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FOUNDATION FOR LIFE



University of Arkansas students worship at The Gathering, held weekly in the Wesley Foundation chapel.

PHOTO BY JENNIFER AL-RIKABI

United Methodist campus ministries aim for long-term spiritual growth

BY RHONDA OWEN
For the Arkansas United Methodist

Most people attend college for an education that will help them in their chosen careers, but others desire an experience that's more than an academic exercise.

During the college years, young people establish identities separate from their parents and make critical decisions about their futures. They begin to define themselves as adults, individuals, people of faith.

"This is where their faith is no longer the faith of their parents, but becomes their own," says the Rev. Omar Al-Rikabi, chaplain of the Wesley Foundation at the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville. "This is where they'll ask the hard questions."

Some students see campus ministries simply as places for fellowship. Other students want

more.

"For those who get involved on a deeper level, they find it really meaningful. It shapes who they want to be and what they want to do after they leave here," says the Rev. Jessica Durand, director of the Wesley Foundation at Henderson State University in Arkadelphia.

"We try to give them strong roles by which they can try on the ministry," says the Rev. Ronnie Miller-Yow, chaplain and director of the Office of Religious Life at Philander Smith College in Little Rock.

Miller-Yow says campus ministry gives students a chance to find out if God is calling them to be pastors or lay leaders. For some, it provides an introduction to a faith-based life. Wesley Foundation activities and missions primarily serve students with a United Methodist background, but are open

to all. United Methodist campus ministries welcome students of other faiths and the unchurched to expose them to God's love and help them forge relationships that will carry over into the rest of their lives.

All campus ministries possess core components of fellowship, study, worship and service, but each also is tailored to meet the needs of students on its campus. Here's a look at what some Wesley Foundations and United Methodist-affiliated colleges in Arkansas offer their students.

Fellowship and faith

"We offer a community for students," says Durand about the Wesley Foundation at Henderson State University. While located on the Henderson campus, the foundation also serves students from neighboring Ouachita Baptist

University.

"We have some born-and-bred Methodists, some who have never walked into a Methodist church and a few who never walked into any church until they got here," Durand says. "For the ones that stay, the experience is almost universally positive."

The foundation offers free lunch every Tuesday, weekly discussion and Bible study, a movie night and a contemporary worship service. Students also find a home away from home at the foundation, where they are free to use the kitchen and laundry facilities. They may also play ping-pong or shoot pool, or even study in the computer lab.

During the school year, the students may participate in two out-of-state mission trips. Last year, they worked with Ozark Mission Project on hurricane recovery efforts [See FOUNDATION, page 4A]



AN OCCASIONAL WORD from the Bishop

BY CHARLES CRUTCHFIELD

Learning to adapt helps make the catch

Dear Friends:

For slightly more than fifty years, my family has had a summer cabin on the Middle St. Vrain River in northern Colorado. The place is rustic. There is no insulation in the cabin. The fireplace is the only source of heat. Indoor water is available only in the summer. It is a place of wonderful memories. It is a place of fun and joy, and new events. This summer we added to all those memories.

I've never been known as a great fisherman, but I have fished the section of the Middle St. Vrain River in front of our cabin with modest success over the past fifty years. I first tried to fly fish the stream, but it is not a classic river for fly fishing.

There are no long sections of placid water—no *A River Runs Through It*-style pools where you can stand thigh-deep in mid-stream and lay out a long, lazy cast of a favored fly. If you did, it would probably get hung up in the trees or bushes along the bank or lost in the rough water.

There are no big pools on the upper section of the Middle St. Vrain. While expert fly fishers can and do fish the stream, I am no expert.

To be successful, *I had to adapt*. I use a fly rod with about 24 inches of 3-lb. test leader and a number 10 hook baited with a common earthworm. Then I hide behind trees, rocks and brush to conceal myself from the sharp-eyed, cagey brown brook and rainbow trout that inhabit the crystal clear water. I sneak up on the stream as I present the bait. I fish the holes and usually catch my limit of four over eight inches in length.

We have always enjoyed eating these eight- to twelve-inch trout—just pan sized for frying! Over the past fifty years, the largest trout we have ever caught was 13-½ inch rainbow pulled in by our daughter Melissa. Until this year.

Melissa and I were fishing together and she had a bite from what she thought was a large fish, but it got away. About fifteen or twenty minutes later, I let my worm float through the same hole.

Imagine my surprise when I got a bite that did not want to be landed! It seemed to me the rod was about to bend double. I managed to get the trout onto the bank, and was I ever stunned.

When we measured, it was a 15-¾ inch rainbow trout. I know

that may not sound like much to some, but in my experience it was just slightly shorter and a bit lighter in weight than Moby Dick. We were all excited (our grandchildren were fishing with us). And even though it was probably the same fish that cleaned her hook earlier, no one was more excited than Melissa!

The trout was too big to fry, so we stuffed it with a mushroom and herb stuffing and baked it. Along with some additional fried trout, boiled potatoes, slaw, and cornbread, we had a fine meal. I do have pictures!

We preachers probably make too much of our personal experiences, but as I reflected on it, I had two thoughts:

I never would have caught that trout if I had not *adapted*, and changed my method of fishing.

And, I also realized that the joy in that moment was not about *who* made the catch, but that the catch had been made....

Faithfully,

Charles Crutchfield



EDITOR'S CORNER

BY AMY FORBUS

How will you adapt for young adult ministry?

The Spring 2010 issue of *Congregations* magazine sits open on my desk. The cover asks a common question: "What do younger adults want?" As I turned to the related story, part of me hoped for a new answer. An easy answer. A "Why haven't we thought of this before? Let's do it!" kind of answer.

But as one who has recently aged out of the young adult demographic, I know better. If it were easy and obvious, United Methodist congregations everywhere would be overflowing with youthful vitality.

The *Congregations* article by Sarah Drummond does offer a few pointers: "...churches should consider how they might be (1) flexible while honoring the importance of commitment, (2) welcoming but not desperate-sounding and (3) overt about theology while making room for doubt."

OK, those suggestions make sense. They may challenge our churches to strike some delicate balances, but I believe we can do that.

Which is why the story's headline confuses me all the more: "Church for the Under-Forty Crowd: Attracting Young Adults to Congregational Life."

Really? Are we still thinking it's about getting young people to join in with what we're already doing? In most cases, the old *Field of Dreams*

model doesn't work. We've built it, and they haven't come.

Last month I sat in on a meeting of the Conference Young Adult Council. While everyone there had experienced at least some fruitful ministry, nobody had the easy solution we all wish existed. But one consistent element kept emerging: relationship.

Shawn Gustin is in a ministry of relationships. A layperson at First UMC of Searcy, he extends an open invitation to local college students. Yes, the group meets for weekly study at the church building, too, but it grows stronger largely because Shawn and his family share more than an hour or two a week. They share their home and their lives.

We all have a specific idea of what "ministry" looks like, whether we realize it or not. But the Holy Spirit sets no such limits. The Spirit is all about making things happen. Are we limiting its work among us by ignoring new ideas?

How are you willing to adapt? How will you react when you come up against your own idea of "how things should be"? Will you leave it there, or will you break your own mold for the sake of making disciples of Jesus Christ and transforming the world?

Maybe it's our own little churchy world that needs transforming.

So... What are we going to do about it?

SAU Wesley Foundation scholarship recipients



Five United Methodist students are receiving scholarships to attend Southern Arkansas University through the SAU Wesley Foundation. As part of qualifying for this honor, the students agree to take on leadership responsibilities in the Wesley Foundation ministry. United Methodist congregations and individuals from the Southwest District provide funds for these scholarships. Pictured, left to right: John Thornsberry of Avery, Texas; Kelsey Maloch of Taylor, Ark.; Amanda Ward of Ogden, Ark.; and Alan Thompson of Texarkana, Ark. Lauren Russell of El Dorado, Ark., is not pictured.

COURTESY PHOTO



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Knowing our Body: Gen-Y thoughts on tradition

BY MARY FAITH "ZOE" MILES
Special Contributor

Editor's note: This column is the introduction to a multi-part series on how young adults view the church.

I was never particularly a science person.

I do remember, though, a teacher in elementary school telling me that if we didn't have skeletons, our bodies would be mushy piles of organs and muscles. Although without a full skeleton, a human could survive, she would obviously not be able to function properly.

With this in mind, the traditions of the United Methodist denomination support our skeletal structure within Christ's body. While these customs do not determine the Body's survival—that is Christ's job

as the Body's Head—the church's structure provides the supporting frame through which spiritual movement can occur.

In the Old Testament, the Law of Moses provides the Israelites' skeleton. The sacrifices, prayers, cleansings, and holy rituals are meaningful in maintaining a relationship with Jehovah. When the Israelites remove themselves from this frame, doing "evil in the eyes of the Lord" (Judges 2:11, 3:7), they dissolve. Without shape, they cease to function, and they become that messy glob of organs and muscles.



Mary Faith
"Zoe" Miles

Looking at the Law of Moses in the New Testament, we find that the Law maintains its structure; however, the bones have overridden other body parts. The Israelites' skeleton is no longer a supple vessel in which God can move, but is more like the brittle exoskeleton of an armored armadillo.

When Jesus healed a blind man on the Sabbath, "[s]ome of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath'" (John 9:16). As Jesus says that "[t]he Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27), the traditions that make up the Body were created as a tool for God. God was not created as a tool for the Body.

Just as the Law of Moses directed Israelites, today's church's doctrines and rituals still provide the

Body a vessel in which the Spirit can move and work.

Unfortunately, the emerging generation perceives today's church to be the same brittle armadillo that questioned Jesus in the New Testament.

They hear our responsive readings and see our bumper stickers and note those customs and traditions as cages in which organized religions place the spirituality of Jesus and Christianity. They cease to see the point in this archaic institution and, rather than viewing it with animosity, they find the church irrelevant.

However, it is this very structure that allows Christians to dance in the Spirit. To open a clarifying dialogue between my generation and the church, the next several columns will be based on

interviews with my peer group, questioning them on their concern with the customs, traditions, and doctrines of the church.

In the New Testament, the Body of Christ is depicted "as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband" (Rev. 21:3). As a bride, we must keep our traditions in their proper places: internal structures supporting our outer forms.

It is imperative to keep a healthy balance between a dry, dusty armadillo and a glob of muscle and organs.

Mary Faith "Zoe" Miles is a senior at Oklahoma City University, a United Methodist-related institution. She can be reached at mmiles.stu1@my.okcu.edu.

UCA student: Peru mission trip surrounded by God's love

BY SARA D. BAYLES
Special Contributor

Earlier this year, I had the privilege of traveling to Peru as part of the University of Central Arkansas Wesley Foundation Mission Team.

As a member of this 13-person group, I was beyond blessed to spend the spring semester bonding with these new and old friends from every corner of the state as we prepared to set out on May 16.

Arriving in Peru, we could barely contain our anticipation. We rolled through customs at midnight and were ready to become immersed in the country. We spent the night in Lima and departed the next morning on a nine-hour bus ride to Trujillo. We were greeted with a welcome dinner and began to prepare for the weeks ahead.

We spent our first week leading Vacation Bible School with Centro de Atencion y Educacion a la Familia (CAEF) and their projects in the Asentamientos Humanos (shanty towns) of Taquila, Torres and Moche. Our focus for VBS was Romans 8:38-39: "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (NIV).

We had several different VBS

stations: recreation and games, crafts, storytelling and face painting. Each session began with a skit based on the Max Lucado book *Tu Eres Especial (You are Special)* followed by songs in Spanish.

After the skit and music, we began station rotations. The children were excited to participate. Spending each day with them, surrounded by so many joyful voices in a small classroom, reminded me of the all-encompassing love of Christ.

One evening we provided a retreat for the CAEF staff, pampering them with manicures and pedicures. After a cookout, we ended the evening with worship and Communion. As I washed the feet of these sweet servants who provide so much for so many children in the shanty towns, I thought of Jesus washing the disciples' feet and the spirit of humility that comes from such an act.

We attended church on Sunday at the Iglesia Misioneros de la Cruz, a strikingly welcoming congregation. When I'm asked what I noticed most about life in Peru, I always answer that it was the people. I felt genuinely loved by everyone I met. Every Peruvian, regardless of age or gender, was incredibly friendly and open. The hospitality and thanksgiving for our presence was unlike any other I've experienced. The kiss on the cheek greetings, smiles, and constant hugs showed the love that encompassed our entire team.

We spent our second week at Universidad Privada Antenor Orrego (UPAO), a university in Trujillo. We passed out fliers and greeted students, inviting them to a concert



LEFT: UCA student Sarah Church sits with children during a Bible story session at Vacation Bible School in Moche, an area just outside the city of Trujillo, Peru. RIGHT: UCA students Kendra and Aaron Wildschuetz, a brother and sister team from Henderson UMC in Little Rock, play with kids at a game station that was part of the Vacation Bible School held in Taquila, an area outside of Trujillo, Peru.

COURTESY PHOTOS

on Wednesday evening.

The entire week was an experience of living by faith and perseverance. We had to keep getting permission from university officials for our plan to have a concert in the auditorium.

We all felt the power of prayer while we prayed for our leaders as they approached the university authorities to explain the specifics of the concert and our involvement on campus. And during this time of confusion, I felt a peace within my heart as I knew the hands of God were using our actions, molding our hearts, and guiding our steps. Praise the Lord, we were granted permission for the Wednesday night festivity.

I learned a dance for part of the skit that would be performed at the concert, and I was encouraged by the patience and determination of Peruvian friends during the practice times. It reminded me of how Christ pursues each of us with unceasing

persistence and love, wanting to have a relationship with us and to use our hearts and hands for His purposes on this earth.

Wednesday night approached, and the concert went off wonderfully. Afterward, we were able to break into small groups and share our testimonies with UPAO students in hopes of bringing new people into the youth group at the local church.

The journey back to the U.S. was marked by tear-filled goodbye hugs, tissues and catching naps until we were back in the Atlanta airport, surrounded by American faces. The culture shock I had experienced just two weeks earlier landing in Lima was completely reversed as we came home to the reality of fast-paced life in the U.S. It seemed like the opposite of our Peruvian friends' loving and welcoming hearts ready to help.

The difference brings to mind the story of Martha and Mary in Luke 10:38-42. Martha became so

distracted by the worries of the world that she forgot to take in what God had already sent her way—the love of Jesus. When I get drawn away from the love of God by schoolwork, worries or problems, I remember Peru—hearing the love echoing through the voices of hundreds of children singing, knowing that nothing this world can throw at me will even begin to compare to the vast love of Christ.

What can I take away from my time in Peru? Love. Throughout my time there, I experienced so much love from all the people that I interacted with. This experience is definitely a gift from God, who once again surrounds me with His love.

Bayles, a junior at UCA, plans to become a certified candidate for ministry. She is a member of Wesley UMC in Springdale and an intern and small group leader at the UCA Wesley Foundation.



ABOVE: Participants in a retreat sponsored by The Bridge spend time in a small group gathering. The Bridge is sponsored by First UMC of Fort Smith for students enrolled at the University of Arkansas' Fort Smith campus.

RIGHT: A group from The Bridge helps out on a Habitat for Humanity building project. FAR RIGHT: Students from the Wesley Foundation at Arkansas State University in Jonesboro spent May 9-16 on Tour de Faith, a 200-mile bike ride down the Atlantic Coast from North Carolina to Georgia. They began the trip by building a wheelchair ramp for a family in Robeson County, N.C., and continued with smaller mission projects along the way.



Foundation for life: UM campus ministries aim for long-term spiritual growth (from page 1A)

in New Orleans. Durand says this year's project is still being discussed.

A visible difference

At the University of Arkansas' Fort Smith campus, United Methodists are building The Bridge CQ campus ministry. The program, sponsored by First United Methodist Church of Fort Smith, was founded three years ago.

Still in the growth stage, The Bridge currently has a core of about 20 participants. The ministry offers a meal and worship service each Wednesday and small group activities throughout the week.

Campus minister the Rev. Todd Vick says the ministry aspires to become more involved in community service, so it has teamed up with Midland Heights UMC to deal with a graffiti problem in the northern part of Fort Smith. Graffiti has become so prevalent that the city government fines residents whose property has been "tagged" if they don't remove the graffiti immediately.

"There are a lot of elderly couples and others who don't have the means to remove it," Vick says of the gang symbols and often off-color messages spray-painted onto people's houses, fences and storage buildings. Students with The Bridge will power-wash or paint over the graffiti so impoverished residents won't be faced with the expense of a fine.

Nurturing religious life

As a United Methodist-affiliated school, Hendrix College in Conway doesn't have a Wesley Foundation.

"A Wesley Foundation's purpose is to provide a Methodist

presence on a campus, but if you're a United Methodist college, then you already have that," says the Rev. Wayne Clark, chaplain at Hendrix.

The chaplain's office and the Hendrix Center for Vocation, Ethics and Calling together offer 20 programs weekly that include worship services, fellowship, service projects, Bible study, home-cooked meals, and discussion groups addressing questions about life, theology and philosophy.

Each year, students may apply to participate in four mission trips in the United States and overseas. This year, students will go to Birmingham, New Orleans, Cuba and South Africa for projects ranging from serving meals to the homeless to building and repairing housing.

The United Methodist Leadership Scholars program involves 50 students who play a leadership role in nurturing religious life on and off campus, Clark says. Some of these students aspire to ordination, but most are looking toward a life in service at their local churches.

Empowering through faith

Philander Smith College in Little Rock is another United Methodist-affiliated campus where you won't find anything named Wesley Foundation. But the school's Office of Religious Life provides spiritual guidance and counseling, plus religious study, service projects, mentoring and worship services for all students.

"We combine intellect and faith at Philander Smith," says Miller-Yow, who also is pastor of Wesley Chapel UMC located on the college campus. Students attend worship services at the church and participate in community outreach such as feeding homeless people once a month.

"We are a ministry of the church that leads people to accomplish the goals God has for their lives," Miller-Yow says.

One program specifically targets male African-American students to mentor and guide them through their spiritual and academic journeys. Empower the African-American Male's goal is to keep young men in school by "using faith to push them through." Miller-Yow says students are schooled for leadership: "We want them to be agents of social justice and we empower them to be able to do things themselves."

Teaching values

The Wesley Foundation at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock offers fellowship and a three-course lunch every Wednesday. On Mondays, students may enjoy a light lunch and Bible study; on Thursdays, they're provided with free dinner and a movie.

The ministry reaches out to students of other faiths as well as Methodists, says director the Rev. Maxine Allen. One way is through its "rolling blessing" during meals at the center.

"Some people have never had blessings at meals or are afraid to pray over their food on campus," Allen says. "So from 11:30 a.m. to about 1 p.m., we may bless the food five or six times. Classes start and end at different times so students cycle in and out. We ask the students to do the blessings to encourage student leadership."

In October, the ministry's leadership team will hold a retreat at Camp Tanako in Hot Springs. In addition to spiritual discussions, the group will clean up the grounds as a mission project.

"The values that we pass on kind of rub off on folks," Allen says. "It's kind of covert evangelism."



Fellowship, study, service: Tech Wesley seeks to form leaders for churches, communities

BY RHONDA OWEN
For the Arkansas United Methodist

United Methodist campus ministries see the future pass through their doors every day as college students seek to strengthen their connections to God and each other.

With the future always clearly in its sight, the Wesley Foundation at Arkansas Tech University in Russellville provides these students with a place to socialize, study and learn skills that will ready them for leadership and other roles in their churches back home.

“Campus ministry is one of the greatest resources available to our church,” says the Rev. Jason Molitor, director of ATU’s Wesley Foundation. “It has the potential to help build and encourage the leadership of local churches in the future.”

Students attend worship services, Bible study, music and theater productions and social gatherings. They’re also given opportunities to learn about God’s love through service to others.

The foundation’s student leadership team has at least 100 members, Molitor says, “but about 500 students will come through our doors every week.” At each of the foundation’s two weekly worship services, attendance ranges from 100 to 200.

“Every program we have has a spiritual connection, but they also have a practical side,” he explains. “Here, we strive to develop [students] as leaders—not only as leaders for our ministries on campus, but also for churches and communities when they graduate.

“All of our ministries are broken up into teams and led by students. Students guide the ministries and the staff guides the students,” he says.

Through the Age to Age ministry, college students mentor and tutor elementary and secondary students that school counselors have identified as needing help in one or more areas of their lives, Molitor says. Wesley Foundation students now help 69 children with homework, plus provide them with afterschool snacks and sometimes their evening meal. And during the summer, the foundation held four camps for the children in Age to Age.

Age to Age lets students pass along the philosophy and practice of serving others to the children they help. Each year, students pair members of a third-grade class at one local school with a nursing home, whose residents they visit and correspond with throughout the year.

The children’s nursing home ministry is in addition to the foundation’s CARE (Caring About Russellville’s Elderly) program, in which college students themselves visit and entertain people in long-term care facilities.

The Wesley Foundation also helps students manage the myriad academic and personal challenges of college life. The FROG (FRfreshman Outreach Group) program reaches out to freshmen to teach them practical skills such as time management while helping them forge relationships with fellow freshmen.

“It provides a place for students to connect to the university, connect with each other, and really kind of walk through the struggles students have the first year,” he says.

In the semester-long Song of Solomon program, students examine dating relationships from a scriptural perspective.

Molitor says the young men and women are often split into separate discussion groups “so they can have honest conversations about being in a dating relationship.”

Discussions cover questions about dating, love, sexuality and building healthy, God-centered relationships. Students delve into issues that may come up during the first stages of dating all the way through the first talk of marriage. Molitor says they’re encouraged to live a “chaste and pure life” and given the support they need to do so.

In all things, the future is present, he says: “College is the place where they can do some really great things. Students who are involved here will be involved at home to do the work of God’s kingdom.”



Arkansas Tech Wesley Foundation ministries reach out into the local community on an individual level. In the photo above, Arkansas Tech University student Lori Williams works with an Age to Age elementary school student during Tutor Time. Below, student Johnnie White participates in CARE by visiting with a resident of a Russellville nursing home.

COURTESY PHOTOS



Hendrix College students engaging in an Exploring Ministry Together (EMT) group activity in which they write the gifts they see in each individual on the sheet of paper taped to that person’s back. EMT groups of between 10 and 15 people meet weekly to discuss their calls to ministry.

COURTESY PHOTOS

A neighboring Conference's recipe for vital, effective campus ministry

BY LISA GARVIN
Special Contributor

"If you feed them, they will come!" That is the mantra of many campus ministers.

They aren't empty words. As with any family meal, a campus ministry meal is full of life, full of energy, full of questions, full of heart, full of love.

As young people leave home and head to community colleges and universities, they find campus ministries eager to welcome them to the table: a sanctuary to enter after a long day of classes and activities, to be fed—often physically and spiritually—and to be embraced by others who want to hear about your experiences and to know and love you.

On 27 campuses across Mississippi, Wesley Foundations offer a home away from home to countless students. For each campus there are unique opportunities and unique challenges.

As with potato salad at a family

reunion, there are many recipes for effective campus ministry.

The Mississippi Conference offers one recipe to nourish young people as they discern their vocations and grow into their God-given potential.

Warning: This recipe appears simple, but requires regular attention, good communication, and strong commitment.

- 1 Part Good Appointments
- 1 Part Consistent (and Dependable) Financial Support
- 1 Part Engaged Board of Directors

Mix all the ingredients together, in any order, and the product is vital and effective campus ministry.

Good Appointments: The Cabinet works collaboratively with local Boards of Directors and the Conference Committee on Higher Education to appoint clergy and laypeople who are called to ministry on campus, invested in the lives of college students and gifted with vision and lots of energy as directors of each campus ministry unit.

Five universities and one community college are served by full-time campus ministers with almost 50 years of combined experience in their field. Twenty additional campuses are served by

part-time campus ministers who split their time between local churches, public school teaching and other vocations while serving faculty, staff and students on their respective campuses.

Consistent (and Dependable) Financial Support: Consistent and dependable quality leadership requires compensation that reflects the value of the gifts and services rendered.

Some time ago, the Mississippi Conference Committee on Higher Education and Ministry committed the Annual Conference to provide salary and benefit support to each appointed campus minister. Using a simple formula that accounts for years of experience, the Annual Conference provides salary support to all 27 units. This frees boards of directors and campus ministers to focus their work (ministry and fundraising) on the programmatic needs of each unit.

The Conference commits approximately 7 percent of its annual apportioned budget to support two United Methodist colleges (Rust and Millsaps Colleges) and the salaries of campus ministers on 27 state-supported campuses.

Engaged Board of Directors: The "secret" ingredient, key to the

success of any vital and effective campus ministry, is a strong board of directors. Where there is a strong and engaged board of directors, there is vital and effective campus ministry.

Likewise, if you know of a vital and effective campus ministry, there is likely a committed and engaged board of directors providing support to the students and the campus minister.

As any good United Methodist Church member does, individual board members offer their time, their talent, their gifts and their service to support the ministry on campus. This ranges from providing food for weekly meals to mentoring students and, of course, giving money to support the programmatic needs of the unit.

On one Mississippi campus, a board member spontaneously donated "a little piece of property behind the baseball field" for a new Wesley Foundation building. Today, The Barn, which sits on that "little piece of property," is the spiritual and social hub of Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College - Perkinston.

Not everyone can donate property or large sums of money, but everyone can invest something in

the lives of young people who are discerning God's will for their lives and seeking to faithfully follow Christ.

Earlier this year, a reporter from the General Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministry called the Conference office. Having read the most recent Lewis Center report on Clergy Age Trends (1985-2009), she noted that 11 percent of Mississippi's elders are under age 35—more than twice the national average. She asked, "How'd you do it?"

The answer: a strong conference-wide commitment to campus ministry!

Campus ministry is nourishing the hearts and souls of young people across our church. Campus ministry is equipping and empowering young people to lead the church today and into the future. Campus ministry matters. Campus ministry matters for young people and it matters for the church.

Thanks be to God for all those who offer support to campus ministers, campus ministries and college students!

The Rev. Garvin serves as director of ministerial services for the Mississippi Conference.



Lisa Garvin

Holy Spirit moves among Christ-centered community at Wesley

BY OMAR AL-RIKABI
Special Contributor

At close to 21,000 students, the largest university in the state of Arkansas began the 2010-11 school year with the largest freshman class and the largest enrollment in its 139-year history. During the first week of classes, we wanted to try and feed a few of them.

Feeding students en masse is a common practice for campus ministries all over the country. But for the Wesley Foundation at the University of Arkansas, preparing food for 200 people poses a constant and unique challenge:

We have no kitchen.

Our cooking space includes a water cooler, a dorm fridge and a small microwave. Any meals we offer students must be prepared at my house (or the home of a student or volunteer) and "picnicked" over to the chapel. And we must make sure that anything we bring won't make a mess because of another unique challenge:

We have no running water,

because we have no plumbing.

I can't fully explain how we got to this point, because this was the state of things when I arrived. But I can tell you this: The Holy Spirit is moving here, and Christ is building his church on campus.

In the past two years we have been in full "rebuilding mode."

We have been rebuilding our donor base. We have been rebuilding our board of directors.

But most importantly, we have been rebuilding our programs, presence and outreach to campus.

Our mission on the U of A campus is to be a Christ-centered student community creatively expressing God's Kingdom within the campus culture in four areas: Prayer, worship and teaching, freshman and small group communities and outreach to the

campus and community.

When I became the director of the U of A Wesley two years ago, we established Acts 2:46-47 as our "foundation passage":

They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved. (NLT)

This text speaks of the earliest church, and it is our model for this body today. We gather together every Wednesday night in the chapel, where we worship through music, prayer, the reading of Scripture, preaching and Holy Communion.

We have student-led small groups that meet throughout the week in dorms or apartments to pray, read Scripture, and share life and discipleship together. We also have students who go out every week to help feed the homeless and serve lower-income families.

In other words, we are the church.

Wesley Foundations all across Arkansas are actually two entities at the same time. First, we are a mission work on the frontier of the college campus. In our midst are the future pastors and lay leaders of the church... but also the future doctors, writers, politicians, engineers and artists... those who will shape the culture the future church will be living in.

But Wesley Foundations are also the local parish on their respective campuses. Students at Wesley are not just the future, they are part of the active Body of Christ **today**, engaged in the work of the Kingdom **now**. What can happen in a dorm room on a Tuesday night is just as holy and valuable to the Kingdom of God as what can happen on a Sunday morning in a sanctuary.

Jesus told us to "go into all the world and make disciples of all nations." At the U of A Wesley in Fayetteville, we believe that includes the "Razorback Nation," and we have been here for more than 80 years.

The prayers and financial support of individuals, local churches and the Arkansas Conference have been an invaluable part of our history, and also of our present.

Indeed, all Wesley Foundations and campus ministries in Arkansas will continue to need the support of a Conference that believes in the Methodist presence and work of the Kingdom at colleges and universities.

Here in Fayetteville, we are praying, visioning and hoping to break ground on a new building in 2012, which will be the 50th anniversary of our current building, Chapel of the Cross. Our sacred space desperately needs additional facilities, so we may continue to share more of our meals with great joy, so that the Lord may add to our fellowship those Razorbacks who are being saved.

The Rev. Al-Rikabi serves as director of the Wesley Foundation at the University of Arkansas. He blogs at firstbornstories.com.



Rachel Goodwin, center, Brandon Bates and Katie Dunn discuss legislative process with Legislative Assembly chair Will Green, left, at the 2010 Global Young People's Convocation.

PHOTO BY JAY CLARK

Arkansans reflect on Berlin convocation

BY RHONDA OWEN
For the Arkansas United Methodist

When young United Methodists from 32 countries joined hands in Berlin, Germany, for the closing service July 26 at the second Global Young People's Convocation, cultural differences and language barriers disappeared.

"We were all there to glorify God," says Katie Dunn, associate youth pastor of Pulaski Heights United Methodist Church in Little Rock. "I looked around the room and saw people of all different backgrounds and none of it mattered. That was real powerful."

Dunn was a young adult delegate representing the South Central Jurisdiction at the Global Young People's Convocation (GYPC) July 21-26. Also in the Arkansas group were adult worker Brandon Bates, youth minister of Lakewood UMC in North Little Rock; youth delegate Judd Burns, a freshman at the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville; and youth delegate Rachel Goodwin, a member of St. Luke UMC in Little Rock.

GYPC brought together almost 350 youth and young adults from around the world so they could learn about each other's lives, faith and struggles. The Legislative Assembly at the convocation allowed delegates to discuss issues affecting United Methodists now and in the future, plus vote on legislation to be presented at General Conference in 2012.

But what proved most significant, the young Arkansans say, was

experiencing their faith on a global level and witnessing firsthand how Christianity affects people of divergent cultures.

Dunn was moved by conversations with delegates from African nations such as the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of Mozambique.

"I won't forget hearing about the hardships they experience that we don't, the poverty they grew up in and how it shaped them, their understanding of who God is and how they were called to be Christians," Dunn says. "They see the need for Christ on a daily basis in a way we in America don't."

Bates says he came away from the Berlin convocation and the first GYPC held in 2006 in Johannesburg, South Africa, with similar feelings.

"It was a great experience seeing how worship can be a unifying force," he said, explaining this realization arose from first becoming aware of how viewpoints of United Methodists in the U.S. differ from those of United Methodists in other countries.

For example, delegates from African and European countries were more strongly in favor of pro-environmental proposals than were U.S. delegates.

Goodwin said she was impressed by the strong feelings delegates from all nations had about legislation to support allowing clergy to perform marriage ceremonies for homosexuals in states and nations where it is legal. This and two other proposals relating to homosexuality were voted down.

"It was eye-opening," Goodwin says. "It was a huge debate showing that even young people are divided about the issue. Sometimes people think all young people have liberal ideas, but I learned there are just as many who don't."

The young people came together on proposals directly affecting their participation in church leadership on a local level. "One resolution was for committees and churches all across the board to consider the times in which they plan their meetings so youth and young adults can be there," Bates said.

Meetings held during business hours on weekdays are difficult for students and young people with jobs to attend, he says. Holding some meetings on weekends would make it easier for young people to be involved.

Bates intends to share what he learned in Berlin with youth members of his church and others. He wants to convey to the youth what is happening worldwide in the UMC while raising older church members' awareness of issues important to youth and young adults.

Burns, at 18 the youngest member of the Arkansas delegation, echoes the others' feelings about Christianity as a global religion. But he emphasizes that his motivation for attending GYPC was to be a voice for his generation.

"We are not just the future of the church," Burns says. "We're here now. We're important now."

Exploring the mystery of young adult ministry

BY ROD HOCOTT
Special Contributor

Enigma. Puzzlement. Conundrum. Mystery.

These are just a few of the words I have used over the past few years with regard to young adult ministry. And according to many local church folks I have visited with, I am not alone in trying to figure this all out. Churches everywhere are baffled, confused, perplexed and yes, mystified as to how to go about making strong disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world among this population.

Between the graded system of youth ministry and the age level of older adult ministry, there's not necessarily a logical landing spot for everyone. It becomes strikingly obvious that many young adults just don't feel like they have a place in the local church.

Who is this elusive group anyway? Well, they are no longer youth, and according to Robin Marantz Henig's August 10 *New York Times* article, "Why are so many people in their 20's taking so long to grow up?", they are not fully adult, either.

They are, however, those persons between the ages of 18 and 30-something who are high school graduates in the work force, college students, singles, singles with children, young married, young married with children, single again, single again with children, never been married and never plan to marry.

Trying to develop a ministry that meets the needs of all these diverse folks can become overwhelming, and the desire to give up often outweighs the need to go on.

I have read the studies. I have

visited with young adults. I have participated in two Young Adult Summits in Nashville. So far, here is what I am completely sure of: In order to have a young adult ministry, there have to be young adults.

We can no longer sit inside the walls of the church and expect them to come to us. We can no longer be mystified by what it takes to reach and disciple this group. We have to get out of our comfort zone and be aware of these folks who need what the UMC has to offer.

Your Conference Young Adult Council has met and has a plan that we hope will help "de-mystify" young adult ministry for local churches who want to intentionally reach out to young adults in their communities.

This plan will seek to help local churches understand the nature of young adults' needs. Among them: authenticity and unselfishness, openness and hospitality, leadership development, a broader understanding of "ministry" to include life beyond the local church or campus ministry, attention to service and social justice issues, integration with the community of faith as a whole and meaningful study of the scriptures. A pilot gathering will be held on October 28, with others to follow in the spring of 2011.

Your church needs what young adults have to offer, and young adults need the community of faith offered by a local church. It is time to stop making excuses and get on with the business of making disciples. Be watching for a young adult ministry gathering coming to your area, or better yet, volunteer to be a host church!

Hocott serves as Arkansas Conference minister of youth and young adults. To volunteer to host a De-mystifying Young Adult Ministry event, call 501-324-8008 or e-mail rhocott@arumc.org.



Rod Hocott

De-mystifying Young Adult Ministry

A free workshop offered by your Conference Young Adult Council

Thursday, October 28, 2010

6:00 p.m.

First UMC Beebe (302 N. Main St.)

For more information or to register,
e-mail Eric Van Meter: astatewesley@yahoo.com

Registration deadline: October 21

TRANSFORMING THE WORLD

How you can help campus ministries

If you've found inspiration in the stories from this special issue of the *Arkansas United Methodist*, you may want to know what you can do next. Here are a few places to start.

Connect:

Do you know a student just starting college? Is he or she familiar with the United Methodist ministry on campus? Provide the student's name and contact information to the chaplain or campus minister where that student is attending, and let the student know there's a resource on campus to help with their spiritual growth. Don't know a student? Try another form of connection: Talk with district and annual conference leaders about support for campus ministry.

Invite:

Ask leaders from a campus ministry near your church to come and share ministry stories with your small group, committee or congregation. If you're a pastor, ask a campus minister to serve as guest preacher next time you're away from your pulpit.

Give:

Some of the apportionment dollars your church sends to the Conference support the salaries of campus pastors and provide some funding for their ministries, but most campus ministries rely on gifts from individuals to cover additional costs. Love offerings from local congregations make an enormous difference, too.

Serve:

In addition to money, many campus ministries also need donations of time. Can your Sunday school class or small group give a lunch hour or evening to cook and serve a meal for students? Are you willing to travel with a young adult mission team? Contact one of the campus ministers listed below and ask what needs currently go unmet. Find a way to meet one of those needs and make a difference in students' lives on a personal level.

Pray:

Efforts like 40 Days of Prayer (pray40.com) offer guidance for lifting up campus ministries in your daily prayers. The current 40 Days of Prayer focus continues through October 1, 2010.

Contacting your Arkansas Conference campus ministries

- Arkansas State University: the Rev. Eric Van Meter, 870-932-2061 or astatewesley@yahoo.com
- Arkansas Tech University: the Rev. Jason Molitor, 479-968-4159 or atuwesleyminister@yahoo.com
- Henderson State/Ouachita Baptist University: the Rev. Jessica Durand, 870-246-6731 or campusrev@sbcglobal.net
- Hendrix College: the Rev. J. Wayne Clark, 501-450-1263 or clark@hendrix.edu
- Philander Smith College: the Rev. Ronnie Miller-Yow, 501-374-7893 or miller-yow@philander.edu
- Southern Arkansas University: the Rev. Mark Lasater, 870-234-1114 or sau_wesley@hotmail.com
- University of Arkansas, Fayetteville: the Rev. Omar Al-Rikabi, 479-443-5226 or omar@uawesley.com
- University of Arkansas at Little Rock: the Rev. Maxine Allen, 501-663-1153 or mallen@arumc.org
- University of Arkansas at Monticello: the Rev. Kavan Dodson, 870-735-6626 or edwardkavanaugh@hotmail.com
- University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff: the Rev. Hank Wilkins, 870-536-6266 or senatorrevhank@aol.com
- University of Central Arkansas: the Rev. John Palmer, 501-327-7173 or wesfound@conwaycorp.net
- The Bridge @ University of Arkansas at Fort Smith: the Rev. Todd Vick, 479-782-5068 or tvick@fsfumc.org



Dr. Walter Kimbrough, president of Philander Smith College, speaks about the institution's history and heritage at the ceremony celebrating the Kresge Foundation grant to establish the Center for Social Justice at the college. Looking on (from left) are John Wilson Jr., executive director of the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities; Bill Moses, program officer for the Kresge Foundation; and Bob Burch, chair of the college's board of trustees.

AUM PHOTO BY AMY FORBUS

Kresge grant helps Philander Smith College establish Center for Social Justice

BY AMY FORBUS
Editor

Philander Smith College's large "THINK JUSTICE" banner facing Interstate 630 has far more behind it than the brick wall on which it rests.

The college's emphasis on social justice on August 12 received a major boost from the Kresge Foundation: a \$1.2 million grant to establish the Center for Social Justice.

The United Methodist-related, historically black college in 2007 launched a social justice initiative that includes guest lecturers, internships and other efforts to infuse justice issues into the curriculum, building on a tradition as old as the institution itself.

"When we adopted the social justice initiative, our vision was to create a Center devoted to these

issues," said Dr. Walter Kimbrough, president of Philander Smith College, who shared an excerpt from the United Methodist Church's Social Principles during the ceremony. "Now, with Kresge's support, we are able to make some monumental strides toward the realization of that goal."

The grant includes a challenge: To receive a matching gift from Kresge, the college must raise \$300,000 in private support by Dec. 31, 2012, a challenge that provides Philander Smith a target for growing its endowment and increasing alumni giving.

The mission of Philander Smith College is to graduate academically accomplished students, grounded as advocates for social justice, determined to change the world for the better.



Join other Arkansas
Sharing Together in Christ's Name churches.

Order your free resources at
www.SharingTogetherUMC.org or call (877)646.1816

Student teams travel to speak, sing, serve in local churches

Most campus ministries don't limit themselves to the boundaries of the college or university they call home.

If you have a desire to know more about the spiritual growth of young adults involved with United Methodist ministries across the Conference, one way to learn is to invite these campus groups into your local church. To get started, call or e-mail the contact of your choice in the above listing.

If you have a campus in your area that isn't served by a UMC ministry and you would like to reach out to students there, consider attending one of the "Demystifying Young Adult Ministry" events coming up on October 28 or in early 2011 (see page 7 for details).

RIGHT: Lauren Grundy, a senior from Memphis, Tenn., and Blake Schrepfer, a senior from Pottsville, Ark., led singing for worship at Campground UMC in Paragould on Sunday, August 29. Both serve on the student ministry team at the Arkansas State University Wesley Foundation in Jonesboro.



AUM PHOTO BY AMY FORBUS

REPORTER

THE UNITED METHODIST

umportal.org



Coping skills

Dulac residents hang on, despite oil spill | 4B



A senior Nativity challenge

Remembering the elderly in Christmas events | 6B



Financial stress

Closing small churches not the answer | 7B

Section B

September 17, 2010



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GOING BEYOND SUNDAY SCHOOL

Small groups help Methodists take their faith to deeper level

BY MALLORY MCCALL
Staff Writer

“Small groups” seem more popular than ever. Churches are offering something for everyone—or at least this is the trend in thriving United Methodist churches.

In an effort to “refashion and reposition” the church for the 21st century, the denomination’s Call to Action Steering Team has taken a data-driven

approach to identify what makes congregations—small, large, urban or rural—tick. The research commissioned by the team shows that an active small-group ministry can lead to vitality for many congregations.

Overall, 60 percent of churches with more than five small groups show evidence of high vitality compared to only 19 percent of churches with three or fewer such groups.

“Small groups are popular because

we no longer live in cohesive communities—we work in one place, live in another, shop in yet another, travel, and have lots of contacts, but many of these contacts are superficial,” writes Robert Wuthnow, chair of the sociology department at Princeton University. “Small groups are a search for something more.” Dr. Wuthnow is the author of *Sharing the Journey: Support Groups and America’s New Quest for Community* (Free Press) and editor of

I Come Away Stronger: How Small Groups are Shaping American Religion (Eerdmans).

According to the Barna Group, a research firm based in Ventura, Calif., women account for 60 percent of small-group members in the U.S. who meet for prayer or Bible study. Two-thirds of those who participate in small groups are married and 45 or older, and residents of the South make

■ See ‘Groups’ page 3B

Q&A: Laying a foundation of theology

Stanley Hauerwas, Gilbert T. Rowe Professor of Theological Ethics at Duke University, grew up poor as the son of a bricklayer in the small town of Pleasant Grove, Texas. Despite the fact that *Time* magazine named him in 2001 as the “Best Theologian in America,” those working-class roots have stuck with him, he says in a new memoir, *Hannah’s Child* (Eerdmans).

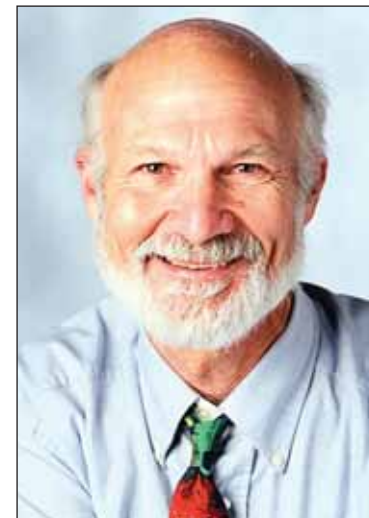
An outspoken pacifist, Dr. Hauerwas, 70, reflects on the people who have influenced his thinking—as a student at Yale Divinity School and then teaching at the University of Notre Dame before arriving at Duke more than 25 years ago. He also describes the hell of living with his mentally ill first wife and raising his son in such difficult circumstances.

Dr. Hauerwas spoke recently with managing editor Robin Russell.

What’s been the response to your very honest memoir?

I get two to three letters a week from people who appreciate the straightforwardness and honesty that they think the book exhibits. I hope that’s true. I also get a number of letters from people who are living with someone who is mentally ill. That cre-

■ See Foundation’ page 2B



Stanley Hauerwas

FAITH WATCH

Breakaway Lutherans form new U.S. church

Conservative Lutherans founded a new denomination Aug. 26 after years of debate within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) over church doctrine and homosexuality. The new North American Lutheran Church “will uphold confessional principles dear to Lutherans, including a commitment to the authority of the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions,” organizers said in a statement.

Groups fight bill that bars faith-based hiring

An interfaith coalition has urged Congress to amend a bill that would withhold federal funds from organizations for treating mental illness or substance abuse unless they “refrain from considering religion or any profession of faith” when hiring employees. In an Aug. 25 letter to Congress, evangelical charities, U.S. Catholic bishops and Orthodox Jews said the bill threatens their religious freedom and their mission to those in need.

PC(USA) rules against pastor in gay weddings

A Presbyterian Church (USA) court declared Aug. 27 the Rev. Jane Spahr guilty of violating both church law and her ordination vows by performing as many as 16 same-sex marriages. Ms. Spahr, a retired California pastor who presided over the weddings in 2008 while it was legal in the state, was the second PC(USA) minister this summer to be convicted of performing gay marriage; a church court in Massachusetts convicted the Rev. Jean Southard in June.

Irish Catholic leaders deny cover-up in '70s

The Catholic Church in Ireland denied any cover-up Aug. 25 in the case of a priest allegedly involved in a 1972 car bombing that killed nine people. A report released in August by police in Northern Ireland had said talks between the government, police and the church led to the transfer of the Rev. James Chesney to a parish outside the country. Chesney, a suspected member of the Irish Republican Army, died of cancer in 1980.

■ **FOUNDATION** Continued from page 1B

ates a kind of loneliness. I hoped by writing the book I might help people feel less lonely by giving them language to recognize there are other people that know what their life is like. I also get letters that respond to the kind of theological work I'm doing in the book. I hope that the book invites the people who don't read theology into the world of theology in a way that is engaging.

Duke Divinity School is a long way from Pleasant Grove, where you say learning the craft of bricklaying left a mark on you.

It certainly did. There are always people around you that are smarter than you are. I just have always said I work harder. And I learned to work hard by being taken to the job when I was very young. I felt privileged to have this job because my father was the subcontractor laying brick on so many of these jobs, and I wouldn't have been able to do it if he hadn't been the boss. So I worked very hard to make sure that I wasn't getting any extra advantage. I worked as a laborer every summer up until I was 16 or 17.

Your mother's attempts to earn love by caring for people, you write, was due to her deep insecurity and life of poverty. How did that impact you emotionally?

I still find it very hard to acknowledge I might be sick! The everyday cold—you don't want to be cared for! But I hope that the portrayal of my mom—who certainly suffered from the hidden injuries of life—was loving, because she was an extraordinarily kind and energetic person, who would, if you would let her, take over your life. I just wish somewhere down the line she would have learned to have rested in knowing that other people loved her. But she loved my father with an overwhelming regard. You couldn't help but love how she loved my father. And he was a wonderfully gentle soul who was in a very hard line of work. My mother always wanted him, I think, to be more ambitious than he was, but that just wasn't in the cards.

And even though you were raised in the church, you believe you had to become a theologian to become a Christian. Explain.

Not everyone needs to do that, but I probably did. It seems odd for someone coming from my background, but I'm such a head job—I've spent my whole life in books and I think what you think matters. And so I feel quite sure that for me, being initiated into the great theological tradition of the church was crucial for me to know what it means to say I'm a Christian.

The mental illness of your first wife, Anne, taught you “how to live when you are not in control of your life.” What does that look like?

Well, it can be hell, because you just don't know what the next five minutes is going to bring. And we all depend on routines, and rightly so. It can also mean, however, that you learn to de-

‘It still feels like I'm such a beginner in being made part of the kingdom of God.’

pend on other people because you can't get through it without depending on other people. And I certainly had wonderful friends that would say, “I know this is hard. Thank you for sticking through it.” So that's part of the gift.

You also say you've been given the work “of trying to imagine what it means to be Christian in a world that Christians do not control.” Do you see the furor over the Ground Zero Islamic center as reflecting this?

Yes I do! I was called last week by *Time* magazine about that. The first thing I think is, how did the World Trade Center site become sacred? Where did that language come from? I

mean, God is holy. What happened at Ground Zero was murder, and it's a pathos, but it's not sacred. It's like calling the people who died there martyrs. They're not martyrs; they were victims—terrible victims. I don't know where all this language comes from. People who are Christians should know better not to use that language about a fight like the World Trade Center.

Your experience at Duke prompted you to write, “Southern civility is one of the most calculated forms of cruelty.” Do you see that played out in the church today? How so?

You bet I do. I think it's extraordinarily manipulative, an inability of people to speak frankly and directly and truthfully with one another in the church because it's so crucial that we be “kind” and “compassionate.” And it's killing us. It's absolutely killing us. Few things are more important than the recovery of truthful but non-cruel speech. You need to tell ministers who are lazy, they're lazy, and that we're not going to appoint you because you're lazy. That needs to be said. Businesses are a more normal context today for the formation of people, because in business you have a bottom line: Namely, if you don't do what is necessary to make a buck, you get fired. In the church, no one gets fired! And people don't seem to think there's anything at stake. I think it's a big problem.

You are now a member of an Episcopal church—a way of bringing Methodism home to its Anglo-Catholic roots, you write. Do you ever feel you need to be at a UMC, to help “save” the institution?

(Laughs.) I think my life teaching people that are going into the Methodist ministry—I'm doing the best I can to help it that way. I am a deeply committed Methodist. I find one of the ways to express that is through worship at the Church of the Holy Family. I care deeply about Christian unity, and I hope it won't be too long that the Methodists and the Episcopalians will be acknowledging one another's ministry.

And I hope that after 25 years of teaching at Duke, I have half the Methodist clergy of North Carolina feeling guilty for not serving the Eucharist every Sunday. I know they won't do it, and I just want them to feel guilty about it. And I know that

serving the Eucharist every Sunday doesn't make the church necessarily more faithful—witness the Episcopalians! But God promised in 1 Corinthians 11 that if we do it unworthily, we'll become sick or die. And I figure it's better to die that way than out of boredom.

My Methodist heritage is something I care a great deal about—how deeply my life has been formed by the

hymns of Charles Wesley. Without that, I'm sure that I would not be a Christian. Methodists sang them without even knowing what they were saying! They produced people like me.

You say you're feeling less hesitancy now in speaking about God, and that you often cry in church. Are you**feeling more comfortable in your Christian skin?**

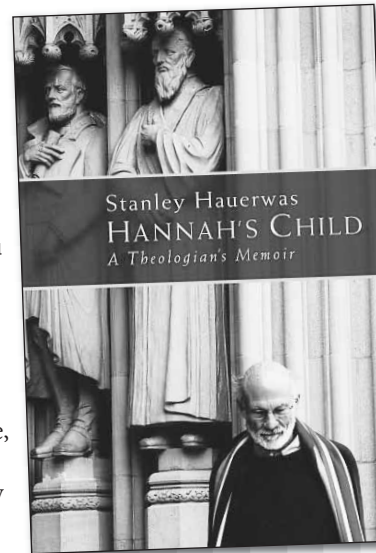
Not really. I feel great joy in being a Christian and in people identifying me as a Christian. And I hope not to betray that trust. But it still feels like I'm such a beginner in being made part of the kingdom of God. I don't regret that. I just think that's a part of God's gift to me. Namely, that I'm not burdened by over self-confidence. So it continues to be exploratory in a way that I find what it means for the Christian life to be a journey.

Prayer doesn't come easy for you, you write, but at the same time, you believe that “The work of theology is the work of prayer.” What have you learned about prayer?

To be quiet. Oftentimes we think prayer is to do and say a great deal. And I just had to learn to let it come. Part of what went into *Hannah's Child* is that as the book develops you see me providing prayers that I hope exhibit my faith.

You keep a poem about death by Irish poet Monk Gibbon on your desk and read it every day. Why?

I just think it's very hard to remember we're going to die. And it's a great gift that some of us live long enough that we have to think that as our bodies are not as healthy as at one time they were, we get to go through a training in learning to die. That's a great gift. And so I'm trying to read that poem as a way to remind myself, “Dust you are and to dust you shall return.” I find that very liberating.

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UM CONNECTIONS

Social media workshop for ministry scheduled

The Beatitudes Society, which seeks to strengthen the progressive Christian network for justice, compassion and peace, will host a workshop on Social Media for Ministry Oct. 16 at Perkins School of Theology, SMU, Dallas. The workshop will familiarize Christian leaders with Facebook, Twitter, blogging and other means of online communication needed for 21st century ministry. The workshop is open to students, faculty members, local clergy and lay leaders. The event is limited to the first 50 registrants. For information, contact Susanne Johnson at susannej@smu.edu; to register, visit: <http://www.beatitudesociety.org/social-media>.

UM seminaries offer online continuing ed

The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry now offers an Online Continuing Education Consortium in collaboration with the 13 United Methodist theological schools. The consortium provides theologically sound, affordable and easily accessible continuing education programs to clergy and lay Christians around the world. The non-academic credit courses range from church history to religion and science to how to build interreligious community. Classes start this fall and will be available year-round. For information, visit www.gbhem.org/continuingeducation.

Deacons gather for rest and rejuvenation

The 2010 Deacon/Diakonate Gathering will be Oct. 24-26 at Lake Junaluska, N.C. The Rev. Gary Gunderson, deacon in full connection in the Memphis Conference and director of Methodist Healthcare in Memphis, Tenn., will speak on health, spirituality and wholeness. For information, visit www.lakejunaluska.com/deacons.

—Compiled by Mallory McCall

GROUPS Continued from page 1B

up half of the nation's small-group attendees as well as a majority of its Sunday schoolers.

Class meetings

In the early 1700s, John Wesley made "class meetings" a requirement for membership in a Methodist society. Each week between seven and 12 people would gather in a neighbor's house to hold each other accountable to keep the "General Rules," to answer the question, "How is it with your soul?" and to give to the relief of the poor. It was in these meetings Methodists learned to love deeply and grow closer to God.

"Methodism began as a way of life, not as a denomination or institution, and [John] Wesley's particular passion was helping people follow Christ," said Bishop Robert Schnase of the Missouri Conference. The early Methodist class meetings held in Christians' homes were designed to help people deepen their faith in a trustworthy, accountable community, he added, not just for the sake of organization.

Those same spiritual benefits can help United Methodists in the 21st century, writes the Rev. Kevin Watson on his blog "Deeply Committed." A doctoral student in the history of Christianity and Methodist studies at Perkins School of Theology, SMU, and author of *A Blueprint for Discipleship: Wesley's General Rules As a Guide for Christian Living* (Discipleship Resources), Mr. Watson writes, "The key contribution that the class meeting can make to contemporary Christianity is that it provides an entry point for every Christian to be in connection with one another in a way that is focused on the dynamic process of the Christian life."

'With our growth, and the amount of people walking through our doors, we've got to meet the needs of everyone who is coming in.'

—Tracey Christensen

Some churches have a notion that if they simply add a lot of small groups they will see an influx in membership and involvement, but that isn't exactly the case. "It isn't just small groups that are important; it's small groups that perform a kind of purpose in forming disciples," says Bishop Schnase.

The churches that are growing and thriving are using small groups to form disciples, and in return, those faithful disciples are helping form the church.

Van Scott, an active layperson at Holman United Methodist Church in

Los Angeles, is one of those disciples. For the last five years he has participated in the Disciple Bible Study, a United Methodist in-depth Bible study that intentionally strengthens Christian leaders and fosters community.

"Through the Disciple program people get connected to the mission of the church," said Mr. Scott. "At first I got involved to learn more about the teachings of the Bible, and from that, I got a better understanding of my role as a child of God and a member of the church."

Mr. Scott is now involved in multiple areas of the church and serves as co-director of the youth department and the chair of the staff pastor-parish relations committee. "Once you get in [the program], you get a hunger and thirst to continue on," he said.

Carol Dunn agrees; she attends a Disciple class at Wesley United Methodist Church in Los Angeles. "It's a wonderful ministry, and I just can't get enough," she said.

Ms. Dunn is actually a member at a local Baptist church but likes the Disciple class at Wesley UMC because it is small, in-depth, long-term and interactive. "We actually get into the Word and discuss it," she said. "It's totally different [than the Wednesday night Bible study at her church.]"

Having completed one Disciple class, Ms. Dunn is already enrolled in another and has invited friends to participate too.

Although churches have different program names and structural organizations for their small-group ministry, they each are attuned to meeting the needs of their congregants.

White's Chapel United Methodist Church in Southlake, Texas, has a well-

attended adult ministry with more than 1,000 participants, yet people wanted more than Sunday school classes, said Tracey Christensen, White's Chapel adult discipleship coordinator.

To provide opportunities for members to grow in deeper community outside of the church building, White's Chapel is launching this fall a small-group ministry called LifeGroups. Groups of six to 15 participants will meet off-campus, providing intentional community and assimilating and connecting newcomers to the church.



PHOTO COURTESY OF GENERAL COMMISSION ON ARCHIVES AND HISTORY

In the early 1700s, members of Methodist societies would gather weekly in small groups and build accountability and unity by asking each other, "How is it with your soul?"

"With our growth, and the amount of people walking through our doors, we've got to meet the needs of everyone who is coming in," said Ms. Christensen. "On-campus small groups, Bible studies and Sunday school classes don't always fit everyone's needs. We are just trying to offer another opportunity for people to get connected besides being on campus.

"It's a Bible-based movement; it's nothing new. We just call it LifeGroup."

There is no set formation for the groups. They can be organized around similar interests, age, children's age, location or hobby and meet in neighborhood homes.

No one way

Small groups can look very different. At First United Methodist Church in Fairbanks, Alaska, the small-group roster includes a berry picking group, a curling team, a crafting group and a lectionary study.

But David Rumph, the small-group director, is not satisfied with mere affinity groups, saying they don't help folks grow in holiness the way the early Methodist class meetings did. They do, however, keep people coming back to the church building.

This summer the average Sunday morning worship attendance was 208 people, and 161 people were involved in a weekly small group. "What we've kind of fallen back on is just trying to get people connected beyond one hour of worship on Sunday morning," said Mr. Rumph.

At Fairbanks FUMC a small group is anything that meets once a week and makes a conscious effort to connect participants to God, the church and an outreach ministry at least once a semester—this could be anything from picking up trash on the side of the highway to singing at a nursing home. Even the choir is considered a small group because it meets once a

week and strives to make the three connections. Sunday school classes are also listed as small-group offerings.

Mr. Rumph will be the first to admit that although the small groups are fun and well-attended, the direct accountability—that "ol' how is it with your soul this week?"—is missing. To redirect groups back to the basics of Wesleyan class meetings, Mr. Rumph has led small-group studies on John Wesley's *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* and *The Practice of the Presence of God* by Brother Lawrence.

Sunday school

Have the convenient, close-knit communities of small groups made Sunday school classes a thing of the past? Not necessarily. Church experts believe both ministries can be beneficial.

Sunday school used to serve as the portal into the church, says Bishop Schnase. "We've relied on Sunday school for several generations as a primary tool for spiritual formation, and it still is that for many people, but there are limitations in many churches' Sunday school format."

Sunday school classes are mostly come-and-go, which makes it welcoming to newcomers. But at the same time, a sometimes inconsistent attendance pattern doesn't lend itself to an accountable community, added Bishop Schnase. The time restraint of a Sunday morning class also means there is roughly 30 minutes of content without much personal engagement.

"Sunday school is great and I support it, but sometimes it's just not enough to fulfill the maturing in Christ quality that small groups can help with," he said.

"A small group is the kind of school for love; it's how we learn the faith."

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Coping with disaster

Despite hurricanes, oil spill, residents call Dulac home

The sun sets behind a shrimper's nets in Dulac, La.



The Rev. Kirby Verett says the Houma people are deeply tied to the unique ecosystem found in Louisiana's coastal estuaries.

By KATHY L. GILBERT
United Methodist News Service

DULAC, La.—Modest wooden houses and mobile homes on pilings tower over bright green lawns on both sides of Highway 57.

Pickup trucks sit in the shade under the houses and shrimp boats gently rock on the bayou that snakes along one side of the two-lane blacktop.

In this small fishing town, Clanton Chapel United Methodist Church has been an anchor through many storms. But the latest disaster—the Deep Horizon oil rig explosion—may be the greatest threat to the faithful people who have lived in and loved this coastal region for hundreds of years.

Clanton Chapel, established in the 1880s, is the only Native American United Methodist congregation in Louisiana. Members of the United Houma Nation have fought back from crippling hurricanes, racism and poverty since the explorer Robert La Salle discovered them in 1682.

Just down the road from the church, lifelong United Methodist and tribe member Destry Verdin is on his front porch swing with his wife and brother. An electric fan stirs the hot air and a small television punctuates the morning with screaming contestants on a game show.

The explosion and massive oil spill happened just as the 2010 shrimp season was getting started. Mr. Verdin and many of his neighbors depend on shrimping in the spring and summer for their income.

For the past several years, Gulf Coast shrimpers have faced tough competition from foreign imports, bringing the price of domestic shrimp below \$2 a pound. But this year, the price is up to \$4 a pound.

“We haven't seen prices this good for a long while,” Mr. Verdin says. “Right now, we would be making a lot more money than we made last year. We have to make all the money we can between the seasons to pay our bills in the winter.”

Mr. Verdin worries about the spill reaching the estuaries near Dulac. He also fears the oil spill will create a dead zone in the Gulf that will destroy shrimp, crabs, oysters and fish for years to come. But despite the damage, he doesn't blame the oil industry.

“They are trying [to clean up the spill],” he says. “We can't get mad at them; accidents happen.”

The Rev. Kirby Verett, pastor of Clanton Chapel, understands that sentiment. It is not as easy as deciding between protecting God's creation and big business, he reasons.

“As one person told me, as bad as this BP spill



ABOVE: Cleanup workers lay protective boom in an effort to keep oil from the Deepwater Horizon accident from entering Caminada Bay in Grand Isle, La. **RIGHT:** Marie Dean, who is nationally recognized for her skill in weaving palmetto fronds into baskets and hats, says she is reluctant to leave her Dulac, La., home during the area's frequent bouts with storms and hurricanes.

is, shrimping cannot support this community, and without oil industry jobs, this area would not survive," Mr. Verett says.

Tied to the water

According to the earliest history, the United Houma Nation has always lived on the east bank of the Mississippi River. They are recognized by the state of Louisiana as a tribe but have waited more than 30 years to be recognized as a federal tribe by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. More than 17,000 live in six parishes in south Louisiana.

The tribe's history, culture and livelihood is deeply tied to the water.

Among the soft reeds, tiny shrimp, oysters, crabs, fish and more than 700 species of birds, reptiles and mammals are cradled in the protective arms of nature's incubator.

Salt water from the Gulf of Mexico and fresh water from the Mississippi River mix beneath miles-long fingers of dark green grass to provide a safe haven for sea creatures to grow up in before facing the open gulf.

The estuaries winding along the coast of Louisiana have faced many enemies over the years. Hurricanes have battered and destroyed the delicate shores, while manmade barriers and structures have altered the natural flow of the Mississippi River.

No one wants the oil to make it into the estuaries. But a moratorium on the oil industry will also be a killing blow to the economy, they say.

Weathering storms

Located near the coastline of Louisiana, Dulac regularly gets pummeled by hurricanes.

Most of the homes are in some stage of recovering from past storms. United Methodist youth and other volunteer teams come often to work on homes. Mr. Verdin's family is just moving back into their home after living in a FEMA trailer for three years.

Today, a team of young people from Grace Community United Methodist Church in Shreveport, La., is sitting on top of the house, in the blazing sun, replacing the tin roof.

Mr. Verdin points to several water-stained spots on the ceiling in his living room. "Hurricanes," he says. Even with this constant threat, he says there is no place he would rather be. His wife, Rebecca, and brother Gabe agree.

"Anywhere you go there could be a flood or a tornado or an earthquake," Mr. Verdin says. "I have lived here all my life. Dulac is an outdoor thing—if you want fish or shrimp for dinner, you

just go out and catch them."

Oddly enough, Hurricane Katrina in 2005 didn't really hit Dulac as much as other parts of the state. But a month later, her twisted sister Rita left behind a lot of the damage that people are still recovering from. Gustav and Ike in 2008 added to the destruction.

The 2010 Atlantic hurricane season is forecast to be an active year with some 16 to 18 storms predicted. Alex, the first hurricane of 2010, missed the Louisiana coast, but everyone in Dulac knows that eventually another hurricane will tear their community apart.

People cope. They know how to clean out the mud, lay their family photos in the sun to dry and replace roofs.

No place like home

It will take a mighty big storm to make Marie Dean, 94, leave again.

Her little blue house has been flooded three times. The water stayed a long time the last time. "I raised my family in this house," she says, speaking in French.

One of her daughters has a nice, elevated house outside of Dulac that she says would probably weather the storms better.

"It's nice, but it's not home," Ms. Dean says. Looking around, she adds, "It takes a lot to leave everything you got."

Family photos are hung high on the paneling of her front room. Among them is a framed certificate from the Smithsonian Institution Office

of Folklife Programs. Ms. Dean is a master palmetto-leaf weaver who learned the art at the knees of her mother. She also makes dolls from the Spanish moss that drapes most of the trees lining the bayou.

The certificate, which she received in 1989, recognized her "exceptional contributions to the increase and diffusion of knowledge about the cultural traditions which comprise the heritage of our nation and of the world."

Most days, Ms. Dean sits just inside her front door weaving. She can look out and see everything happening on the road. She can glance to her right and watch the boats go by on the bayou.

Mr. Verett says Ms. Dean is tough, and he tells a story to back up his claim.

A few years ago, when she was 88, she wanted a fresh orange from the tree in her backyard. She climbed up on a ladder, fell and broke her knee. Instead of calling for help, she crawled back into her home. When the pain was too much, she did have to go to the hospital and have surgery.

She points to the long scar, "I didn't want anyone to know I fell," she says, shrugging her shoulder.

'Don't look back'

Growing up in nearby DuLarge, Mr. Verrett learned about racism early in life.

"We [Indians] knew our bounds. That was the way life was," Mr. Verrett says. "If you went into Houma, you couldn't walk on the main street or sit in movie houses; you couldn't vote. I mean

people would flat out tell you, 'You can't come in here.'"

He remembers once as a young boy, an angry crowd targeted his family as his parents drove past a white high school when a football game was just letting out.

"People recognized my parents to be Indian and they started throwing beer bottles at the car," he says with his distinct Cajun French accent.

Mr. Verett knows his community is hurting. Most folks are shrimpers and fishers; others work in a seafood-related business or for the oil industry.

Many of the shrimpers like Mr. Verdin are being paid by British Petroleum to use their boats to help in the cleanup efforts. The bright blue and green "skimming" nets are being replaced temporarily by orange and yellow booms that surround and soak up the oil.

Mr. Verett was happy to hear BP wanted access to the large, centralized sewer system—built after Hurricane Juan in 1985—on the church's property and space to house cleanup teams on church grounds. They asked about bringing in 50 trailers.

After several hard days of clearing the land, however, Mr. Verett is still waiting to hear if BP is going to follow through on its request.

The stress is taking its toll.

He was in the hospital for three days recently with chest pains. A follow-up angiogram showed five blockages that won't require surgery or stints at this time, but he will be on medication and needs to curtail his activities.

But a few days later, Mr. Verett is happily greeting the congregation as they come into church.

On Sunday, the message is from Luke 9:62. He reads, "Jesus said to him, 'No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.'"

"Jesus says, 'Don't look back!'" he said to the few scattered around the sanctuary.

At the end of the service, he greets each person. People linger to talk.

"We do not have millionaires; we have good loving, hospitable people that are faithful to the church," he says. "And out of that, good things keep coming."

Mr. Verett believes in good things.

"God has a better plan for all of us. If you are willing to give into what God has planned for your life, then you can be happy and fulfilled. And in easy and hard times, he is going to lead you through."



The Rev. Kirby Verett leads children's worship at Clanton Chapel United Methodist Church in Dulac.

UNITED METHODIST NEWS SERVICE PHOTOS BY MIKE DUBOSE

AGING WELL

A senior Nativity challenge

BY MISSY BUCHANAN
Special Contributor

Christmas was just days away. The excitement in the room was palpable as the audience began to fill the seats. In the corner, a Christmas tree twinkled. Everyone was in a festive mood.

A crew of volunteers rushed to make last-minute adjustments to the costumes of the actors who were hidden away in nearby rooms.

Mary's robe had to be pinned up so she wouldn't trip. Joseph's headpiece needed extra twine to keep it secure. One of the angels had foam-board wings that needed to be adjusted. Another angel's silver-tinsel halo had slipped down over her glasses and had to be re-taped.

Down the opposite hall, the wise men were fingering their treasures. They tugged on their elaborate turbans. Nearby the shepherds laughed about their makeshift sheep, a white Scottie dog wearing a Christmas hat.

At last the moment came. The audience grew quiet as the narrator began reading the Christmas story. From one hallway, Mary and Joseph moved through the shadow of the doorway.

All eyes were on the 90-year-old Mary as she made her way to the manger. She was slightly stooped and was slowly pushing a walker. Behind her 80-year-old Joseph held tightly to his cane and chose his steps carefully. When they arrived at the stable, Mary turned her walker around and sat on its seat while Joseph rested in a dining room chair.

A few grown sons and daughters in the audience brushed tears from their cheeks, watching their aging parents and elderly friends re-enact the story of Jesus' birth.

As the narrator continued, a shepherd made his entrance in a wheelchair, holding a staff and being

pushed by a volunteer dressed in black so not to distract from the story. Another shepherd pushed a walker and was soon joined by a host of rosy-cheeked angels. Two had wings taped to their wheelchairs; another wore wings tied to her tiny frame as she pushed a walker.

Finally came the wise men. Actually they were women with their gray curls tucked inside jeweled turbans



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS

Jewell Faulkner, 90, portrayed Mary, and John Quinlan, 80, played Joseph in a Nativity play last year at a Dallas assisted living center. Missy Buchanan says churches shouldn't forget to include the elderly in such Christmas events.

and crowns. They cautiously placed their gifts in the wooden manger alongside the doll that was Jesus.

As the narrator completed the story, choir members from a local United Methodist congregation led everyone in a few carols while the older adult actors remained on their walkers or seated in chairs.

In many ways, the Nativity was a familiar scene being played out in churches around the world. Costumes and carols, a stable and a manger. This one just happened to take place in the dining room of an assisted living center.

'This one just happened to take place in the dining room of an assisted living center.'

Even though the characters for this interpretation were older than their biblical counterparts, everyone seemed to embrace the timelessness of the story.

A few weeks before the event, I sat next to 90-year-old Jewell and asked her to play the role of Mary. I remember how she grabbed my hand and squeezed it, telling me that she was deeply honored to play Jesus' mother.

With a smile on her face and a tear in her eye, she whispered, "No one has ever asked me to be Mary. Never in my whole life," she said.

When I returned to the assisted living facility for a visit a few days after the Nativity portrayal, the director of the center told me that the residents were all abuzz. It seems they were still enjoying rehashing the de-

tails and re-living the joy of the day.

As Advent approaches again, I can't help but wonder what would happen if more United Methodist churches reached out to seniors in assisted living centers or retirement communities with something more than a poinsettia or a card? What if churches made it possible for older adults to step into the Christmas story themselves?

I'm calling it the Great Senior Nativity Challenge!

Think about it. What church doesn't already have a stockpile of biblical costumes? Of course, safety and comfort must be the top priority. Use com-

mon sense when it comes to adapting costumes so that no one will trip or fall. Ask someone to be a narrator so that the older adults don't have to worry about remembering lines. Have enough volunteers and eldercare staff to keep every participant safe and at ease.

I challenge each congregation to carry through with good intentions. Be creative. Give frail seniors something to anticipate. Help them find purpose in the midst of lonely days. Remind them that they will never be too old to come to the manger.

Ms. Buchanan, a member of FUMC Rockwall, Texas, is the author of *Talking with God in Old Age: Meditations and Psalms* (Upper Room Books). Visit her Facebook page, *Ageing and Faith*.

Large-church pastors, U.S. bishops meet on revitalization strategy

BY ADAM HAMILTON
Special Contributor

The senior pastors of 89 of the largest United Methodist churches in the United States met Aug. 31-Sept. 2 with 32 of the active U.S. bishops in Park City, Utah, to discuss ways the two groups might work together to reverse the decline of the United Methodist Church.

First, a word about the history of this gathering. Four years ago, the pastors of 10 of the largest churches in the denomination gathered at my home to discuss how large churches could work together to be a part of the revitalization of our denomination.

This group did not organize around theological poles or to support one side or the other in the issues that divide us as United Methodists. Among them were progressives and conservatives with differing views on issues like homosexuality.

Instead we sat down to get to know one another and to discuss what we might be able to do to help reverse the 40-year decline in our denomination.

As we sat down together at supper, we shared the stories of our call, why we are followers of Jesus Christ and what we value about the United Methodist Church. We found there was much more that united us than divided us.

Out of that meeting came a vision of bringing together the pastors of the 100 largest churches (by worship attendance) in our denomination for Christian conferencing. We wanted to pray with one another, learn from one another and look for ways that large churches could be a part of the revitalization of the United Methodist Church.

In 2008, we held our first gathering of this group, tentatively called the Leading Edge. At that time, the 100 largest churches in the denomination averaged a weekend worship attendance of between 1,200 and 7,500.

This year was our third annual gathering, and we invited the active U.S. bishops to join us.

A joint planning team designed the schedule, and most sessions were led by both bishops and large-church pastors.

For instance, Kansas Bishop Scott

Jones led a session on improving preaching in worship, with input from the Revs. Jorge Acevedo, pastor of Grace Church in Cape Coral, Fla.; Junius Dotson, pastor of Saint Mark UMC in Wichita, Kan.; and Mark Beeson, pastor of Granger (Ind.) Community Church.

Denver Bishop Elaine Stanovsky and the Rev. Mike Slaughter, pastor of Ginghamburg (Ohio) Church, led a session on creating missional churches. Texas Bishop Janice Huie and the Rev. Kent Millard, pastor of St. Luke's UMC in Indianapolis, Ind., closed the event.

The discussion at each table of two bishops and six-to-eight pastors centered on strengthening the church's ministry with young adults; helping young adults hear a call to ordained ministry; how large churches can help start new faith communities; improving the quality of preaching across the church; and missional outreach.

Participants also discussed how technology could change how United Methodists "do church" in the coming decades. It was suggested that if Wesley and the early Circuit Riders were alive today, they would use video and the Internet in their efforts to develop churches and to supply these churches' needs in their absence.

Forty percent of the pastors present had already launched additional campuses. Some used live preaching and others preached at their central campus with sermons sent by video, DVD, satellite or over the Internet.

Several of the churches have already become multi-point churches—yoked with smaller churches that had been declining or near death—and seen remarkable results.

A late-night conversation was held with bishops and large-church pastors in which the questions were asked, "What in our current structure inhibits vital ministry in local churches?" and "What in our structure, if changed, could promote vital congregations?"

We ended the gathering with a call that pastors and bishops be "prophets of hope" within the United Methodist Church—leaders who recognize the problems that need to be solved, who personally devote themselves to being part of the solution, and who proclaim and work toward a "future with hope."

The Rev. Hamilton is pastor of The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kan.



Missy Buchanan



Adam Hamilton

WESLEYAN WISDOM

Don't sacrifice small churches on altar of economics

BY DONALD W. HAYNES
UMR Columnist

United Methodism is a denomination of predominantly small membership churches, both from its Evangelical United Brethren and Methodist predecessors.

I am saddened by those who are urging us to respond to the fiscal crunch by closing small-membership churches that cannot support a full-time ordained pastor.

While we all applaud the growth of some megachurches in the denomination, their number is small compared to the 37,000 local churches. Yet most leadership seminars, conference speakers and the most revered pastors represent the megachurch paradigm.

If the very large church is the model from which most pastors learn, we are destined to lose the capacity for vital ministry in small-membership churches. The megachurch is wonderful, just as cathedrals are wonderful, but a denomination of the ethos of historic Methodism they doth not make.

Church-growth model

The church-growth movement has much to teach us, but it has more than one Achilles' heel. When I was appointed in 1977 to a county-seat church with a modest membership decline pattern, I invited Win Arn from the Church Growth Institute at Fuller Theological Seminary to come.

Since that time I have learned much from that missiology and methodology. I support it because every number represents a human being, and denying the reality of membership and attendance is like ignoring the red oil light in our car.

Programs like Vision 2000, Igniting Ministry and "Open Hearts, Open Doors, Open Minds" have not taken root in most local churches, except for signs on the lawns and logos in church publications. Are they good? Yes. Are they effective? The jury seems to have been out several years and not returned with a verdict!

Meanwhile we continue to lose members and attendees.

On the other hand, the church-growth movement presupposes a non-denominational ethos. We have had to tailor the words of pundits like George

Barna, Herb Miller, Tom Ranier or other church-growth gurus because we are Wesleyans who believe in comprehensive church growth—growing deeper in discipleship, growing together in koinonia fellowship, growing out in community and world mission, and growing more in numbers.

Books like Bishop Robert Schnase's *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations* and Bishop Larry Goodpaster's *There's Power in the Connection* are attempts to define the UMC ethos and force us into a reality check about downward trends. The terms "radical hospitality" and "passionate worship" are sprinkled in many bulletins and newsletters, but our annual conference numbers do not reflect a turnaround.

The bottom line has been a continuing decline in worship attendance and membership, a precipitous decline in Sunday school attendance and an aging demographic.

To respond to our trend by abandoning those who brought us to the dance is capricious and cruel. If we give in to political forces who call for the closing of all these little churches, we should cease all references to John Wesley and Francis Asbury.

First of all, small-group ministry is gaining a lot of traction. We cannot resurrect the ethos of the 18th-century class meeting, but we can acknowledge its contribution to Methodist growth.

Furthermore, if we look at the church reflected in the New Testament, the growth and spiritual impact of the Quakers and Moravians, the monastic orders of the Middle Ages and the mission stations of the 19th century, we see a pattern of small-group ministry. Rather than mimic corporate models we need to affirm the appeal of the local watering hole in *Cheers*—a place where everybody knows my name.

Megachurches have to work hard to achieve individual recognition and maintain personal pastoral care; small-membership churches have it by default.

I serve a church that averages about 100 in worship (up from 65 nine months ago). By sundown on Sunday, 90 percent of those attending know who were guests that morning!

Greeters outside the door and persons who cross the whole church to speak to visitors during "meet and greet" time establish visitors' identities by learning their name, where they live and their present faith family, if any. It is easy for me to follow up on

our handful of visitors with a phone call or an e-mail, and a pastoral call if they welcome my offer to come into their home and get acquainted.

Though I live 53 miles from the church, I average 17 pastoral calls a week. I also maintain e-mail correspondence and a website where I post my weekly sermons and my columns.

At 75, I have an honorary doctorate, but from octogenarians to kindergartners, my parishioners call me "Don"—except for my former grade-school classmates, who call me "Donald." I am serving a church in the school district that I left in 1952 to go to college. You *can* go home again. Roots are real.

Effective in ministry

Secondly, "small" is a relative term. Megachurches can be burdened with debt retirement, staff bureaucracy and a revolving door syndrome of new members and silent dropouts. Small-membership churches, meanwhile, can be community servants who devote little of their budget to bricks and mortar and staff, but rally around every member with a small crisis or a milestone birthday or anniversary.

We recently asked our 49 families to bring shoes for a mission called "Soles 4 Souls." We collected, bagged and shipped 1,035 pairs of shoes to both Haiti and a poverty pocket in Appalachia. A neighboring church has a food pantry to which several churches of four denominations contribute non-perishable food.

Thousands of small-membership

churches send mission teams annually to Central American countries, the West Indies, Bolivia, Columbia, Peru and African countries. They also send relief and recovery volunteers to sites affected by hurricanes, floods and oil spills in the U.S.

One pastor who was a contractor before his call to ordained ministry now takes up to a dozen laity every year to be in mission. His church has grown from 65 to over 225 in the eight years of his pastorate, three of which he was a seminary student.

Thirdly, small-membership churches, for the most part, are in economically stable rural areas but that have a depleted and aging population. Others are inner-city churches where former generations no longer live in the area, or congregations built around mills and factories that are now closed.

Let's face it: The United Methodist Church's quadrennial emphases on strengthening ethnic minority churches has raised millions of dollars but not been accompanied by numerical growth. Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses, non-denominational churches and Islam are all outdoing us in population groups where education and income is rather high. This is in sharp contrast to early Methodism in England or the early American republic.

Shifting paradigms

The time is long overdue for a dramatic paradigm shift in how our appointment system serves small-

membership churches. To abandon them is cowardly. We deeply believe that Wesleyan "grace upon grace" theology is more therapeutic and holistically redemptive than religious "brands" that preach emotionalism, prosperity gospel or harsh legalism.

In the country where I grew up, we had two sayings regarding this. One referred to a "chicken house complex" where any chicken with a drop of blood was pecked to death by the other chickens. We must guard against this judgmentalism in churches that are small. (The challenge of large churches, on the other hand, is overcoming anonymity.)

The other saying was "the chickens are coming home to roost" if poor farming practices—such as the absence of soil conservation, contour farming, use of legumes or rundown farm equipment—gradually reduced the harvests. All these terms have parallels in the church and will likewise lead to reduced spiritual harvests.

The answer is not in the size of the congregation; the answer is in re-kindling the flame of relational evangelism, enhancing missional ministry at the local level and deploying our personnel through a covenantal relationship between conference and congregation rather than the obsolete method of appointment-making.

Dr. Haynes is a retired member of the Western North Carolina Conference and is interim pastor of Kallam Grove Christian Church. E-mail: dhaynes11@triad.rr.com.

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Donald Haynes

Baptismal waters bless post-Katrina church

BY BETTY BACKSTROM
Special Contributor

NEW ORLEANS—A cloudy sky and blustery breezes greeted worshippers gathering Aug. 29 at Bethany United Methodist Church, a scene eerily reminiscent of Hurricane Katrina's approach five years ago.

"Five years ago, we were running for our lives. We were running from a storm on a Sunday morning," said the Rev. Hadley Edwards, pastor of the New Orleans church that was destroyed by nearly 11 feet of standing floodwater after Katrina struck.

On this Sunday, worshippers at Bethany and in many churches across the region gave thanks for people all over the country who welcomed nearly 1 million evacuees from the Greater New Orleans area.

"We are thankful for those who embraced us, who opened their homes and their arenas to shelter us. We are thankful for every meal, every blanket and every pillow that was given to us by the hands of people who opened their hearts to us," Mr. Edwards said.

Most of all, as they prayed in their renovated worship center, Bethany members praised God.

"We have rebuilt our church, and God truly was the power behind our success," said Anita Crump.

Connection steps up

The church did not have worship services for seven months after Hurricane Katrina. However, Bible studies and other ministries went on, said Ms. Crump, church member and past lay leader for the Louisiana Conference.

When they resumed worship, Ms. Crump said, "We met in the sanctuary which had been gutted. It was very hot

due to the lack of electricity, and we used portable toilets because there were no water services. But it was a joyful reunion."

Finances were a major obstacle. Insurance coverage was limited, and the buildings were essentially ruined.

A spiritual anchor

"Gifts poured in from members scattered over 23 states. On one special Sunday alone, the collection totaled \$11,000," Ms. Crump said.

And they had a lot of help from their friends throughout the United Methodist Church.

"The United Methodist connection really works," Mr. Edwards said.

"Churches sent work teams, money, supplies, Bibles, crosses and much more. Our connection provides strength."

Sharon McNeil, a Bethany member for more than 50 years, was a patient at Pendleton Memorial Methodist Hospital when Katrina hit.

"We assumed that the hurricane was going to be another one of those storms. I wanted to stay at the hospital, but my friend convinced me to leave with her family," Ms. McNeil said. "Twenty-two hours after we left, we arrived in Houston. From New Orleans, that is usually a six-hour drive."

Recovery continues

Life after Katrina hasn't been easy for Ms. McNeil. She lost her home in the flood and struggles with health problems, receiving dialysis twice a week.

Yet the church has never left her side.

"All of the stress has had a negative effect on my health. I've gotten depressed at times. But my Bethany family has gotten me through it all. They mean all the world to me."

Life is not the same in the area around Bethany.

"Just a walk down the street reminds us that our neighborhood has

changed so much. Many members have not been able to return to their homes, or they died trying to get back home," Mr. Edwards said. "In many ways, Bethany and other United Methodist churches are a light on a darkened pathway. We are serving as an anchor to those still struggling in their own personal storms of rebuilding and restoring."

As the congregation sang the refrain from "Wade in the Water" at the end of Sunday's service, Mr. Edwards scooped water from a baptismal font

to bless them as they came toward the altar.

He reminded worshippers that water was "flowing" as New Orleans flooded, as storm survivors shed tears and as Jesus was baptized by his cousin, John.

"It is with blessed water that we make a witness to a broken world," he said. "God has troubled the water, and his blessings are flowing full and free."

Ms. Backstrom is director of communications for the Louisiana Conference.



UNITED METHODIST NEWS SERVICE FILE PHOTO BY MIKE DUBOSE

Church member Anita Crump checks the flood repairs in 2006.



PHOTO BY BETTY BACKSTROM

The Rev. Hadley Edwards of Bethany United Methodist Church in New Orleans leads a service of remembrance five years after Hurricane Katrina hit the city.

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