

## SPECIAL ISSUE

Clergy Counseling Network provides therapists attuned to the stresses of ministry

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Parish nurses bring basic health care to churchgoers and the broader community

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Arkansas United Methodist churches hope to increase help for recovering addicts transitioning back into normal life

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Kaleidoscope Grief Center, now part of Methodist Family Health, consoles children and teens dealing with serious loss

### 8A

# Conference stepping up its wellness efforts

HEATHER HAHN  
Editor

For United Methodists who believe they haven't got a prayer of getting fit in 2010, the Arkansas Conference has a suggestion: Try adding more walking to your spiritual journey.

In early 2010, the conference's Holy Healthy Task Force will launch a walking program for all full-time clergy and their spouses as well as laity on the conference's insurance plan.

The Virgin HealthMiles program will provide participants with pedometers to track how many steps they take each day. Participants will then be able to upload their results onto a Web site, chart their progress and even compete as groups with other United Methodists across the state.

The program is part of Virgin Group, which also includes Virgin airlines, Virgin Megastores and other companies started by Richard Branson.

"What this program does is create accountability," said Bob Burton, the chair of the conference's Holy Healthy Task Force and co-senior pastor of Cherokee Village United Methodist Church.

"You're part of a group, and you're accountable to that group. They can look and see how many miles you've walked, and you can see how many miles they've

[See HOLY HEALTHY, page 6A]

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## A WORD ABOUT HEALTH from the Bishop



BY CHARLES CRUTCHFIELD

Dear Friends:

The debate has been extensive, occasionally thoughtful, often, sadly, filled with political posturing and demagoguery. And there has been forgetfulness.

While the proponents of all of the plans for health-care reform tout the number of folks their particular take on reform will cover, there will still be millions who are forgotten, who are somehow, for some reason, left outside the pale of access to good health care.

Personally, I do not want anyone denied access to good health care. And, frankly, I think I know what God would want. It is just not

given to me how to accomplish what I believe to be the right thing to do. However, there is something important I can do, something that is universal.

While the health-care debate rages, we are prone to forget that there is a spiritual dimension to health care.

The Christ we follow offers us "abundant life." The God we worship challenges us to "choose life."

There is evidence that worship attendance and prayer is good for you physically as well as spiritually. There have been studies that suggest that the recipient of prayer benefits from those prayers.

The most wonderful thing is that this activity does not take any additional infrastructure. It does not require a large bureaucracy or massive government intrusion. The churches and prayer groups and a place for kneeling at your bedside

already exist. You won't find any of this expressed in red ink on a spread sheet.

As an added attraction, it does not require being surrounded by debate too often characterized by vicious, unwarranted invective or questionable assertions of "the truth" or "the facts." Add to this that no one, absolutely no one, need be left out.

The spiritual dimension of health does have some requirements. It requires that we remember to be disciplined in praying for others. It requires that we move beyond self-absorption to welcome into our lives with gracious hospitality those who are wounded and hurt.

Spiritual health requires that we be disciplined, persistent and patient in our prayer, devotional and worship experience.

Spiritual health requires that we focus not on anger, but on

forgiveness and compassion. Anger, particularly of the self-indulgent, self-righteous kind, is destructive and deadly to the spirit, if not also to the body.

Spiritual health requires that we reject the option to live based on fear. Rather, we choose to live with confidence and faith in the Christ who frees us for abundant life.

Spiritual health requires us to remember that purpose in life is not about money and "things," but is found in my relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and in my relationship to others.

God's gift to us on Christmas is the One who reveals in his life the pathway to spiritual health. All we need to do is to live the most grace-filled, Christ-like life we can.

Faithfully,

*Charles M. Crutchfield*



John Miles II, the senior pastor of First UMC in Jonesboro, and his father, John Miles, a retired United Methodist elder, talk about their experiences in the ministry for Bob Hager's documentary *Caught in the Crossfire*. The United Methodist pastors note the different pressures they face in serving God's call.

Still shot by Patrick Shownes



## Ministers face new challenges to wellness

BOB HAGER

Special contributor

A clergy mentor and a person who guided me through a time of crisis, suffered from clinical depression.

In the midst of that struggle, he had the courage and vulnerability to share in worship his diagnosis and asked for the congregation's prayer and support.

A few saw this as a sign of strength, and they offered him and his family the support they needed. But many others became extremely critical of him, believing the pastor's words were an inappropriate topic for worship.

H.B. London and Neil B. Wiseman write in the introduction to their book, *Pastors at Risk*, "The church faces a perilous future when pastors find it so tough to survive emotionally and economically. Many flounder for meaning and mission as traditionally morality keeps buckling under brutal unrelenting assaults from secular society..."

"Some pastors consider their lives to be shadows of what they dreamed they would be because many old formulas for ministry no longer work."

Contrast this gloomy perspective with a recent survey conducted by the University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center that ranked clergy highest in job satisfaction and "general happiness."

Which is it?

I think it would be wrong to dismiss either one of these perspectives outright when trying to gain a better understanding of the state of clergy health and wellness today.

For the past four years, I have been involved in pre-production and



Bob Hager

production on a documentary film, *Caught in the Crossfire*, which examines the impact of 50 years of seismic cultural shifts on pastoral ministry.

I think by holding these two opposing

viewpoints in tension with each other, we can begin to see a picture of a group of people who genuinely feel a call to ministry and love for God, but who are struggling to live out that call in the midst of the theological, cultural and historical context of ministry in North America today.

In a study on clergy wellness, Fuller Theological Seminary has identified multiple risk factors faced by contemporary pastors.

- 80 percent believed that pastoral ministry negatively affected their families.

- 33 percent said that being in ministry was an outright hazard to their family.

- 70 percent say they have a lower self-esteem now than when they started out.

- 70 percent do not have someone consider a close friend.

- 40 percent say they have considered leaving their pastorates in the last three months.

Another indicator of deterioration of clergy wellness has been the increased cost of providing health care for pastors.

It has been my privilege for the past eight years to serve on the North Arkansas and then the Arkansas Conference Group Insurance committee.

Soaring medical costs in the last few years have severely reduced

program benefits as well as drastically increased premiums for the local church.

In my documentary interviews — which included current and past group insurance committee members as well as people from the medical field — several reasons came to the surface.

They include a national health-care crisis, the smallness of our group, the sedentary nature of ministry and the high stress level of pastors today.

The interviews suggested a correlation between high levels of stress and certain cardiovascular and diabetes-related diseases.

In response to this perceived crisis, Duke University has recently completed a survey of clergy from the North Carolina United Methodist Conference on clergy wellness.

In a 37-page introduction to that report, it states, "There is also a growing literature on stress and burnout among clergy. Pastors have reported difficulties with stress, feelings of inadequacy and frustration meeting ministry goals, and data indicate that there is an increase in burnout and dissatisfaction with ministry among clergy families."

There is much being done within our conference (such as the Holy Healthy Task Force) and in the general church to address this crisis (such as General Board of Pensions Center of Health).

Still, it will take a concerted effort on the part of clergy and laity of our church to improve clergy health and wellness.

*Bob Hager is a retired ordained elder in the Arkansas Conference. To learn more about his documentary Caught in the Crossfire, visit [www.clergyculture.com](http://www.clergyculture.com).*



## EDITOR'S CORNER

BY HEATHER HAHN

## Here's to your health

Health may seem an odd topic for the special issue published closest to Christmas. After all, the subject skips Noel and moves straight into New Year's resolution territory.

But by this time of December, many of the church Advent activities have already taken place and most of this paper's readers likely already know where they will worship on Christmas Eve.

So, the Arkansas Conference's communications staff decided instead to focus on the sense of renewal that typically follows our Christmas celebrations.

In this issue, you'll read about health ministries that address the mind and body as well as being good for the soul.

This issue is for those who are resolving to shed a few pounds in the New Year and those looking to do more to help the world's poor. It's for those seeking comfort and those hoping to comfort others.

These goals aren't that dissimilar. Now it's true the Bible says absolutely nothing about what our body mass index should be or what size clothes we should wear.

But the Bible has plenty to say about God's call to serve those in need. And when we're spiritually, emotionally and indeed physically fit, that's when we are best able to answer God's call. Sometimes we need to take care of ourselves before we are able to take care of others.

That's an insight I learned from Bob Sells, a member of Pulaski Heights United Methodist Church in

Little Rock.

In February 2007, Sells decided to join his church's Weight Watchers program after learning he was diabetic and had high blood pressure. He also started riding his stationary bike for 30 minutes six days a week.

I first spoke to Sells in January 2008 when I was working on a story for the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* about the Arkansas Conference's Holy Healthy initiative.

By then, Sells had lost 27 pounds and felt much better. His back pain had eased, he told me, and he could walk farther.

More importantly, he said, his improved health allowed him to serve as an usher at his church's Christmas Eve service for the first time in years. And he was looking forward to assembling emergency supplies at Sager Brown, the United Methodist Committee on Relief's depot in Baldwin, La.

After raking and bagging leaves this fall, my sore leg muscles were reminder enough that I certainly am not as physically fit, as I should be. And yet I am keenly aware that those very same muscles are a tremendous gift from God. My body — like all of God's creation — is something I have a responsibility to use wisely.

So like many other Americans, I plan to spend 2010 exercising more and eating better in hopes of being better equipped for mission and ministry.

In the mean time, I'd like to wish you a very merry Christmas and a happy, healthy New Year.



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# Pastors in need of pastoral care now can find help

HEATHER HAHN  
Editor

Pastors are supposed to be there for their parishioners when they deal with grief, anxiety or other emotional and spiritual crises. But what happens when a pastor needs pastoral care?

Rebecca M. Spooner has made it her mission to ensure that no pastors go without the emotional and spiritual support they need. An ordained Presbyterian pastor and licensed counselor, Spooner leads the Laurence E. Schmidt Center, which primarily provides counseling to clergy and their families.

Now in partnership with the Arkansas Conference, the center is launching the Clergy Counseling Network specifically for United Methodist elders, deacons and local pastors as well as their families. The program starts in January.

"Pastors who are in the business



Rebecca Spooner leads the Clergy Counseling Network to provide a safe and confidential place for United Methodist clergy and their families to deal with psychological and emotional issues.

Photo by Heather Hahn

of caring for the souls of others tend to think that the abundant-life train past them by," Spooner said. "But pastors are not exempt from Christ's promise. Our general purpose is to help them rediscover life as God

intended it to be. Because if they are living stressed out, worn out, burned out lives, they are not living as God intended."

Through the Clergy Counseling Network, United Methodist clergy will be able to choose among 22 therapists across the state. There are at least two therapists in each district, but pastors can cross district lines to see another therapist in the network. The list of licensed therapists in the program will be on the Arkansas Conference's Web site at [www.arumc.org](http://www.arumc.org).

The clients will pay their therapists a reduced rate of \$50 per session. At the end of the month, the therapists then let the Laurence Schmidt Center know how many sessions they provided under the United Methodist contract.

Participating therapists must maintain strict confidentiality,

including not revealing the names of the clients. Rebecca Spooner says she and the Arkansas Conference will only know how many sessions were held under the contract.

The need for such services is great, Spooner said.

Before opening its doors to clients in 2007, the Laurence Schmidt Center completed a needs assessment surveying more than 600 pastors in five denominations.

"According to our survey, we learned that clergy experience two and three times the prevalence rate of depression and anxiety than the general population," Spooner said. "Seventy-five percent of those surveyed said they knew they need counseling but they don't get it."

Clergy today often face stress because of impossibly high expectations of their congregations, she said.

"If clergy buy into these expectations," she said, "they are setting themselves up to fail."

Gary Teeter, who was licensed as a United Methodist local pastor in 1984, now operates Daily Bread Counseling. He is among the therapists who will serve in the network.

"I see it being very important from the perspective of seeing first hand the issues that clergy have to face," he said.

"The counselors involved in this ministry see it as a ministry. We are reducing our rates and are giving our time to make sure the clergy and their families have a place to do some healing."

To learn more about the Clergy Counseling Network, contact Rebecca Spooner at [rebeccaspooner@veralloyd.org](mailto:rebeccaspooner@veralloyd.org) or call (501) 664-7777.

## Making a list, checking it twice

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends the following checklists for health screenings. But consult your physician to learn what is best for you. The most important things you can do to stay healthy, the department says, is to get recommended screenings, be tobacco free, be physically active, eat a healthy diet, stay a healthy weight and take preventive medicines if you need them. To learn more, visit the department's Web site at [www.healthfinder.gov](http://www.healthfinder.gov).

### Screening Tests for Men: What You Need and When

Screening tests can find diseases early when they are easier to treat. Health experts from the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force have made recommendations, based on scientific evidence, about testing for the conditions below. Talk to your doctor about which ones apply to you and when and how often you should be tested.

- Obesity:** Have your body mass index (BMI) calculated to screen for obesity. (BMI is a measure of body fat based on height and weight.) You can also find your own BMI with the BMI calculator from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute at: <http://www.nhlbhsupport.com/bmi/>.
- High Cholesterol:** Have your cholesterol checked regularly starting at age 35. If you are younger than 35, talk to your doctor about whether to have your cholesterol checked if:
  - You have diabetes.
  - You have high blood pressure.
  - Heart disease runs in your family.
  - You smoke.
- High Blood Pressure:** Have your blood pressure checked at least every 2 years. High blood pressure is 140/90 or higher.
- Colorectal Cancer:** Have a test for colorectal cancer starting at age 50. Your doctor can help you decide which test is right for you. If you have a family history of colorectal cancer, you may need to be tested earlier.
- Diabetes:** Have a test for diabetes if you have high blood pressure or high cholesterol.

- Depression:** Your emotional health is as important as your physical health. If you have felt "down," sad, or hopeless over the last 2 weeks or have felt little interest or pleasure in doing things, you may be depressed. Talk to your doctor about being screened for depression.
- Sexually Transmitted Infections:** Talk to your doctor to see whether you should be tested for gonorrhea, syphilis, chlamydia, or other sexually transmitted infections.
- HIV:** Talk to your doctor about HIV screening if you:
  - Have had sex with men since 1975.
  - Have had unprotected sex with multiple partners.
  - Have used or now use injection drugs.
  - Exchange sex for money or drugs or have sex partners who do.
  - Have past or present sex partners who are HIV-infected, are bisexual, or use injection drugs.
  - Are being treated for sexually transmitted diseases.
  - Had a blood transfusion between 1978 and 1985.
- Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm.** If you are between the ages of 65 and 75 and have ever smoked (100 or more cigarettes during your lifetime), you need to be screened once for abdominal aortic aneurysm, which is an abnormally large or swollen blood vessel in your abdomen.

### Screening Tests for Women: What You Need and When

Screening tests can find diseases early when they are easier to treat. Health experts from the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force have made recommendations, based on scientific evidence, about testing for the conditions below. Talk to your doctor about which ones apply to you and when and how often you should be tested.

- Obesity:** Have your body mass index (BMI) calculated to screen for obesity. (BMI is a measure of body fat based on height and weight.) You can also find your own BMI with the BMI calculator from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute at: <http://www.nhlbhsupport.com/bmi/>.
- Breast Cancer:** Have a mammogram every 1 to 2 years starting at age 40.
- Cervical Cancer:** Have a Pap smear every 1 to 3 years if you:
  - Have ever been sexually active.
  - Are between the ages of 21 and 65.
- High Cholesterol:** Have your cholesterol checked regularly starting at age 45. If you are younger than 45, talk to your doctor about whether to have your cholesterol checked if:
  - You have diabetes or high blood pressure
  - Heart disease runs in your family.
  - You smoke.
- High Blood Pressure:** Have your blood pressure checked at least every 2 years. High blood pressure is 140/90 or higher.
- Colorectal Cancer:** Have a test for colorectal cancer starting at age 50. Your doctor can help you decide which test is right for you. If you have a family history of colorectal cancer, you may need to be tested earlier.

- Diabetes:** Have a test for diabetes if you have high blood pressure or high cholesterol.
- Depression:** Your emotional health is as important as your physical health. If you have felt "down," sad, or hopeless over the last 2 weeks or have felt little interest or pleasure in doing things, you may be depressed. Talk to your doctor about being screened for depression.
- Osteoporosis (Thinning of the Bones):** Have a bone density test beginning at age 65 to screen for osteoporosis. If you are between the ages of 60 and 64 and weigh 154 lbs. or less, talk to your doctor about being tested.
- Chlamydia and Other Sexually Transmitted Infections:** Have a test for chlamydia if you are 25 or younger and sexually active. If you are older, talk to your doctor about being tested. Also ask whether you should be tested for other sexually transmitted diseases.
- HIV:** Have a test to screen for HIV infection if you:
  - Have had unprotected sex with multiple partners.
  - Are pregnant.
  - Have used or now use injection drugs.
  - Exchange sex for money or drugs or have sex partners who do.
  - Have past or present sex partners who are HIV-infected, are bisexual, or use injection drugs.
  - Are being treated for sexually transmitted diseases.
  - Had a blood transfusion between 1978 and 1985.

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality

# Imagine no malaria

United Methodists expand on 'Nothing But Nets' to eradicate a disease that claims a life every 30 seconds

LINDA BLOOM  
*United Methodist News Service*

STAMFORD, Conn. — United Methodist Bishop Thomas Bickerton keeps a \$10 bill in his pocket so he can demonstrate how little money it takes to protect an African household from malaria.

But the roving ambassador for the denomination's involvement in the Nothing But Nets project, a joint effort with the United Nations Foundations and other groups, has a much larger goal than the millions of bed nets that have been sent to Africa.

Bickerton, who is chairman of the Global Health Initiative for the United Methodist Council of Bishops, seeks nothing less than the elimination of malaria — a treatable and preventable disease that still claims a life every 30 seconds — by 2015.

The reality, he told directors of the United Methodist Committee on Relief during their Oct. 13 meeting, is that it will take a far greater effort than Nothing But Nets to achieve that goal.

Although UMCOR has been among the United Methodist partners combating malaria, "we have to imagine something more," the bishop explained. "We have to imagine collaboration, cooperation and partnership on a scale we have not thought of before."

A new campaign, Imagine No Malaria, has been formed, with a public launch set for the next World Malaria Day — April 25, 2010.

## \$75 million fundraising goal

The church's Global Health Initiative has a \$75 million fundraising goal approved by the

2008 General Conference. Imagine No Malaria will expand grassroots programs like Nothing But Nets and develop more comprehensive efforts to promote prevention and education activities, strengthen health delivery systems and train health care workers to more effectively treat the disease.

The United Methodist Church was the first faith-based partner in Imagine No Malaria, but the Lutherans have joined the cause. The Lutheran Malaria Initiative, also with a \$75 million goal, is a shared effort among the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod and Lutheran World Relief.

Bickerton, who leads the Pittsburgh episcopal area, admits that the 2015 deadline — a date set to halt deaths from malaria is one of the millennium goals of the United Nations — "has been laughed at."

But in the midst of such doubts, "the power of God is at work. We have 160 years of success in this denomination when it comes to the mission of the church."

The United Methodist Church was approached to be a partner in this endeavor because of the health delivery system it already has in Africa, an aging but intact infrastructure that "has put us in place to be a player on the world scene," he said.

In fact, Bickerton added, a distinctly Methodist system — the connectional system that binds its churches together around the world — is serving as a model for the campaign.

"Malaria is being eliminated through connectionalism," he declared. "What the world is



Siriki Lacinan, a volunteer in the Nothing But Nets campaign, carries a child as he demonstrates the proper way to use an insecticide-treated net. The United Methodist Church is building on its Nothing But Nets efforts in hopes of eliminating malaria by 2015.

discovering is that we need each other to solve big problems."

The connection with the United Nations Foundation is "putting us in places where, as a church, we could not go on our own," Bickerton pointed out.

The church, for example, is both a donor to and recipient of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. The church has received a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and is working with International Federation of the Red Cross on distributing mosquito nets in Sierra Leone.

## 'Uniting of faith and work'

United Methodist Communications is leading the denomination's effort to meet the \$75 million goal by the end of 2012. "This effort is really a uniting of faith and work," said Gary Henderson,

staff executive.

An Imagine No Malaria pilot fundraising project in the Southwest Texas Conference, which will expand across the denomination on a regional basis, uses a five-step plan to attract donations.

"We go to churches and we ask them to set a goal — and then make it fun," explained Kevin Armshaw, a fundraising consultant. One of the models is the "Impact 100 Society," where individuals pledge gifts of \$1,000, \$5,000 and \$10,000.

Other church agencies are playing a role in the Global Health Initiative. The Board of Global Ministries is focusing on the delivery of health care-focused services to Africa through missionary work and UMCOR.

The Board of Higher Education and Ministry is educating Africans to help them acquire the skills to lift

themselves out of poverty and raising funds in the United States to aid the effort.

The Board of Church and Society is advocating for better education about diseases of poverty plaguing Africa and asking lawmakers to adopt policies to address the diseases.

Shannon Trilli, an executive with UMCOR Health, noted that a significant portion of the \$75 million goal will be invested back into United Methodists hospitals and health systems in Africa. Church leaders and local health boards "will tell us what they need, in their communities, to fight malaria."

Bickerton believes the goal is attainable.

"When people sense a need in the United Methodist Church," he said, "they have an overwhelming ability to respond."



de-treated mosquito net during a distribution in Dadiékro, Côte d'Ivoire. The United

A United Methodist News Service file photo by Mike Bubose



Therese Akichi of the United Methodist Church in Dabou, Côte d'Ivoire, welcomes participants to a dedication service for the distribution of 1.1 million insecticide treated mosquito nets through the Nothing But Nets campaign against malaria. The service was held at the Methodist Hospital of Dabou.

United Methodist News Service file photo by Mike DuBose

## To boost global health, just remember 3 for 1

DAVID FREEMAN  
Special Contributor

The numbers regarding global disease and poverty are overwhelming.

- More than 1 billion people live on less than \$1 per day and 2.7 billion people live on less than \$2 per day (Source: United Nations Millennium Project)
- Some 500 million people are infected with malaria each year and more than 1 million die from it. (Source: "Nothing But Nets" Campaign)
- There is 9 million new cases of tuberculosis each year and 1.7 million deaths annually. (Source: World Health Organization)
- Currently an estimated 30 million people live with AIDS worldwide.
- An estimated 2.1 million people die of AIDS each year with nearly three quarters of those occurring in Sub-Saharan Africa. (Source: UNAIDS)
- Tuberculosis is the leading AIDS-related killer and in some parts of Africa, 75 percent of people with HIV also have tuberculosis (Source: UN Millennium Project)
- Together, malaria, AIDS and tuberculosis account for 10 percent of global mortality.
- Developing countries account for 95 percent of the global AIDS prevalence and 98 percent of active tuberculosis infections (Source: World Health Organization)

The three major diseases of poverty: AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis also help perpetuate global poverty.

If you are constantly battling disease you have no ability or resources to earn money or save money and thus the cycle of poverty continues.

My friend Habakkuk, who lives in western Kenya, is both a subsistence farmer and raises cash crops.

However, in the past year he has spent several weeks in the hospital with malaria. Time in the hospital means money out of his pocket by missing work and paying hospital bills. It also means less time and physical ability he has to work his farm.

Add on top of that the fact that Habakkuk has taken in two children who have been orphaned by AIDS. With an annual income of about \$1,000 from farming, Habakkuk now has to stretch that over two more people. He also has



A woman waits beneath a tree marked with a red ribbon, an international symbol of AIDS awareness, at United Methodist-related Chicuque Rural Hospital in Mozambique.

UNMS file photo by Mike DuBose

five biological children, his mother, and wife all living on that income.

If these children's parents had survived, there would have been more people who could grow the food or work for income.

The problems caused by malaria, AIDS and tuberculosis can seem so daunting that one person's efforts to help can seem small and insignificant.

But consider these numbers:

- A \$10 bed net treated with insecticide from "Nothing But Nets" can reduce malaria transmissions by 90 percent.
- A \$20 donation can provide a full regiment of TB medication through the World Health Organization's "Stop TB Plan."
- The United Methodist Global AIDS Fund will provide more than \$8 million for research and prevention of HIV and AIDS worldwide.

When we come together the numbers aren't so overwhelming. The only numbers that matter are "Three for One." The Arkansas Conference is working to find three cures for one Kingdom.

The 3-for-1 Project brings churches and groups together for the work of finding cures and prevention of the three diseases of poverty: AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis.

A church that joins the 3-for-1 Project commits over the next three years to:

- give \$1 per member to the United Methodist Global AIDS Fund,
- purchase one net per every 10 members through the "Nothing But Nets Campaign."
- give \$1 per member to the World Health Organization's "Stop TB Plan."

It's a commitment of only \$1

per member over three years' time. It's a simple way to combat an overwhelming problem.

One person's effort to confront the overwhelming problems of disease and poverty may seem small and insignificant.

But when churches join together through the 3-for-1 Project, they make a major impact.

Launched at the 2009 Arkansas Annual Conference, the 3-for-1 Project is designed to be flexible. There is no set formula or structure for how churches can participate.

It works well for churches or groups of any size. Those participating are encouraged to use their own creativity to educate their members about the diseases of poverty and raise the funds in fun and engaging ways.

Some churches have chosen to have a special offering as part of worship. Others are planning a series of fundraising efforts.

In just six months, the project has already raised several thousands dollars for these three initiatives.

Many churches, Sunday School classes, small groups and various organizations around the state are working to eradicate disease and poverty one dollar at a time.

For example, Holiday Hills United Methodist Church, which has 140 members, already raised its three-year goal of \$420.

First UMC in Fort Smith — a large-membership church — has also already raised several thousand dollars.

The Northwest District set a goal for their churches to raise \$60,000 over the next three years. In October, this district held a benefit concert for 3-for-1 with Lawrence Hamilton and the Renaissance Choir from Philander Smith College that raised more than \$2,000.

Preventing and eradicating these diseases will stop the cycle of poverty they perpetuate as well. Combating the three diseases of poverty is the work of building the one Kingdom of God.

To learn more about how to get involved in the 3-for-1 Project, visit [fumcwired.com/3for1](http://fumcwired.com/3for1) or search for 3-for-1 Project on Facebook. Together, we can find three cures for one Kingdom.

David Freeman is executive pastor at First UMC in Springdale. He can be contacted at [david@fumcwired.com](mailto:david@fumcwired.com).

# Arkansas Conference offers course to prepare parish nurses

JANICE SUDBRINK  
Special contributor

I discovered my calling to parish nursing during Stephen Ministry training while in Waco, Texas. One night, one of the Stephen Ministry leaders brought me an article from her hometown newspaper in Illinois about a woman who served her congregation as a parish nurse.

At the time I was working in an emergency room, but on that day God sparked my interest. I realized that I could use my skills as a registered nurse to serve the church.

Today, I am a parish nurse at First United Methodist Church in Fort Smith, directing the congregation's health ministries. I also am a member of the Arkansas Conference's Holy Healthy Task Force.

In July with the sponsorship of Methodist Le Bonheur Healthcare in Memphis and the Arkansas Conference, I attended the Parish Nurse Instructor Course at the International Parish Nurse Resource Center in St. Louis, Mo.

As a result of this training, I will lead the conference's first Basic Preparation Parish Nurse



Janice Sudbrink

Certification Course for registered nurses who feel a similar call to use their medical skills on behalf of the church. The course, sponsored by the conference's Holy Healthy Task Force, will be March 10-13, 2010, at Mount Eagle Retreat Center near Clinton.

The course costs \$50 and includes room, meals and instruction materials. The class size is limited to 15.

With the offering of this basic preparation course, the Arkansas Conference will have parish nurses who can further minister to the whole person in our churches and in our communities.

Our goal is to follow the example of Christ, who in His earthly ministry addressed the whole person by caring for people spiritually, mentally, physically and emotionally.

The term "parish" has its origin

from a root word that means "to walk beside." The parish nurse assists in the development of church health ministries and "walks beside" the members to empower each to take ownership of their personal health and achieve the optimal level possible.

During our 2009 Annual Conference, more than 50 congregations were awarded Holy Healthy UMC awards for faithfully initiating and offering health ministries in their churches.

By offering these ministries, we are "Rethinking Church." By having health ministries in our churches, we are "doing church."

A health ministry can be as simple as offering blood pressure and/or diabetes screenings on Sunday mornings.

It can be helping people understand their medications, offering exercise classes, hosting Biblically based weight-loss programs, hosting flu-shot clinics and visiting the homebound or hospitalized.

Health ministries in our churches can be initiated by anyone



Nurses at First UMC in Fort Smith worked for five days to provide flu shots to church members and the broader community. They administered more than 300 shots at \$15 each. Pictured is nurse administering a shot at the church.

Photo courtesy of Janice Sudbrink

who has the desire to help their congregations and communities to lead healthy lifestyles. Parish nurses will add yet another dimension to the Arkansas Conference Health initiative of ministering to the whole person.

Through parish nursing, I answered God's call in ministry to the church. There are registered nurses in many of our congregations who probably already play a role in helping people in their churches

By offering the Basic Preparation Parish Nurse Course, the Arkansas

Conference hopes that nurses will answer God's call to this unique ministry.

Janice Sudbrink is a registered nurse and ordained deacon. Registration for the basic preparation course is open now. To register, visit [www.mounteagle.org](http://www.mounteagle.org) and click on events.

To learn more about parish nursing, visit the International Parish Nurse Resource Center Web site at [www.parishnurses.org](http://www.parishnurses.org).

## HOLY HEALTHY Continued from Page 1A

walked. And you don't want to let your group down."

Burton envisions that participants might compete with each other by district or by smaller groups.

The program encourages previously inactive people to walk about 10,000 steps a day. Up to \$300 from Virgin HealthMiles is also available for those who achieve certain goals.

The conference plans to use January and February to raise awareness and enroll people in the program. The official launch date is March 1.

Ultimately, conference leaders hope other Arkansas United Methodists will be able to join in. But for now, the program is largely limited to clergy and their families.

The hope is that the program will not only help pastors get in better shape but also help keep the conference's healthcare costs in check.

"What we find is pastors are very stressed and very unhealthy," Burton said.

A number of studies have found that while overall mortality rates are much lower for clergy than their non-clergy peers, pastors have long



From left, Charles Murry, senior pastor of First UMC in Conway, and Chester Jones, South Central District superintendent, walk in the Holy Healthy 5K during the 2009 Annual Conference.

File photo by Heather Hahn

been more likely to die of coronary disease than those in the pews.

Conditions such as hypertension and diabetes have grown only more prevalent as pastors have become more sedentary and the ranks of clergy have grown older.

"In Arkansas, we're even worse," Burton said. "We rank in the bottom 10 of all the health indicators."

The ministers' stress and deteriorating health is reflected in rising insurance claims, Burton said.

To help cover the costs, Arkansas United Methodist pastors will face a 19 percent increase in their health insurance premiums in 2010.

But the Mississippi Conference has seen good results using a similar walking program. From 2007 to 2008, the conference saved \$158,364 for 51 participants while the costs for 769 non-participants increased \$215,855.

The United Methodist Church's General Board of Pensions and Health Benefits adopted Virgin HealthMiles in some conferences earlier this year.

For each full-time clergy member who participates, the General Board will pay half of \$2.84 Virgin HealthMiles charges per month.

The conference insurance

wellness benefits as well as donations to the conference's Holy Healthy funds will pay the other program expenses, said Roy Smith, the conference's director of ministries and assistant to the bishop.

One of the program's advocates is Karen Crutchfield, who worked with the New Mexico Conference Board of Pensions for 19 years and is now a director on the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits.

"Obviously being healthy means you live longer, you are more effective, you have more stamina," Crutchfield, who is also Bishop Charles Crutchfield's wife.

"I find there is a direct relation to how you do ministry. ... I see clergy all the time. I know those who choose intentional about their wellness, they tell us that they have more energy for their ministry and they don't get as tired."

Chaplain John Wilcher, the director of clergy and conference ministries at Methodist LeBonheur Healthcare in Memphis, has participated in a similar walking program for the past two years as part of a pilot program at his hospital.

He now exercises more regularly, he says, because the pedometer doesn't lie.

"There are days when I think I have done a great deal of walking in the hospital and I look down, and it's like 3,800 steps," said Wilcher, an Arkansas Conference member.

"Then there are days when you think, 'I really didn't do much today. I got to go home and walk.' Then I look down, and it's like 8,300 steps. It keeps a much better record than my internal monitor."

Along with an improved diet, Wilcher says the program has helped him lose more than 30 pounds over the past two years.

He clips the pedometer to his belt when he gets dressed each morning and takes it off when he gets ready for bed. An internal clock lets the pedometer know when a new day has begun.

Burton says, like a lot of Americans, he has long struggled with his weight. Four times in his life, he has lost 30 pounds or more only to regain it all back. But he expects that will change with the new walking program.

"The thing I think that will change my life more than anything else is being part of a group and the shared bond that goes on," he said. "All of us will be working toward a common purpose."

# Ministry starting to support those recovering from substance abuse

HEATHER HAHN  
Editor

After four convictions for driving while intoxicated, Jack Fryer Jr. found himself in a cubicle-sized prison cell in Little Rock with nothing but a Gideon Bible and tube of toothpaste. That's where, he said, Christ found him.

"I've always been in the church, and there's never been a time that I doubted my faith in God," Fryer said. "I just didn't know what the relationship was. I thought God and I were partners. All my prayers were foxhole prayers. I didn't know the full life."

That revelation, he said, was the beginning of his recovery from substance abuse.

Still, once released from the Arkansas Department of Community Correction, the prospect of keeping clean and keeping the faith seemed daunting. Fryer credits the six months he spent in a transition center with helping him to break the cycle of addiction.

Three years later, Fryer — a lifelong United Methodist — is now hoping to get more United Methodists involved in supporting the work of similar transition centers across the state.

Many congregations already host Alcoholics Anonymous meetings and other addiction-related support groups in their buildings.

Fryer has launched Addiction Treatment and Transition Support Ministries in hopes of building coalitions of churches that want to expand their help to those still on the road to recovery (many of whom are just coming out of prison).

The Arkansas Conference has provided \$1,000 seed money to help start Fryer's ministry get started. Likewise, Fryer's home congregation, Pulaski Heights United Methodist



The Sugarloaf Center just east of Heber Springs is a licensed transition house that provides a waystation for people on the road to addiction recovery. First UMC in Heber Springs is leading an effort to provide community support for the nonprofit that now houses 15 people recently released from incarceration.

Photo by Martha Taylor

Church in Little Rock has also contributed \$1,000.

Addiction treatment centers typically require 30 days of intensive, full-time rehabilitation.

Transition centers offer after-care, typically lasting three to 18 months. They provide a chemical-free, communal living environment for those not ready to avoid temptations of their old life. And, Fryer says, that's just about everybody.

But there's very little state funding for such centers. Instead, many rely on donations as well as fees from clients.

Fryer currently is working with First UMC in Heber Springs to provide support for Sugarloaf Center, a state-licensed transition house just east of town.

The 3-year-old center offers a refuge for up to 35 clients, most just released from the Cleburne County jail or the Arkansas Department of Community Correction.

For \$175 a week, clients receive

lodging and three meals a day. They must perform household chores and participate in the center's 12-step recovery program. The center also offers training basic life skills like how to budget their money or go on a job interview.

The clients are able to get full-time work, pocket their earnings and build up savings while adjusting back to life in a chemical-free world.

The center will even provide free bunks or significantly discounted rates for those searching for employment. At present, the center houses 15 clients, none of whom are paying the full cost of lodging.

Probation and Parole Officer Marilyn Mayfield, who oversees many of the center's clients, said Sugarloaf "fills a void" for people until they can live independently.

Kelly Hampton, the center's co-founder, formerly served as assistant to the warden at the Community Correction Department's Little Rock facility and as a probation and parole officer.

She said she and her fellow co-founder Becky Milligan, another parole officer, saw all the problems these people have when they get out of prison.

Some transition facilities, she said, claim the bulk of their clients' paychecks, leaving them with almost no resources to begin a new life.

"It's just a cycle," Hampton said. "They get out. No one is there to help them. People re-offend because they can't support themselves or their families. Becky and I started this because we saw a need."

But with reductions in state funding, the center must increasingly rely on donations.

Hampton said one big need is

## Rehab part of LR church's mission

Theresa Hoover UMC in Little Rock has long regarded caring for recovering drug addicts and alcoholics part of its mission.

William Robinson, the church's founding pastor, started the Hoover Treatment Center 17 years ago after three young men were killed a few blocks from the church in a drug deal gone bad.

"We decided we had to do something," Robinson said. "We wanted to be in a more preventive role. ... Plus, we already had a homeless shelter, and many of the people who were homeless also had an addiction."

The state-licensed center, which operates as part of Robinson's faith-based nonprofit Black Community Developers, offers a 30-day residential, intensive treatment program for more than 40 people with substance abuse problems.

Black Community Developers also has set up transitional "chemical-free" housing in five formerly vacant buildings near the church. For a modest rental fee, up to 24 spaces are available for individuals who

have found employment.

Those in transitional housing can stay indefinitely, provided they stay sober and work toward moving out on their own.

Residents receive financial counseling to help them move into their own homes. About 70 percent of residents achieve this goal.

The center also provides out-patient services. Black Community Developers has built and now leases homes to former addicts.

Altogether, the center now serves about 200 Little Rock residents each year. They include people whom judges have sent to treatment as an alternative to incarceration as well as those recently released from behind bars.

"Addiction does not discriminate," Robinson said. "We have people who come from upper-class families down to the lowest at the bottom. If I understand the teachings of Jesus right, He accepted all of them."

To learn more about Black Community Developers, visit [www.bcdinc.org](http://www.bcdinc.org).

for men's undergarments and socks.

"These guys have nothing when they come out," she said. "They literally have on a pair of paper underwear and whatever they can find in the prison lost and found."

For the past two months, First UMC in Heber Springs, with a weekly attendance of about 600, has provided the home with much-needed groceries and clothes and taken care of some of the facility's utility bills.

Two of Sugarloaf's clients have come to the church to worship on Sunday morning, said Tommy Toombs, First UMC's senior pastor.

"This congregation welcomed them," Toombs said. "People shook hands with them and invited them to Sunday School. It was truly, truly the church."

But the center has more needs than one congregation can provide. So Toombs has brought the center's work to the attention of the ministerial alliance. St. Francis Episcopal Church in Heber Springs has already started offering help where they can.

Fryer has plans to recruit other area churches to join the United Methodists in supporting Sugarloaf

Center. He hopes the interdenominational effort will serve as a model for similar community coalitions around the state.

To learn more about the Addiction Treatment and Transition Support Ministries, contact Jack Fryer Jr., at (501) 280-3785 or [jtfryer@att.net](mailto:jtfryer@att.net). To offer financial support and find a needs list for the Sugarloaf Center, visit the Arkansas Conference's Web site at [www.arumc.org](http://www.arumc.org)



David Isaacs, a resident at the Sugarloaf Center, washes dishes after lunch. As part of their keep, residents take turns doing household chores.

Photo by Martha Taylor



Jack Fryer Jr., at left, listens as Kimball Murphy, Sugarloaf Center staff member and Kelly Hampton, the center's co-founder at right, discuss the center's needs.

Photo by Martha Taylor

# A blessing for those who mourn

## Kaleidoscope Grief Center offers comfort to children

JANE DENNIS  
*Special to the AUM*

April Leslie's life came crashing down around her on Nov. 2, 2007. That's the day her 33-year-old husband, Clark, a conductor for a railway company, died suddenly and unexpectedly of a heart-related ailment.

At age 32, Leslie found herself a widow with a 3-year-old daughter to raise alone. Struggling with her own profound grief, the young mother faced the daunting task of helping her daughter, Hannah, understand and deal with the sadness and the sense of loss that was overwhelming them both.

"As a mom, you want to protect your child and make everything better and make things go away," Leslie says. "Unfortunately, when she lost her father, I couldn't protect her from that."

While making arrangements to bury her husband, the funeral home referred Leslie to a grief support group for adults. However, Leslie discovered the support group was comprised mostly of older adults. They didn't know how to help a 3-year-old deal with losing her father. But she soon crossed paths with Janet Breen, licensed professional counselor, a therapist with Kaleidoscope Grief Center.

"I immediately felt a relief knowing I could talk to Janet," Leslie says, "and I quickly went to her and said, 'I have my own grief work to do, but help me help my daughter with all she's going through.' And she was able to help both of us."

The center serves seriously ill and grieving children, teens and their families. Established in 1995 as an independent nonprofit organization,

Kaleidoscope Grief Center has been part of the Methodist Family Health Counseling Clinic since January 2009.

"The addition of Kaleidoscope Grief Center to Methodist Family Health's continuum of care brings a new dimension to the services we are able to provide to Arkansas families," says Andy Altom, Methodist Family Health president and chief executive officer. "We are pleased to be able to offer care and support to children and youth facing grief and loss."

Kaleidoscope Grief Center offers a range of services for children ages 5 to 18 (sometimes younger like Hannah), including individual counseling, peer support bereavement groups, a Kids' Club that hosts quarterly social events and a bereavement camp each summer called Camp Healing Hearts. Licensed therapists oversee all programs. The team is rounded out with a hospital administrator, program director and a cadre of volunteers.

The impact of grief on children and youth is almost always profound.

"They want a sense of feeling safe and feeling they can trust their world, because their foundation is shaken when they lose a parent," Breen says. "Sometimes children worry that the other parent will die. Also, sometimes they feel they can't openly express their feelings because they'll make others sad again."

As a result, grieving children sometimes have trouble sleeping, eating or concentrating in school. Behavior issues often arise — acting out, being easily frustrated or being aggressive. Grades may slip. Depression and anxiety may be apparent.

Acknowledging and expressing feelings is a significant part of the

grief process. While adults may be able to verbalize feelings and emotions of grief and loss, it can be difficult for children, especially those as young as Hannah.

At one session, Hannah and other Kaleidoscope friends close to her age made small pillows and included in the stuffing soft foam shapes containing wishes and words of love for the person they missed most.

"She can always have this pillow with her to remind her of her dad, and it's comforting," Leslie says. "They find different ways for children to come to terms with their loss. For a child it's easier to color to explain how they feel than it is for them to tell you. It's hard for me to figure out, so it's got to be hard for her."

Today, Hannah, now 5, loves going to Kaleidoscope, where she gathers once a week for an hour with a group of three or four other children and two facilitators.

"Instead of just talking, they play," says her mother, who is part of a parent grief support group as well. "They might play with the dollhouse or make something."

Simply by playing and doing what little girls like to do, the facilitators can tell "if she's angry today, or if she's sad, without her even having to say things."

Sarah Cowan has been a Kaleidoscope peer support group volunteer for more than three years. Her job is to "offer comfort and support, an open mind and an open heart," she says.

"I frequently leave Peer Support Bereavement Group both inspired and humbled," Cowan says. "The kids at Kaleidoscope have taught me to acknowledge my grief and share it



April Leslie reads *Peter Pan* to her 5-year-old daughter, Hannah. The two received support from Kaleidoscope Grief Center after the death of Hannah's father and April's father in 2007.

Photo by Michael Pirniquie

### Heber Springs members get training in grief counseling

Last spring, eight members of the First United Methodist Church in Heber Springs completed Kaleidoscope Grief Center's three-and-a-half hour grief counselor training.

Nikki Pierce, a licensed associate counselor and member of the church, asked for the training because the vast number

of deaths in their community have affected children and teens.

There is an adult grief group, but the members wanted to incorporate a children's grief group as well. Since completing the training, the church members have taken what they learned to work with the young people in their community.

with others."

In addition to interacting with her young charges, Cowan says her favorite part about Peer Support Bereavement Group is "the last line of the meditation that Janet Breen reads during the opening ceremony at each meeting.

"As she encourages us to leave the stresses of our days behind and take time to remember our loved ones, she reads, 'People die. Relationships don't. I think this is the strongest sentiment I'll take from my journey with Kaleidoscope.'"

Hannah is comfortable talking about her dad and remembering their time together. "We played in the pool together," she says shyly, recalling a favorite memory of her dad.

"Always playing, weren't you?" her mother says. "We played on the trampoline, but now we can't get on the trampoline with him," Hannah says in a quiet voice.

Kaleidoscope Grief Center has been a haven of healing and hope for

the Leslies.

"It's definitely going to be a lifetime challenge," April Leslie says. "The life we knew before Nov. 2, 2007, is gone. But thankfully, we'll always have that memory. And talking about it actually makes it much easier."

Leslie looks down at her daughter.

"We'll both have to deal with this forever," she says. "But it's going to affect her in different ways than it affects me. I can't make it any easier. All I can do is help get her the tools to make it better."

To learn more about the Kaleidoscope mission, visit the Web sites

[www.kaleidoscopekids.org](http://www.kaleidoscopekids.org) and [www.methodistfamilyhealth.org](http://www.methodistfamilyhealth.org).

This article is reprinted with permission from Methodist Family Health and Jane Dennis. It originally appeared in the Fall 2009 issue of *Sentinel*, the news magazine of Methodist Family Health Foundation.



# REPORTER

THE UNITED METHODIST  
umportal.org



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Grant provides minister with sabbatical | 8B

Section B  
December 18, 2009

# Signs and wonders

## FAITHFUL STILL LOOKING FOR MODERN MIRACLES

BY BILL FENTUM | Staff Writer

**W**hen a U.S. Airways jet plunged into New York's Hudson River on Jan. 15—and 155 passengers and crew survived with mostly minor injuries—people called the outcome a miracle.

That's certainly how it seemed to Dave Sanderson, a member of Providence UMC in Charlotte, N.C., who was on the plane, returning home from a business trip. "I sensed God's presence the whole time," he said recently. "I also felt that my mother, who has passed on, was my guardian angel."

Mr. Sanderson remained on board for several minutes after the crash, helping others escape before being pulled onto a rescue boat. He now travels around the world, sharing his story as an inspirational speaker.

The incident also brought him closer to his oldest

■ See 'Miracles,' page 3B

## Q&A: United Methodists working on climate issues

Climate change is clearly a topic that garners much debate. Not everyone agrees on whether it's a scientifically proven fact, or whether it's really within our control to affect climate changes significantly relative to the cost required to do that.

In the meanwhile, however, representatives from some 65 world governments, along with religious leaders and environmental activists, have gathered

in Copenhagen Dec. 7-18 for the United Nations Climate Change Conference.

The Rev. Ole Birch, a United Methodist district superintendent in Denmark, is among them. As chair of the Climate Group for the National Council of Churches in Denmark, he responded in an e-mail interview with managing editor **Robin Russell** about how churches there are participating in the summit.

**How do you respond to someone who doesn't believe that global warming is happening, or that human habits might be contributing to climate change?**

How do we come to understand and assess anything that goes on in our world? We listen to the scientists and specialists who help us to be informed. Today the vast majority of scientists in the world tell us that

global warming is real, and that human activity is one of the reasons behind it.

**In recent weeks, there have been reports of e-mails hacked from a computer server in Britain that indicate some data on climate change have been manipulated to**

■ See 'Q&A,' page 2B



Ole Birch

## FAITH WATCH

**Muslims plan appeal of Swiss minaret ban**

Critics of Switzerland's ban on minarets at Muslim houses of worship will appeal to the European Court of Human Rights, according to Religion News Service. The Nov. 29 public vote that banned construction of minarets amounted to a victory for the nationalist Swiss People's Party, which had said minarets aren't needed for worship and symbolize Islamic power. "We're faced with a real anti-Muslim campaign that has begun in Switzerland and which might spread elsewhere in Europe," Kamel Kebtane, director of a mosque in Lyon, France, told France-Info radio.

**UM missions board condemns massacre**

The United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries released a statement Dec. 3, urging a full investigation by the Philippine government of the recent massacre of 57 people in a southern farming village. Andal Ampatuan Jr., the heir of a powerful clan, was charged in connection with the Nov. 23 attack on a convoy that included the wife, relatives and several supporters of his political rival, Esmael Mangudadatu. The United Methodist Church in the Philippines has protested the rise in political violence since President Gloria Arroyo took office in 2001. Ms. Arroyo denied any military role in the killings and declared a national day of mourning.

**Religious hate crimes rise in 2008, FBI says**

U.S. hate crimes targeting people because of their religion increased last year to the highest level since 2001, according to a Nov. 23 FBI report. The report found 1,519 religious hate crimes in 2008, including 1,013 crimes against Jews or Jewish institutions. Attacks against Muslims dropped slightly to 105 reports; the numbers had spiked to 597 in 2001 after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

—Compiled by Bill Fentum

## ■ Q&amp;A Continued from page 1B

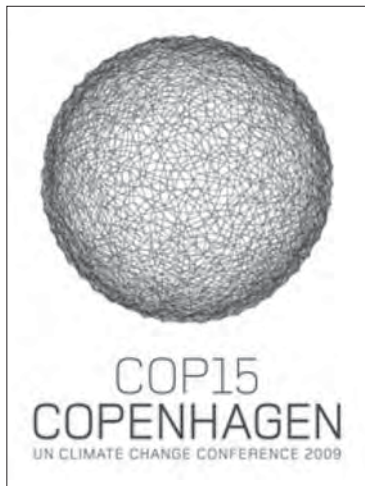
**better support the idea of human influence on global warming. Your thoughts?**

I have seen the story unfold some days ago. As far as I can see, it is about a few scientists who have manipulated some of the information about climate change. But the warnings about man-made global warming are based on the work of many scientists. This will have consequences for these few people, but I don't see it changing the basic understanding of what is happening with the climate. I hope there will be a proper investigation, so we can feel sure that the information we are given is correct.

**Is there a biblical mandate prompting the involvement of Danish churches in these environmental issues?**

There is a multitude of texts and themes from the Bible that gives us not just a mandate, but inspiration to examine our civilization, our lifestyle, our churches and our faith. Consider the basic premise of our creed, that God is the creator of all things. Neither the universe, nor the earth belongs to us. Everything remains God's property. To us, it must always remain a gift and a responsibility.

Consider the concept of stewardship in Genesis 1 and 2. What does it mean to be a steward? Surely something more than being a consumer! Consider the Old Testament covenant between God and Abraham's descendants. The covenant promise is,



among other things, about a land that is a special gift and that has to be received with humility and consideration for the poor. Consider the laws concerning the use of land states (in Exodus 23), which state that land must not be subject to over-exploitation but treated with respect.

Consider then, that in the visions of the prophets and the words of Jesus Christ, this covenant will be renewed and expanded to encompass all people and all of creation, and that Jesus begins his public ministry with an open commitment to covenant and the plight of poor (Luke 4). And consider that today the poor in Africa and Asia are the people suffering the most from the effects of global warming.

**How have churches in Denmark been involved in raising awareness for environmental concerns?**

The Climate Group of the National Council of Churches in Denmark has been working for two years now. Our areas of focus have been:

- Raising awareness within the churches and involving them in action to lower their CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. To this end we have produced a number of publications, created a Web site and organized informational events.

- Organizing the churches in advocacy towards politicians.
- Setting up infrastructure (lodging, events and so on) for the many international guests and activists descending on Copenhagen during the Climate Change Conference. Many churches have opened their doors for international activists to use their facilities as their base.

- Creating a big ecumenical celebration in the cathedral of Copenhagen on Dec. 13, right in the middle of the conference. The Danish Queen, the Danish prime minister and hundreds of representatives of churches from all over the world will attend. All the governmental delegations to the conference are being invited. Danish National television will broadcast it live (also on the Internet) and offer it to Eurovision. Archbishop Desmond Tutu will be there and the



PHOTO COURTESY OF CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION

**Many who believe global warming is creating havoc with the Earth's climate are gathering in Copenhagen this month for a world summit.**

Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams will be preaching.

In connection with this celebration we initiated a global call for churches all over the world to ring their bells 350 times at 3 p.m. local time on Dec. 13. The WCC has been spreading the word and reports from many different countries are coming in.

**What do you hope the summit in Copenhagen will accomplish?**

A binding, effective and just agreement. I think the goal must be a reduction by 80 percent of CO<sub>2</sub> in 2050, with special emphasis on necessary compensation to the poor countries. That is not going to happen, but if we can get a binding agreement, the numbers can be changed in the coming years.

**President Barack Obama will present an offer at the summit to cut U.S. greenhouse gas emissions by 17 percent by 2020. What else, in your opinion, needs to be done?**

The task at hand is clear, but daunting. We must stop global warming at 2 degrees Celsius, otherwise the consequences for the poor will be catastrophic, and the process can become irreversible. As Bill McKibben, writer, journalist and United Methodist teacher in Vermont points out, the best science we have says that 350 parts per million of greenhouse

gases in the atmosphere is the limit, if global warming is to stay under 2 degrees Celsius. My fear is that a 17 percent cut, from the world's largest contributor of CO<sub>2</sub>, is out of proportion to the magnitude of the problem, though it is positive that the U.S. seems committed to be part of the solution in Copenhagen.

**What do you suggest United Methodists do to help reduce our "carbon footprint"?**

Study their Bibles, get informed about the issues, reduce their CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by saving energy. Lead their communities in joyful pursuit of holiness in their relations to each other and God's creation.

**Why are environmental issues so often such "hot-button" topics for many Christians?**

That is hard for me to answer. To me, the issue of climate change strikes to the core of our faith and provides an opportunity to proclaim central parts of the Christian creed. The world is in need of a church that can proclaim God's call to responsible stewardship and help us find ways to sustain life—not out of fear for the future, but out of love and joy over the wonders of God's creation.

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## UM CONNECTIONS

**Translators sought for young people's event**

Organizers of the Global Young People's Convocation and Legislative Assembly are seeking a team of translators who can help before and during the event, July 21-26 in Berlin. As many as 500 young people are expected to attend. Everything from the registration Web site to event packets must be translated; persons able to translate from English to German, Russian, French or Portuguese needed. Contact [erowlison@gbod.org](mailto:erowlison@gbod.org) or phone (303) 947-3825.

**Seminary hosts leadership gathering**

The Ethical Leadership, the Church and the Global Economy Conference will bring key academic, business and church leaders together Feb. 25-27, 2010 at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Ill., to explore ways faith communities can "become agents of transformation in the new economic reality of the Midwest and the world." Speakers will include Bishop Gregory Palmer, president of the United Methodist Council of Bishops, Bishop Sally Dyck (Minnesota) and Bishop John Hopkins (East Ohio). Visit [www.garrett.edu/elc](http://www.garrett.edu/elc).

**Caring for Creation at Lake Junaluska**

Lake Junaluska Conference and Retreat Center's 5th annual Caring for Creation, April 8-11, will help members of the faith community learn how they can become caretakers of the Earth. Twenty workshops are planned, including Biblical/Theological Foundations for Creation Care, Native American Spirituality and Creation Care, and Mapping Your Ecological Footprint. Scholarships are available for ethnic young adults ages 18-35. Early registration deadline is March 5. For information, visit [www.lakejunaluska.com/caring-for-creation.aspx](http://www.lakejunaluska.com/caring-for-creation.aspx).

—Compiled by Mary Jacobs

**MIRACLES** Continued from page 1B

daughter, who had been estranged from him since 2007.

"That's probably been the biggest blessing out of this," said Mr. Sanderson. "It's been a year of miracles for me."

Talk of wondrous events abounds in December, as churches revisit the Nativity story and read the gospel accounts of the Virgin Birth. Many in mainline congregations, however, sometimes struggle to believe because they don't often see holy mysteries in their own lives.

It hasn't always been that way.

Belief in miracles thrived in the church for several centuries, according to the Rev. Mark Teasdale, a United Methodist elder and professor at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary. As late as 1701, he says, "[English philosopher] John Locke said miracles existed as a form of evidence to prove someone was sent by God as a messenger, and we should hear what they have to say."

Then in 1758, Scotland's David Hume declared that miracles, by definition, were "transgression(s) of the laws of nature," accepted only in "ignorant and barbarous" cultures. Empiricism—the idea that all knowledge comes from sensory experience—began to dominate and later influenced 20th-century modernists.

Some scholars argue that John Wesley, the founder of Methodism who was himself a product of the 18th-century Enlightenment era, wasn't convinced of modern miracles. In at least one sermon, Wesley implied that some gifts of the Holy Spirit were no longer present in the physical world.

But in a 1749 letter to Anglican priest Conyers Middleton, Wesley defended a wide range of miracles—from casting out demons and healing the sick, to visions and escaping great dangers.

"He fell into the middle ground," said the Rev. Daniel Jennings, an Independent Methodist pastor who compiled Wesley's journal writings on miracles in *The Supernatural Occurrences of John Wesley* (Sean Multimedia, 2005).

"He was careful to not get swept up in charismatic emotionalism, but he wasn't closed to the possibility that God might still act in our world in a miraculous way."

**Sharing stories**

The Rev. John Sumwalt, pastor of Our Lord's UMC in New Berlin, Wis., tells a story of a miracle in his book *How to Preach the Miracles* (CSS Publishing, 2007):

In bed one night, Mr. Sumwalt looked up and saw a light above his head, "a bright, luxurious purple, then deep azure blue, radiant, dynamic,

pulsating; a spirit of light and energy moving slowly closer. . . . Then the spirit touched me, more like flowed into my being. I felt warmly loved."

The vision lasted only a few minutes. But the memory "with the holy still warms my heart," he writes. "I am healthier physically, emotionally and spiritually than I was before I opened my eyes that night."

Mr. Sumwalt shares that story in sermons, and lectures at seminars on visions and unexpected healings from illnesses. "Nearly always," he said in an interview, "someone tells me afterward, 'A thing like that happened to me, but I've never talked about it.'"

Keeping a miracle to oneself, he noted, dilutes its power. "The sad thing is that other people don't hear about it," he said, "and don't feel the encouragement that comes from knowing these things do happen."

He cautions, though, against spreading false hope.

"There are people who tell someone who has cancer, 'All you need is enough faith and you'll be healed.' That kind of attitude is hurtful. We don't know in whose life a miracle will happen or why. We can only receive what God gives, be thankful and give witness to it."

**Lessons to learn**

The "whys" of miracles don't usually interest David Otto, a religion professor at United Methodist-related Centenary College in Shreveport, La. He's more intrigued by how people react to them.

In *The Miracles of Jesus* (Abingdon Press, 2000), Dr. Otto suggests ways that Christians can still respond today to biblical signs and wonders, including the Nativity. "We should strive to create a world in which all births become sacred proclamations of God's historical presence in the world," he writes, adding that working for the wellbeing of children "serves as testimony that the birth of Jesus still makes a tangible difference in our lives."

Many of the miracles Christ performed in his ministry—from healings to exorcism—showed God weeding out evil, Dr. Otto said in an interview.

"We see narrative evidence in Scripture that the world God intends isn't the world we actually live in," he said, "and through salvation in Christ we will return to a pristine state, the world where we were one with the holy before sin caused separation."

Christ's death and resurrection, Dr. Otto believes, created a "fountain of grace" that will last to the end of time and will make other miracles possible. "It made the spread of Christ's spirit available to all persons throughout the world," he said. "The cross is the



IMAGE COURTESY OF WIKIMEDIA

This 16th-century painting by El Greco, "Christ Healing the Blind," depicts one of the miracles performed by Jesus.

mechanism by which miracles can occur anywhere."

A few years ago, he recalled, a woman near Shreveport claimed to see Jesus in a shadow on her refrigerator door, each day before dusk. Visitors flocked to the home, and several felt spiritually moved. The shadow disappeared, however, as soon as neighbors cut down a tree outside the kitchen window.

So it wasn't a miracle, right? According to Dr. Otto, that's a matter of perception.

"To this woman," he said, "the shadow looked like the portrait of Jesus in her Sunday school class. Her claim testified to the work of Jesus in her life, and then people gathered and talked about their own relationships with Jesus. The experience increased their faith, and in that sense, it was a miracle."

**Healing ministry**

The same litmus test holds true for healing miracles, says the Rev. Walter Shropshire, a retired United Methodist elder and former research physicist for the Smithsonian Institution.

For years, he led weekly healing services at Foundry UMC in Washington, D.C., inviting persons with ailments to come for prayer, Holy Communion, laying on of hands and anointing with oil. In Dr. Shropshire's words, most of them were "healed but not cured."

"We made a distinction between a cure where all physical symptoms disappear, versus healing where a person feels assured of God's love and gains strength from that assurance," he said.

But it's not unheard of for someone to pray over a fractured bone and then discover in X-rays that the break has vanished, added Dr. Shropshire: "If we believe this is a world that God cares for, then sure, normal physical laws can be set aside."

He isn't a fan of scientific studies

into the effectiveness of prayer, including one from the National Institutes of Health in 2006 that showed intercessory prayer had no effect on cardiac patients at six U.S. hospitals. He believes those kinds of studies are really an attempt to prove whether or not God exists—something theologians insist is impossible.

"How do you get controls for the study?" he asked. "How do you account for a religious group in Calcutta that prays for the whole world? It's a waste of money."

**Postmodern hope**

Dr. Teasdale at Garrett-Evangelical sees some hope that postmodern thinkers—those open to ideas beyond the hard-and-fast truths of modernism—may welcome the idea of new miracles. But he wonders if the emerging church is the place for it to happen.

"The focus [in the emerging church] is on simply participating in the Christian journey, here and now, and if something unexplainable happens, they accept it and keep moving," Dr. Teasdale said. "But there isn't always a well-developed theology of the Holy Spirit, so they may just call it a mystery instead of a miracle."

Whatever it's named, Dr. Otto at Centenary says a miracle takes place any time the Spirit moves people toward acts of public service and working for the welfare of others.

"In that sense, you might include care of the planet as a miraculous act. It's a willingness to radically alter our behaviors," he said, as part of restoring the world to God's perfect plan.

"God isn't sitting on a cloud being a passive observer, waiting for us to get our act together," said Dr. Otto. "God is ever-present and if we allow it, will prod us to move toward the life of the sacred."

[bfentum@umr.org](mailto:bfentum@umr.org)

# Gift of life

Heifer International offers chain of hope to the needy



PHOTOS COURTESY OF HEIFER INTERNATIONAL/JAKE LYELL

**ABOVE:** William Longa, 9 (left), and his brother Laston Longa, 12, with the family's chickens in Luanshya in Copperbelt Province, Zambia.

**RIGHT:** Momanyi Range feeds a goat with Eva, 3, and Eliya, 6. They are part of the Goat and Dairy Cow Project in Muribe Village, Tarime District in the Mara Region of Tanzania. Momanyi Range said having a cow had made it possible for him to send his children to school.

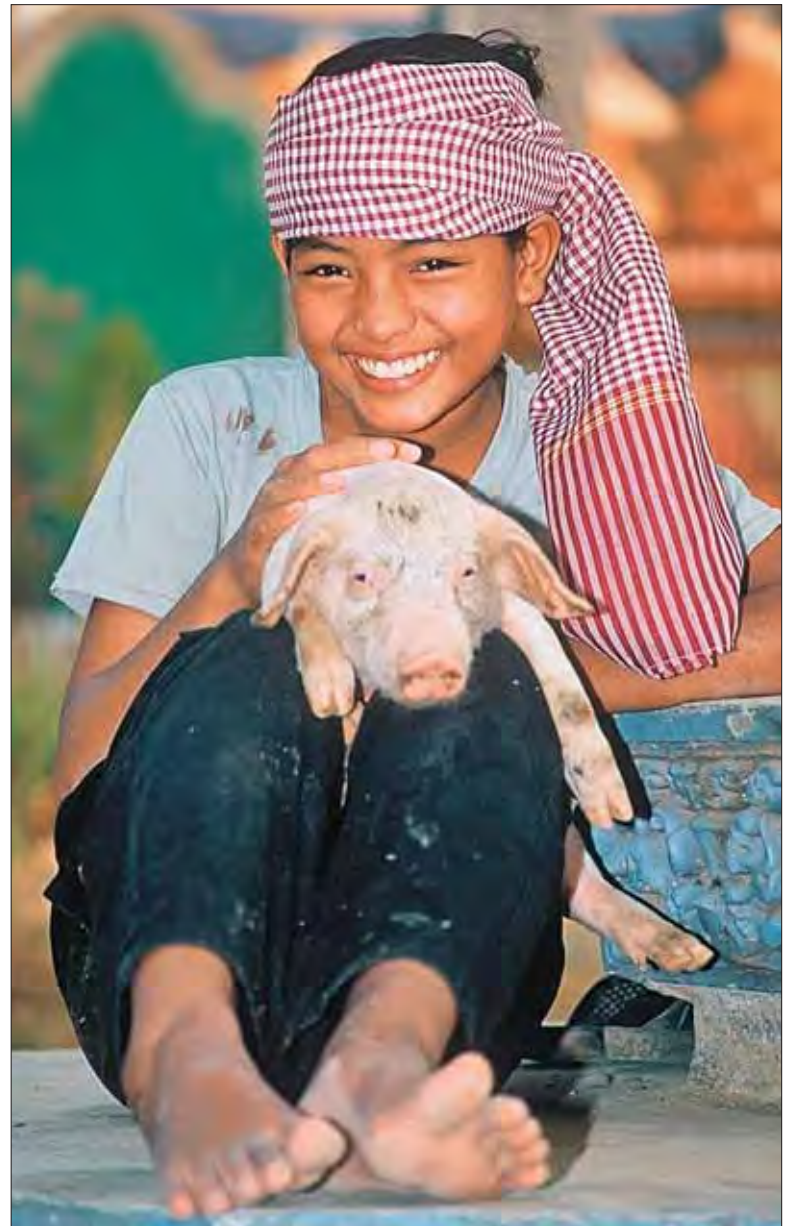


PHOTO COURTESY OF HEIFER INTERNATIONAL/DARCY KIEFEL

Yorn Sokhan poses with a family pig on the pagodas in her village in the Prah Nethprah District of Cambodia. Heifer targeted three of the poorest villages in the district to assist in pig husbandry to restore the livelihoods of the villagers.



STAFF AND WIRE REPORTS

**N**eed a Christmas gift but don't have time to fight the holiday shopping crowds or search for a parking space at the mall?

Try Heifer International's alternative gift catalog to provide a farm animal or training in sustainable agriculture for impoverished families around the world.

Heifer International is marking its 65th anniversary of helping families in developing countries, who use the livestock for food as well as income that helps them become self-reliant.

United Methodists can help set in motion a gift of hope by using the organization's catalog to send gifts to people who truly need it.

Animals donated through Heifer International are called "living loans" because in exchange for receiving their animal and training in its care, each family agrees to "Pass On the Gift": to give one of its animal's offspring to another family in need, a living form of paying it forward. Families can then sell the animal's future offspring—about \$120 for a goat or \$500 for a cow—to pay for housing or other needs.

Families that once struggled daily for a single meal have milk, are able to buy food, improve their diets and improve their health. They move from hunger and poverty to self-reliance and independence, with a willingness to share their knowledge and their resources to help others.

Since 1944, the Little Rock, Ark.-based secular organization has provided livestock and environmentally sound agricultural training for those who struggle daily for reliable sources of food and income. Heifer is currently working in 50 countries, including the U.S., to help families and communities become more self-reliant.

A cow, goat, flock of chicks or hive of honeybees provides transformational change. Heifers and goats give milk to drink and sell to make money for medicine or education. Chicks provide eggs for protein and profit. Sheep, alpacas and llamas provide wool for clothing and to sell in the market.

Each provides hope and opportunity for a better life.



PHOTO COURTESY OF HEIFER INTERNATIONAL/JAKE LYELL

Sebastian, 22, of the Singa Group pig project in Kibosho East in the Kilimanjaro Region of Tanzania.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF HEIFER INTERNATIONAL/DARCY KIEFEL

Mieczyslaw Rodzynka, with his son Grzegorz, 10, pose with Heifer International sheep in the village of Skorodne and Podkarpacie, Poland.

Heifer International has a gift at any price range. Gifts of cows, goats, sheep, trees, pigs, rabbits or even cash range in cost from \$10 for a share of an animal to \$5,000 for an ark full.

A gift of \$120, for instance, will buy a goat, which can supply a family with several quarts of milk each day. Extra milk can be sold or made into cheese, butter or yogurt. Other gifts include: a llama (\$150), a water buffalo (\$250), a heifer (\$500) or a hive of honeybees (\$30). Donors can buy a share of any of these for as little as \$10.

Gifts can be made in honor of a friend or relative. Besides giving in honor or memory of another, individuals can use a gift registry at [Heifer.org](http://Heifer.org) to ask others to contribute animals to Heifer in place of conventional gifts.

Donations to Heifer for 2008 were reported at \$128 million, representing a 22.7 percent increase in support from the previous year.

For information, call (800) 422-0474 or visit [www.heifer.org](http://www.heifer.org) to view The Most Important Gift Catalog In The World and to read stories of those families who have been helped.



Fred Sarilla with his cow in the village of Bugcaon and Lantapan in the Philippines, where he participates in a Heifer community group that calls itself the Cooperative of Poor Farmers. "My heart gives more thanks than you will ever know," Mr. Sarilla said.

# Holiday season reveals much about who we are

BY TOM EHRLICH  
Religion News Service

Now we are in the holiday season, our annual extravaganza of travel, shopping, worshipping, eating and deep emotions.

Some treasure every moment of it. Some look anxiously for gold amid the dross of hyper-everything. Some sink into a seasonal funk. Our economy kicks into now-or-never mode.

In our fundamental nature as nomads on a journey with God, the next few weeks tell us volumes about who we are and who God is to us.

We are a commercial culture. Maybe we should be a higher-browed culture grounded in academy, arts and altar. But in fact, we make goods and services for people to buy.

We aren't exactly a "nation of shopkeepers," as Napoleon dismissively termed Great Britain. But the economic engine of modern America is stoked by consumer spending and small businesses. No matter how much wealth financial firms grab, value and capital are created in the daring, doggedness and inventiveness of entrepreneurs.

This is their season. The day after Thanksgiving isn't called "Black Friday" because it is gloomy, but because a four-week shopping surge tips countless enterprises into the "black" and out of the "red."



Tom Ehrlich

Yet we are also a family culture. A modern Currier & Ives would paint "family" differently—more single-parent families, blended families, same-gender couples, childless couples, mixed-ethnicity families, non-English-speaking families, unemployed families.

But listen to the joys and sorrows of this season, and you will hear family stories: children coming home for Christmas, soldiers not coming home, loved ones too poor to come home, turkey-centered celebrations or the longing for such togetherness, buying "perfect gifts" for loved ones or wishing one had money to spend or loved ones to honor.

This can be a difficult season. Ours is a lonely age. These next weeks are prime time for suicide and worsening addictions. Many



PHOTO BY KRIS DE CURTIS, WIKIMEDIA

**Christmas can be a difficult season, says Tom Ehrlich, for people who feel unusually sad and isolated during the holidays.**

people who get along fine during other seasons feel unusually sad and isolated during these holidays.

Such feelings are the fount of true holiness, of course, as Jesus said in the Beatitudes. They lead us to holy ground, and that ground isn't a lavish liturgical spectacular. It is more likely to be an act of kindness, a shopkeeper's smile, a friend's invitation, a telephone call, a clinging to sanity through prayer and the fellowship of the broken.

Despite hackneyed sermons about "putting Christ back into Christmas," these glimpses of the divine reveal the "reason for the season."

I, for one, have no clue how I will buy presents for loved ones in this recessionary year. But I know that our middle son and his girlfriend came home from California for Thanksgiving Day—our 33rd year as a family. I know that my wife and I will go shopping, always wishing we could do more, but experiencing holy time because we do it together.

I know I will write at a deeper emotional level during this season. I know the moment will come when I stand to sing "O Come, All Ye Faithful." I will remember in an instant every Christmas we have shared, as well as the ones that went before and the people who are absent. I will taste the pathos of being human and the abiding love of a God who shares this journey.

I probably won't be able to form the words; too much will be happening inside. But in a manner of God's choosing, I will be "joyful and triumphant."

**The Rev. Ehrlich is a writer, church consultant and Episcopal priest based in New York.**

# Re-learning to listen

BY ERIC VAN METER  
Special Contributor

I've started hiding my friends. I mean, of course, on Facebook, that ubiquitous form of self-expression.

It's not that I don't love each and every one of the 507 Facebook friends I've amassed so far. When I began social networking three years ago, I had no idea how much I would enjoy getting to know people in cyberspace or reconnecting with friends.

Facebook has been a great tool. But it's also incredibly noisy.

Even when I limit the information I get to "status updates" from my friends, I still get bombarded by everything from the tragic to the trivial.

Granted, these statements may be nothing more than adolescent angst emerging from somewhere inside otherwise fully grown adults. But there's no way of knowing without having a conversation. And how do you decide which conversation to have?

The answer is that I usually don't. I scan Facebook for trends among my students or for substantive news among my other friends. I gather information and occasionally apply it to my work and prayers. I hear all these things clumped together as an interesting if chaotic ball of noise.

But rarely do I listen.

Listening is an art. Listening is different from hearing. Simple hearing is important, but mostly passive. We can hear the crying baby at the Christmas Eve service, even if we'd rather not. Sound presents itself to us, and we have little choice but to take it in.

Really listening, however, requires action. It involves not just our ears, but our minds. We hear the crying baby, but we focus our attention on the liturgy. We listen for the choir or the bells or maybe even the preacher. We can't always choose what we hear, but we can choose the things we listen to.

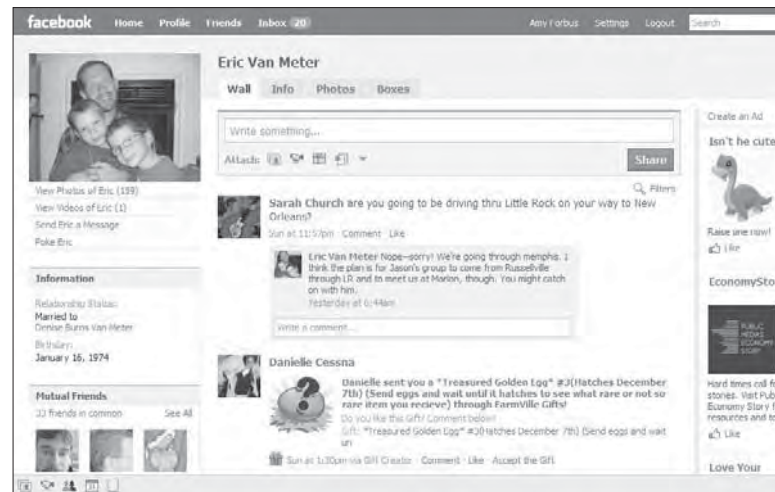


Eric Van Meter

Listening is an art. Perhaps one that is almost lost.

American churches have gotten pretty good at hearing and processing information from the cultures around us. Most of us have gotten market-wise and tech-savvy, at least on a rudimentary level. A few even hire communications experts to analyze and synthesize what gets reported.

When a picture of the data begins to emerge, we use it to package our



church message for billboards and newsletter and sermon series. Communications folks call this "grabbing for market share." We usually call it ministry. But I think we are mistaken.

Defined as "being heard by the people we want to hear us," ministry becomes little more than noise. Our primary work becomes getting people's attention. We think we have the answers to life's biggest questions and so we speak. And speak. And speak.

I don't mean to be too hard on us Christians. I am a preacher, after all. My job involves a significant amount of proclamation. Jesus did that sort of thing, too.

But while the gospel may involve proclamation, its heart is incarnation. And that's something else entirely.

My children have never been the best of churchgoers. One of the first phrases out of young Zachary's mouth was "all done with church," which he tended to scream at the most solemn moments of my senior pastor's sermons.

When Jonathan came along, things got even tougher. He crawled over people. He got stuck in chairs. And he picked the worst times to cry.

The church I served at that time had a "cry room" in back, a place where noisy babies and frantic parents could be sequestered. It had a rocking chair and toys, even a speaker that piped in the audio feed from the sanctuary.

The church's message was polite, but clear: we want to listen to what's going on in the sanctuary. Your child keeps us from doing that.

No one came right out and said that, of course. No one needed to. My wife got the message. But she still couldn't bring herself to go into the cry room. It was too separated from the living act of worship.

Thankfully, some of the older ladies in the church understood. Occasionally, one would pull Denise aside and say: "You keep bringing that baby to church. He belongs here just as much as you do. And I can't imagine

that baby Jesus was always so quiet, even if the songs say he was."

Denise and I were grateful for words of grace from those who understood how difficult it was to be the parents of a small child.

Looking back, I see more wisdom in those church ladies than I first realized. They were not listening just for the symphony of well-planned worship; they were listening for the voice of God, pointing to the activity of God. That could come just as easily through the Hallelujah chorus or the fussing of a baby.

Listening is an art, a form of expression—not of what we think or feel or want others to know—but of love. Listening expresses caring without using any words at all. To listen is to enter into the world as someone else portrays it, to intentionally be part of a different story than our own for the sake of the storyteller.

In other words, listening is embodying the incarnation of Jesus.

That said, I feel guilty for hiding my friends on Facebook. It feels judgmental to say that someone's constant self-expression is more than I can handle. I don't want to belittle the things that go on in their lives.

Listening as incarnation, however, means that I have to accept not only the responsibility to actively listen to others, but the limitations of my own being. I cannot keep up with 507 friends, even if I work at it daily.

So I'm limiting the number of conversations I engage in. I'm trying to rid myself of the need to be God, to hear all and know all and respond to all. Instead, I'm trying to listen more deeply and intentionally. And I'm trying not to judge the people right in front of me as distractions from my more important task.

I'm trying to listen to what God is saying to others and what God might be saying to me, if only I would stop to listen.

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

# Race still matters a year after Obama's election

BY C. ANTHONY HUNT  
Special Contributor

A year after the election of Barack Obama as the 44th president of the United States, these continue to be days of tremendous change and challenge in our society.

For many, Mr. Obama's historic election as the first president of African descent renewed (or birthed) a sense of hope across the nation and the world. For many, the election seemed to be a glimmer of hope that our society had somehow arrived at our ideals of "E Pluribus Unum" (out of many, one), and the creed shared in our nation's



Anthony Hunt

Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all [persons] are created equal."

Throughout his presidential campaign, Mr. Obama offered a framework for what he termed an audacity of hope amid the challenges we face.

Many seemed to sense and even hope that the election of Mr. Obama would usher in an age of post-racism and post-racialism in America—and perhaps across the world. A year later, we discover that racial and racist realities continue to afflict us.

In his 2006 book, *The Audacity of Hope*, Mr. Obama offered words of cau-

tion to America in thinking that we may have arrived at becoming "post-racial" that we already live in a color-blind society and that we may be beyond the need for discourse and critical engagement regarding racism and related forms of oppression and injustice.

"To say that we are one people," he wrote, "is not to suggest that race no longer matters—that the fight for equality has been won or that the problems that minorities face in this country today are largely self-inflicted."

We know the statistics: On almost every socioeconomic indicator, whether infant mortality, life expectancy, employment or home ownership, black and Latino Americans lag far behind their white counterparts.

In his address "A More Perfect Union," delivered during his presidential campaign, Mr. Obama offered an analysis of the racial tensions that continue to define the relationship between black and white communities. He argued that to simply shelve anger over racism could prove to be detrimental. He pointed out that race factors into the opportunities provided to each American citizen.

Most inferior school systems today are often the same ones that were segregated 50 years ago. The history of racism in America, Mr. Obama said, is undeniably at the root of the lack of opportunities for African Americans today. All Americans need to unite and battle racial prejudices. To move toward a more perfect union, people of all races must recognize the historically oppressive and tyrannical nature

of racism and its impact on the black experience in America.

A year after Mr. Obama's historic election, recent events have heightened our awareness of the ongoing problems of race and racism in America. Among these are the Supreme Court confirmation hearings of Justice Sonia Sotomayor; the arrest of Harvard University professor Henry Louis Gates at his home in Cambridge, Mass.; debate surrounding the president's September speech to students returning to schools across the nation; the heckling offered by U.S. Congressman Joe Wilson (South Carolina) during President Obama's speech to the joint session of the U.S. Congress; and the ongoing debates surrounding the president's efforts toward reforming our nation's health-care system.

During a recent visit to the Southern Poverty Law Center in Montgomery, Ala., I learned that in 2008, there were more than 800 hate-related groups identified, and that this number is on the rise since Mr. Obama's election as president.

In 1992, philosopher Cornel West published *Race Matters* (Beacon Press), a book written against the backdrop of the April 1992 riots in Los Angeles that followed the acquittal of the police officers charged in the beating of Rodney King. Dr. West referred to the "nihilism of black America," where a certain nothingness, meaninglessness, lovelessness and hopelessness have permeated much of urban society.

In his most recent book, *Hope on a Tightrope* (Hay House, 2008), Dr. West cautions against a false sense of security in hope that is yet unborn. He points out that real hope is grounded in a particularly messy struggle, and it can be betrayed by naïve projections of a better future that ignore the necessity of doing real work.

For Dr. West, real hope is closely connected to attributes like courage, faith, freedom and wisdom. It comes out of a history of struggle and points to a future filled with the possibilities of promise and progress.

A year after the historic election of President Obama, significant challenges remain to the actualization of real hope in America. Race still matters in America, and while we may be moving toward such real hope, it is a hope yet unborn in its fullness.

The Rev. Hunt serves on the board of the General Commission on Religion and Race and is a district superintendent in the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

## REFLECTIONS

# Christmas memories

BY BISHOP WOODIE W. WHITE  
UMR Columnist

I recently took my grandchildren and daughter to see the Radio City Christmas Spectacular at the historic Fox Theatre in Atlanta. The show fea-



Bishop Woodie White

tured the renowned high-kicking Rockettes. While the children were excited about attending an evening performance, I think I was even more excited. Growing up in New York, my Christmas ritual included a visit to Radio City Music Hall. It remains a treasured childhood Christmas memory.

As the colorful, festive performance was nearing its conclusion, I noted something missing from the printed program. I whispered to my daughter that when I was a boy, the show always ended with a dramatic telling of Luke's account of the birth of Jesus. For me, it was the highlight of the performance. I was disappointed.

But after what seemed like a magnificent grand finale, the theatre was brought to total darkness. Then a voice was heard in the hushed audience as the narrator began to tell the story of the birth of Jesus. I was not disappointed after all!

Performers in appropriate colorful dress processed on the stage to softly accompanied music. Camels, sheep and donkey were soon on the stage, some coming down the long aisle of the theater.

My four grandchildren were awestruck, perhaps experiencing what I had looked forward to each year growing up. They were building their own storehouse of Christmas memories.

Another of my Christmas memories is my first shopping trip to purchase gifts for friends and family. I had saved up nearly five dollars! An older cousin and I set out to enjoy a grand shopping spree. It was a one-stop shopping venture: We did all our shopping at the "five-and-dime."

There were lots of items from which to choose, some tied in red and green ribbon, some already in decorated boxes. I purchased gifts for everyone, filling two shopping bags mostly with sets of water glasses, ashtrays and perfumes for the adults.

I was so pleased with that first venture. Today, of course, five dollars would not even pay for parking. Christmas memories.

I remember the year when a pool table was at the top of my Christmas list. Pool tables were all the rage among the boys in my neighborhood. I talked about the pool table for weeks before Christmas—it was the only thing I wanted.

Christmas morning arrived, but there was no pool table under or near the tree. I knew it was somewhere in the house, so I waited to hear the word, "Surprise!" I waited and waited. I looked and looked. No pool table.

About noon, I finally concluded there would be no pool table that Christmas. I said nothing, and tried to hide my disappointment. I don't think anyone noticed that my eyes were red most of the day. No one even mentioned a pool table. Christmas memories.

For years, I was one of the Three Wise Men in the Christmas cantata at church. I sang the same verse year after year, dressed in my bathrobe covered with a costume and wearing a regal headpiece that I rather liked.

I sang with childish pride: "Myrrh is mine; its bitter perfume breathes a life of gathering gloom; sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying, sealed in the stone cold tomb." Christmas memories.

Adult memories have now been added to those childhood ones, those I've accumulated as a son, husband, father, pastor, general church staff and a bishop. Each one is cherished. Some are joyous and happy; others are sad and filled with heartbreak.

Memories of loved ones and friends, some still close, most forever in heart. Early memories are more of laughter; later ones, more of tears.

Yet never absent is the Christ, born a child and yet a king! The memories are pregnant with singing and music—and the reminder of a God of hope and love, a forgiving and grace-filled God who is ever present.

Perhaps among the most precious gifts this time of the year are Christmas memories.

A once-popular song began, "Thanks for the memories." Indeed!

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



UMNS FILE PHOTO BY JAY MALLIN

Young volunteers watch the Jan. 20 inauguration of President Barack Obama in Washington.

# Grant provides sabbatical for Methodist minister

BY ANN BUTLER  
Special Contributor

Weddings, funerals and meetings. Preaching at four services every week and prepping for them for 15-20 hours at a time. Counseling parishioners in crisis and visiting the sick. Leading a congregation that numbers about a thousand members, from small groups to the staff and lay leaders.

This is the life of the Rev. Jeff Huber, the senior pastor at First United Methodist Church of Durango, Colo. It's a life that is rewarding, but tiring as well.

The United Methodist Church recommends pastors take a sabbatical every seven years or so to refresh and renew their spirit. But in 22 years of ministry, Mr. Huber has never done so, in part because he never had a long-term congregation before coming to Durango.

That is going to change in 2010, when he will enjoy an almost four-month leave during the summer under a grant from the Lilly Endowment Inc.

"The National Clergy Renewal Program gives pastors the gift of being able to live in Sabbath time, to honor that moment as God-given," said Craig Dykstra, endowment senior vice president for religion. "Many clergy renewal participants have reported to the endowment that they found their vision for ministry enlarged when they returned, and that their call and commitment were renewed."

Other United Methodist clergy receiving the grants included: Robert C. Brown, Coronado Community UMC, New Smyrna Beach, Fla.; Eun-Hye Choi, Morgan Park UMC, Chicago; Troy D. Benitone,



PHOTO BY STEVE LEWIS/COURTESY OF THE DURANGO HERALD

**The Rev. Jeff Huber enjoys a sunny day in front of his church, First United Methodist Church of Durango, Colo. He has been awarded a grant to spend the summer of 2010 to rest and renew his body and spirit.**

Pawnee UMC, Pawnee, Ill.; Ek Ching Hii, Cabin John UMC, Cabin John, Md.; Warren C. Black, Oxford-University UMC, Oxford, Miss.; Sunny M. Shim, St. Luke's UMC, Long Branch, N.J.; Twila Gibbens-Rickman, St. Paul's UMC, Tulsa, Okla.; Shirley G. Oskamp, Church of the Wildwood (United Methodist Church), Chittenden, Vt.

## Members' support

Three people from Mr. Huber's church wrote the grant, which re-

quires a plan for both the church and for the pastor. Before the application was submitted, members were surveyed and they supported the move. Mr. Dykstra said many congregations grow in their leadership and create an environment for their returning pastor that is at a more sustainable pace.

Out of the \$50,000 grant, \$15,000 will go to taking care of the church during his renewal leave. The Rev. Steve Martyn, a seminary professor, will take over the leadership. He's

planning to preach a series on the Sermon on the Mount.

"That was my biggest concern, making sure the church is taken care of," Mr. Huber said. "A lot of churches wouldn't let their pastor be away for so long."

Another part of the grant is designed to include his family. Mr. Huber

and his wife, Tami Bradshaw, adopted two children from the Ukraine a few years ago. Thomas and Viktoria will get to see more of their birth country during a family trip to the region. The couple also will attend a marriage retreat during the leave.

Rest and renewal are the heart of the grant, and the Huber/Bradshaw clan is also planning a trip to North Carolina to enjoy the ocean. While there, Mr. Huber will spend time at a church that has an outreach ministry similar to one the Durango church is planning in Grandview.

## Footsteps of Paul

In the most powerful religious part of the leave, he will be joining a group of ministers in a journey following the footsteps of the Apostle Paul. Rome, Ephesus and Corinth will be just a few of the stops.

"It's a tour just for pastors who want to make a spiritual pilgrimage," he said. "There's time for prayer and learning, not just being a tourist."

The other clergy grants are as diverse as the ministers who applied for them. Spanish-language immersion courses, gardening and musical studies are on several agendas. Others are planning to attend the Passion Play in Oberammergau, Germany, or walk the pilgrimage known as the Camino de Santiago de Compostela (the way of St. James) in northern Spain.

And when Mr. Huber returns? There's money in the grant for a welcome-back party with his congregation.

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