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The story of 'Bibi Kay'



Items in Kay Oursler's Hot Springs Village house remind her of Uhekule, the Tanzanian village that is her home for 10 months of each year.

PHOTO BY THOMAS HUDSON/Courtesy of Arkansas Democrat-Gazette Tri-Lakes Edition

Hot Springs Village woman serves village in Tanzania, builds orphanage

BY AMY FORBUS
Editor

Kay Oursler lives in two very different villages.

One is Hot Springs Village, the community where she, like many of the town's residents, relocated after retirement. There, she's a member of Christ of the Hills United Methodist Church.

Her other village is Uhekule, located in the Southern Highlands region of Tanzania, where she spends about 10 months of every year and is currently preparing to open Sunrise Children's Home, a sorely needed orphanage.

How did a Midwestern 70-year-old woman become an orphanage builder in Africa?

"When my husband left in January 2003, I thought my life was over," Oursler said. "The word

'divorce' was not in my vocabulary. And now I see how it was meant to be—it was not the end of my life, but the beginning of my life."

Oursler says she and her ex-husband, who were married for 46 years, are now "best of friends." And her life has changed in more ways than she could have imagined.

Looking for a new start and interested in serving others, Oursler applied to the Peace Corps. She proceeded with her move from Cottage Grove, Minn., to Hot Springs Village, and shortly thereafter received a Peace Corps invitation to serve in Tanzania.

After training with other Peace Corps volunteers, most of whom were 40 years her junior, Oursler was assigned to the village of Uhekule. There, she learned she held one distinct advantage over the average volunteer: Her age brought her

respect among the villagers. They began calling her "Bibi Kay"—a title used for older women or grandmothers.

Bibi Kay focused much of her Peace Corps work on education and health issues, particularly on helping those affected by HIV/AIDS, which makes outcasts of those suffering from the disease and leaves many Tanzanian children without one or both parents.

A specific calling

It was near the end of her two-year Peace Corps stay in Uhekule that she received her next calling. It happened on one of her regular supply runs to the nearest town. She got off the bus and saw Usiah, an 11-year-old, selling onions by the roadside.

[See BIBI KAY, page 10A]

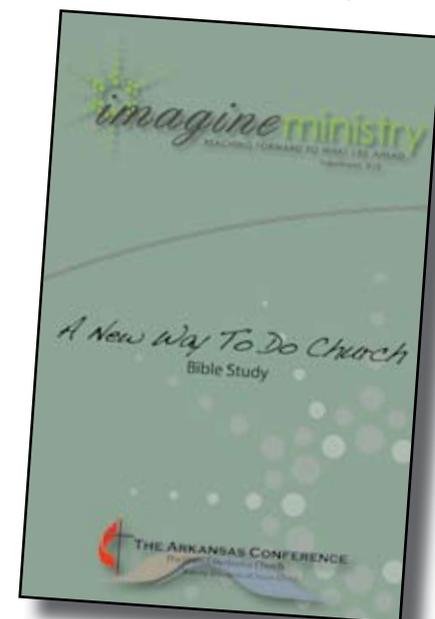
Q&A: Imagine Ministry releases Bible study

During the past 18 months, the Imagine Ministry (IM) team has explored ways for the Arkansas Conference of the United Methodist Church to become more effective in fulfilling its mission. The team continues to work toward a plan to present at Annual Conference, which meets this year June 5-8 in Hot Springs.

As part of the IM team's work of discerning future paths for ministry, they have written a four-session Bible study for Arkansas churches, to be distributed this month. IM team member the Rev. William "Bud" Reeves led the development of the study. He spoke recently with editor Amy Forbus.

Why is this particular Bible study important?

Imagine Ministry is a spiritual process. Through prayer, conversation and discernment, we are trying to hear God's direction for our Annual Conference. One of the most important ways we hear God's [See BIBLE STUDY, page 4A]



The mission is life: reflections on adventures in serving

BY JENNI DUNCAN
Special Contributor

I have been on leave of absence this year to explore mission and writing. Less than a week after my farewell reception at St. James UMC Little Rock, my husband, Glen, and I headed to California.

We worked in some vacation time with my son, then headed to Point Reyes National Seashore, where we spent eight days on a Sierra Club Service Adventure.

Maybe the word “adventure” should have warned me that an old Coast Guard bunk has no give... whatsoever. Elephant seals were molting on the beach, and they moored all night. We pulled invasive weeds in 30- and 40-mph winds, sometimes in rain, often in fog. It was May, and one day I wore three layers of clothing. All day.

Nevertheless, I wanted to discover how it felt to serve with a group *not* going in the name of Jesus. What was it like to get out there in the world?

First off, faith was not a common subject. When my husband said, “The Lord blessed us with the weather that first day,” he got strange looks.

However, people were fascinated with the ministries I had just quit. They hadn’t imagined a church could be so connected with life. “You must have an active church,” they said in disbelief, which gave me a new perspective. I always see so much more we can do!

After we finished our Service Adventure, I didn’t think I’d really accomplished anything, other than amassing piles of weeds. A workmate emailed me, though: “Keep up the good ministry!”

On the trip I kept waiting for the icebreakers and reflection questions, but none emerged. Connections between workers formed slowly.

It occurred to me later that community is something we really know how to do in church circles. We should capitalize on that. I’ve always loved the intimate community that forms on mission trips and retreats. Could it be that Christ, not shared work, forms that

community? Likely so!

Our second mission was to the Hinton Rural Life Center as drop-in NOMADS (Nomads On a Mission Active in Divine Service—a United Methodist mission where you bring your own camper for lodging). Glen and I each worked with a youth team at a site in the mountains of North Carolina.

I spotted God’s sense of humor in my team’s task. My group painted an entire house above a full basement, and everyone was afraid of going up on ladders!

Still, I was comfortable with devotions over lunch and talks with Ms. Kay, who at age 80 worked alongside us on her house. I drove a pickup with no first gear or inner door and a pervasive scent of mothballs, but I could have echoed Rob Bell’s “I can’t believe I get to live this life.” Was I too comfortable?



Jenni Duncan

‘I wanted to discover how it felt to serve with a group not going in the name of Jesus. What was it like to get out there in the world?’

God took care of that. At home I have begun adapting my peace curriculum for Familia, an after-school program for Hispanic youth. It wasn’t enough to work with an age level I haven’t tackled in twenty years. No, I have to figure out a whole other culture! I think it’s working anyway.

I guess I shouldn’t have doubted because just before I began, Glen and I stopped to pray in a pioneer-era chapel in the Tetons. I turned to the Scripture for the day, and it was Matthew 5:9, “Blessed are the peacemakers.” I’ve experienced this year that God speaks no matter what

the context is. I love it when God surprises me.

A surprising part of my mission is fiction writing. I couldn’t keep the church out of it. I wanted to, because I planned to write for people outside the church. But church folk are who I know, along with the way people struggle with where God is and whether God intends good for us. Finding hope, trusting others and trusting God—I’ve spent thirty years on that.

So, I gave up and wrote *My Heart Will Choose*, so titled because it echoes themes in the song “Blessed Be Your Name” by Matt Redman. It doesn’t yet fit any publisher’s niche, but I’ve begun its sequel, *Leap of Faith*.

Another first was going on a St. James mission trip with someone else leading. Guess what? Service itself doesn’t nourish my soul as much as helping others to serve. (I suspect that’s because I’m a deacon, but I had to check!)

Recently, I trained as an Individual Volunteer in Mission and will spend February in Rio Bravo, Mexico, setting up community education. (Want to join my prayer or support team?) In mid-May, Glen and I will do our first three-week NOMADS service in Montana.

I’ve found I’m really not on a leave of absence, but of presence. God is present; God calls me to be present. Isn’t that true for you?

My aim has been to experiment with various forms of mission and discover where God’s call is for me. Instead, I keep hearing God say, “Be with me where you are. Offer your gifts. Who do you think planted your aspirations in you?”

I can’t figure out where God is going with these experiences, but that’s the way it always is, really. I do know I can’t stay comfortable inside the drawbridge of the church, yet I’ve learned I need the community of Christ. I have to practice keeping close to God so I can feel his leading.

These are things I already knew, but now I’m living them more. Perhaps that’s what mission is all about, both for me and for you.

The Rev. Duncan, a deacon in the Arkansas Conference, blogs at bridgetwords.wordpress.com.



EDITOR’S CORNER

BY AMY FORBUS

Healthy habits for 2011

Once again, the calendar shows us it’s a new year. Though it’s just the beginning of another month, a human method of tracking time, it feels like a fresh start to many.

But how fresh of a start is it, really? Does the average day look any different to you?

Often at this time of year, we hear talk of forming healthy habits. People make promises to get to the gym more often; to atone for their holiday excesses by eating a well-balanced diet; perhaps even to take on a practice that cares for the soul.

I’m hoping that this year, the average day will begin to look different in the lives of United Methodists in Arkansas.

What if we begin by realizing we have a great deal more to do in following the way of Christ? And then, we do something about it?

What if we take seriously Bishop Crutchfield’s invitation on page 3 to the discipline of weekly fasting and prayer? (I’m not just asking y’all—I’ve taken on the challenge myself, and have joined the Facebook group “A Call to United Methodist Prayer and Fasting” to stay accountable.)

What if we participate together in the four-week Bible study arriving in our churches later this month? (It’s on the cover of this issue, so you’ll have some idea of what to look for.)

What if we attend the April 16 Vital Signs workshops at First UMC North Little Rock (more details in the Feb. 4 issue, and in brochures distributed through the district offices)? And what if, when we get

back in our cars for the trip home, we don’t leave our new insights in the parking lot, but instead take them into our churches and our lives?

What if we make a new commitment to stay connected to one another? This newspaper isn’t the only way to connect. You might click the “like” button on the Arkansas Conference Facebook page (facebook.com/arkansasumc), and on your local church’s page, too. (If your church doesn’t have one, consider starting one.) Make certain your local church has all of your current contact information, as well.

Are you thinking about this year’s Annual Conference yet? It will be held June 5-8 in Hot Springs. Whether or not you’re planning to attend, please include it in your prayers.

The Imagine Ministry team will make its report on the Monday morning of Annual Conference. With all the talk of deep change (both the idea of “deep change” and Robert Quinn’s book by that name, reviewed in our Dec. 3 issue), I’m guessing the report will carry with it a big opportunity to demonstrate how much change we are willing to make.

My hope is that it won’t be change for the sake of the United Methodist Church in Arkansas, but change for the sake of making disciples of Jesus Christ.

What are the healthy habits you practice as part of following Christ and his teachings?

Are you willing take them to a deeper level in 2011?



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Feb. 4	Jan. 20
March 4	Feb. 17
April 1	March 17



AN OCCASIONAL WORD from the Bishop

BY CHARLES CRUTCHFIELD

Dear Friends:

As we dig out from Christmas and begin to exercise the poundage off in a disciplined manner...

May I make a suggestion?

For a number of years, Karen and I have practiced the spiritual discipline of fasting during the Lenten season. We fast following the method of John Wesley by not eating following lunch on Thursday until dinner time on Friday.

It is a discipline we choose to help us focus on our prayer life. It is a time which also helps us focus on what is to come, on that which God is preparing for us.

At the most recent Council of Bishops meeting, our president, Bishop Larry Goodpaster, challenged all the bishops to engage in a season of fasting and prayer in preparation for the General Conference of our church to be held in the spring of 2012.

The 2012 General Conference has the potential to become a

watershed moment for the United Methodist Church and for what we are capable of doing for the Kingdom of God. Significant change is being anticipated in the way we do the mission and ministry of the church. Unlike times past, while there may be structural change, the most profound change required is in our attitude about and practice of discipleship.

Prayer will lead the way.

I invite you to the discipline of fasting and prayer as we prepare for our annual conference in 2011. Delegates will be elected to represent you at the General Conference. The Imagine Ministry team will present a road map into our future along with some specific proposals for change in the way we do ministry as a conference.

There will undoubtedly be proposals regarding structure, but more important will be the call for a change in attitude and spirit as we share our faith with a needy world.

We are going to need to trust

God and one another more. We are going to have to recognize that the focus for ministry must be on the mission field and on our purpose, not on our place or status as pastor in charge or chair of the church council.

We can capture once again the unselfish spirit of commitment that made the Wesleyan movement a dynamo for the Kingdom of God. We can be agents of transformation. We can prepare for what God is preparing for us.

And for all this, we must begin on our knees in prayer.

As we begin this new year, I invite you to join me in a season of prayer and fasting for the future of our witness as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Faithfully,

Charles Crutchfield

Ride with Conference group to Youth 2011

Youth 2011 is the national youth gathering for the United Methodist Church—an event that only happens every four years, it is the largest national single gathering of United Methodist youth in existence.

This four-day event brings together top United Methodist leaders as well as the best ecumenical speakers and bands with thousands of youth from all around the nation for a life-changing event full of passionate worship experiences, concerts, Bible study, small groups, workshops and training, interactive exhibits, on-site mission opportunities, late-night fun and games and more.

And for the first time, it takes place twice, on opposite sides of the country, to reach more people. **Arkansas Conference youth will attend the event held at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Ind., July 13-17.**

Registration is now open via youth2011.org, and there is still time to make your deposit before the Feb. 1 early bird registration deadline. The deposit is \$750 for the all-inclusive event at Purdue—meals, programming and lodging. After Feb. 1, the per-person rate will increase by \$35. No final group numbers are needed until March 31.

The Arkansas Conference is providing two buses to the event at Purdue University. One bus has already filled, but there is room on the second one for your group! Contact Rod Hocott at 501-324-8008 or rhocott@arumc.org to get your name on the list. For further information about Youth 2011, check out youth2011.org.



The difference between showing up and being present

BY BEVERLY BOWLES
Special Contributor

Several years ago I realized that I wasn't getting much out of worship. Then I realized that I wasn't putting much into it.

I used the prelude and introit to sign the attendance pad and read the bulletin. If the hymn was familiar, I would sing. If the prayer of confession sounded like it was written for someone "more sinful," then I didn't pray all of it. Too often, during the sermon my mind was on the week ahead.

You get the picture. No wonder I wasn't getting anything out of worship.

When was the last time you heard a speaker or attended a performance and you were so deeply, emotionally moved that you were on the edge of your seat, and when the last word was spoken or the last note was resonating, you were on your feet, applauding enthusiastically? Remember that feeling? That is the feeling in Psalm 100:1, "On your feet now—applaud God!" (*The Message*)

Give God a standing ovation

from your heart, from your soul. Be happy in his generous blessings and praise him. That is the attitude that I seek as I prepare to come to church. I am not proposing we turn God's house into a football stadium—reverence is important, but I have decided that I can be reverent without being solemn. I can be so happy to be in God's house that it shows in my actions.

With that attitude, I can focus on each part of the service. I

used to daydream, make a grocery list or read the bulletin until it was time for me to "do" something, like say a response or sing a hymn.

Then one Sunday I actually listened to something Pastor Charles said after he shared the announcements: "Let us be in prayer." So, I bowed my head and waited for the prayer, but heard instead the prelude.

What did he mean? Was I supposed to keep my head bowed

the whole service? Maybe I misunderstood him. But the next Sunday he said the same thing. I realized the whole service is us being in conversation with God.

Now I use the prelude to pray that I will open myself to hear what God wants to say to me today. It isn't always the message the pastor is delivering, but God always has a message just for me in every service.

I strive to be active in every part of the service. The call to worship is not just some words to get the service started; I read them from my heart and I pray them to God. When we pray the prayer of confession, I try to recall specific times during the past week that I have sinned and confess those sins to God.

I try to listen more closely to the Scriptures we read, and often a small phrase grabs my attention and reveals something I had never thought of before. As the prayers of the people are read, I repeat them silently because it helps me to be more conscious of our collective petition to God.

The sermon is sometimes a

guide and sometimes a challenge. Sometimes I hear the message the pastor intends, and sometimes the words say something totally different to me. But there is always a part that directs me in my Christian walk.

Music provides another opportunity to talk with God. We are abundantly blessed with talented musicians who joyfully offer their gifts to God. I love all of the music: preludes, offertories and postludes on the organ; adult, youth and children's choirs; handbells and instrumentalists; and the congregational singing.

Of course, there are hymns I prefer, like "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine." The old Cokesbury hymns bring back fond memories of childhood. Also, the tunes are easier and the words familiar. It is not too challenging to understand the message in those hymns.

However, some of the hymns we sing are much more complicated, musically and lyrically. Being musically challenged, I sometimes find it impossible to sing and read the words at the same time. I used to just close the hymnal and listen,

anxiously awaiting the end of the hymn.

Then one day I decided that if I couldn't sing the hymn, I would at least read the words. Wow—what a blessing! There was a message in those words, and it met my needs at that time. So now, if I can't pretend to carry the tune, I read the words. They are certainly part of our conversation with God.

Am I saying that I am truly present in worship every week, from the first note of the prelude until the last note of the postlude? Hardly. But on the Sundays when I am successful, my cup of blessings overflows. The benediction is more than a "wrap-up" of the service; it is a commissioning for me to go out and be a witness to others through my words and actions.

I would invite you to not let worship be a passive activity, but make it an interactive communication experience with God.

Bowles is a member of First UMC Conway. This commentary is adapted from her sermon on Laity Sunday 2010.

Imagine Ministry asks us to face conditions of church and culture

Editor's note: In the Nov. 5 issue of the Arkansas United Methodist, the Revs. Kurt Boggan and Mackey Yokem outlined progress and plans of the Imagine Ministry team. Those plans included gathering 100 lay and clergy leaders for training on the Conference vision and priorities identified by Imagine Ministry. Since that update, the first of two gatherings has taken place. The Rev. Eric Van Meter was among the "Leadership 100" at the Dec. 2 meeting, and he offers these reflections on the experience.

BY ERIC VAN METER
Special Contributor

"Are we really going to do anything meaningful, or are we just rearranging deck chairs on the *Titanic*?"

In the Dec. 2 Imagine Ministry gathering of 100 clergy and laity, I heard some form of that question several times. It's a clear enough analogy: Why put a pretty face on something destined to sink? If that's all we're doing, we might as well just go play golf.

In many ways, I empathize with those who can't quite buy into what the Imagine Ministry team is tasked with. Those of us who have been United Methodists for any length of time can tick off a half-dozen failed initiatives that promised to revolutionize the church. We've earned our skepticism through countless disappointing efforts.

Still, the *Titanic* question doesn't do much to move us toward a solution. It is by nature an admission of defeat, a recognition that the ship we're on is mortally wounded, and nothing we can do will save her.

Perhaps the *Titanic* question is, as Imagine Ministry consultant Gil Rendle would say it, merely a statement of the conditions under which we operate. Our problems are not "problems," else they would have a solution. Rather, the dire straits we find ourselves in are conditions that we can't control. We simply have to live and work in light of them.

Many of us would agree. But

what then?

It's all too easy to call much of our United Methodist structures a sinking ship. Everyone agrees that some church bureaucracy weighs us down, and that we need to let it go.

But what will connect us with our larger mission after that? What will keep us afloat once the *Titanic* is gone?

Beyond the boat

A year and a half into its existence, the Imagine Ministry team is still not ready to suggest another design, a plan to move us away from the wreckage. They are proceeding with caution, intent on getting the input they need to make the best possible recommendations.

I admire their diligence, if not their efficiency.

The truth is, however, that almost any change we make at our management and structural levels—however brilliant or well-intended—will still do little more than provide yet another barrier between us and the water. We may be able to change our boat, but nothing we can do will change the uncertain seas of our postmodern world.

Which begs the question: Why spend so much time worrying about the boat in the first place? That, I think, is a very good thing to consider.

I do not want to see the United Methodist Church die. She has been the vessel of my salvation and the context of my identity. I would mourn her passing greatly.

But I do not fear her death. Anything worth loving will someday die, and while death is sometimes too painful for the living to contemplate, it is also never the final word for God. The whole point of

being a church in the first place is to hold together to sacred wisdom such as this.

Anything that dies can be reborn. Those who follow Jesus believe this enough to stake our lives on it. I wonder if we believe it enough to stake our church on it.

My great fear is not that the United Methodist Church in Arkansas will die or break apart or sink. Rather, my great fear is that we will worry so much about ourselves that we lose our identity as followers of Jesus.

The best hope of success for Imagine Ministry is to create an environment in which we can engage our local communities in meaningful ministry. If the end result of this process helps us care

'Anything that dies can be reborn. Those who follow Jesus believe this enough to stake our lives on it. I wonder if we believe it enough to stake our church on it.'



for the poor, promote economic justice, invite new people into the story of God's salvation and develop a new generation of principled leaders, then Imagine Ministry will have been well worth the time and effort.

Even in that best-case scenario, however, Imagine Ministry cannot make good work magically happen. Those of us who are committed to Christ and to our neighbors have to step forward into the chaos of our local contexts. We have to live and love like Jesus, especially in the places we live and work every day.

So what about Imagine Ministry? Is it the last best chance

for United Methodism in Arkansas? Or are we rearranging the proverbial *Titanic* deck chairs?

Or something else?

A better metaphor

My five-year-old son Jonathan unwittingly gave me a better metaphor for the Arkansas Annual Conference last week. We were playing with the Potato Heads, and had a nice family of five constructed when he threw a ball into the mix and demolished them.

"Meteor," he explained.

I laughed, but Jonathan set right to work putting them back together. When he'd finished, he made a slide out of the box lid and pushed the Potato Heads down onto

the bottom shelf—a full three shelves below their normal spot.

"Don't worry, Daddy," he said. "They aren't really dead from the meteor. They're just exploring new worlds."

Can we Arkansas United Methodists find the courage to laugh at what threatens to disrupt or even destroy us? Can we trust God to resurrect us, even if he doesn't place us back in what we think is our rightful spot? What part will

Imagine Ministry play in our exploration?

If we are not committed to the larger tasks that come with following Jesus, it doesn't matter all that much what Imagine Ministry produces.

And if we are committed to those messier tasks of loving God and neighbor, even at the expense of our own survival, it may matter even less, because we will already be exploring the new worlds God is creating around us.

The Rev. Van Meter serves as campus minister at the Arkansas State University Wesley Foundation.

Bible study (continued from page 1A)

voice is to listen to God's Word.

We hope that small groups in local churches can spend some time in the Word, and that fruitful conversation will be generated for the future. We also think it will be helpful to have a common biblical background as we bring the Imagine Ministry proposals to Annual Conference in June.

How did you choose Acts as the Scripture focus?

The Book of Acts is the chronicle of the early church as it was born and matured. It is also the book that is most explicit about the movement and power of the Holy Spirit. By returning to our roots, we can discern God's plan for the Body of Christ.

The issues the church in Acts faced are still confronting us: core activities of the church, division of labor, inclusion of the outsider, and standards of behavior in the community of faith.

Yet, the study's title is "A New Way To Do Church." How can studying the old way help us find a new way?

It's a little ironic to look backward in order to move forward. But we are convinced that some of the answers to our current dilemma lie in being faithful to Scripture and to our Wesleyan heritage.

The Bible is fresh in every generation, and Wesley transformed a nation. Our problems are not in our roots; they are in the branches that have become rigid to the point of irrelevancy, so that we are not nimble enough to adapt to a rapidly changing culture. Without the nourishment of our Scriptural and Wesleyan roots, the Imagine Ministry process will not bear fruit.

What would you hope that the average person in the pew gains from it?

I hope that the local church member would get reacquainted with four of the crucial texts for the identity of the church, and realize anew that the early church faced some of the same dilemmas we do today. Then I hope that those biblical insights can be applied to the identity and mission of the local church today.

And finally, I hope that some of the Spirit-filled excitement of the apostolic church will rub off on some 21st-century United Methodists!

Philander Smith College president honored in *Ebony*

Kimbrough among magazine's 'Power 100'

BY AMY FORBUS
Editor

Last year, Walter M. Kimbrough searched *Ebony* magazine's Power 100 for potential speakers to invite to Philander Smith College's "Bless the Mic" lecture series.

This year, he is on the list himself.

The accomplishments of the 43-year-old president of Philander Smith College, a historically black institution affiliated with the United Methodist Church, garnered the attention of the nation's premier entertainment and lifestyle publication geared toward an African American readership. The honor came as a complete surprise to Kimbrough, whose father, the Rev. Walter L. Kimbrough, is pastor emeritus of Cascade United Methodist Church in Atlanta.

"I found out on Facebook," the college president said. A family friend from Atlanta posted a congratulatory message on his Facebook wall before the December/January issue of *Ebony* had arrived on Little Rock newsstands.

Since Kimbrough's installation in December of 2004 as the college's 12th president, Philander Smith has seen its retention and graduation

rates increase, more high-achieving students enter and its national profile rise.

A hip-hop lecture series

One reason for the campus' increasing name recognition has been "Bless the Mic," Kimbrough's reinvention of the traditional president's lecture series held at many colleges and universities. Bless the Mic specifically seeks to appeal to the hip-hop generation and has brought such diverse voices to campus as former *Essence* magazine editor Susan L. Taylor, the Rev. Al Sharpton and Ann Coulter.

Power 100 honorees who have spoken at Philander Smith College include Taylor, Sharpton, Michael Steele, African Methodist Episcopal Church Bishop Vashti McKenzie and Tom Joyner. In addition, two of this year's Power 100 honorees—Mellody Hobson, president of Ariel Investments, and Phaedra Ellis-Lamkins, CEO of Green for All—are slated to speak next year.

"I've had the most fun with the lecture series," Kimbrough said. "It exposes our campus, it exposes the state and particularly central Arkansas, to people who have never been here."

For example, Kimbrough says Bernice King, daughter of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who made her first trip to Arkansas to speak at Philander Smith College's convocation this year.

"It's been an opportunity to showcase the state to people from all across the country," he said. "And I think part of that is how [being mentioned in] *Ebony* happened, because they talk to people. There are a number of people on that list who have been to campus, who are really champions for the college."

Academic emphasis

According to *Ebony*, choices for the Power 100 meet one or more of the following criteria: They consistently challenge the status quo, forge new paths to opportunity and success, make an impact due to the sheer breadth of their sphere of influence, and display efforts that positively benefit African Americans.

Kimbrough's listing appears on the "academia" page, along with nine other honorees, including Ruth Simmons, the first African-American president of an Ivy League school (Brown University), and Henry Louis Gates Jr., the director of



Walter M. Kimbrough

the W.E.B. DuBois Institute for African and African American Research at Harvard University.

While the attention he's receiving is exciting, Kimbrough emphasizes that his proudest accomplishment is raising the bar for the Philander Smith student body and seeing them meet the challenge.

Moving from open to moderately selective admission policies has increased the school's academic profile to the point that statewide, it places second only to the University of Arkansas in ACT scores and grade-point averages

among African American students.

The college's retention rate has grown from 51 percent in 2004 to 77 percent in 2009. Its graduation rate has increased from 16 percent in the late 1990s to an average of 20 percent in the past two years.

"Now we have students graduating in three years and going to law school," he said. "We didn't have anybody like that when I got here."

"They're excited, and they just bring a new energy to campus," he said. "And I think that becomes a catalyst for all the other things that are happening."



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ROME celebrates 10th year of mission in Marianna

BY AMY FORBUS
Editor

For the past decade, members of St. James United Methodist Church in Little Rock have made an annual weekend trip to Marianna, Ark., for an experience they call

ROME—Reach Out Mission Event.

Begun as an outreach connected to St. James UMC's Vertical Event contemporary worship service, ROME started out by helping the Marianna food pantry. It has grown to include a free carnival that serves about 350

Marianna residents.

All events—whether a carnival game, a grilled hot dog lunch, a clothing giveaway or a health screening—are free to all. In an area where, according to U.S. Census data, approximately 37 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, such activities make a noticeable impact.

"I think it's a real morale booster for our community when they have the carnival," said Evelyn Banks-Shackelford, a church and community worker from the United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries. She has served for several years through the Marianna Larger Parish, comprised of five ethnic churches in the area.

Banks-Shackelford says that the people of St. James readily pitch in wherever she and the community need the help, whether it's with the backpack ministry that helps feed children over the weekend when they don't have access to school lunches, or building wheelchair

ramps for elderly residents.

"Whatever I ask, they've been willing to do," she said.

ROME signifies far more than just another church activity, according to Marcia Dunbar, director of evangelism for St. James. She says that among the 50 to 100 participants each year, many include entire families that return to Marianna for each ROME.

"We get to visit with the folks," she said, "and because we have gone so many times, there are relationships that we have fostered with those individuals, especially the children."

"For me personally, it has been a beautiful way to teach my children what it means to give back, to do what we are called to do as Christians," Dunbar added. "Now, each year, my kids come with me and we work side by side.... This is really a time to show God's love in action."

In addition to working out in the community, ROME takes on improvement projects for Bear Creek

Camp, the Southeast District retreat center where some of the St. James participants stay overnight. Jobs there include screening in the outdoor chapel, cleaning the cabins and rest area and beautifying the grounds.

The band for the Vertical Event worship service and the Rev. Greg Schick, pastor of contemporary worship for St. James, lead Sunday worship in an area church. This year First UMC Marianna hosted the group for worship.

After the close of the weekend's work and festivities, Schick leads a time of devotion and invites ROME team members to share the moments in which they saw God at work.

This year one of the volunteers shared the experience of hearing a child say, "This is the best day of my life!"

Moments like that help St. James members see God's blessings, and keep them coming back to serve others in Christ's name year after year.



ABOVE LEFT: A youth from St. James UMC hands out pudding cup snacks at one of the carnival booths.

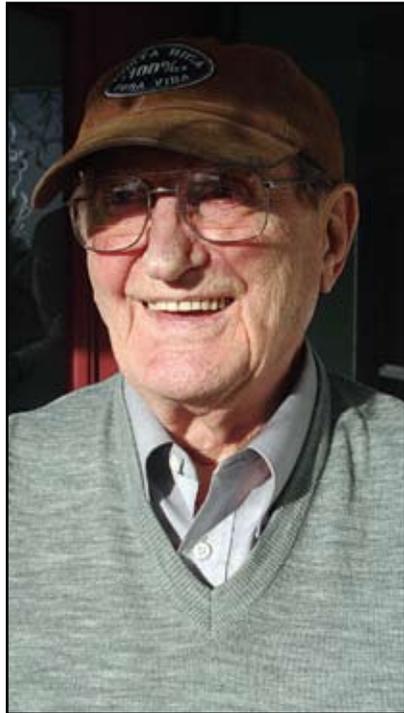
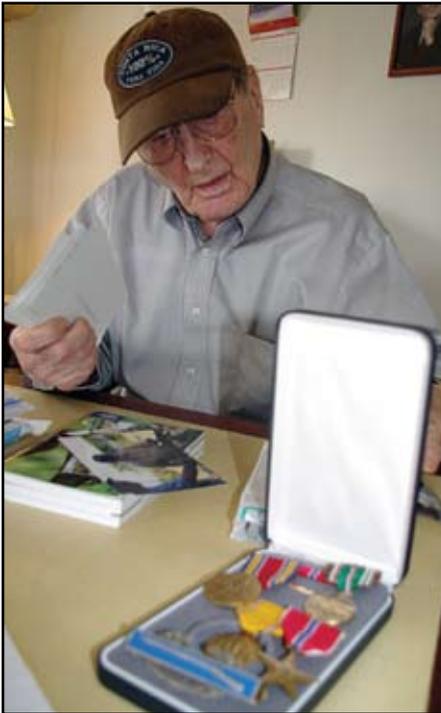
LEFT: The carnival includes games for all ages. Activities, prizes and food are free and open to everyone.

RIGHT: Involvement with this mission doesn't end with the carnival weekend. This year, a Sunday school class at St. James held a Christmas toy drive for the same children they met through ROME, hanging each child's photo on the tree along with suggestions for toys.

PHOTOS BY MARCIA DUNBAR AND GREG SCHICK



LEFT and ABOVE: The face-painting booth is a popular stop for youngsters at the ROME carnival in Marianna. RIGHT: Workers at the game booths often get as much reward from the experience as do people playing the games.



ABOVE LEFT: Ken Kruger shows mementos of his time in the U.S. Army. Military travels first sparked his interest in seeing life in other parts of the world.
ABOVE RIGHT: Kruger reminisces about his travels and experiences.

PHOTOS BY KAYLEA HUTSON

With a walker by his side, Ken Kruger sifts sand and rocks for a construction project during Central UMC Rogers' 2010 mission trip to Costa Rica.

COURTESY PHOTO

Rogers man delves into international mission trips after age 90

BY KAYLEA HUTSON
Special Contributor

At a time in life when many may chose to take things easy, Kenneth Kruger was up for a new challenge: going on an international mission trip.

In fact, since turning 90, the member of Central United Methodist Church in Rogers has taken three such trips—to Chile, Belize and Costa Rica, along with an excursion to Israel.

"I like to see what's over the next hill," Kruger said with a smile.

Kruger's venture into international missions began in 2004, when he talked with Constance Waddell, then co-director of Campamento Metodista in El Tabo, Chile.

After learning about the ministry, he decided to travel to the facility on a trip led by the Rev. Les Oliver, minister of music and worship at Central UMC.

"Something was nagging me," Kruger said. "I thought, 'I've got to do something. I like to see what the other half looks like.'"

During that trip, Kruger helped with painting and general repair projects. He also helped to construct an 18-foot addition to a building.

Since then, his travels have taken him to two Methodist elementary schools in Belize in 2006, and to Alajuela, Costa Rica, in 2010, where he helped construct a fellowship hall and kitchen for a United Methodist Church.

He made the latest trip even though he needed some assistance, which came in the form of a rented walker.

"I [knew] I could do things even though I am walking around with a walker," Kruger said. "I knew I was adaptable to any kind of work."

"So I just did it."

Oliver said Kruger is the "youngest" 90-plus-year-old person he knows.

"Our team considers him one of the 'worker bees' just like they are," said Oliver. "He encourages those who are a young 70 that might think they can't do a mission trip. Ken's attitude is always up, never down."

Kruger said that during the Costa Rica trip, he helped sift sand to remove pebbles, so team members could use it to build the walls of the new building.

While he enjoyed traveling to other countries, Kruger said he mainly enjoyed meeting the different people—those on the

work teams and those they were going to serve.

"I like people," Kruger said. "When I lived in New York, before I married, I would often sit on the corner and watch people go by."

"People are like you and I the world over, we have the same aspirations and the same thoughts. People are pretty much the same the world over."

Kruger said the trips have helped him learn how to adapt to the customs found in other countries. They have also given him a new "extended family."

"I've made a lot of friends who have done things for me, without me even asking them to do it," Kruger said.

Kruger hopes to continue to travel through the mission program at Central UMC Rogers.

"We've all been given talents to work with," he said. "Why not use the talents you have?"

"I would like to go as long as I can make it, and can afford it. Why waste what talents I have?"

A native of New York state, Kruger was no stranger to travel before he began going on mission trips. He got a taste of life beyond his hometown while serving in the U.S. Army during World War II.

During his time with the 44th Division, 324th Infantry, Kruger traveled through much of the U.S., France, Germany, Austria, Scotland and Canada.

After Kruger was discharged, he returned to the states through Camp Chaffee in Ft. Smith, Ark.

It was then he met his future wife, Virginia J. Fine. The pair married in 1951 after corresponding by mail. They lived in Long Island, New York for more than 30 years before returning to Northwest Arkansas—

and joining Central UMC—after he retired.

"If you had told me, when I was a 15- to 16-year-old kid, that I would travel as much as I have, I would have said you were crazy," Kruger said. "[I] saw things I never would have seen otherwise."

Hutson serves as minister to families with children at First UMC Siloam Springs, and maintains the website for the Northwest District, NWDist.org.

Central UMC reaches beyond church walls

Kenneth Kruger's experience with missions is due in part to his congregation's philosophy of mission—both foreign and domestic.

The Rev. Les Oliver, minister of music and worship at Central UMC Rogers, said the congregation views mission trips as "an opportunity to see beyond the four walls that our brothers and sisters in Christ are struggling."

"It's a humbling experience to work alongside those who live in a marginal world," Oliver said. "The people of Central have a genuine care for persons in need, whether it's in Rogers, Ark., or around the globe."

In addition to the foreign trips, members of the congregation have adopted the Bonnie Grimes Elementary School—named after a retired educator who is also a life-long member of Central UMC.

Oliver says that outreach to the school, which began two years ago, includes hosting a workday in August to help teachers set up their classrooms and, for students, a shoe drive as well as a coat drive.

The congregation also strives through an Angel Tree program to provide Christmas presents for at least 25 children. And this spring, the congregation will host a book drive designed to provide every child in the school with a new book to take home during the summer.

Oliver said the book program was developed as a way to help students maintain their English reading skills during the summer, since many live in homes where English is never spoken.

Other mission outreaches for the congregation include a monthly food drive for the food pantry at Grace UMC in Rogers, and a mission trip to the Navajo Reservation in Shiprock, N.M., set for April 2011.

On the third Sunday of each month, the congregation hosts a "Third Quarter" Sunday, where people fill a large acrylic tube with quarters, which are then given to Heifer International.

Oliver said the mission team hopes to return to Costa Rica in 2012.

—Kaylea Hutson

COMING UP

January

Perkins School of Youth Ministry Jan. 10-13

Register now for Perkins School of Youth Ministry, scheduled for Jan. 10-13, 2011. Internationally-known author Brian McLaren is the keynote speaker. For details, contact Charles Harrison at charles@mcyouth.org or 972-333-9870, or visit the PSYM website: <http://www.smu.edu/Perkins/PublicPrograms/PSYM.aspx>.

"Journeys of Paul" Greece trip registration ends Jan. 15

Wayne and the Rev. Lynn Lindsey, Pulaski Heights UMC, have openings on their "Journeys of Paul" trip to Greece in the spring of 2011. Registration deadline is Jan. 15, and the approximate cost of the trip is \$3,000 per person. The group will travel with Educational Opportunities, a company that specializes in travel for church groups. If you are interested, call 501-664-3600.

Connected in Christ seminars begin Jan. 15

In the first quarter of 2011, Connected in Christ (CIC) will offer a series of Saturday seminars in three different parts of the state. Cabot UMC, Heritage UMC in Van Buren, and First UMC Magnolia will serve as hosts.

Seminar topics include Total Impact: CIC and Leading the United Methodist Way; Ministry in Color: Relational Dynamics, Team Building, and Leadership Using the Birkman Method; and Transformational Ministry Planning. Each seminar runs from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., with lunch provided. See arumc.org/calendar for scheduled dates.

Arkansas Conference on Evangelism Jan. 29

The 2011 Arkansas Conference on Evangelism will meet from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 29, 2011, at First UMC Benton. The event is free.

Dr. John Ed Mathison will deliver the message at opening worship. After lunch, three breakout groups, led by Mathison, the Rev. Carlton Cross and the Rev. Jeff Jones, will address evangelism in small, midsize and large congregations. For more information, contact the Rev. David Bush at 870-830-7777.

February

Volunteers in Mission team leader training Feb. 5

The Rev. Larry Norman, VIM coordinator for the Louisiana Conference of the UMC, and Arkansas Bishop Charles Crutchfield will be the featured speakers at the Feb. 5 VIM training event in Little Rock. For details, see the Volunteers in Mission announcement on page 9.

Worship Fair Feb. 18-19

The Arkansas chapter of the Fellowship of United Methodists in Music and Worship Arts has scheduled Worship Fair for Feb. 18-19, 2011, at St. Paul UMC in Little Rock. The theme is "Making the Ordinary Extraordinary." Participants will learn to plan and perform meaningful worship and preaching during the "Ordinary Time" that stretches between Epiphany and Lent and between Pentecost and Advent.

Clinicians include John Thornburg, Anna Laura Page and Gail Wells. For information, visit arkansasfummw.org and view the latest newsletter.

Parenting seminar Feb. 19

On Saturday, Feb. 19, Dr. Scott Turansky and Joanne Miller, RN, BSN will present a parenting seminar at Asbury United Methodist Church, 1700 Napa Valley Drive in Little Rock. "Everyday Parents CAN Raise Extraordinary Kids" runs from 8:45 a.m. until 2:30 p.m.

Receive practical, biblical advice for your parenting in a fun and uplifting environment, with ideas you can put into practice right away. This particular seminar helps parents help their children be internally motivated to do the right thing. It also teaches parents how to develop a specific plan for addressing problems their children may face.

The \$25 registration fee includes a box lunch. Register online at fumcl.org or call Pam Snider, 501-225-9231. A children's program relates to what the parents are learning. Please bring a lunch for your child.

This event is sponsored by Asbury, Highland Valley, Little Rock First, Pulaski Heights and Winfield UMCs.

Call for submissions to 'Crisis of Conscience' supplement

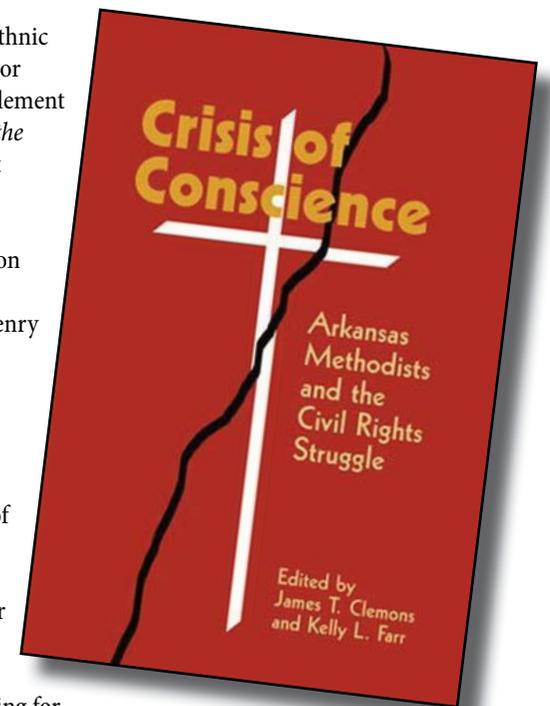
The Rev. Maxine Allen, Arkansas Conference Minister of Ethnic Ministries, and the Rev. Jim Clemons, retired clergy and Professor Emeritus of Wesley Theological Seminary, are co-editing a supplement to the 2007 book *Crisis of Conscience: Arkansas Methodists and the Civil Rights Struggle*. They invite Arkansas Methodists to submit writings to be considered for inclusion in the publication.

Authors whose stories will appear in the new supplement include Dr. James Cone, professor of systematic theology at Union Theological Seminary in New York City and a Philander Smith College alumnus; and Kathleen Woods, wife of Federal Judge Henry Woods, who served in Little Rock when Governor Orval Faubus called out the National Guard to prevent black students from entering Central High School.

Contributors to *Crisis of Conscience* included Dr. Joycelyn Elders; Senator Dale Bumpers; Carlotta Lanier, one of the Little Rock Nine; the Rev. Chester Jones, former Executive Secretary of the General Commission on Religion and Race; State Senator Linda Pondexter Chesterfield; University of Arkansas Professor Miller Williams; and twenty-six other clergy and laity. Philander Smith College hosted the book's launch.

Grif Stockley, author of several books examining Arkansas race relations, has said that *Crisis of Conscience* is essential reading for anyone seeking to understand this subject.

The co-editors urge any Methodist who can contribute to the supplement to notify Allen at the Conference office before Feb. 15, either by e-mail (mallen@arumc.org) or by mail (800 Daisy Bates Drive, Little Rock, AR 72202).



First UMC Mountain Home breaks ground for new activity center



Leadership at First UMC Mountain Home participates in the Oct. 31 groundbreaking ceremony for the church's new activity center. From left, executive pastor the Rev. Randy Ludwig, Jim Brown, Frank Davis, Phil Garner, Bryan Bell, Karen Yeakley, Elton Kirby, Pansy Dimick, Steve Luelf and senior pastor the Rev. Siegfried Johnson.

COURTESY PHOTO

First United Methodist Church of Mountain Home on Sunday, Oct. 31, 2010, held a groundbreaking ceremony for the construction of a new multi-purpose facility.

The 16,000-square-foot building, to be named the United Methodist Activity Center (UMAC), will house all children's and youth programs as well as provide fellowship and recreation space.

The UMAC will include a regulation-size gymnasium, a 1/8-mile walking track, an aerobic and weight training facility, a commons area that will facilitate small group gatherings, a state-of-the-art youth center and six new classrooms for elementary education.

Designed by architect Jim Brown of Mountain Home, the

UMAC is being built under the supervision of general contractor Bryan Bell Construction Co., also of Mountain Home.

Named the Arkansas Conference Church of the Year two out of the past three years, First UMC of Mountain Home has been recognized as one of the fastest-growing churches in Arkansas United Methodism.

PEOPLE OF FAITH

Rice Depot names Christ of the Hills UMC members Volunteers of The Year

The Arkansas Rice Depot honored the women and men of Christ of the Hills United Methodist Church, Hot Springs Village, as Volunteers of the Year at the Nov. 23 “Thanks-for-Giving” awards ceremony, held at the Clinton Center in Little Rock.

Christ of the Hills members Gene Phillips and Pete Johnson accepted the award presented by Laura Rhea, President and CEO of the Arkansas Rice Depot.

“The Christ of the Hills UMC men and women from Hot Springs Village are some of our most dedicated and hardworking volunteers,” Rhea said, noting that in 2010 Christ of the Hills members have worked more than 4,000 volunteer hours at Arkansas Rice Depot. “This year they have labeled about 250,000 cans of vegetables, sorted food, boxed bread, made rice mixes, sorted school supplies, made health kits, and performed volunteer tasks too countless to list.”

Rhea also said that Christ of the Hills helps by making monthly deliveries to Garland County hunger relief programs and has even purchased a van for delivering food to schools.



Arkansas Rice Depot president Laura Rhea, center, presents the Volunteer of the Year award to Pete Johnson, left, and Gene Phillips, right, representatives from Christ of the Hills UMC.

COURTESY PHOTO

Copley and Snyder honored by Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families



Stephen Copley

Two United Methodists—the Rev. Stephen Copley and Congressman Vic Snyder—on Dec. 7 received the Friend of Children Award from Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families (AACF) at the organization’s annual luncheon.

The award has been given by the Arkansas Kids Count Coalition since the 1990s to recognize outstanding work on behalf of Arkansas children.

Copley, director of Arkansas Justice For Our Neighbors, was recognized for his work to improve children’s lives, particularly with regard to alleviating poverty. His involvement in civic organizations makes him “a critical connection to the faith community for many of these groups,” according to Tara Manthey, communications director for AACF.

Snyder, a United Methodist layperson and spouse of the Rev. Betsy Singleton-Snyder, received the award for his consistent support of legislation that benefitted children in low-income households during his service in the Arkansas General Assembly and in the U.S. Congress.

Also receiving the honor was Tom Butler, vice-chancellor of the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences and a member of Antioch Missionary Baptist Church, for his work coaching Little League for 43 years and serving as a mentor in the Little Rock School District.



Vic Snyder

Grace UMC Rogers honors food pantry helpers from four churches

The food pantry at Grace United Methodist Church in Rogers on Nov. 30 honored its volunteers with a celebratory luncheon.

A joint effort of four United Methodist congregations in Rogers—Central, Oakley Chapel, First and Grace—the food pantry opens each Tuesday and Thursday for distribution of grocery items. In October and November alone, some 600 families received help through this ministry.

In 2010, approximately 35 helpers from all four of the pantry’s supporting churches gave an estimated 1,540 volunteer hours to the ministry. They handled a range of tasks, including shopping, sorting, packaging and stocking of the grocery items, as well as serving those who came to the food pantry for assistance.



COURTESY PHOTO

Quapaw Quarter UMC adopts statement of inclusiveness

BY AMY FORBUS
Editor

“Drawn together by the loving grace of God, we of Quapaw Quarter United Methodist Church believe that there are no inherent barriers to living in relationship with Christ. We welcome into our faith community people of all ages, ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, physical and mental abilities, economic means and family structures.”

This statement, adopted by Quapaw Quarter UMC’s administrative council at its Oct. 5 meeting, acknowledged what church members and many in the community already knew about the distinct welcoming nature of the Little Rock congregation.

“Taking this step was more of an affirmation of who we are than of who we want to be,” said the Rev. Thompson Murray, the church’s senior pastor.

At the Oct. 26 church conference, members of Quapaw Quarter UMC voted unanimously to affiliate with the Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN).

RMN defines itself as a “movement of United Methodist individuals, congregations, campus ministries, and other groups working for the full participation of all people in the United Methodist Church.” Its particular focus is on full inclusion of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons.

The Arkansas chapter of the Methodist Federation for Social Action is listed as a Reconciling Community on RMN’s website, rmnetwork.org, but Quapaw Quarter

is the only church in the state listed, making them the first Reconciling Congregation in the Arkansas Conference.

Murray believes that the church’s decision is especially timely, given recent news coverage of suicides among young people bullied about homosexuality.

“Not only do we think it’s the right message to send to the larger community, our welcoming statement serves as a good reminder to us of the high standard of acceptance that we have created for ourselves,” he said.

Barbara Mullins, a member since 2002, recalls that the first Sunday she visited Quapaw Quarter, she encountered the gay son of a deceased friend of hers.

“Susan [had] told me that her dream was to one day see a Methodist Church where her gay son would be welcomed,” Mullins said. Mullins ended up joining Quapaw Quarter UMC on the same day as her friend’s son, partly in her friend’s honor. She remains active today.

Both Murray and Mullins credit Harold Hughes, the congregation’s social justice coordinator, with laying the groundwork for the affiliation, which was an open and deliberate congregation-wide process.

“We had a series of meetings that were open to everyone to develop our welcoming statement,” said Murray. “During this time we made it clear to the congregation through our newsletter, bulletin and weekly email announcements what we were exploring and intending to do.”

VOLUNTEERS IN MISSION

This Volunteers in Mission listing for the Arkansas Conference also includes mission opportunities offered by local churches and districts. Often there is room for additional volunteers to join a team. For more information on any such projects, contact the individuals listed or Don Weeks, Arkansas Area Volunteers in Mission coordinator, 501-868-9193 or 681-2909; dweeks@arumc.org.

VIM team leader training

A Volunteers In Mission training event will be held from Saturday, Feb. 5, 2011, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. in the Kendall Center of Philander Smith College in Little Rock (the same building that houses the Arkansas Conference offices).

The event will benefit VIM team leaders and those wishing to become team leaders. Bishop Charles Crutchfield will speak, and

the Rev. Larry Norman, VIM coordinator for the Louisiana Conference of the United Methodist Church, will lead the day’s training sessions.

The registration fee for this training session is \$20, which includes lunch and a training manual. To register, contact Don Weeks, 501-681-2909 or dweeks@arumc.org; or Libby Gray, 501-324-8028 or lgray@arumc.org. Registration deadline is Jan. 31.

The story of 'Bibi Kay' (continued from page 1A)

"I knew his father was dead and he was living with his mother. I said, 'Usiah,' and in Swahili, 'You're not in school. Why? This is a school day.'

"And he looked at me and said, 'Mama Kufa,'—that's his mother—'she died.'"

The death of his mother meant Usiah had no choice but to quit school and find a way to support himself. As Oursler looked at the young boy, she received a message from God.

"I can remember it was like a bolt of thunder and lightning hitting me saying, 'Hey, Kay. Build an orphanage,' at that very moment," she said.

Knowing that her assignment would end in just a couple of months, Oursler wasted no time. Back in Uhekule, she let the village government know that she was willing to return to the village on her own after her Peace Corps work ended.

"I said to them, 'I'm not coming back with money,' because I wrote a lot of grants while I was in Peace Corps, to help with the library and the classroom and the dispensary, and I did programs and HIV work," Oursler said.

"And this one villager came up to me and said, 'Bibi Kay, we don't want your money,' and then he pointed to my brain and said, 'We want this.' It was such a nice compliment!"

"So I said, 'I don't know if I'll have any luck fundraising, but I know we need an orphanage. Do you want an orphanage?' And the government agreed that yes, they wanted an orphanage."

Oursler began planning. It would be the villagers' orphanage, not hers, so they had to decide how to form a non-governmental organization (NGO). Their options included working with a nearby government district, with one of the four churches in the village (Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Assembly of God and Seventh-Day Adventist) or on their own as a stand-alone NGO.

The leadership of Uhekule decided on the third option, and about 400 villagers signed up for the project. Oursler helped them find ways to support the construction.

"They made 90,000 mud bricks to construct the orphanage," she said. "And they go into the mountains to gather rocks for the foundation of our building.... They've done a lot of work."

Uhekule residents' primary source of income is farming potatoes

and corn, and they do give some of their profits to the orphanage, which will also have its own garden. As a result of the villagers' work and sacrifice, the buildings are now standing, and Sunrise Children's Home was dedicated in June 2010.



Kay Oursler, left, shows visitors a girls' dorm room during a tour of the new orphanage.

Opening the doors

The target date for the opening of Sunrise Children's Home is late January or early February 2011—later than Oursler wanted, but delays with solar panel installation prevented an earlier launch.

She spent part of her November visit to the U.S. continuing her fundraising and interviewing Roman Catholic nuns who are interested in staffing the orphanage. She also secured funding from a donor in California to have the solar panels installed.

When the home does open, it will begin with about 10 children as residents. A month later, they will add 10 or 15 more. Oursler has realistic expectations; she knows that it may take a while for the children to adjust to their new setting.

"These kids have been living with an aunt or a grandma or an older sibling. And they all have their own families to feed," she said. "These kids have been pretty well neglected, as most kids are over there, nutrition-wise and caring-wise. They haven't had any love. We're gonna have problems, OK?"

Oursler knows she can rely on leaders in the village, including Fredy, the foreman who does far more than supervise construction. He has become a counselor of sorts for his fellow villagers, and helps Bibi Kay further her work.

"When I get stuck on Swahili, he'll translate for me," she said. "He loves kids, and has six of his own. His wife passed away 10 years ago and he's raised six kids by himself... he wants this orphanage up and running so bad, and so do I."

Feeling God's presence

Construction in Uhekule holds more struggles than it does in Hot Springs Village. It's more difficult to

locate supplies and arrange for their transportation to the work site, then there's the matter of haggling over pricing. Oursler admits to moments of discouragement.

"It's just so much work, and I think sometimes I can't do it, and I'll go to bed, and the next morning I am so revived, I know it's the Lord working in my life," she said. "He wants this orphanage as much as I do."

Oursler says when she lived in the U.S. full-time, it was easy to lose a sense of God's presence. But in Uhekule, she thinks her spiritual life benefits from having fewer distractions. It's a trade-off for which she seems glad to give up the luxury of having a home with plumbing and electricity.

"Over there, I feel his presence every day," she says. "For some reason, God gives me so much strength over there to continue."

"We just finished planting two and a half acres of potatoes and an acre and a half of corn. I worked right alongside for three and a half hours of back-breaking work," she said. "Sure, I had a backache, but it was gone the next morning."

"It just amazes me, and I just pray that my health stays good, and that he continues to give me the strength to do his will. It's just overwhelming when I think about it."

Support from home

Oursler calls joining Christ of the Hills UMC "the best move I've made." Brought up in the Methodist Church, she was quite active in her home church in Minnesota before joining the Peace Corps. In fact, it helped prepare her for the hard work of building an orphanage.

"I came from a little church that I was the general contractor for when we built it," she said, a task which included speaking regularly with the construction manager and



ABOVE: Sunrise Children's Home was dedicated in June. Here, attendees of the ceremony prepare to receive a tour of the administration building.

RIGHT: Elementary school students sing at the dedication of Sunrise Children's home.

COURTESY PHOTOS



coordinating volunteer labor for installing drywall and insulation in the building. "See how the Lord works in my life?"

With limited time in the U.S., Oursler's involvement with Christ of the Hills consists primarily of providing updates on her work in Uhekule. She spends part of her time in the U.S. making presentations to church groups on behalf of her ministry.

Her pastors in Hot Springs Village praise the work Oursler does.

"Many in the faith community are familiar with such missionaries as David Livingstone and Dr. Albert Schweitzer," said the Rev. Walter "Bubba" Smith. "I would place this humble member of our church on the same platform with them."

"Knowing how she could live here with so many amenities, yet choosing to live in Tanzania... is an inspiration," says the Rev. David Wilson. "She gives flesh to how closely the words 'selfless' and 'commitment' are related. What she is doing in Tanzania will bless generations. She's sowing seeds in the minds and lives of children that will produce countless fruits."

Christ of the Hills supports Oursler by providing money through

their mission budget, and in other ways, too. One seemingly small but significant act of support: They ship a care package monthly containing protein-rich foods such as tuna and beef jerky. Oursler struggles with protein deficiency in a village where meat is on the menu only for special occasions.

"Christmas over there is this: There's no decorations, and no gifts. There's church and singing and praise, and then there's a meal with meat," she says. "[Meat is] something they don't have."

"All these 27 kids who are being sponsored for secondary school by myself and my friends here in America, they'll be hanging out at my house, so I will have food for all of them. I'll probably butcher a couple of my chickens."

Not only has living in Uhekele helped her learn about Tanzanian culture, but it also has exposed her to the generosity of those in her home country.

"The American people are the most generous people in the whole world," she says, "because they come to your aid when you really, really need it—like that food. I'm just amazed, and so happy to be living in two villages."

Want to learn more?

Visit bibikay.com to read Kay Oursler's journal, see more photos of Sunrise Children's Home and find out how you can help.

Rollin and Lucile Barnett Memorial Endowment Fund supports grants, local church ministries

Lucile Holman Barnett's 98-year life on this earth ended in October of 2010, but she was not finished with the work she wanted to do for the United Methodist Church.

Income from her \$650,000 endowment at the United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas (UMFA) will benefit First UMC Little Rock and support the foundation's grant-making to United Methodist ministries forever.

Barnett liked to tell the story that she was born early on a Sunday morning, and her father and brothers signed her up for the Cradle Class at First UMC in Little Rock that very day. She was a faithful church member every day of her life.

"Lucile was profoundly generous and loving," said the Rev. Michael Mattox, senior pastor of First UMC Little Rock. "She had no children of her own, so the church folk became her children,"

She and her husband, Rollin, named UMFA as their executor and the trustee of their revocable trust in 1995. Rollin died soon after, and for the rest of her life Foundation staff members cared for Lucile. The trust now has established the Rollin and Lucile Barnett Memorial Endowment Fund at the Foundation.

United Methodists in Arkansas interested in creating an endowment fund to benefit United Methodist ministries may contact Janet Marshall, UMFA vice-president of development, at 501-664-8632 or 877-712-1107.

Among the largest United Methodist foundations in the country, UMFA manages more than 550 trust accounts with combined assets in excess of \$100 million.



Lucile Barnett



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OBITUARY

CLINTON

Georgie Thelma Bruner

Georgie Thelma Bruner, 96, passed away Wednesday, Dec. 1, 2010, at Ozark Health Nursing Center in Clinton, Arkansas.

She was born April 7, 1914, in Kentucky to the late Oric Noris and Norma J. (Herndon) McMaster. Born to Scotch-Irish immigrants, she traveled in a covered wagon to Arkansas with her family.

She was preceded in death by her husband, the Rev. Elbert W. Bruner, who served churches in the North Arkansas Conference; her parents, Oric and Norma McMaster; three sisters, Captola Lemay, Jenna McMaster and Billie Horn; and a grandson, Michael Adams.

She is survived by her children, Elbert W. Bruner, Jr. of Mexico, Norma Anne Hare of California, Sue Solley of Memphis, Carole Gilliam of Clinton and Jo Carter of Ruston, La.; ten grandchildren and eleven great-grandchildren.

A service was held Dec. 4 at First United Methodist Church in Clinton, with the Rev. Vaughn Marsden officiating. Burial followed at Hunter Hill Cemetery.

Camp Tanako offers lodging, projects for spring break missions

Work on a project at the camp, or use it as a base for your team's mission in surrounding areas

Is your church group looking for a mission opportunity this Spring Break, but doesn't want to travel too far or spend a lot of money?

Camp Tanako, the Arkansas Conference camp just south of Hot Springs, may have what you are looking for.

Camp Tanako operates year-round, offering camps, retreats and conferences for Christian and civic organizations. Each summer, more than 600 children and youth attend its camping program.

From March 21-25, 2011, Tanako is offering two options for mission:

Help with on-site projects:

Join the Camp Tanako staff for a little "spring cleaning." Depending on ages and skill, youth and adults can assist in yard maintenance, painting, trail construction or minor repair projects.

Use Tanako as a base camp:

Less than a 15-minute drive from Hot Springs and Malvern, Camp Tanako can serve as a base camp for mission excursions into nearby communities. Tanako can connect you with service groups including women's shelters, homeless shelters, senior citizen groups, deaf ministry and local congregations who have members in need.

For recreation time, Tanako has several on-site options, or your group can venture to nearby hiking trails, botanical gardens, science museums or historic downtown Hot Springs.

For spiritual nurture, your group may join in worship with other groups each morning and participate in evening devotional sessions.

Meals, lodging, and recreation options are flexible. For information or to schedule your group, contact the camp office at 501-262-2600 or by e-mail at tanako@tanako.org.

Prayer vigil lifts up homeless community, seeks path for ministry



Sixty-four people gathered on a chilly Saturday night last month to pray for Central Arkansas' homeless community.

Canvascommunity, a one-year-old United Methodist congregation that meets in a downtown Little Rock storefront, hosted the Dec. 4 vigil. Following a time of prayer and meditation, the group made a candlelit walk to the State Capitol building to underscore the need to pray for elected officials as they consider legislation that affects the homeless population.

Several participants in the vigil either were homeless at the time or have experienced homelessness at some point in their lives.

John Ripa, a member of canvascommunity and founder of the Alliance of Revolutionary Love, a homeless ministry associated with the church, guided the prayer time. The Alliance focuses on building relationships with homeless individuals, as well as with other organizations serving the homeless community.

"If [homeless ministries] work together without a duplication of effort, we believe that we have more than enough food to feed and more than enough clothing," Ripa said. "The one issue that I think we all struggle with is what to do about housing. We will all work together towards that, but I think that's the toughest issue."



LEFT: The Rev. Jamey Bentley, pastor of canvascommunity, welcomes those gathered for the Dec. 4 prayer vigil focused on helping Central Arkansas' homeless population.

RIGHT: John Ripa of the Alliance of Revolutionary Love, a canvascommunity ministry with the homeless, reads a prayer request card during the vigil.

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It will require a change of attitude, thinking | 6B



Getting personal

Grace theology in hardest places | 7B

Section B

January 7, 2011

United Methodist of the Year

Pair honored for ministries of compassion, costly service

BY MARY JACOBS
Staff Writer

For the courageous service to the poorest of God's children that cost them their lives, the Rev. Sam Dixon and the Rev. Clinton Rabb posthumously share the distinction of being our 2010 United Methodists of the Year.

"They literally gave their lives in the cause of improving human living conditions," said Thomas Kemper, top executive of the denomination's General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM).

Both men died of injuries suffered after being buried in the rubble of a collapsed hotel following the Jan. 12 earthquake in Haiti.

As leader of the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), Dixon

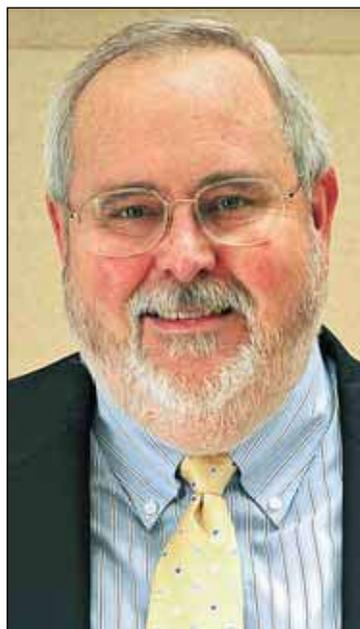
'They literally gave their lives in the cause of improving human living conditions.'

—Thomas Kemper

was attending meetings in Port-au-Prince when the earthquake struck. In recent years, he had traveled to Indonesia after the 2004 tsunami, to Africa to help those whose crops had withered in drought and to tornado-ravaged areas across the U.S.

A native of North Carolina, where he served for 24 years as a pastor, Dixon had worked with the GBGM since 1998, and became UMCOR's top executive in 2007.

Rabb, a clergy member of the Southwest Texas Conference, was also in Haiti to discuss ways to help the impoverished nation. He joined the GBGM in 1996, moving to Mission



Sam Dixon

Volunteers in July 2006.

At Rabb's funeral, the Rev. James Gulley, an UMCOR consultant who was trapped with both men, shared how the men had prayed and sung hymns while awaiting rescuers. Rabb, with his legs broken and pinned in the rubble, spent much of his time trying to make Dixon more comfortable by



Clinton Rabb

creating a makeshift bed using plastic bags. As rescue workers struggled to free him, Rabb told a reporter, "Please tell my wife that I deeply love her."

In the days and months following news of the missionaries' deaths, a groundswell of United Methodists responded to help the people of Haiti.

■ See 'Nominees' page 2B

Q&A: Next generation: living out faith by ancient values

Christian America may be on its last leg, but author Gabe Lyons is optimistic about a new breed of Christians on the rise. His new book, *The Next Christians: The Good News About the End of Christian America* (Doubleday), identifies a movement of Christians—evangelicals, mainline Protestants, Orthodox and others—dedicated to restoring Christianity and recovering the gospel in our changing society.

Mr. Lyons is the co-author of *Un-Christian* (Baker) and founder of Q (qideas.org), a learning community that mobilizes Christians to advance the common good. He spoke recently with staff writer **Mallory McCall**.

Tell me about these "Next Christians."

The "Next Christians" represent something I call the restorers. They're Christians who have felt for a long time that there had to be more to the intermingling of their faith with the wider world, and how they approach engagement with culture and people who aren't Christian. They are the people who are living out being Christian in a new way, in this new era, that's giving a picture of how it's possible to be both faithful and credible in a world that's grown to have marginal opinions about Christians.

The big picture is it's not just an age group; it's a mentality. It's Christians going back to the gospel and asking how the gospel Jesus Christ taught and lived out in a

culture not very excited to see him apply to the 21st century. The Next Christians are those who are trying to figure out a new way forward that's really not all that new. It's actually quite historic and orthodox.

■ See 'Ancient' page 8B



Gabe Lyons



UNITED METHODIST NEWS SERVICE PHOTO BY MIKE DUBOSE

Melissa Crutchfield of UMCOR carries a bouquet of wildflowers as she walks past the wreckage of the Hotel Montana in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. The Revs. Sam Dixon and Clinton Rabb died from injuries received in the hotel's collapse.



UNITED METHODIST NEWS SERVICE PHOTO BY PAUL JEFFREY/ACT

Earthquake survivors in the Haitian city of Leogane unload emergency supplies. The legacy of Dixon's and Rabb's lives and ministries inspired many United Methodists to contribute generously to relief efforts in Haiti.

FAITH WATCH

Protests force delay in Haiti mission trips

Plans for a dozen United Methodist Volunteer in Mission (VIM) teams to travel to Haiti in January were canceled after protests erupted in the country over an upcoming presidential runoff election. "Team safety and welfare is our first priority," the Rev. Tom Vencuss, a VIM coordinator based in Haiti, told United Methodist News Service. Additional schedule changes are possible through February; for information, visit www.umvimhaiti.org.

Report notes needs of chaplains after repeal

Though Congress voted Dec. 18 to repeal the Don't Ask/Don't Tell ban on openly gay military personnel, a Pentagon report issued before the vote urged that "special attention" be given to the concerns of military chaplains. "Service members will not be required to change their personal views and religious beliefs," the report said. "They must, however, continue to respect and co-exist with others who may hold different views and beliefs."

Pair plead guilty to Texas church fires

Two men who pleaded guilty in December to a series of East Texas church arsons face up to life in prison when they are sentenced Jan. 10. Jason Bourque, 20, and Daniel McAllister, 22, were arrested last February after fires that damaged or destroyed 10 churches including Russell Memorial UMC in Wills Point, Texas, which lost its sanctuary.

Minneapolis to be site of UM bishop's office

When the United Methodist Dakotas and Minnesota conferences join in a new episcopal area in 2012, the bishop's office will be located in Minneapolis, a transition team has determined. The new area is the result of a cost-cutting decision by the 2008 General Conference that each of the denomination's five U.S. jurisdictions should reduce their number of bishops by one. The conferences will not merge.

■ **NOMINEES** Continued from page 1B

Inspired in part by the sacrifices of Dixon and Rabb, churches hosted concerts, talent shows, spaghetti suppers and other fundraisers. As of early December, more than \$43 million had been raised to support UMCOR's work in Haiti.

"We are immensely grateful for their lives," said Mr. Kemper. "We work to keep their legacies alive in the church and world by sharing God's love and transforming people and the world."

Some worry that John Wesley's fears for the denomination are coming to fruition: that the United Methodist church is sinking into comfortable complacency. But Wesley also spoke of the incredible power of a few selfless souls: "Give me one hundred men who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God," he wrote, "and I care not whether they be clergyman or laymen, they alone will shake the gates of Hell and set up the kingdom of Heaven upon the earth."

For reminding us that that kind of dedication still exists in our midst, Sam Dixon and Clint Rabb share the United Methodist of the Year designation.

Other United Methodists—clergy and laypersons who also fulfill their calling and serve the church in ways that make a lasting impact—were among the nominees for the 2010 United Methodist of the Year. They are:

Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton

Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton (Pittsburgh Area) was nominated for his work as United Methodism's "point man" for wiping out malaria. Since 2006, he has served as lead bishop and spokesperson for the denomination's Global Health Initiative, including the Nothing but Nets anti-malaria campaign. To date, United Methodists have raised \$6 million through grass-

roots fundraisers to purchase mosquito nets that help prevent malaria in Africa.

In May, Bishop Bickerton was on hand to launch the United Methodist Church's new \$75 million Imagine No Malaria campaign to educate about prevention, establish community-based malaria control programs, and revitalize hospitals and clinics to improve treatment across Africa. Imagine No Malaria's ultimate goal: to eliminate deaths from malaria by 2015. To date, that project has raised \$10 million. Bishop Bickerton's work takes him frequently to Africa, and in September, he was called on to speak at a panel discussion at United Nations headquarters in New York, calling for collaboration to combat malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS through support of the Global Fund.

—Nominated by the Rev. Rich Peck

Dr. Tom Brian

A short-term mission trip in 1991 changed the life of Dr. Tom Brian, sparking a 20-year project that continues to change lives today. Dr. Brian, a dentist and a member of First UMC in Allen, Texas, created Send Hope in 1995 to help provide for the medical and dental needs for persons in the remote area of La Mosquitia, Honduras. Send Hope sends teams for short-term medical, dental and construction projects; sends supplies and equipment; helps people with medical



Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton



UMNS FILE PHOTO BY MIKE DUBOSE

United Methodist Bishop Thomas Bickerton (right) listens as Bishop Nkulu Ntambo (left) describes church efforts to improve drainage canals in order to fight malaria to South African singer and malaria ambassador Yvonne Chaka Chaka (center) in Kamina, Democratic Republic of the Congo in April 2010.

treatment; and helps students with education. The organization also sends funding for children needing care at hospitals in Tegucigalpa. Dr. Brian has also arranged for about 25 children to travel to the U.S. to receive complex medical treatment.

"Tom is a friend and an inspiration to many," writes the Rev. June Franck, associate pastor of First UMC Allen, Texas.

—Nominated by the Rev. June Franck

The Rev. Noel Denison

The Rev. Noel Denison, retired director of Serving Ministry at Chapelwood UMC in Houston, Texas, was nominated for her long-time dedication to children and others in need in the community. Through her leadership, the ministry grew to shepherd some 35 local agencies and a dozen global ministries with volunteers and regular funding. She has participated in more than 30 mission trips on five



Noel Denison

continents and has assisted with many more mission trips, "too numerous to estimate," according to Kathy Schenck, a member of the church. She also spearheaded Faith in Action, an annual day of service that involves some 450 church members serving 25-40 charities. Since retiring in 2007, she remains active in local charities and conference mission projects.

"With great faith and courage, Noel accepted an invitation from the One whose ear is bent toward the brokenhearted to choose the difficult options of ministering with our underserved, silent and previously invisible sisters and brothers in Christ," writes Ms. Schenck.

—Nominated by Kathy Schenck, member of Chapelwood UMC

Robert "Bob" Dibble

Bob Dibble is an active member of First UMC in Boerne, Texas, whose efforts touch the lives of many beyond the church. He serves as chair of the church's outreach committee and has helped provide financial assistance to the local Family Services organization, Hill Country Daily Bread Ministries, the Mobile Mission for Health and a local battered women's shelter. He also volunteers on Saturdays for the church's home repair team and on Mondays with another home repair ministry called "Golfers Fore Others." Mr. Dibble delivers used appliances to needy people in the area. He has made



Robert Dibble

■ See 'Nominees' page 3B

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UM CONNECTIONS

GBGM names leader for mission volunteers

Una Jones is the new executive for annual conference relations and mission volunteers programs at the United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries.



Una Jones

Ms. Jones, who has served in various positions at the agency over the past 11 years, succeeds the Rev. Clint Rabb, who died as a result of injuries suffered in the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti.

Resources posted for Sanctity of Life Day

Sanctity of Human Life Sunday will be Jan. 23 this year. Since 1983, Americans have observed the day to celebrate the intrinsic value of all human life. The day is celebrated on the Sunday that falls closest to Jan. 22, the day in 1973 when the U.S. Supreme Court handed down the Roe v. Wade and Doe v. Bolton decisions. For United Methodist resources to share with your communities and congregations, visit the blog of the Rev. Chris Roberts, associate pastor of Meridian Street UMC in Indianapolis, Ind., at <http://pastorchrisorberts.blogspot.com>.

Exploration 2011 set for November

Exploration 2011, an event for young adults who feel God's call to ordained ministry as a deacon or elder in the United Methodist Church, will take place Nov. 11-13 in St. Louis, Mo. The event, sponsored by the denomination's General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, provides an opportunity for young people ages 18 to 26 to explore the call to ordained ministry through worship, prayer, workshops, networking and small groups. Updates and registration information will be posted at www.gbhem.org/exploration.

—Compiled by Mallory McCall

■ **NOMINEES** Continued from page 2B

numerous trips to Mexico to help build a clinic and church and to deliver donated furniture. Mr. Dibble also travels to Uganda annually to serve on a mission team called "Tree of Life" ministries.

"I think Bob epitomizes the hands and feet of Christ," writes fellow church member Fred W. Martin.

—Nominated by Fred W. Martin

Gil Hanke

Gilbert C. Hanke, a layperson and general secretary of the General Commission on United Methodist Men, was nominated for his mission work in the U.S. and abroad. Putting his professional skills in speech pathology to work, Mr. Hanke has led 18 mission trips to Haiti, eight trips to Costa Rica and one trip to Tomsk, Siberia, to help children with hearing impairments and other handicaps. Mr. Hanke also traveled to Haiti in January 2010 as part of a mission team rebuilding a school in Mellier. As general secretary, Mr. Hanke worked with the North Carolina Bible Outreach program to introduce Disciple Bible study in male prisons within five states, and partnered with Stop Hunger Now in an effort to provide emergency rations all around the globe. At the National Boy Scout Jamboree in Fort Hill, Va., he promoted the Nothing But Nets program and passed out New Testaments to the 5,000 scouts attending a worship service.

—Nominated by the Rev. Rich Peck



Gil Hanke

The Rev. Donald E. Messer

Dr. Messer, executive director of the Center for the Church and Global AIDS in Centennial, Colo., was nominated for his dedication to helping those affected by HIV and AIDS. Dr. Messer wrote the church legislation that created the United Methodist Global AIDS Fund at the 2004 General Conference, and has raised over \$3 million that has been distributed to more than 80 HIV education, prevention, care and treatment projects in 35 countries. In October, he received an inaugural United Methodist Global AIDS Leadership Award at the "Lighten the Burden III" Conference in Dallas. Dr. Messer has written 12



Donald E. Messer



COURTESY PHOTO

Gil Hanke, top staff executive for the General Commission on United Methodist Men, was nominated for his mission work, including dozens of trips to Haiti to help children with hearing impairment.

books, including *Ending Hunger Now*, which he co-authored with George McGovern and Bob Dole. He was president of Dakota Wesleyan University from 1971-1981 and president of Iliff School of Theology from 1981-2000. Concern for the escalating global HIV/AIDS pandemic has prompted Dr. Messer to travel and speak in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

—Nominated by Shirley Struchen, member of Church of St. Paul and St. Andrew, United Methodist, New York City

The Rev. Romeo del Rosario

The Rev. del Rosario is a missionary serving for the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) whose work has taken him around the globe. After graduating from Boston University, he worked as a pastor and community developer in the California-Pacific Conference. In 1985, he volunteered for GBGM to teach at a seminary in Sierra Leone in West Africa. Then he spent three years in Jerusalem serving as a liaison between the United Methodist Church and the Middle East Council of Churches. Other assignments have taken him to Kenya, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and the Philippines, where he served as president of Union Theological Seminary. Currently, he's in Cambodia, helping coordinate the



Romeo del Rosario

ministries of various Christian denominations and agencies, teaching at Cambodia Methodist Bible School and serving as district superintendent. At almost every location he has served, he has taken the time to learn the language—at least six, by our count.

"Everywhere Romy has served, he did so with love and humility," said the Rev. Eduardo Cajuat of Garland, Texas. —Nominated by Mary-Helen Marigza and the Rev. Eduardo C. Cajuat

Stefanie Schutz

Stefanie, 17, a member of Well-spring United Methodist in Georgetown, Texas, was nominated for her leadership as a United Methodist youth. She is the youth representative on the Connectional Table and serves on district, conference and jurisdictional youth teams. Stefanie wrote a piece of legislation that was passed at the Global Young People's Convocation in Berlin this summer and will be voted on at the 2012 General Conference. A junior in high school, Stefanie is a member of the National Honor Society and plays viola in her high school's orchestra.

"In addition to all her leadership roles . . . Stefanie still finds time to bring donuts for her Sunday school group, lead a dance troupe at the church for the little children and to be a mentor to many of the junior high



Stefanie Schutz

girls in the youth group," writes Barbara Brightwell, a member of the church. "Stefanie has a heart for Christ and it radiates from within her."

—Nominated by Barbara Brightwell

Stephen Wilke

Stephen Wilke was nominated for work to bring "the current tools of the culture (online software for providing online college course curriculum) to the United Methodist Church." As the executive director of the Richard and Julia Wilke Institute for Discipleship (IFD), Dr. Wilke has strived to bring online opportunities to nurture Christian leaders for effective ministry through BeADisciple.com. The site offers a place where pastors can earn continuing education units, lay speakers can renew their certifications, and laity and clergy can grow in their faith. Dr. Wilke helped establish a partnership with the Wesley Ministry Network to provide a full roster of high-quality courses online. Another partnership with Upper Room Books led to the creation in 2010 of an online Advent study, *Uncluttering Your Heart During Advent and Christmas*. He also helped roll out an online version of Disciple Bible Study, now in its second year and expanding its reach globally.

—Nominated by Lisa Buffum, IFD assistant director, BeADisciple.com

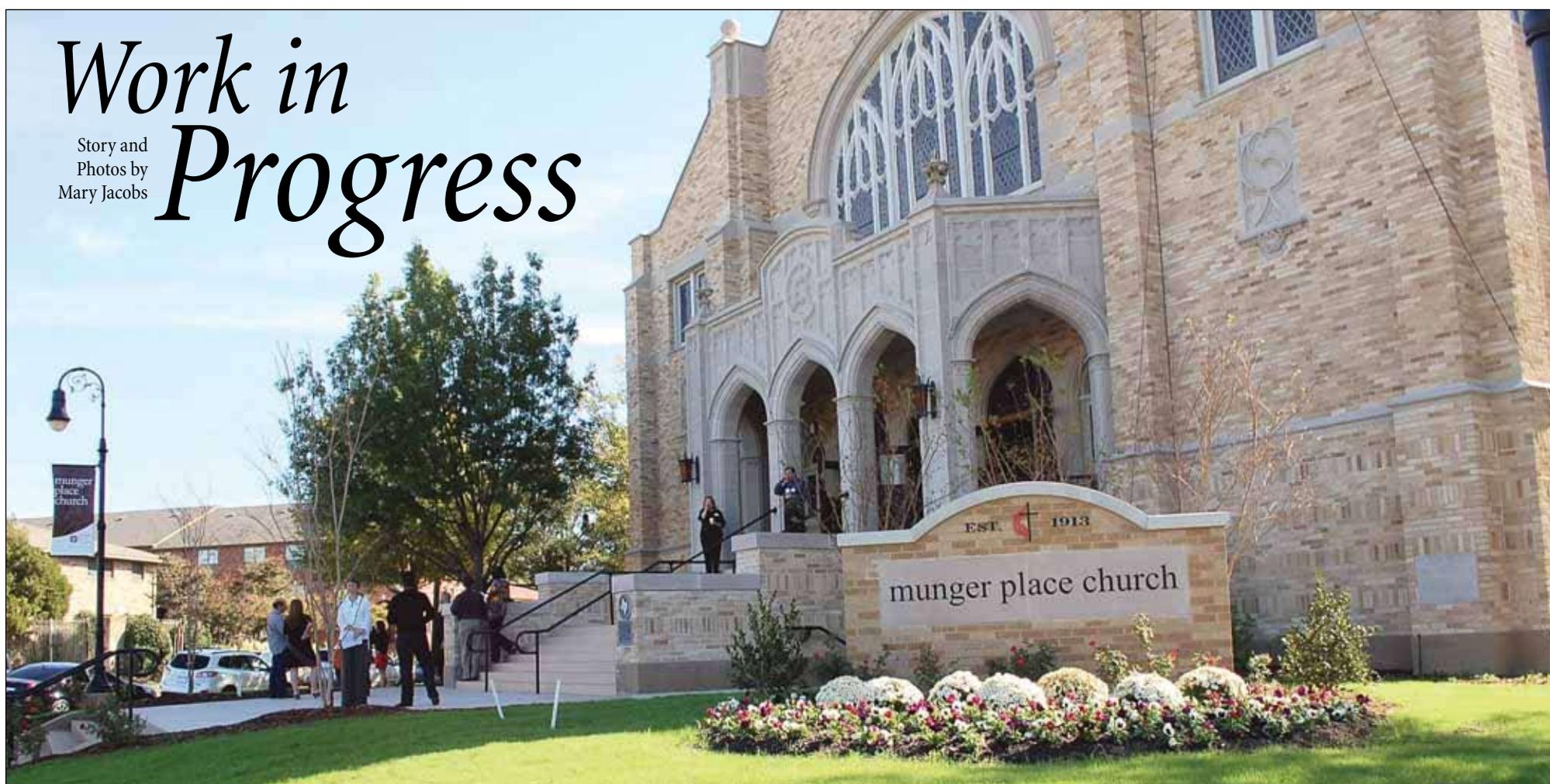


Stephen Wilke

[mjacob@umr.org](mailto:mjacobs@umr.org)

Work in Progress

Story and
Photos by
Mary Jacobs



The exterior of stately Munger Place Church, once home to an affluent congregation of 2,000, was restored in a \$4.5 million renovation before the re-launch in October.

Munger Place Church mixes old with the new

BY MARY JACOBS
Staff Writer

DALLAS, Texas—Ask the pastors at Munger Place Church in East Dallas whether the worship service is traditional or contemporary, and likely they'll answer, "Yes."

They're not just being snarky. At Munger Place, worshippers sit in traditional wooden pews but enjoy state-of-the-art video screens and acoustics. A musical riff might start with an up-tempo, jazzy praise song and then deftly transition into an unplugged version of "How Great Thou Art."

"We're a church that values old and new," said campus pastor Andrew Forrest.

Indeed, Munger Place Church is an old church—founded in 1913—but at the same time, it's brand new. The former Munger Place United Methodist Church closed in June 2009 and was purchased by Highland Park United Methodist Church in Dallas. After a \$4.5-million renovation financed by Highland Park, the church re-launched in October as a satellite campus of Highland Park's Cornerstone worship community, led by the Rev. Paul Rasmussen.

Some 800 people turned up for the Oct. 24 opening Sunday worship service, and now regular weekly attendance hovers at just under 400. Many of the folks getting involved are singles and young families in their early 30s who live in the neighborhood.

"There's an energy here that I'm not finding at other churches," says attendee Cary Walker, 34. "They're doing things other traditional churches aren't doing."

What's happening at Munger Place that's working so well? By putting new wine in old wineskins, founders say, they're creating a model for United Methodist churches in older, urban neighborhoods—for sparking new life into church properties that otherwise might dwindle or die.

Resurrected

When they relocated to the Dallas area in 2009, Joe Camp, 31, and his wife, Molly, chose the Munger Place neighborhood. They were enchanted by the area's restored old homes as well as its ethnic and economic diversity.

For many of the same reasons, the Camps chose Munger Place as their church.

"We liked the idea of a community church," Mr. Camp said. "We can walk to Munger Place." With its location, the Camps felt the church could also "reach out to the underserved."

"Seeing an old church like that restored, that really appealed to me," said Nick Weatherford, 32, another regular attendee. "I felt like I could contribute to the church."

An article in *The Dallas Morning News* dubbed Munger Place's renovation "This Old House of God," because the work preserved the church's original beauty. Ornate carved woodwork and masonry stayed; the existing heating and air conditioning systems, which hadn't been operable in years, were replaced.

The church's basement was gutted and remodeled as classroom and nursery space for children.

That old-new blend appeals to many of the people who love East Dallas.

"East Dallas is a little melting pot inside of Dallas," said Mr. Weatherford. "It's artsy. There are no chain restaurants. And this church has that East Dallas vibe."

That's exactly what leaders hoped to achieve. While Munger Place operates as a satellite

campus, "We're not just dropping a piece of Highland Park into the neighborhood," said Mr. Rasmussen. The new congregation is developing an 8,000-square-foot space called Art House Dallas as a venue for nurturing and supporting local artists, both creatively and spiritually.

What the two churches are sharing is resources—namely preaching. Some weeks, Mr. Rasmussen preaches at Cornerstone and at Munger Place via videotape; other weeks, he'll preach at Munger Place and via videotape at Cornerstone. Mr. Forrest takes turns at both Munger Place and Cornerstone as well. Like many other aspects of the church, leaders are still tweaking the preaching rotation.

No one has officially joined Munger Place yet; Mr. Forrest says leaders are "tweaking" their approach to membership, too. They want to design a process that will appeal to younger people who look for a chance to contribute meaningfully.

'Kitchen Groups'

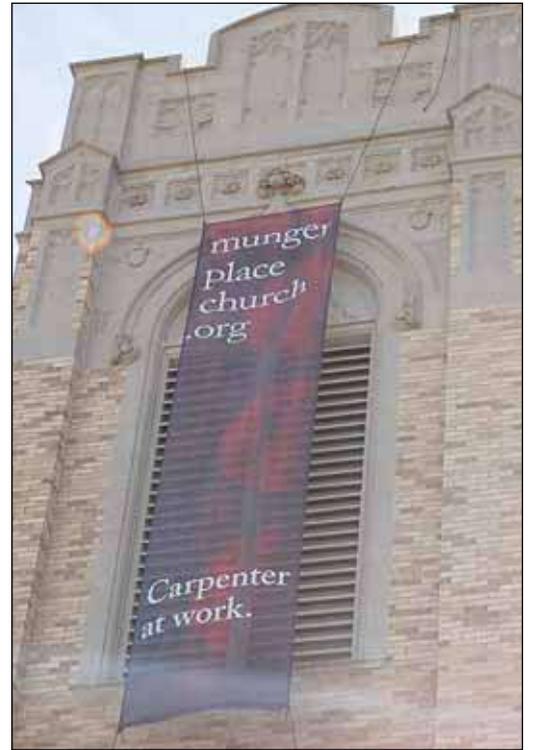
"We want to have a low threshold for welcoming visitors, but high expectations for our members," he said. Members will be expected to attend worship every Sunday, contribute finan-



LEFT: Some 800 turned up for Munger Place Church's first worship service; regular attendance is now just under 400. MIDDLE: Worshippers come forward for communion at Munger Place Church. RIGHT: Kate Miner (center, arms outstretched), Munger Place's music director, blends traditional and contemporary elements in the worship service.



LEFT: Space behind the sanctuary's altar was renovated to create a comfortable lounge and coffee bar. BELOW: A sign alerts neighbors that Munger Place Church is back in business.



cially, perform regular service work and become part of the "Kitchen Groups," Munger Place's small-group program.

Kevin Watson, an ordained United Methodist elder and a doctoral student in Wesley Studies at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, has been involved in setting up the weekly small groups. Instead of simply following a curriculum, he says, Kitchen Group members spend time sharing their reflections to a single question each week: "How is your life in God?" It's a 21st-century version of John Wesley's question for his class meetings: "How is it with your soul?"

"People are learning to interpret their week through the lens of what God is asking of them," Mr. Watson said. "Over time, their answers change and they go deeper."

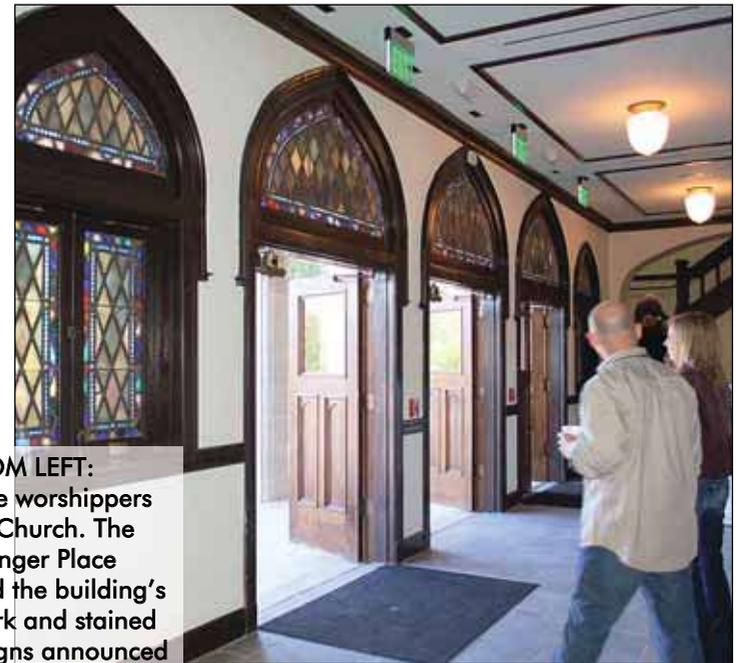
Kitchen Groups mix old and new, too, and they're a big part of Munger Place's vitality, Mr. Forrest believes.

"When Methodism was rocking and rolling 200 years ago, the class meeting was key," he said. "Getting together with like-minded believers, with whom you can ask that question, is a powerful tool of the Holy Spirit."

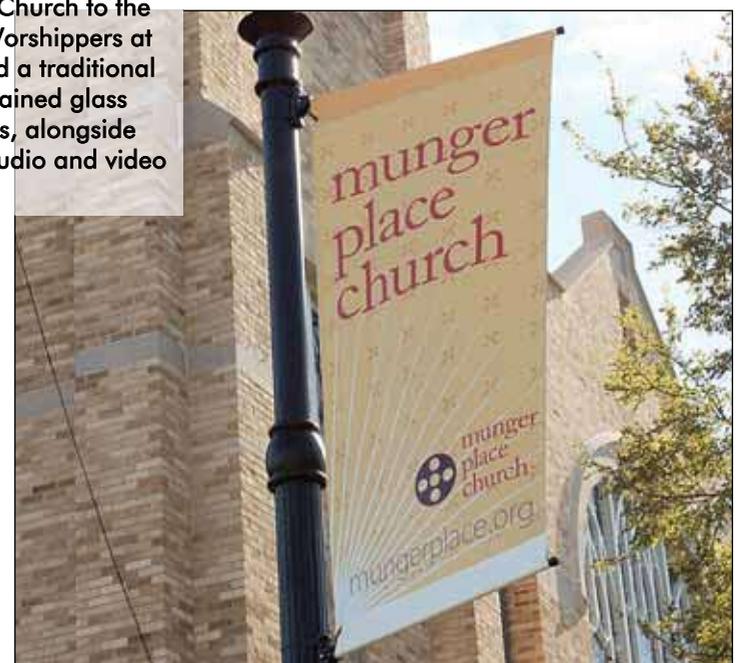
Mr. Watson likes the way that Munger Place Church has provided a venue for experimentation and leadership for Mr. Forrest, a talented but relatively inexperienced (and not-yet ordained) pastor. The new church also leverages the talents of Mr. Rasmussen, a popular preacher at Highland Park.

Highland Park, which already offers eight worship services on Sunday mornings, has no room to grow physically. So creating the new church in an old building at Munger Place created another venue for attendees to hear Mr. Rasmussen preach.

"Most churches grow on the 'big tent' model," Mr. Rasmussen said. "You fill the tent, it gets full, you raise money and build a bigger tent. But that old paradigm is no longer sustainable. Why not grow by empowering neighborhood churches?"



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Greeters welcome worshippers to Munger Place Church. The renovation at Munger Place Church preserved the building's original woodwork and stained glass. Colorful signs announced the renovation and re-opening of Munger Place Church to the neighborhood. Worshippers at Munger Place find a traditional sanctuary, with stained glass and wooden pews, alongside state-of-the-art audio and video technology.



The Emma dilemma: how to help those truly in need

BY DAN DICK
Special Contributor

Who deserves grace? In this season of giving and goodwill, who should be helped, and who warrants disdain?

I listened to a table-full of pastors lament this time of year when some unfortunate few attempt to exploit the system of charity for their own benefit.

"I won't let anyone have anything until I talk to them."

"I can tell if they're pulling a fast one."

"If I even think they are trying to take advantage of us, I will show them the door—empty-handed!"

"We only give to people we know. We don't offer assistance to strangers."

"We used to give food and clothes away all the time, but I put my foot down when I got here. We hardly even have people stop at the church anymore."

One courageous young pastor said, "We try to help everyone who asks."

This was met with stony silence. The consensus around the table was three-fold: You can't trust people who come to the church for help, you can't help everyone, so you need to have some standard by which to decide who deserves help and who does not.

It was only a couple of weeks ago that I attended a church where the preacher confessed that he helps appreciative people much more than those who act like they are entitled to assistance. Apparently, generosity is conditional—we give to those who earn our approval.

Years ago I ran into this odd way of thinking. The church I served embraced a 45-year-old single mother, Emma, who'd been abandoned by her husband and lost her job and lived in a squalid little apartment on the edge of town. A core group of the congregation adopted her and her family and pledged to help them in any way they could.

This worked fine as long as Emma obediently accepted their charity, but there was a problem with Emma. She was the absolutely most kind and generous woman in the whole church.

One woman in our church gave Emma a quality cloth coat—which Emma turned around and gave to a homeless woman in town. The congregation provided a lavish Thanksgiving feast for Emma—which she

divided with a welfare family living temporarily in a roadside motel. Toys that were given to her kids were shared with poor children in town.

The response of my congregation to Emma's generosity? They were furious. How could Emma be so ungrateful? How could she be so disrespectful? The few people who defended Emma did so by saying, "Well, she just doesn't know any better."

My solution to the Emma Dilemma was to make her the chair of our missions committee. She worked with a small group of people to do for others what the chosen few had wanted to do for her.

Under her guidance, our local missions exploded: We were actively engaged with the poor, marginalized, imprisoned, homebound and unemployed in hands-on, meaningful ways.

'The Christmas season is a time of giving. Yet we find ways to make it conditional.'

The one commitment we made as a congregation was simple: We would help whoever we could, whenever we could, wherever we could—whether they deserved it or not. It made our job a whole lot easier. When you don't have to judge people, you can actually help them.

Oh sure, there were some who tried to take advantage, and we pointed it out and let them know we knew, and it all worked out fine. Being generous doesn't mean being a doormat, and it doesn't mean you don't follow some guidelines.

But a person in need is a person in need, and we chose to serve the Jesus in each one we met instead of looking for the devil in the few.

The Christmas season is a time of giving. Yet we find ways to make it conditional. How an undeserving people who have received God's grace and blessing have the audacity to withhold a small blessing from those less blessed seems the worst kind of sin.

May we all resolve the Emma Dilemma by giving until it feels good, then finding a way to give a little more.

The Rev. Dick is director of connectional ministries for the Wisconsin Conference.



Dan Dick

Do you want to get well?

BY JOSEPH YOO
Special Contributor

What would you say to a man like this?

He is overweight. Never exercises. Eats very unhealthily. Burgers. Steak. Deep-fried food. Hardly any green or fruit in his diet.

Then he has a heart attack. He has surgery and survives. But the doctor warns him that he needs to make some changes in his life.

The man goes home. And he still never exercises. Still eats very unhealthily. Burgers. Steak. Deep-fried food. Hardly any green or fruit in his diet.

He suffers another heart attack. This time, it's fatal.

What would you say? Would you be surprised? Would you shake your head a bit and say something like, "Well, he really should've changed his lifestyle?"

Do you think that man really wanted to get well?

Now what would you say about this: A church was healthy in the 1970s and '80s. It grew and enjoyed being a thriving and growing church.

It's been 30 years now. The people of the church grew older together. They have had more church members dying in recent years than new people coming to church. But they love the way they do church.

They love the organ music. They love their traditions of the church. They love the way they do things and the way they've done things for years and years.

But they're running low on funds. They're running low on living members. They need to do something.

So they ask their district superintendent and the cabinet to give them a young pastor. A pastor with energy. A pastor with new ideas. A pastor that can reach the young people of our community. So the cabinet sends a young pastor to them.

Time warp

The pastor sees that even though the year is 2010, once you step into the church, you travel back to 1980.

The pastor tries to change the music. "You can't do that!" "We love our music!" "People love the organ!" "Our music is the draw!"

The pastor tries to change the worship service a bit to make it a bit more relevant. "How dare you mess with our worship?" "We've been doing worship like this longer than you've been alive!"

The pastor tries to implement a



Joseph Yoo



As depicted in Bartolomé Esteban Murillo's 17th-century oil painting, "Christ Healing the Paralytic at the Pool of Bethesda," we have to want to be healed, says Joseph Yoo.

new members class. "You can't do that!" "People don't want requirements to join a church!"

So the congregation begs the district superintendent to send this young pastor away. The cabinet sends the pastor elsewhere. And soon, the conference closes the church.

What would you say to that church? Did they really want change? Did they really want to get well?

life!"

Could you imagine what it would look like if the man came back to the pools in Bethesda and repeated his life of 38 years or so?

To churches that are declining, the real question we should ask is, "Do you want to get well?" I mean, "Do you really, really, really want to get well?"

Because, getting well will require sacrifice. Getting well means you don't

'Getting well requires sacrifice. A change in life. A new attitude. A new way of thinking.'

In John 5, Jesus walks up to a man in Bethesda who had been ill for 38 years. Jesus asked, "Do you want to get well?" It's sort of an odd question to ask, don't you think? The man was near Bethesda because people believed the pools had healing power. Of course, the man wanted to get well!

It's kind of an offensive question. Could you imagine going to a doctor with an illness and being asked, "Do you want to get well?"

Living old life

By Jesus telling the man to get up and walk, and then telling him to not sin anymore, I feel that Jesus was telling the man: "Now that you are well, don't go living the life of a sick man, fighting his way into the stirred pool. You've been made well! You are free! Live a way that reflects your new

go back to the life you were living while waiting for the pools to be stirred in Bethesda.

Getting well means you can't use the excuse: "We've always done it this way!"

If the doctors told you that you had high cholesterol, you wouldn't say, "Well, I've always eaten this way!"

Getting well requires sacrifice. A change in life. A new attitude. A new way of thinking.

If declining churches want to get well but don't want to change their ways, who's to blame if they eventually close their doors?

The Rev. Yoo, a provisional member of the California-Pacific Conference, serves as pastor of youth and spiritual formation at Valencia (Calif.) United Methodist Church.

WESLEYAN WISDOM

Our grace theology is redemptively personal

BY DONALD W. HAYNES
UMR Columnist

I sat recently beside my brilliant and handsome grandson in a United Methodist Church fellowship hall jammed with 160 teenagers and college students, their parents and their grandparents. During this “Gratitude Service,” the young people thanked their families who had supported them through their addiction to alcohol and drugs—including marijuana and methadone, and prescription drugs like valium, hydrocodone and antihistamines taken from family medicine cabinets.

The parking lot was filled with expensive cars; the families were mostly professionals. The cost of the rehab program was quite pricey. The evidence was clear: Brokenness, pain and unmanageable lifestyles know no socio-economic boundaries.

It was a two-hour testimony meeting. Tears flowed. Parents spoke poignant words: “Our family has been in a very dark place.” Young people said: “I have been less than human.” “I have violated everything I was ever taught about how to live.” “I lost all my self-esteem, even my will to live.”

Then they announced how many months they have been clean. Huge young men hugged their mothers and wept. Doctors paid tribute to the “Insight” program, which had accomplished what medical science could not do.

Though not all attendees were Christians, God was mentioned in almost every testimony. Naturally I was proud that a United Methodist Church is living out “radical hospitality” by providing a place for the group to meet. As I came from that meeting I was more than ever determined to tell the world that Methodism has a message!

Mr. Wesley was far ahead of his time, and ahead of many Christians today, when he said that every person is a child of God, that the Holy Spirit can whisper to every soul, and that we are invited to “come every soul with sin oppressed; there’s mercy with the Lord, and he will surely give you rest by trusting in his Word.”

Today we see God using counselors, doctors, pastors, youth ministers, lay mentors and small groups. But all these, Wesley would insist, are

augmented by the awakening presence of the Holy Spirit. It is time again to talk about Wesley’s insights on “The Imago Dei” (Genesis 1:27).

Those who insist on taking the Bible literally often gloss over what Wesley considered the most important verse in the creation narrative: Genesis 1:27. Our Methodist theology begins with divine endowment, not with human sin.

Wesley preached that the imago dei is the foundation of all Christian doctrine. In his sermon “The New Birth,” he said: “Why must we be born again? What is the foundation of this doctrine? The foundation of it lies near as deep as the creation of the world.”

In his *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, Wesley delineates how he interpreted our being “made in the image of God”:

- “We have God’s natural image. Each of us is a spiritual being endowed with understanding, freedom of will, and various affections;

- “We have God’s moral image. If God is full of justice, mercy, and truth; so was man as he came from the hands of his Creator. Otherwise God would not have pronounced him, along with all creation, as very good” (Genesis 1:31).

God seeks us

Commenting on creation, Wesley preached: “God is love, accordingly man at his creation was full of love. God is spotless purity; and so man was in the beginning pure from every sinful blot.”

In the 15th chapter of Luke, Jesus’ parables reveal God as the seeker of all who are “out of the fold” or lost or given to prodigal lifestyles. God is both seeking shepherd and waiting Father. What parents do for their children on drugs can in no way be compared to how far God goes in loving us. We might give up on God, but God never gives up on us.

We believe in grace as the “moving force” in God’s revealing Himself to us. The first expression of this is completely divine initiative. We call it “preparing grace” or “prevenient grace.”

Wesley documented it by pointing out the universality of human conscience, based on Romans 1:20. He preached about the “whispers to the heart”: “The Son of God begins his work in man by enabling us to believe in him. He both opens and enlightens the eyes of our understanding. . . . And we then see not by a chain of reasoning, but by a kind of intuition, by a di-

rect view, that ‘God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.’”

Resisting God’s love

Yet Wesley and classical Methodism recognize, in the words of Albert Outler, “something has gone fearfully awry in the human enterprise.” Outler forces us to admit, “Everywhere (and in our own hearts) we see the signs of this tragic discrepancy between our visions of what human existence ought to be and what it ever actually is.”

Sin is rooted in the inherent “political image” of God, which is free will. God ran an incredible risk in giving us free will rather than making us little robots. The Bible is clear: Adam and Eve misused it from the get-go. Rather than celebrating their harmony with each other and God, they chose to do it their way. Hence came into this fallen moral order what we call the doctrine of “original sin.”

Sin is universal, unavoidable and totally pervasive, giving us a distorted view of God, ourselves and all created order, and our responsibility for being stewards of that order. Reinhold Niebuhr was one of several who rescued us from the naiveté of liberalism with his seminal volume, *Moral Man in an Immoral Society*. As sinful persons, we build the distortion of sin into economic, political, educational and ecclesiastical systems.

Therapeutic model

In becoming a professing Christian, one becomes open to grace as a “healing stream.” Sin is a disease, a corruption of what was originally good. That is, we are sick unto death. In our corrupted condition, we are estranged from God and we resort to

destructive behavior.

Wesley sometimes called sin “disease” and salvation “taking the cure.” Scholars like Kansas Bishop Scott Jones, Duke Divinity professor Randy Maddox and the late pioneers Albert Outler and Robert Cushman have helped us rediscover this important language of Wesley’s grace theology.

It provides a deeper insight into the meaning of the theological word “Fall.” To fall, one must have been at a higher plane. Salvation is healing, restoration, rehabilitation. In the language of a drug addict, salvation is “being clean.”

Free will is a gift of God’s grace. Calvinists misunderstand us Arminians at this point. They connect free will to Pelagianism in Augustine’s time and to the thinking of 18th-century Enlightenment rationalists, as the morally neutral capacity we have to choose right or wrong, good or evil, and in so doing, participate in our own salvation.

Methodists are Arminian, but this does not mean that we choose to save ourselves. Rather our capacity for free will is a gift—a “grace gift.”

Both revival theology of old and fundamentalism today tend to dwell too long and exhaustively on our sin. In his sermon “Original Sin,” Wesley encouraged the most incorrigible sinner, “The great end of religion is to renew our hearts in the image of God, to repair that total loss of righteousness and true holiness which we sustained by the sin of our first parents.” Sin is a sickness of soul that can be cured by the Great Physician.

We are addicted to our sin, but God’s gift to us is universal grace to all who would respond to the Holy Spirit. Charles Wesley recalls his own

conversion with the assurance: “The morning breaks, the shadows flee, pure Universal Love thou art. To me, to all, thy mercies move—thy nature and thy name is Love.” No Calvinist could write these words because they emphasize the love of God, and no humanist would need to because they recognize the sin of humankind!

Are we all sinners? Yes, the Bible is clear and the evidence is unarguable. Does God will that we all be saved? Yes! Read John 3:16 again: If “God so loved the world that He sent his only son that whosoever believes in him should not perish,” the answer is “yes.” As an old gospel song puts it, “Whosoever surely meaneth me.” It is God’s intention that all be saved. Can we resist God’s saving grace? Yes, just as we can reject or respond to love in any relationship.

Methodism has a message: “Jesus is tenderly calling you home . . . Why from the sunshine of love wilt thou roam farther and farther away? Jesus is calling the weary to rest . . . bring him your burden and you will be blessed. He will not turn you away.”

All this ran through my mind as I sat among the brokenness of these beautiful lives. Best of all, my 21-year-old grandson had his arm around me and said more than once that evening, “I love you, Pop—very much.”

And I responded each time with a squeeze of his knee and the words, “I love you too, son—very much—and I am proud of you.”

Dr. Haynes is a retired member of the Western North Carolina Conference, an adjunct professor at Hood Theological Seminary and interim pastor of Kallam Grove Christian Church. E-mail: dhaynes11@triad.rr.com.

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Donald Haynes

■ ANCIENT Continued from page 1B

You say it's the end of Christian America, and yet there's good news. What part do the Next Christians play in that?

The Next Christians are indeed the good news about what's happening in America. So many people are disappointed, frustrated or disheartened about the way they see Christianity slipping in a culture where Christianity used to be very respected, and Christians can react in different ways. One is to be fearful and to believe the end is near, and we all need to circle up the wagons and hold on tight because it's about to get a lot worse.

That's a valid opinion, but I wrote this book because I have seen something very different that gives me incredible hope. And I think it could give a lot of hope and inspiration to people who don't realize there are Christians figuring out how to navigate this new terrain.

The good news about our moment is that although we see Christianity—or this idea of being a Christian America—declining, it can give birth to something really fresh and new. The reality is our Christian nation has become a bit complacent. The good news is that it can bring a fresh vibrancy to the faith, allowing Christians to say: “No, I'm not just going to live my faith the way I saw someone living it last year. I'm going to go back to the roots of Scripture and try to understand through the lens of my context what it means to be faithful to Jesus Christ today but also proximate to the world he cares so much about.”

You write that these Next Christians are all about being countercultural. What do you mean, and why is that important?

So much of the last couple of decades of Christian movement has been trying to play catch-up with culture—basically wanting to make sure the Christian faith could make sense to the broader culture. But if you

‘Even though we see declining church attendance in some of our major denominations, there is a rebirth happening.’

—Gabe Lyons

carry that too far, it puts the church in the position of trying to form-fit the gospel and the truth into every cultural value and norm. When that starts to tip, what you find is the church starting to become all things to all people. Instead of trying to appeal to cultural values, the church is called to be a different body, reflecting values that run counter to the world, yet are good for the world.

When the largest discussion in churches is about their worship appealing to the most people, and growing the church in terms of how many people are showing up on a Sunday morning, that's a sign the church is starting to go down a path I'm not sure Jesus ever intended. The church should be the kind of place where you're sitting alongside people who are different from you—who have different economic means, who talk differently, who look differently, who might engage in worship differently. We're supposed to be a community of people who are different and yet are on God's mission together. That's really countercultural, and I think it's something people actually long for.

Deep in their soul, people want to be a part of community. They don't want to just be individuals—even though culture tells them they do—and when they see a community living it out, they go: “Man, that is interesting. I'm curious what's motivating them. How can I be a part of that community of friends that is genuinely willing to sacrifice their own good for the good of someone else?” I think when the church is that force for restoration, and is living out these orthodox and ancient values, and embodying them in our culture, it really stands out as remarkable.

Does this countercultural aspect mean a radical change in lifestyle?

I don't think there's a cookie-cutter profile in how these principles apply. Christians who are navigating this new terrain have some basic principles that are consistent. They're not going to live by the values of the world; they're going to live by their own values. Part of being a faithful Christian is that you can be in a world that's broken and running counter to some of the values that God would have for his people, yet still embody and express something different with the talents God's given you.

Right now the church is waking up to realize there are really creative ways to apply our understanding of faith, and the story God's telling us about creation, fall, redemption and restoration. There's a corrupted edge to every business proposal and marketing campaign. Everything we encounter in our normal everyday job has the ability to go toward the broken edge or the redemptive, restored

edge. I think followers of Jesus are waking up to realize what it means to be salt and light in today's economy, to lead people toward the redemptive edge of what God dreamed about for humanity.

We're supposed to show up as salt and light in every environment we're in, and to bring the truth of God's word. That doesn't always mean leading with verbalized opinion, but living faithfully alongside people who have different faiths or no faith at all, and letting relationships and conversations happen, as the Spirit prompts people to share what's motivating them to live the way they are living.

How can “typical” Christians become Next Christians?

If somebody is very satisfied with how they see the Christian faith playing out today, they're not the audience for this book. This is for the people who feel there is a dissonance between the life Jesus calls Christians to lead and how we're seeing that played out today. Those who feel a discontentment, or who have felt the challenges of trying to remain faithful to Christ and yet have normal conversations with a colleague, neighbor or friend about their faith. Or those who are constantly trying to discover more about how Jesus is telling us to live. I would say it's about going back to the roots of recapturing and relearning restoration. It's understanding the story God is telling about how he made every human being in [his] image, and because of sin we've been separated from God, and then through redemption we're given the opportunity of new life. And that restoration is what it looks like to apply to the world the gospel that transformed our lives.

The key here is rediscovering this narrative, because in the last century or two we've seen that storyline truncated. It's become a story about how we're fallen and then redeemed through Christ. And while that is absolutely true, when you leave off the first part of the story and don't explain that every human being is made in the image of God, and that God looks to human beings to reflect his image, I think it disappoints [God].

As Christians we need to learn how to start the story there, knowing that everybody around us has the potential to serve God and use their talents to advance his work in the

kingdom. When we connect to that part of the story, it actually changes the way we see the entire world. And when we understand that, we understand what restoration looks like—we understand what we are restoring and what God intended relationships and work to be. When we rediscover this storyline, it gives us great imagination for what is possible. This book is about helping Christians who want to know how it's possible to remain faithful to Christ, and yet exist in that environment and be credible.

Historically, there have been major shifts in Christianity every 500 years, yet the faith remains. Where do the Next Christians fit into this?

When you see church attendance at its lowest numbers—at least percentage-wise—in American culture and history, and see that just 15 percent of millennials are becoming Christian by age 18, you realize the game has completely changed. Christianity is not the dominant force it once was in Western culture.

Something new will emerge, because the gospel will go forward; it's unchanging. What is changing is our ability to interpret what Christ has always been telling us, and to live that out faithfully in this environment. Jesus showed up in a culture where most of the religious folks were either very separate from the culture—judging anybody and everything that looked different from them—or they blended completely into the culture and were very lukewarm. Religion had become a very cultural, civil religion. I think we're in that same moment today.

Even though we see declining church attendance in some of our major denominations, there is a rebirth happening. The next generation is still seeking spirituality, and our churches are going to have to learn how to support a new generation trying to practice their faith in this culturally changing environment. Their church attendance might not look the way it once did. Instead of just showing up once every seven days, the Next Christians are learning to apply their faith the other six days of the week. Churches that discover that and learn how to support the movement will be the denominations that are vibrant and growing.

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UMNS PHOTO BY SAMUEL AHN
COURTESY OF GBCCS

Bishop Minerva Carcaño, Desert Southwest Conference (right), marches to the Senate office buildings in December in support of the DREAM Act.

DREAM Act's fate dismays church leaders

STAFF, WIRE REPORTS

United Methodist leaders are expressing disappointment at the failure of a bill that would have given young immigrants the opportunity to earn legal status by serving in the military or completing a college education.

The Senate voted 55-41 to block the DREAM (Development, Relief & Education for Alien Minors) Act from reaching the desk of President Obama. The House of Representatives had already approved the bill in a 216-198 vote.

Bishop Minerva Carcaño, Desert Southwest Conference and chair of the denomination's Interagency Immigration Task Force, said the Senate “failed to supply the necessary leadership to provide humane and effective solutions to the badly broken immigration system.”

Bill Mefford, director of civil and human rights for the General Board of Church and Society, expressed disappointment in senators “who chose politics over leadership, exclusion over justice.”

The General Board of Global Ministries' internal task force on immigration also supported the bill. Thomas Kemper, top executive, said the bill is in keeping with resolutions approved by the General Conference.

“Among these are measures that would have mitigated the separation of families and children in deportation cases and provided means for young adult immigrations to move toward citizenship,” he said.

MARCHA, the Hispanic caucus of the denomination, also expressed disappointment: “We are saddened by the negative vote of several senators who disregarded the talents and contributions of the young people who grew up in this country, did everything right and yet became the object of misinformation and discrimination.”