's staff told Cassat that all its rooms could use some refurbishing. But what really excited Cassat was the chance to completely upgrade the somewhat sterile-looking apartment.

"The moment I heard about it, my mind went 'Oh yeah, that's it,'" she said. "I love doing stuff like this. I always tease my husband when we see those shows on TV where they redo a home. I tell him, 'I could do that.'"

A place of tranquility

But Cassat also had a more a personal reason for wanting to help families caring for a sick child. She lost a son when he was 16. He went to sleep one night, she said, and did not wake up the next morning. He died when a blood clot burst in his brain.

"When I knew it involved children, I knew I had to be involved," she said. "The trials and tribulations of a parent losing a child or potentially losing child tugs at me heart."

Cassat, who work as a dental hygienist, committed herself over the next four months to working 20 or 30 hours a week on top of her full-time job to line up corporate sponsors to provide furniture, paint and other accessories for the renovation project.

In addition, the church sold yellow T-shirts bearing the Ronald



Kevin Lyon, senior pastor of Henderson UMC, leads his congregation in the "Blessing of the Home" in the United Methodist Book of Worship. To the far right is church volunteer Kathy McLeod. For the dedication, many church members wore yellow Ronald McDonald House T-shirts that the church sold as a fundraiser for the project.

Photo by Heather Hahn

McDonald House logo to raise money for the project. Churchgoers also began collecting tabs from aluminum cans as part of the Ronald McDonald House's ongoing "Pop Tab Pandemonium" fundraiser.

Altogether, the church raised about \$10,000 for the remodeling project. About 20 companies donated or discounted their services for the project. Home Depot provided a \$2,000 grant, and Kohl's likewise contributed \$1,000 toward the effort.

"I found the Ronald McDonald opened doors that a church alone could not have opened," Cassat said.

Without that corporate support, she said, the entire endeavor could easily have cost \$25,000 or more. And that's not even counting the volunteer labor church members provided.

Just about everyone in the congregations was involved in some way with the project, either in buying the fundraiser T-shirts or working on the apartment.

Jim Berman, a retiree, was there early each morning during the 10-day makeover and handled most of the painting.

Like Cassat and other volunteers, he was charmed by Iyana's enthusiasm with a paintbrush.

"When the little girl found out she could help paint this stuff," he said, "she just lit up."

Kathy McLeod volunteered nine out of the 10 days on the project.

"We were really trying to be the hands and feet of Christ," she said.

Like home

The result of the church's efforts was the dedication on Sept. 27 of cozy apartment that might warm the heart of even Ty Pennington, the host of ABC's *Extreme Makeover*.

The living room is now decorated in warm crimsons and golds. A new flat-screen TV is perched on a table to the side. The words "Hope," "Love," "Strength" and "Faith" that adorn one wall are among what people first see when they enter the apartment.

With the bar removed, the kitchen now has space for a kitchen table and chairs. New countertops glisten. Small accessories like fall wreaths enliven walls throughout the apartment. Pictures of dogs line the walls of the new chocolate-brown and sky-blue bedroom.

"I wanted to do something very homey and very calming," Cassat said, "and so when they come home from hospital they have a place to get some peace and relief from stress."

Kevin Lyon, senior pastor of Henderson UMC, said the project got people throughout the church excited.

"[On the Sunday of the dedication] we had a lot of folks in our congregation, just speckled throughout, wearing the yellow T-shirts," he said. "That showed the importance of the project to the

entire church."

Dozens of Henderson members and friends turned out for the consecration.

After "ooing" and "ahing" at the new decor, they bowed their heads in prayer for the families undergoing trying conditions who would make the place a temporary home.

"Gracious God," Lyon said. "I pray for families who over the next years come through these doors, that they might find healing for their spirits, that there would be laughter here and, Lord, love shared through these rooms."

Kelly Caldwell, the Ronald McDonald House's director of development, hopes Henderson UMC's accomplishment will encourage other churches to look for ways to get involved with her organization.

She said the charity often relies on churches to provide meals, help out on cleaning days, and provide toiletries and other supplies.

The Majors are delighted just to get the chance to settle into their new digs. The two weren't able to attend to church's consecration of the apartment because they were in Philadelphia, where Iyana was receiving additional treatments.

Back in Little Rock, Kiatonya Major, Iyana's mother, said her first response upon seeing the completed apartment was "It is cool!"

Her daughter was particularly delighted by the redesigned bedroom.

She said: "It's home sweet home."

To learn more about how to help Ronald McDonald House Charities of Arkansas, visit www.rmhlittlerock.org.



Saturday, January 9
9 am—3:30 pm
First United Methodist Church, El Dorado

Big Girl Big God challenges women to deepen their faith and grow up in Christ while reminding them how strong and awesome their God is. The Big Girl Big God conference promises to be a day that will strengthen their daily walk with Christ while reminding them that God is present in daily life.

Featured Guests



BABBIE MASON is synonymous with Christian music. She is the recipient of two Dove Awards and has performed at Women of Faith, Beth Moore and the National Women's Conferences. She is the host of a popular TV show, *Babbie's House*. www.babbie.com



JAN SILVIVIOUS is a counselor, Bible teacher and speaker. Her bottom line, humorous messages appeal to the young and old alike. Jan has been guest speaker for Women of Faith, Moody's Women's Conferences and numerous church conferences. www.jansilvius.com

Tickets are \$20 and include lunch and child-care. Tickets available by calling 870.826.1341 or online at www.fumceldorado.com.

Water and Spirit

Two United Methodist congregations in Little Rock recently received new members who chose to be baptized by full immersion.

The United Methodist Church is unusual among Christian denominations in allowing multiple modes of baptism — sprinkling, pouring and immersion. This level of flexibility follows in the tradition of John Wesley, who famously taught:

“In essentials — Unity

In non-essentials — Liberty

In all things — Charity.”

Immersion is less common than sprinkling. But both methods offer the essential components of baptism — water and the Holy Spirit.



Bridget Mosley joined Oak Forest UMC in Little Rock and was baptized on profession of faith on Oct. 11. She requested baptism by immersion and wanted it to be outside. So the church held an old-fashioned baptism service at the home of members Alda and Gerstle Ellis. After the baptism, congregants warmed up with hot cider and a bonfire and then enjoyed dinner on the grounds. Mosely is pictured at the start of the rite with Russ Breshears, senior pastor of Oak Forest UMC.

Photo courtesy of Oak Forest UMC in Little Rock



During Sunday morning worship on Oct. 25, Faith UMC in Little Rock celebrated the sacrament of baptism in two different forms. Sue Howe, the church's senior pastor, baptized 6-year-old Brett Hall, pictured at left, by total immersion — symbolizing the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Bart was sponsored by his parents, Melanie and Bart Hall. Melanie Hall made her profession of faith and was baptized by sprinkling, symbolizing the cleansing activity of the sacrament. Tyler Hansen, pictured at right, was also baptized by immersion. He made his profession of faith and afterwards along with his wife and stepdaughter became members.

Photo courtesy of Faith UMC in Little Rock

COMING UP

First UMC in Magnolia, 320 W. Main St., will have a Rethink Children Conference for children's ministers and child-care workers from 9 a.m. to 3:45 p.m. Nov. 7. Registration is at 8:30 a.m. Registration has been reduced to \$5. To register, call the church at (870) 234-4530.

Pulaski Heights UMC, 4823 Woodlawn Drive, Little Rock, will host a United Men of Faith breakfast at 7 a.m. Nov. 8. The ecumenical group seeks to support drug and substance-abuse treatment and prevention. To learn more, call Leo Hauser at (501) 352-1868.

The Marriage Enrichment Council at Pulaski Heights UMC will sponsor Second Sunday Supper Seminars from 5 to 7 p.m. Nov. 8. Childcare will be provided at church. Forthcoming topics include “Marriage Survivors Speak Out” and “Outlaws and In-Laws.” To reserve a seat, call the church at (501) 664-3600.

Cancer Friends Support Group will meet from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Nov. 11 at Pulaski Heights UMC. The speaker will be Stephanie Simonton-Atchley, a church member and founder of the Behavioral Medicine Division at Arkansas Cancer Research Center at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences. The cost is \$8.50 for lunch reservations made by Nov. 9. To reserve a seat, call the church at (501) 664-3600.

Shaunti Feldhahn, a bestselling author, will speak at “Girls Gotta Get Out Night,” an evening for women only, at 7 p.m. Nov. 12 at Fellowship Bible Church, 1401 Kirk Road, Little Rock.

Feldhahn is the author of *For Women Only: What You Need to Know About the Inner Lives of Men*, and co-author with her husband, Jeff, *For Men Only: A Straightforward Guide to the Inner Lives of Women*. Tickets cost \$10. Those who bring one or more canned goods for an area food pantry that evening will be eligible for a door prize. To order tickets, call Fellowship Bible Church at (501) 224-7171 or visit fellowshiponline.com/women.

The Arkansas Conference will have a Rethink Church Workshop from 9 a.m. to noon Nov. 14 at Corning UMC, 612 Pine St., Corning. Martha Taylor, director of communications and Rethink Church trainer, will lead the seminar. To register, e-mail mtaylor@arumc.org or call (501) 324-8005.

Arkansas Conference United Methodist Women will have their Annual Meeting from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Nov. 14 at First UMC, Russellville, 308 S. Commerce Ave. Harriet Jane Olson, deputy general secretary of the Women's Division of the General Board of Global Ministries, will speak. The cost is \$14. Registration deadline is Nov. 6. To learn more, call Barbara

Nichols at (479) 521-2082.

The North Central District fall youth rally will be at 2-7:30 p.m. Nov. 15 at Cabot UMC, 2003 S. Pine St. Registration will begin at 1:30 p.m. The cost is \$16 for the Youth Service Fund. The theme is “God Through the Ages.” To learn more, call Kim Barton at (501) 425-5420 or Fonda Kirkman at (501) 329-5141.

First UMC, Little Rock, Eighth and Center streets, will have a workshop titled “Praying in Color: Drawing a New Path to God” from 9 a.m. to noon Nov. 21, in the fellowship hall. Praying in Color developed by Sybil MacBeth is an active and meditative prayer practice for the word-weary and fidgety pray-er. The cost is \$25 and includes supplies and lunch. To learn more, visit the Web Site www.prayingincolor.com. To register, call Mary Jane Cole at (501) 372-2256.

Friendship UMC, 110 Caney Road, Arkadelphia, will celebrate 135 years of ministry with homecoming celebrations at 2 p.m. Nov. 21 and 9 a.m. Nov. 22. To learn more, call Robert Reid, the senior pastor, at (501) 337-1854.

Western Hills UMC, 4601 Western Hills Ave., Little Rock, will present the Apostles, a Southern gospel group, in concert at 6 p.m. Nov. 22. A free-will offering will be taken. To learn more, call Carlton

Finch at (501) 796-8817.

First UMC, Little Rock, Eighth and Center streets, will host a free Community Thanksgiving Soup Supper and Worship Service, on Nov. 24. Dinner will be served at 5:30 p.m. in the fellowship hall with the worship service beginning at 7 p.m. in the sanctuary. To learn more, call the church at (501) 372-2256.

The Servant Leadership School of Northwest Arkansas will offer a class on Holy Listening in a Circle of Trust on Dec. 3-5 at Camp Mitchell Retreat Center, 10 Camp Mitchell Road, Morrilton. During the retreat, participants will study the spiritual formation model described by Parker Palmer in *A Hidden Wholeness*. Retreat tuition is \$495 per person, payable by Nov. 15, and includes lodging (double-occupancy) and meals. Enrollment is limited to 25 participants. To learn more, visit www.stpaulsfay.org.

Quapaw Quarter UMC, 1601 S. Louisiana St., will have its Christmas in the Quarter tour of restored homes from 2 to 5 p.m. Dec. 6. The event includes music and Christmas snacks. Also local artists who rent studio space at the church will have their displayed at the church during the tour.

Tickets cost \$20 and can be purchased on the day of the tour at 1:30 p.m. To buy tickets, call the

church at (501) 375-1600.

First UMC, El Dorado, 201 S. Hill Ave., is taking reservations for “Big Girl, Big God” Women's Conference from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Jan. 9, 2010. The keynote presenters, Jan Silvius and Babbie Mason, are both nationally recognized.

Silvius has participated in the Women of Faith tour. Mason is a two-time Dove Award winner and has performed her music for three U.S. Presidents. Silvius and Mason will each lead a session, and Mason will wrap up the conference with a concert. Tickets are \$20 and include lunch and child care. Tickets are available online at www.fumceldorado.com or by calling the church at (870) 862-1341.

St. Paul UMC, 2223 Durwood Road, Little Rock, is selling a cookbook in honor of its centennial on March 7, 2010. The cost is \$20, or \$25 to have it shipped. It contains 765 recipes including submissions from Bishop Charles and Karen Crutchfield. To buy a cookbook, contact Karen Branton at centraldistrict@arumc.org or (501) 324-8022.

The deadline for the next edition of the Arkansas United Methodist is 5 p.m. Nov. 11. 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.

West District churches build Habitat house and relationships

HEATHER HAHN
Editor

FORT SMITH — Because of the United Methodist churches in the West District, Thanh Ngo and her three children expect for the first time to spend Christmas in a house of their own.

All 70 congregations in the district — comprising roughly 14,000 members in a seven-county area — joined together to sponsor Ngo's house through Habitat for Humanity.

Since last year, the churches have raised \$50,000 to build a Habitat for Humanity house in western Arkansas, and an additional \$5,000 to erect another Habitat house overseas.

The ecumenical Christian housing ministry operates in nearly 90 countries overseas, and the West District hasn't yet determined the location of its international build. The district office plans to select five nominations for the overseas location and then put the nominees up for an online vote by district churchgoers.

Meanwhile, volunteers from West District churches both large and small have taken turns each Saturday since Sept. 12 building the 1,280-square-foot, four-bedroom house Ngo and her children will call home.

The project is scheduled to be completed and the Ngos able to move in by sometime in December.

"What we were looking for was a way for all of the district churches to feel that connection and to work together toward a common goal," said Becky Neighbors, a veteran Habitat volunteer and administrative assistant for the West District office. "Each week, we have churches from



Above, members of St. Paul UMC in Fort Smith, Kibler UMC and Magazine UMC raise the wall of a Habitat for Humanity house in Fort Smith. Cavanaugh UMC in Fort Smith provided lunch that day. The churches of the West District joined together to raise money and build the Habitat for Humanity house for a mother and her three children in Fort Smith and raised additional funds to build a house overseas.

Photo by Becky Neighbors

all over the area come and work together."

Neighbors, the district's volunteer coordinator and chief fund-raiser for the project, has worked at the site almost every Saturday.

She said the project has helped build fellowship among members of very different United Methodist congregations.

She watched with delight one Saturday as a member of Faith United Methodist Church in Fort Smith and a member of the new Vietnamese congregation in Fort Smith worked closely together to complete most of the siding on the front of the house.

The Vietnamese church already has already asked Neighbors to work on a Habitat build again.

A job for everyone

On Oct. 17, members of Hays Chapel UMC and Hartman UMC, both near Clarksville, as well as the new Vietnamese mission in Van Buren, were working together to paint the house's interior.

"This is the first time I've done this, and with the great group we have, it has been awesome," said Regina Turner, the senior pastor of Hartman and Hays Chapel churches.

"Our congregations have mostly seniors in them, and this has been a wonderful opportunity. We don't do a lot of physical stuff."

Even with physical limitations, volunteers found ways to help with the project. Peggy King of Hartman UMC said because of a stroke, she couldn't do much heavy lifting but she gladly volunteered to stir paint. One of the things she liked about the project was that there was a way for just about anybody to help, she said.

Ngo, who attends a Vietnamese Baptist congregation in town, also got to connect more with members of the Vietnamese mission where her children take lessons in Vietnamese.

Ngo, who works for Tyson, said through a translator that she was deeply touched by the churches' construction efforts. She had immigrated to Fort Smith some 16 years ago, but this marked the first time she could realize the American dream of owning her own house.

Her children also were excited to be getting their own rooms.

Neighbors has arranged enough churches to cover every weekend until the scheduled completion of



This sign stands outside the construction site of the West District's Habitat house.

Photo by Heather Hahn

Ngo's house.

Not every district congregation has the ability participate in the actual construction, she said. Some have opted to provide lunch for the volunteers. And every church has given funds to make construction possible.

"The churches have been amazing in coming together to raise the money," Neighbors said. "Little-bitty churches have given sacrificially. You know they have when they send in \$300 or \$400 checks and there are 20 people in the church."

The project also has led to a renewed commitment to missions in some congregations, she said.

Paying it forward

Jay Poppe, executive director for Arkansas Valley Habitat for Humanity, said individual United Methodist churches and clusters of congregations have helped with the construction of five Habitat houses in western Arkansas. But, he said, it's

rare for an entire denominational jurisdiction to collaborate together to fund and build a home from start to finish.

Habitat for Humanity International — founded in 1976 by the late Millard Fuller and his wife, Linda — provides safe and clean houses at no profit. So far, the organization has constructed more than 300,000 houses.

"Every house we build takes someone out of a verified, bona fide poverty-housing situation into a place that's simple and decent that they can raise their families in," Poppe said.

But Habitat for Humanity is not a giveaway program. Homeowners must invest hundreds of hours of their own labor — "sweat equity" — in the construction of their Habitat house. For example, Ngo has spent hours clearing her lot of piles of thick brush.

Homeowners also must pay a down payment and monthly mortgage payments. Habitat then uses that money to pay for the materials of the next house.

Thus by completely paying for two houses, the West District is enabling at least four to be built.

Joe Fowler, a Hays Chapel UMC member, wore a broad grin and a lot of white paint after a morning of slathering the bathroom walls with a coat of primer. This was also his first time to work on a Habitat house.

"I'm so happy to do it," Fowler said. "The Lord's blessed me. We can't pay back the Lord, but we can pay it forward to the people we come into contact with."

To learn more about the work of Habitat for Humanity International, visit www.habitat.org.



Thanh Ngo takes a lunch break to have lunch with her three children, from left, Andy, 4; Tyree, 8; and Lillian, 7. Ngo and her children have been working with United Methodists to build the house they hope will be completed in time for them to move in by Christmas.

Photo by Becky Neighbors



Joe Fowler, a member of Hays Chapel UMC, paints the interior of the Habitat house.

Photo by Heather Hahn

PEOPLE OF FAITH

Charles Sigman, senior pastor of First UMC in Newport, recently published *Church, Science, and a Rabbit: An Amiable Conflict*, which is available for purchase at amazon.com and barnesandnoble.com.

Frank Jones, a retired United Methodist pastor in Conway, received a Governor's Award for the Arts in Hot Springs on Oct. 4. He was recognized for his work as a storyteller in schools and other venues over the years.

Now 80, he also tells stories to grownups one night each month at the Faulkner County Library to groups around 40.

Jones served as a pastor in the North Arkansas Conference for six years before returning to his native Missouri. He now offers 40-minute Bible lectures each

Sunday at First UMC in Conway.

Stephen Copley, an ordained United Methodist elder, was recently honored by the OMNI Center for Peace, Justice and Ecology as one of the group's Peace and Justice Heroes. This took place at their sixth annual Heroes Awards Banquet at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Fayetteville.

Copley is the director of Justice for Our Neighbors and chairman of the Arkansas Conference's Committee on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns.

Phil Sturdy, a senior in the master of divinity program at Phillips Theological Seminary in Tulsa, Okla., received the Wylie Preaching Award at the student

awards banquet held at the seminary.

From Magazine, Sturdy is the pastor of Magazine UMC, Moore's Chapel UMC and Waveland UMC.

This is a monetary award which recognizes an outstanding student preacher. Factors included in the decision making are the student's classroom sermons and peer evaluations.

Retired pastor **Bob Hager** has completed a documentary film project, *Caught in the Crossfire*, that examines the impact of 50 years of cultural changes on pastoral ministry. An accompanying Web site, www.clergyculture.com, includes video highlights, a blog and resources for clergy caught between a postmodern culture and a nostalgic church.



The Peace Ministry of Pulaski Heights UMC in Little Rock honored Unitarian Universalist Church of Little Rock and Mimi Dortch on Sept. 27 as the recipients of the third annual Bishop Kenneth Hicks Peace Awards. Hicks said the Unitarian Universalist congregation was recognized for its tradition of hospitality, welcoming other congregations and groups to use its building and holding public events to promote dialogue. Dortch, a member of Our Lady of Holy Souls Catholic Church in Little Rock, was a leader in Peace Links — a group founded by Betty Bumpers that advocated nuclear disarmament during the Cold War. She also is the longtime executive director of the Arkansas Interfaith Conference, which works with the state's religious leaders to coordinate disaster recovery. Pictured above, from left, is Bob Klein, minister of the Unitarian Universalist Church, Bishop Kenneth Hicks and Dortch.

Photo by Scharmell Roussel

SHOPPING OPPORTUNITIES

St. Luke UMC, 32 School St., Pine Bluff, will host its "Taste of Fall" from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Nov. 7. The United Methodist Women will prepare frozen main dish casseroles, vegetables, cornbread dressing, and fresh desserts, pickles and jellies. A lunch of various soups, cornbread, dessert, and drink will be served from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. for \$5 per person. The proceeds will go toward the mission projects of the United Methodist Women. To learn more, call the church at (870) 535-2291.

The United Methodist Women of Mayflower UMC, Miller Street and Arkansas 89 South, will hold a Fall Bazaar starting at 7 a.m. Nov. 7.

On sale will be fried pies, cakes, cookies, jellies and breads. Lunch will be served at 11 a.m. for a donation to UMW mission work. To learn more, call Valerie Hohenberger at (501) 470-3114.

First UMC, Little Rock, 8th and Center Streets, will hold its Alternative Christmas Market from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Nov. 8 and Nov. 15 in the fellowship hall. The Alternative Market offers gifts such as the United Methodist Committee on Relief's Equal Exchange coffee and shea butter from the Burkina Faso

orphanage.

Agencies represented will include: Arkansas Rice Depot, Heifer International, Humane Society of Pulaski County and numerous First UMC outreach programs. To learn more, call the church at (501) 372-2256.

The United Methodist Women of Beebe First UMC, 302 N. Main St., Beebe, will sponsor a Holiday Bazaar and Soup Luncheon from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. Nov. 14. Proceeds will benefit local, national, and global missions. To learn more, call the church at (501) 882-6427.

The United Methodist Women of Highland Valley UMC, 15524 Chenal Valley Parkway, Little Rock, will sponsor an Arts and Crafts Sale from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Nov. 14. Lunch will be on sale from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. To learn more, call the church at (501) 224-6047.

Cokesbury Little Rock, 715 Center St., will host its Christmas Open House from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Nov. 19 and 20, and from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Nov. 21. The store is usually closed on Saturday, so this is a special opening. Most merchandise will be 25 percent off. To learn more, call Yvonne

Armstrong at (501) 372-4901 or toll free at (877) 653-7113.

St. Paul UMC, 223 Durwood Road, Little Rock, will have an Alternative Christmas Market from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Nov. 21 and 9 a.m. to noon Nov. 22. Among the charities represented will be Arkansas Children's Hospital; Arkansas Rice Depot; Central Arkansas Rescue Effort for animals; Heifer International; Boy Scout Troop 30; St. Nick at St. Paul, which provides Christmas gifts for local families; and Shana Harrison's Chilean mission, La Crescendo.

The event also will include a silent auction by local artists with proceeds to benefit the church's Samaritan Fund, which provides emergency assistance with utility bills, groceries and rent. Fair Trade coffee also will be on sale. To learn more, call the church at (501) 666-9429.

Waller's Chapel UMC, 998 Ashley 14 N., Crossett, will have its Bazaar & Bake Sale from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Nov. 21. Breakfast and lunch will be available to buy along with homemade jelly, crafts, cookbooks, woodworks, ornaments, baked goods, etc. To learn more, call the church at (870) 519-8262.

First scouting specialist named in AR conference

Bill Byrd, a member of Pulaski Heights United Methodist Church in Little Rock, has been named the first scouting ministry specialist in the Arkansas Conference.

The conference had earlier been selected by the national United Methodist Scouting Office as a pilot area for testing the concept of recruiting volunteers to help congregations understand the importance of scouting as outreach.

Byrd is a 17-year veteran of scouting and charter organization representative for four scout units related to the Pulaski Heights UMC. He is also a member of the executive board of the Quapaw Boy Scout Area Council and the father of a Life Scout.

Byrd said his first goal is to recruit and train 15 additional volunteers to serve as scouting ministry specialists.

"I want to call attention to all Methodist scouting alumni that we need help," Byrd said. "We have a lot of churches that don't have a youth

group, and this is good way to start."

Volunteer specialists will provide neighboring churches with information about the Programs of Religious Activities with Youth, training opportunities, resources for Scout Sunday and various awards for young people and adults.

Scouting troops include Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and Venturing crews.

Volunteers for the position must be over 21 years old and provide proof of Youth Protection Training or take an online Sexual Ethics and Safe Sanctuaries course. Candidates who have experience in scouting must read Scouting Guidelines and submit a \$10 registration for a background test and printed materials.

The Office of Scouting Ministry is an arm of the General Commission on United Methodist Men.

To learn more about starting scouting troop at your church, contact Byrd at (501) 680-3409 or billbyrd1@yahoo.com.

To see more photos of church activities, visit www.arumc.org/news

TRANSFORMING THE WORLD



From left, Stacia and Joel DeWitt give blood at the Red Cross Blood Drive during the "Family Funanza" on Sept. 13 at Highland Valley UMC in Little Rock. The community event, which featured a number of charities, also raised money for the Humane Society of Pulaski County, Arkansas Women's Shelter and various missions of the church.

Photo courtesy of Highland Valley UMC



The Youth Group at Valley Springs UMC visited the Heifer Ranch in Perryville on Oct. 17. They presented a check to Heifer Ranch director, Michelle Dusek Izaguirre, for \$760, with which they hoped to purchase a heifer, a goat, bees, chickens and rabbits for the Heifer Project's work in underdeveloped nations. The young people of the church, which has 19 members, have worked for months to raise the money. Pictured from left at back are Tate Brown, Michelle Izaguirre, Colton Edwards, Jennifer Thompson and Ben Thompson. Pictured at front are Ty Potter, Chase Edwards, Brooklyn Potter, Morganne Savage, Tel Potter and Delanie Cox.

Photo courtesy of Valley Springs UMC



First UMC in Marmaduke had a "Cook-out Kick-off" earlier this year to start its Vacation Bible School "Miracle at Sea." The following day, the VBS program included crafts, music, games and Bible stories. The church displayed Jesus' boat, which children filled with school supplies for mission outreach from their offering of \$76. Pictured from left at the grills are Donnie Reynolds, Harry Gibson and Tommy Hill.

Photo courtesy of First UMC in Marmaduke



Mabel Harris Webb, honorary chairwoman of the Central Conference Pension Initiative fundraiser at First UMC in Little Rock, presided over a DVD showing on Sept. 28 that netted \$4,600 in total pledges from 13 donors, placing the church closer to its goal of \$10 per member. For a copy of a DVD about the needs in Asia, Africa and Central Europe, contact Don Woods, church administrator, at (501) 372-2256. Pictured above, from left, is Nnanta Uwadinecki; Michael Mattox, the church's senior pastor; Webb; and her husband Jim Webb, a retired pastor.

Photo courtesy of First UMC in Little Rock



At a meeting of United Methodist Women at First UMC in Forrest City, Mary Harrison Clark told the story of her grandmother's wedding dress. Mattie Mann wore the dress in 1919 as the first bride to walk the aisle of the present-day sanctuary when she married B. Frank King. Pictured are Clark and her mother, Alice King Harrison, who were also married in the sanctuary. The framed gown will hang in the bride's room.

Photo courtesy of Forrest City UMC



Sylvan Hills UMC in Sherwood and Trinity UMC in Little Rock were among the United Methodist congregations in the state that held pet blessings this fall. Pictured at left is Arlene Peach with her dog, Sarah. At right, is David Glaze, minister of music at Trinity UMC, and his dogs Shelby and Cocoa. Quapaw Quarter UMC and Pulaski Heights UMC in Little Rock, also had pet blessings, not pictured. The tradition of pet blessings began as a way to honor St. Francis of Assisi, the 13th century founder of the Franciscan Order who is remembered for ministry to the poor and his love of all God's creation, including four-legged friends. His feast day falls on Oct. 4 in the Catholic Church.

Photos courtesy of Sylvan Hills and Trinity United Methodist churches

Foundation hires CPA

Jennifer H. Abston, certified public accountant, recently was hired as Accountant for the United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas. She will work with the Chief Financial Officer on all accounting and financial matters.



Jennifer H. Abston

A magna cum laude graduate of the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville, she is a member of the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants and the Arkansas Society of Certified Public Accountants.

Abston was an accountant for Knapp, Craig & Co., P.A. in Little Rock for nine years, performing audits, preparing financial statements, preparing tax returns and performing administrative duties for profit-sharing plans. She was previously employed by L. Cotton Thomas & Company, ALLTEL Information Services, Inc., and Ernst & Young. She and her family live in Little Rock.

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• DISCIPLES *Continued from Page 1A*

Experian credit reporting agency, the U.S. Census and other groups to give churches a more detailed picture of their surrounding mission fields.

A pastor can look up a ZIP code or other geographical area on the program's Web site and get a 15-page report.

The document includes such details as residents' median household income, educational attainment, marital status, charitable giving practices and whether the neighborhood's level of religious involvement is below, above or about the same as the average in the state.

MissionInsite also works with Mosaic, a system that segments populations into lifestyle types.

"Mosaic is basically the same system with some tweaks that Rick Warren used to build up Saddleback Church," Gray said. "It's 35 pages on one demographic, down to where they shop, what music they listen to, what brands they buy. It is just unbelievable."

The conference formerly used Nielsen Claritas for its demographic research. But local churches didn't have access to it. For that reason, conference has opted to go with MissionInsite, whose chief executive officer Michael B. Regele is a veteran of the United Methodist Church's General Board of Global Ministries.

Gray stressed that demographics are only a tool in identifying possible disciples. The main goal, he said is congregational development, and that requires also closely examining the state of congregations.

He gave the example of a church that once opted to build a \$2.5 million daycare center because the community was full of families with young children.

But after the daycare was built, the church saw no growth in worship attendance. The daycare was full, but with children from outside the immediate area.

Gray visited the church to talk about the congregation's strategic plan. His research found that the surrounding community said the main entry point into the church was recreation — not child care. But the church didn't have a gym.

Congregants started to argue with Gray's findings, but then a young man in the church spoke up to defend Gray.

"He's exactly right," the young man said. "You didn't ask us. You assumed that's what we needed. But if you had asked us, we would have told you, we don't need child care.



Brock Patterson

Our moms are stay-at-home moms. ... But if we had a church gym, we'd bring our families there and we'd bring our friends too."

Brock Patterson, a United Methodist pastor in Little

Rock, is already trying to avoid the problems that befell the congregation and its daycare.

Patterson has been using the research on MissionInsite in preparation for the launch of his new congregation, FaithSpring Church, in Ferndale not far from the affluent neighborhoods of western Pulaski County. His congregation will begin to hold weekly worship services starting at 10:30 a.m. Nov. 8.

"It has proven useful to us because we understand our community better," he said. "The average age of our community was lower than we thought. The average age is 32.9. What was surprising it is they are part of highest income area by far."

Patterson and other church leaders have used that information to tailor their communications to the affluent young families. His goal is to start a church that blends the worship styles of the booming nondenominational megachurches across Arkansas with Wesleyan theology. The congregation has a presence on social-networking sites, car magnets, T-shirts and cards — but everything points to church's Web site at www.faithspringchurch.org.

Before getting started on worship, FaithSpring began offering Sunday afternoon and evening programs for children and youth at the beginning of the school year. A few weeks later, the church held its first preview worship with 200 adults and children in attendance. The following week, FaithSpring's Web site got 33,000 page views.

Patterson is confident he's using his limited resources wisely to spread the word about the new church.

"If you're trying to tell the whole world, nobody has that much money," Patterson said. "If you going to be a good steward, you got to put your money in the right place.

You've got to find what your target is."

To learn more about MissionInsite, contact Leon Gray at revleon2000@yahoo.com.

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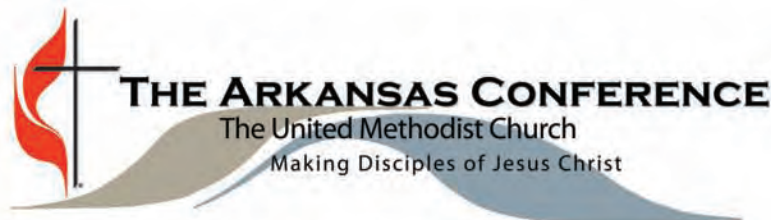
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Operation Christmas Child brings joy, hope | 4B



Live Webcast

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Section B

November 6, 2009



UMR PHOTO BY BILL FENTUM

The Rev. Eric Pridmore, a legally blind United Methodist pastor, serves Communion with his wife, the Rev. Lisa Pridmore, during an October meeting of disabled ministers at Perkins School of Theology.

Full participants

Pastors with disabilities share struggles, hopes in ministry

BY BILL FENTUM
Staff Writer

DALLAS—For the Rev. Kirk VanGilder, life in the deaf community and his call to ministry both began in a single moment of grace.

Born hard-of-hearing, he learned sign language when the condition progressed in his teen years. But he still struggled in his 20s to identify with deaf culture, in many ways its own world.

Then during a mission trip to a deaf school in Kenya, a hearing teacher pushed him aside, refusing to let him lead a class. Later he told his mission partners what had happened.

"I had experienced total rejection of myself as a deaf person, and I broke down in tears in front of the team," he recalls. "I tried to leave the room, but the other deaf people encircled me in

prayer. It was like a sacrament—every bit as powerful as my baptism—and I felt at home."

Mr. VanGilder then went to seminary and now serves as an ordained United Methodist elder in the Baltimore-Washington Conference. He shared his story during a meeting of the United Methodist Association of Ministers with Disabilities (UMAMD), Oct. 6-7 at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University.

UMAMD, an official caucus within the denomination, changed its name at the meeting from the Association of Physically Challenged Ministers.

Founded in 1990, the group supports disabled people in ordained or lay ministry, and advocates for them at all church levels.

The United Methodist Social Principles urge "the Church and society to recognize and receive the gifts of persons with disabilities, to enable them to be full participants in the life of the church."

Many people, though, experience the opposite.

The Rev. Bill Downing, an elder in

■ See 'Disabilities,'
page 3B

Church giving shows decline

BY MARY JACOBS
Staff Writer

American Christians aren't putting their money where their faith is, according to a new report from Illinois-based research firm empty tomb, inc.

The report, "State of Church Giving Through 2007: What Are Our Christian Billionaires Thinking—Or Are They?" examined trends in denominational giving. The most troubling trend, according to authors John and Sylvia Ronsvalle, is that Christians are giving less to the "least of these" and spending more on supporting their local churches.

While overall contributions to churches as a percentage of individual income increased from 2006 to 2007, giving for benevolences hit an all-time low in 2007. An average of just 14 percent of member contributions went to needs beyond the church, down from a high of 21 percent 40 years ago.

Benevolences includes causes outside of the local congregation's operations, such as missions and seminary support, in contrast with congregational finances such as salaries, operating budget and building costs.

"Churches are giving a smaller and smaller portion of contributions to causes beyond the local congregation," said Ms. Ronsvalle. "Church members are de-emphasizing the larger mission of the church."

Aside from a small uptick in 2005—due to giving related to the tsunami in Asia, Hurricane Katrina and an earthquake in Pakistan—the downward trend in benevolences has continued since 1968.

"If that continues to happen, how can the church really be the church?" Ms. Ronsvalle said.

The report did show some

■ See 'Giving,' page 2B

FAITH WATCH

Vatican opens doors to former Anglicans

The Vatican announced plans Oct. 20 to allow dissident Anglicans to join the Catholic Church while keeping many of their traditional forms of worship. New Catholic dioceses, set up in response to local demand, will be headed by former Anglican and Episcopal clergy who opposed their churches' stands on homosexuality or women priests. Married clergy in the dioceses will be eligible for ordination as Catholic priests but not as bishops, while unmarried clergy may be ordained as bishops. The Vatican will release more guidelines soon, according to Religion News Service.

9,000 petition U.N. on blasphemy law

A petition signed by over 9,000 people calling for an end to Pakistan's blasphemy laws—which impose the death penalty on anyone found desecrating the Quran—was delivered Oct. 14 to the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Courts in Pakistan have acquitted people accused of blasphemy in more than 100 cases. Some lawyers, however, have said that non-Muslims they defended, including Christians, had been killed while awaiting trial.

Sect leader Prophet dies of Alzheimer's

Elizabeth Clare Prophet, former spiritual leader of the Church Universal and Triumphant, died Oct. 15 at age 70. Prophet gained notoriety in the late 1980s when she predicted a nuclear attack by the Soviet Union, and thousands of followers built fallout shelters and stockpiled weapons at the church's Montana ranch. Prophet, who retired in 1999, had been under full-time care for Alzheimer's disease. The church declined in membership, but continues its teachings through the Summit Lighthouse, a non-profit based in Gardiner, Mont.

—Compiled by Bill Fentum

Reporter editor named Communicator of Year

BY MARY JACOBS
Staff Writer

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—The United Methodist Association of Communicators (UMAC) has named Robin Russell, Managing Editor of the *United Methodist Reporter*, as its 2009 Communicator of the Year.

The award was announced at a gala banquet on Thursday, Oct. 22, as part of UMAC's annual gathering, held in Nashville this year.

In selecting her for the award, UMAC cited Ms. Russell's "expertise in interpreting United Methodism to the world," according to Victoria Rebeck, vice president of UMAC and director of communications for the Minnesota Conference of the United Methodist Church.

UMAC also gave the *Reporter* top honors for best national newspaper and best blog.

Ms. Russell was nominated for her award by Shari Goodwin, chair of the board of directors of UMR Communications, the *Reporter's* parent company.

"Robin's thorough and balanced coverage of major events and issues relevant to the United Methodist Church has brought United Methodists around the country into greater understanding and honest dialogue with each other," said Ms. Goodwin, who is also director of communications at Boston Avenue United Methodist Church in Tulsa, Okla.

"Robin represents the excellence, professionalism and humility to which all church communicators should aspire," said Ms. Goodwin.

Before Ms. Russell became editor of the *United Methodist Reporter* in September 2005, she covered religion as a staff writer for the Longview (Texas) *News-Journal* and as a freelance writer for *The Dallas Morning News*. Her work has been recognized with writing awards from the Religion Newswriters Association, the Texas Headliners Foundation and the Texas



UNITED METHODIST NEWS SERVICE PHOTO BY MIKE DUBOSE

Reporter editor Robin Russell accepts the Communicator of the Year Award.

Associated Press Managing Editors.

Since coming to the *Reporter*, she has also earned national recognition from the Associated Church Press, the Religion Communicators Council and the United Methodist Association of Communicators.

"Robin has been instrumental in providing current, meaningful and insightful communications to our family of readers," said Robert Mathews, chief executive officer of UMR Communications Inc. "This honor is not only in recognition of her tireless contributions, but also her integrity and love for her readers and staff."

"Robin clearly sees herself as part of a fellowship of United Methodist journalists, always making herself available to assist other journalists," said Ms. Rebeck. "She is compassionate and fair, a true model for all of us."

UMR Communications is the parent company of the award-winning *United Methodist Reporter* newspaper, and has helped churches, church agencies and other mission institutions communicate their stories of ministry and service for more than 160 years.

■ GIVING Continued from page 1B

positive trends. Churchgoers gave 2.26 percent of their income to charity in 2007, considerably more than the 1.8 percent contributed by members of the general population.

However, the Ronsvalles, who attend First UMC in Champaign, Ill., say their report shows that United Methodists aren't immune to the downward trend in giving to benevolences.

As a percentage of income, benevolences in the United Methodist Church declined from 0.4 percent in 1969 to 0.28 percent in 2007, a 30 percent difference that is on par with decreases tallied in other denominations. (The report's calculation of benevolences does not include Connectional Clergy support, which covers district superintendents' and bishops' salaries, pastor pensions and benefits.)

Similarly, the United Methodist Church dedicated only 1.3 percent of total contributions to overseas missions, compared to an average of about 2 percent for the 34 denominations compared in the report.

"The denominations have not used their bully pulpit, so to speak, to call on people to do something great," said Ms. Ronsvalle. She cited the United Methodist Bishops' Initiative on Children and Poverty, announced with great fanfare in 1997 but quietly discontinued in 2004, as an example.

"You have this great vision, this rhetoric, but not the stick-to-itiveness to see it through and really get something done," she said.

That's a fair criticism, according to Bishop Thomas Bickerton, chairperson of the Global Health Initiative for the Council of Bishops. "It's safe to say that we tend to get onto something for a while and then move onto something else," he said. "We've got to stay on message if we're going to meet the challenges we've set."

The 2008 General Conference launched the Global Health Initia-

tive, with a goal of raising \$75 million to eliminate malaria by 2015. To date, \$7 million has been raised—putting the effort on target for 2009, according to Bishop Bickerton.

Interest remains high in the cause of fighting malaria, he added, and that makes him optimistic about reaching the goal.

"We have a very intentional 5-year game plan to raise the \$75 million," Bishop Bickerton said. A new campaign, Imagine No Malaria, is set for a public launch on April 25. Fundraising consultants have helped create a five-step plan to attract donations.

That kind of goal is doable, Ms. Ronsvalle said, but only if the denomination commits to a clear strategy for carrying it through. Churches do know how to run focused fundraising drives, she added—building campaigns being a prime example.

"When a local church has a building campaign, every week there's someone standing in front of the congregation reporting how much has been raised and reminding them of the deadline," she said. "But you don't see that follow-through with more important denominational efforts that could really make a difference in the world."

The report stated that foreign-born people living in the U.S. sent \$79 billion overseas in 2007—an average of about \$2,076 per person. If churches sent money overseas at the same rate, that would mean an additional \$314 billion for international needs.

The report also advocated the idea of "wholesale billionaires"—high capacity donors—helping to mobilize individual donors by matching their contributions.

"Here we are living in the largest economy the world has ever seen," Ms. Ronsvalle said. "Are we taking our calling seriously, or are we building institutions?"

mjacobs@umr.org

THE UNITED METHODIST REPORTER

www.umportal.org
news@umr.org

Bob Mathews, CEO

Robin Russell, Managing Editor

Bill Fentum, Staff Writer

Mary Jacobs, Staff Writer

Ken Lowery, Copy Editor

Cherrie Graham, Advertising Manager

Kristin Del Mul, Senior Designer

THE UNITED METHODIST REPORTER (USPS954-500) is published weekly by UMR Communications Inc., 1221 Profit Drive, Dallas, Texas 75247-3919. Periodicals postage paid at Dallas, Texas and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to THE UNITED METHODIST REPORTER, PO Box 660275, Dallas Texas 75266-0275.

THE UNITED METHODIST REPORTER has provided denominational news coverage since its beginning as the Texas Methodist newspaper in 1847. The Reporter has no official ties to the United Methodist General Conference or to any of the denomination's general boards or agencies. This newspaper aims to provide readers with a broad spectrum of information and viewpoints consistent with the diversity of Christians.

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Send Correspondence and Address Changes (include mailing label) To: P.O. Box 660275, Dallas, TX 75266-0275 Telephone: (214) 630-6495. Subscriptions are \$26 for 52 issues per year. Click on "subscriptions" at www.umportal.org, e-mail circulation@umr.org or send a check to UMR Communications, Attn: Circulation, 1221 Profit Dr., Dallas, TX 75247.



UMNS PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY MIKE DUBOSE

Churches are spending an increasingly smaller percentage of contributions to support causes outside of their congregations, according to a new report.

UM CONNECTIONS

Ethnic internship deadline nears

The deadline is Dec. 15 to apply for the 2010 Ethnic Young Adult (EYA) Summer Internship in Washington, D.C. Young adults, ages 18-22, with an interest in issues of public policy, social justice advocacy and social change are eligible to apply. Interns will work in social justice placements in the U.S. capital from May 30 to July 31, and will receive a stipend and transportation expenses. For information, call Neal Christie at (202) 488-5611.

UMC gets nod for advertising slogan

Which religious denomination has the best slogan? According to a vote of nonprofit professionals, it's the United Methodist Church. The denomination took home the 2009 Getting Attention Non-profit Tagline Award in the category of Religion & Spiritual Development for the slogan: "Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors." Other winners included "A Mind is a Terrible Thing to Waste," the 38-year-old slogan of the United Negro College Fund, and "Nothing Stops A Bullet Like A Job," for Los Angeles-based Homeboy Industries.

Archives to record Methodist history

A digital archive of Russian Methodist history is being created through a joint project of the Boston University School of Theology and the Russia United Methodist Theological Seminary in Moscow. The project was announced during a recent international academic conference on "Breaks and Links: Past, Present, and Future of Russian Methodism," sponsored by the Russian seminary, the United Methodist Church in Eurasia and the United Methodist General Board of Higher Education and Ministry.

—Compiled by Mary Jacobs

■ **DISABILITIES** Continued from page 1B

the Peninsula-Delaware Conference, led local churches for three decades before a serious auto accident forced him into disability leave in 2003. "Friends distanced themselves from me," Mr. Downing said at the meeting, "and I heard more 'poor Bill' than, 'You're OK, and you'll go far just the same.'"

Worse, he said, someone suggested that he must have sinned or "crossed lines with God," to be forced out of the pulpit so violently.

That's retributive justice theology, says the Rev. Bruce Birch, a former dean of Wesley Theological Seminary who led part of the UMAMD meeting. "The Book of Job tried to knock it down," he said, "but a lot of the friends of Job are still out there, preaching that the righteous prosper and the wicked perish."

Dr. Birch helped draft policies on disability adopted in 2008 by the Association of Theological Schools, an agency that accredits most seminaries in the U.S. and Canada. Under the new policies each seminary is urged to ensure physical access, welcome disabled students and faculty, and include disability concerns in its courses.

Many schools, according to Dr. Birch, need advice on how to take those steps. "I'd love it if people in our network would go to all 13 United Methodist seminaries and ask to see their disability policies," he said. "See if you can open a conversation."

Dr. Birch's daughter Becky, 29, was born with severe intellectual and developmental disabilities. Being her father "has been both challenging and immensely rewarding," he said in a sermon at Perkins Chapel, where UMAMD members led a worship service for students and faculty.

Early on, Dr. Birch recalled, a doctor told him to accept that Becky would "live her life as a flawed human being."

"I was shocked," he said. "I couldn't imagine that her very humanity was in question. Are people on a continuum from more human to less human? I think not."

Even some theologians, he added, measure worth according to ability. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) wrote in *Summa Theologica* that "only in a rational creature do you find a resemblance to God in the manner of an image. . . [O]ther things resemble him in the manner of a trace."

"This naturally leads to a hierarchy of intellect," Dr. Birch said, "that probably leaves my daughter as a flawed human being, and leaves the profoundly disabled often labeled as subhuman."

"I want to suggest," he said, "that the image of God has nothing to do with any set of abilities. Every human

has the created possibility of reflecting the goodness of God, with whatever gifts we possess."

The Rev. Eric Pridmore, who co-chairs the UMAMD, has lost most of his sight to a degenerative eye disease but leads Memorial United Methodist Church in Bolton, Miss., with his wife, the Rev. Lisa Pridmore. A Ph.D. candidate in sociology of religion at Drew University, he also teaches Old and New Testament classes at a community college.

Mr. Pridmore's disability and his busy schedule sometimes clash, he said at the meeting.

"Living with blindness takes a secondary role to doing what people expect of me," he said. "On one hand it's nice to have those responsibilities. But to deal with everything and still find a way for my spirit to sing, now and then becomes difficult."

It's easy for people with disabilities to begin feeling vulnerable and overwhelmed, qualities that no one looks for in a church leader. Perhaps, Dr. Birch noted, that calls for a new "theology of disability"—the idea that God, too, is vulnerable.

"It started in the Garden of Eden," he said, "when God was the first one to be wounded and rejected in a relationship." Later, in Exodus 3:7, God tells Moses: "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings. . . ."

Those should also be powerful words, Dr. Birch said, in a postmodern world faced with war, economic woes and the needs of an aging population. Who better to preach that God shares in human suffering, he suggested, than disabled clergy who draw strength from that promise?

In 2007, the Rev. Tom Hudspeth, director of deaf ministries at Lovers Lane UMC in Dallas, was struck with Guillain-Barré syndrome, an autoimmune disorder that paralyzed most of his body. He recovered after several months, but the outcome wasn't always certain.

"People were quick to pray for my healing, but slow to ask how I was actually doing," he told others at the meeting. "Why not ask what God was saying to me, in the midst of my frailty? We might learn something."

Dr. Hudspeth, who is hard-of-hearing, earned a D.Min. in deaf ministry at Wesley Seminary in 2002. Wesley has since dropped the program—not for lack of funding, but because it couldn't recruit enough students.

"I see an opportunity for us to be stewards of a vision," Dr. Hudspeth said, "where we encourage a sense that people with disabilities are needed in the church." He plans to teach a workshop on opportunities for clergy with



UMR PHOTO BY BILL FENTUM

The Rev. Al Herzog, a retired United Methodist pastor who lives with cerebral palsy, chairs the Committee on Disability Concerns in the East Ohio Conference.

disabilities during Exploration 2009, the denomination's conference for young people exploring a call to ministry. The annual event will be held Nov. 13-15 in Dallas.

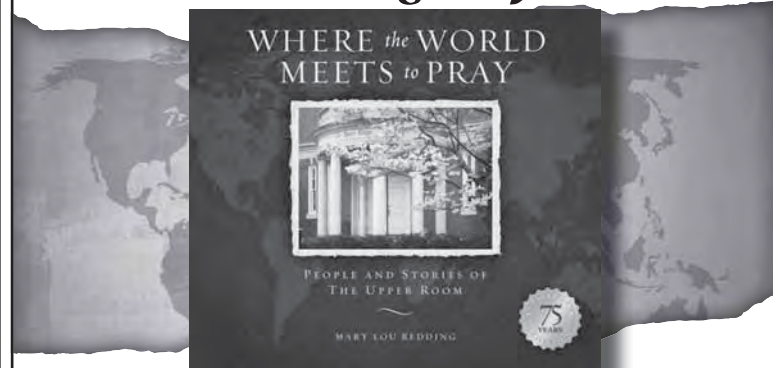
"Growing up with hearing loss, it was always something I tried to hide from the rest of the world," he said. "Then I realized God was calling the

deaf side of me and saying, 'I want to use all of you, Tom, not just the hearing side.'

"That's what this group can offer to the Christian community: God's call on people to do ministry that involves all of their abilities."

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A brighter Christmas

United Methodist sews dresses for the world's needy children

BY BILL FENTUM
Staff Writer

Dozens of young girls who live with little hope will know at least a moment of joy this Christmas. Doris Higgins has made sure of it.

The 91-year-old member of First United Methodist Church in Durango, Colo., sews 60 brightly colored dresses each year for Operation Christmas Child, a ministry of North Carolina-based non-profit Samaritan's Purse.

The dresses—as well as gifts donated by millions of other Christians worldwide—will be delivered in wrapped shoeboxes to children in countries devastated by war, poverty or natural disasters.

Last year, a total of 7.9 million boxes were collected, including 4.8 million in the U.S. Organizers say over

7,000 United Methodist churches participated.

Imagining smiles

Samaritan's Purse is headed by Franklin Graham, son of evangelist Billy Graham. The relief group works with church teams in more than 100 countries to distribute the boxes in impoverished neighborhoods, orphanages, children's hospitals and refugee camps.

In addition to her dresses, Ms. Higgins also stitches tote bags to help the children carry their school



PHOTOS COURTESY OF OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD

Children pack a gift box to send overseas for Operation Christmas Child.

supplies. She prays for them while she sews, and pins a hair ribbon into

the pocket of each dress for a signature touch.



A girl in Ecuador receives her gift from Operation Christmas Child.

How to participate

Shoebboxes packed with gift items must be dropped off at an Operation Christmas Child collection center the week before Thanksgiving, Nov. 16-23. For a list of centers, see www.samaritanaspurse.org/occ or call (800) 353-5949. Boxes may be mailed year-round to Samaritan's Purse/Operation Christmas Child, 801 Bamboo Rd., Boone, N.C. 28607.

Gift ideas

Gifts must be chosen for a specific sex and age range: 2-4, 5-9 or 10-14. Suggestions: small cars, balls, dolls, stuffed animals, yo-yos and jump ropes, pens, crayons, writing pads, toothbrushes and paste, combs, washcloths, mints, gum, T-shirts, socks, ball caps, sunglasses, hair clips, toy jewelry, watches and flashlights with extra batteries.

DO NOT SEND used, damaged or breakable items; war-related toys (guns, knives or military figures); chocolate or food; liquids or lotions; medications or vitamins; aerosol cans.

Packing

Identify each box with a boy or girl label, available at collection centers or by calling (800) 353-5949. Pack the items in a shoebox, which can be wrapped (lid separately), though not required. Place a rubber band around each box.

You may leave a note for the child and a photo of your family in an envelope (include your name and address) inside the box.

Samaritan's Purse asks a donation of \$7 per shoebox for shipping and project costs. Checks payable to Samaritan's Purse may be placed on top of gift items inside the boxes. Donations are also accepted online.

"I try to imagine the smiles on their faces when they open the boxes," she said. "Maybe they've never had anything as nice as that."

Ms. Higgins retired in 2004 after 36 years as a professional seamstress. But she still finds time to volunteer two days a week at the First UMC thrift store and sews hundreds of craft items for the annual church bazaar.

"I use materials I glean from the thrift shop, so I never need to buy very much," she said. The crafts fill the guest room of her house, and range from aprons and potholders to throw pillows and crib quilts.

Her son Tom Higgins, also a First UMC member, said his mother never goes anywhere without her sewing basket: "There's never an idle moment in her life."

Mr. Higgins oversees an Operation Christmas Child drop-off center at the church. Just before Thanksgiving, thousands of packed shoeboxes will pour in from area congregations, businesses and schools. Trucks will then deliver the boxes to a processing center in Denver for inspection and shipment.

The church collected 3,200 boxes in 2008, down a little from 2007. Mr. Higgins blames the economy, but ex-



ABOVE: Gifts from the United States are shipped from six distribution centers.

RIGHT: Doris Higgins, a member of First UMC in Durango, Colo., sewed 60 dresses and 25 tote bags this year for Operation Christmas Child.

'It's something that almost anyone can do, to reach a child living a world away.'

—Randy Riddle



pects things to turn around this year.

"We've set a goal of 4,000 boxes," he said, "and a lot churches are pitching in."

Parents and children often shop together for items to fill a box, Mr. Higgins said. Popular choices include stuffed animals, T-shirts, hard candy or toothbrushes.

"Young kids especially learn a little about how children live in other parts of the world—and how blessed we are here," he said.

Started in Wales

Operation Christmas Child (OCC) began as the brainchild of Dave and Jill Cooke of Wrexham, Wales. Motivated in October 1990 by seeing news footage of revolution-torn Romania, the couple collected and sent six truckloads of medical supplies and gifts in time for the holiday.

The Cookes sought Mr. Graham's

help in 1993 to expand the project into Bosnia. Since then, more than 61 million boxes have been distributed around the world.

The Greatest Gift of All, a booklet about the life of Christ that has been translated into 50 languages, is handed out with the gifts if recipients choose to accept it. "There is a real passion and a real sense of urgency for our volunteers and our staff to reach these children with the gospel," said Randy Riddle, OCC's national director. "That's our mission."

OCC asks a donation of \$7 per shoebox for shipping and project costs. Participants often enclose personal notes or family photos in their boxes, and kids can invite the children to become pen pals.

"That isn't always easy," Mr. Riddle said. "The child who receives the gift

may not have the means to post a letter, or they can't find anyone to send an e-mail to you."

Starting this year, however, anyone who donates the \$7 online at SamaritansPurse.org can print out a barcode label to attach to the shoebox. When it ships out, they will learn via e-mail the destination along with information about how OCC operates in that country.

Local Christians who know the safest routes oversee of the transportation of boxes on trucks, helicopters or even dog sleds. "We do whatever it takes to see that each gift is hand-delivered to a child," said Mr. Riddle.

"It doesn't take much to fill a shoebox. It's something almost anyone can do, to reach a child living a world away."

bfentum@umr.org



Operation Christmas Child distributes nearly 8 million gifts each year to children in impoverished regions of the world.

Let's look at effectiveness of the itineracy

BY ERIC VAN METER
Special Contributor

"Daddy, when will we move to our new house?"

At first, Jonathan's question didn't make sense to me.

"We just moved," I answered. "This is our new house."

Only a few months before, my current charge decided to sell their parsonage and offer me a housing allowance. My wife and I had chosen a

small, white house with a big backyard.

"No, Daddy," he said in his most patient voice. "I mean, when will we go to our new house?"

A sickening thought occurred to me. All the work we've done, my kid doesn't even like

the house we bought for him.

"Don't you like our home?" I asked, with some trepidation.

Jonathan looked down at the grass. "I like it a lot. But I know we won't get to keep it."

In a sense, Jonathan's concern is no different from millions of Americans. Our culture is not only mobile—it's restless. Families move. Houses come and go. That's life.

But when Jonathan speaks, I don't think about millions of Americans. I think about my son. And I realize with a rock in my stomach that, at age 3, he's already learned that a Methodist pastor's kid should not get too attached to people or places.

To love too much will be to hurt too deeply. Better to anticipate loss than to live too fully in any one spot.

That is the reality of the itineracy,

and not just for me and my family. The anxiety fostered by our practice of itineracy affects the entire United Methodist connection.

Before any punches get thrown my way, I'm not advocating a move toward a "call" system, in which congregations hire and fire pastors. I'm simply suggesting that our practice of itineracy needs to be considered for its current effectiveness, not for its place in our history.

While writing this column, I browsed a sampling of annual conference Web sites to find out if any approached the itineracy differently than my own. Granted, my poll was thoroughly unscientific. But without fail, every site tried to educate what it assumed to be an ignorant public by providing information about the theories of itineracy.

When we spend so much energy defending our practice, however, we can forget that we created it to serve us, not the other way around. The itineracy is merely a tool, and nothing more. And as any good carpenter will attest, even the right tool used in the wrong situation will wreck the project, and maybe even hurt someone.

Rather than defend the institution of itineracy, perhaps we should take time to imagine a better story.

Church planters do this as well as anyone I know. They enter a setting with the resources and encouragement of the conference, and often of a larger "mother" church. They start out not with board meetings and council decisions, but with coffee-shop visits and high school football games. They learn how to share life with their people before they try to preach to them.

It strikes me that Jesus did the same kind of patient pre-ministry learning about the people around him—for three decades, give or take.

I imagine an attitude toward ministry that models stable relationships in



PHOTO BY CLAUDE BOUCHER/WIKIMEDIA

For United Methodist pastors in the itinerant system, relocating is part of the ministry. Eric Van Meter says it's time to make the system more effective.

a world of frantic schedules and fanatic opinions. I imagine pastors who commit to knowing and loving people without yielding to the chosen isolation the threat of a move encourages. I imagine congregations who learn to solve their conflicts in healthy ways, who commit to honestly challenging their pastors without killing them with demands.

Shared ministry works best when both parties expect the relationship to last long enough to carry significant meaning. Shared life as a means of disciple-making requires an investment over the long term.

I'm speaking about more than longer tenures, although that will certainly come into consideration. But neither clergy nor their charges can throw blame onto episcopal leaders for the problem, nor expect them to provide the solution.

A positive adjustment to arbitrary itineracy has to begin among rank-and-file United Methodists willing to drop the grass-is-greener attitude toward leadership.

For congregations, this means rejecting a consumer approach to ministry. When the primary mission of the church is to provide services that will attract clientele, the pastor's role is simply to produce; if he fails, he gets replaced, like a broken cog or faulty valve.

A consumer church will constantly search for a more productive employee.

But Jesus never seemed obsessed with disciple production or religious market share. He made plenty of invitations and instructed his disciples to do the same. Still, at the end of the day, he cared more about the character of his followers than their assembly line numbers. And character is revealed through relationship—through loving and bringing out the best in one another, including our leaders.

On the clergy side, we need to remember why we became pastors to begin with. None of us (or at least very few of us) entered ministry in the United Methodist Church to build a career or satisfy an ego.

We became pastors because someone modeled God's love for us, and we wanted to make a life out of loving others in the name of Christ. A concern for "advancement" gets conditioned into us by an unhealthy clergy culture, or forced upon us by seminary debt. But it's not our first love.

If we United Methodists are to quiet our anxieties about leadership and move toward greater health, our first step is to relearn the art of loving one another in specific time and space.

We need some help from our bishops and cabinets, of course. They will have to be disciplined enough in their appointment-making to keep consumer churches and unhealthy pastors from controlling the appointment process.

Even as they look at the so-called big picture, they will have to understand that the forest they are charged with is only as healthy as the individual trees. Their best work is not to solve a problem through a series of moves, but to give their pastors and congregations time enough to grow together.

I cannot promise Jonathan that he will get to keep his house forever. Life situations change rapidly, and so do ministry situations. Graceful living requires a fair amount of agility.

What I can do—and have done—is to promise him that I will not uproot my family at the first offer of a pay raise. I will model for him a commitment to Christ that is lived out among people I will dare to truly love.

That may mean I lose something in salary or outward success. But I'm more than willing to lose that life for the sake of a fuller one.

Jesus said something like that, I think. I'll have to remember to look that up for Jonathan.

The Rev. Van Meter is director of the Wesley Foundation at Arkansas State University.

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Pruning for greater fruitfulness

BY BISHOP ROBERT SCHNASE
Special Contributor

Recently while teaching in a congregation, I recounted many of the Scripture verses about fruitfulness. Vines, branches, seedtime, harvest, soils, vineyards, trees, fruits—the Bible is replete with stories that lift high the notion that God expects us to use what we have received to make a positive difference in the world



Bishop Robert Schnase

around us. Fruitfulness points us toward the result, the impact and the outcome of our work for God's purposes and saves us from merely congratulating ourselves on our efforts, our hard work or our input. Fruitfulness reminds us to ask ourselves, "Do our ministries really change lives and transform the world?"

While I was quickly listing agricultural metaphors, someone from the audience shouted out, "Don't forget pruning!"

She was absolutely correct. The biblical stories of plants and seeds and growth and vines and branches are incomplete without the idea of pruning. How do we deal with ministries that have served their time and are no longer fruitful?

Peter Drucker, the organizational guru who focused much of his professional energy on churches and non-profits in the later years of his career, offers this as one of his top lessons for church leaders: Practice planned abandonment. Planned abandonment involves intentionally closing down work that no longer contributes to the mission.

According to Drucker, the purpose of any non-profit organization is the changed life. If we are doing work and offering ministries that are no longer shaping lives in significant ways, perhaps we should stop doing them. As we create new initiatives and nourish more productive ministries, a strategy of planned abandonment means we also allow some work to fade from view and cease to continue.

As we initiate new ministries, consider revamping worship services, create more effective mission projects and plan how to better reach people, are there also services, activities and outreach ministries that we need to reduce or close down? How do we redirect staff time, volunteer energy and financial resources toward the ministries that most help us fulfill our mission?

These are tough questions. It's hard to stop doing something that we've been doing for a long time, even when everyone questions its current usefulness.

One of the church members later told me he had never thought about planned abandonment in the church. In his business, however, they taught four key words for strategic planning: more, better, different, less. These words served as tools to guide their continual evaluation and priority planning. Their goal was to do more of what works very well; to do better at what serves acceptably well but can which could be improved; to do different by welcoming new ideas and initiatives; and to do less of what was not working.

These are different words to express the same idea: If it's not bearing fruit, stop doing it.

Before you accuse me of sounding too harsh, listen to what Jesus says on the subject: "Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Luke 3:9). Ouch!

Paul shares a similar notion in a gentler fashion when he talks about aspects of the spiritual life. He suggests that as we accept the new creation offered us in Christ, we starve the old nature and feed the new. As leaders of congregations, we implicitly make decisions every day that express value and direction. Our tasks include worship preparation, pastoral care, staff management, administration, small group teaching, mission and outreach, personal prayer, visitor follow-up, ecumenical involvements—and many more.

Are there adjustments we should make that help us focus more effectively on our mission? What's the one practice that, if we performed it with utmost consistency, effectiveness and intentionality would have the greatest positive effect on the ministry of our congregation? How can we give it more time and emphasis?

And what is an aspect of our ministry we give time to regularly that brings little positive effect and has no visible impact? Can we collaborate with others to plan a path forward that grants release from it? How do we apply our resources to greatest effect? This is a question of stewardship.

One pastor of a larger congregation decided to have one lunch each week with a prospective member. The personal contact with more than 40 people each year allowed him to know the visitors and to invite them to further involvement. This simple practice, repeated with consistency and effectiveness, changed his ministry.

Another pastor worked with her secretary to develop a weekly list of five people for the pastor to phone each Monday before she finished her day's work. These were members and visitors, and the calls had no purpose other than to check in, offer prayer, and listen. This consistent practice earned her a level of trust that allowed her to propose bold initiatives without unnecessary resistance.

What single practice, repeated consistently, would strengthen your ministry? And what can you prune to make that practice possible?

Missouri Bishop Schnase blogs at fivepractices.org.



PHOTO COURTESY THE KANSAS FOREST SERVICE

When thinking about how to develop fruitfulness, Bishop Schnase says we shouldn't neglect to prune out ineffective ministries that sap the life of the church.

REFLECTIONS

Focus on good news!

BY BISHOP WOODIE W. WHITE
UMR Columnist

"There's good news tonight!" That's the way a popular radio commentator began his nightly program when I was a boy.

While I was too young at the time to know the difference between good news and bad, I looked forward to hearing that promising phrase and distinctive voice. It seemed to lift the spirits of my parents, and I recall hearing them talk with other adults about the program. Even my little boy world seemed brighter.

Times have apparently changed. It appears to me that too many news commentators and analysts delight more in announcing bad news than good. Even when events being reported are, in fact, good or favorable, some reporters seem to give it a negative perspective or provide a possible negative consequence.

Good news seems undesirable. In fact, perhaps for some, good news is bad news!

It is true not just in the world of journalism, of course. There are individuals for whom good news seems an aversion. These core pessimists seem to delight in sharing and spreading news of a negative character.

I know a few people like that. It is predictable. Their greeting is always followed by some bad news. Whatever the other possibilities of the event or circumstances, they are certain to see only the negative aspects. Such people exhaust me!

There are even some in the church who have become perpetual bad news-bearers. They find a place in the congregation, conference and the general church. They fail to see any positive dimensions in church life or ministry. Every flaw in individuals, in programs or in strategy is magnified and made permanent.

What is troubling about such persons is their seeming to feed on bad news. It seems to nourish something within.

To be a bearer of good news is not to ignore or even minimize the

bad things that happen in the world and to people. We all know that poverty, prejudice, crime, violence, selfishness—the litany goes on—still exists. But these need not shape the character of individuals, national life or even the life of a congregation or denomination. Instead, they can indeed become that which drives it, to turn bad situations into good ones.

Perhaps there needs to be a little more balance in news reports. To be sure, it is important to be informed of the events that reveal flaws of leaders, nations and individuals. These must be addressed forcefully and effectively. Our desired end is the common good, freedom, justice and fairness for all. We must correct all that would dehumanize or seek to destroy our common humanity and desire for community.

But it is the good in people and the good of people that makes the world a better place. To overlook or minimize this good, as evidenced in deeds or works, is to forget who we are as a people and the children of a God. Not a bad God, but a good God!

In the midst of all the bad news, however, there is good. There are those who make war, yet there are those who work for peace. In a society too divided by class and color, there are many seeking common ground. In a nation where there is too much disparity between rich and poor, there are those striving to bridge the gap, so that none will be without the promises of nation and Creator.

And while too many youth seem to be caught in a cycle of crime and violence, most are not!

To tell the truth, one need not distort it! To see the bad in the world is not to be blind to the good. Indeed, those of us in the tradition of the Christian faith, call our message, the Good News! Centuries ago, it was concluded that what the world needs to hear is Good News, not bad! I suppose, that is the heart of the message of that old spiritual, "Ain't That Good News?"

Perhaps that old radio commentator was more right than he realized when he announced, "There's good news tonight!"

Retired Bishop White is the denomination's Endorsing Agent for Chaplain Ministries and bishop-in-residence at Candler School of Theology.

Methodists watch commissioning service on Web

BY LINDA BLOOM
United Methodist News Service

STAMFORD, Conn.—Shannon and David Goran use the Internet to advertise their campus ministry to students in the Ukraine.

So it seemed fitting that the young couple's formal commissioning as missionaries of the United Methodist Church could be viewed live as a Webcast.

"I think it's a good illustration of the global church in the 21st century," Mr. Goran said.

They were among the 40 people commissioned in an Oct. 13 service during the annual meeting of the United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) in Stamford, Conn.

For the first time, any United Methodist with computer access could watch that evening as one of the largest groups in recent years were blessed and sent out in service. Commissioned were eight international missionaries, 10 church and community workers, seven deaconesses, two home missionaries, six mission interns, two Hispanic/Latino Plan missionaries and five US-2s, young adults serving two-year terms in the United States.

"This is not a Board of Global Ministries moment, it is a churchwide mission moment," Bishop Joel Martínez, the board's interim top executive, said as he opened the commissioning service.

According to a report from the mission agency following the Webcast, 300 sites stayed with the link for the entire service, with a peak at 1,000



David and Shannon Goran are missionaries with the Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church, serving in L'viv, Ukraine.

sites. Viewers were identified as coming from the United States, Australia, Indonesia, Western Europe, the Caribbean and South America.

"A terrific idea to live stream the commissioning of UMC missionaries tonight," twittered Missy Buchanan, a writer from Texas. "People around the world sharing the experience!"

Sybil Dodson wrote on Facebook: "So enjoyed watching the commissioning of fellow deaconesses and home missionaries as well as the other missionaries. Makes one proud to be a United Methodist!"

Because of the time difference—the Ukraine is five hours ahead of the U.S. East Coast—the Gorans weren't sure that any of their students would be watching. Nor, Ms. Goran admitted, did the students totally understand the concept of com-



UNITED METHODIST NEWS SERVICE PHOTOS BY CASSANDRA M. ZAMPINI

Bishop Bruce Ough and Lois Dauway of the General Board of Global Ministries lay hands on David Goran as he is commissioned Oct. 13 as a missionary.

missioning. But, she added, "They're excited for us."

Student ministry

David Goran, 26, an Illinois native, and his wife, Shannon, 31, a Texan, have been working for the past year among the roughly 150,000 college students in L'viv, Ukraine. Because the schools there do not have campuses, they run their ministry from a fourth-floor apartment in a downtown building. They offer tea and cookies, free Internet access, a clean

bathroom and a place for students to hang out, do homework and take part in Bible studies.

Married for two and a half years, the couple met while pursuing mission studies at Asbury College. Ms. Goran, who was raised a United Methodist and has a master's degree in social work, decided to be a missionary in 2001 and interned in the L'viv program in 2003. Her husband, a Free Methodist, is combining a calling by God with "the desire to do something of true value."

Haewon (Cindy) Moon, 53, and Sungchul (Gary) Moon, 57, also felt the call and have prepared themselves through a number of short-term mission experiences. The Moons are members of Covenant United Methodist Church, a Korean-American congregation in Pomona, Calif.

For the past five months, the couple, who have three adult children, has attended language school in Thailand. When they finish their studies next spring, the Moons plan to open an orphanage for children with HIV/AIDS in Chonburi Province, about an hour south of Bangkok.

During the application process with GBGM, Mr. Moon, a chiropractor, and Ms. Moon, who has administrative experience with assisted living programs, immersed themselves in study about HIV/AIDS to prepare to establish the orphanage. "We'll start very small, with about four kids," he said.

They were both excited about the Webcast of the service, and hoped that

friends from Bangkok, Los Angeles and Texas would be watching. "I sent out e-mails to a lot of people I know," Mr. Moon said.

Privilege, responsibility

Bishop Bruce Ough, the GBGM's president, described mission service as both a "great privilege" and "solemn responsibility." He called on those being commissioned, who represented 23 U.S. conferences and one partner church in the Caribbean, to make a public pledge of their dedication to that service.

After each had been individually called forward and commissioned with a laying on of hands "to take the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ into all the world," the group stood in a long line across the ballroom, reciting the Wesley Covenant Prayer, which begins: "I am no longer my own, but Yours."

The Gorans and Moons will soon head back to their assignments. In the Ukraine, the Gorans already have seen some progress with bringing students to the faith. "I think we've been able to mobilize some students in leadership," said Mr. Goran, who is studying for ordination there through the United Methodist church.

The Moons expect to rely on connections with other missionaries, as well as assistance from local hospitals, doctors and the staff of similar orphanages, during the start-up process for their orphanage. "I'm so grateful for the ministry we'll be involved in," Ms. Moon said.



Bishop Joel Martínez and Bishop Bruce Ough commission Jennifer Battiest as a church and community worker.