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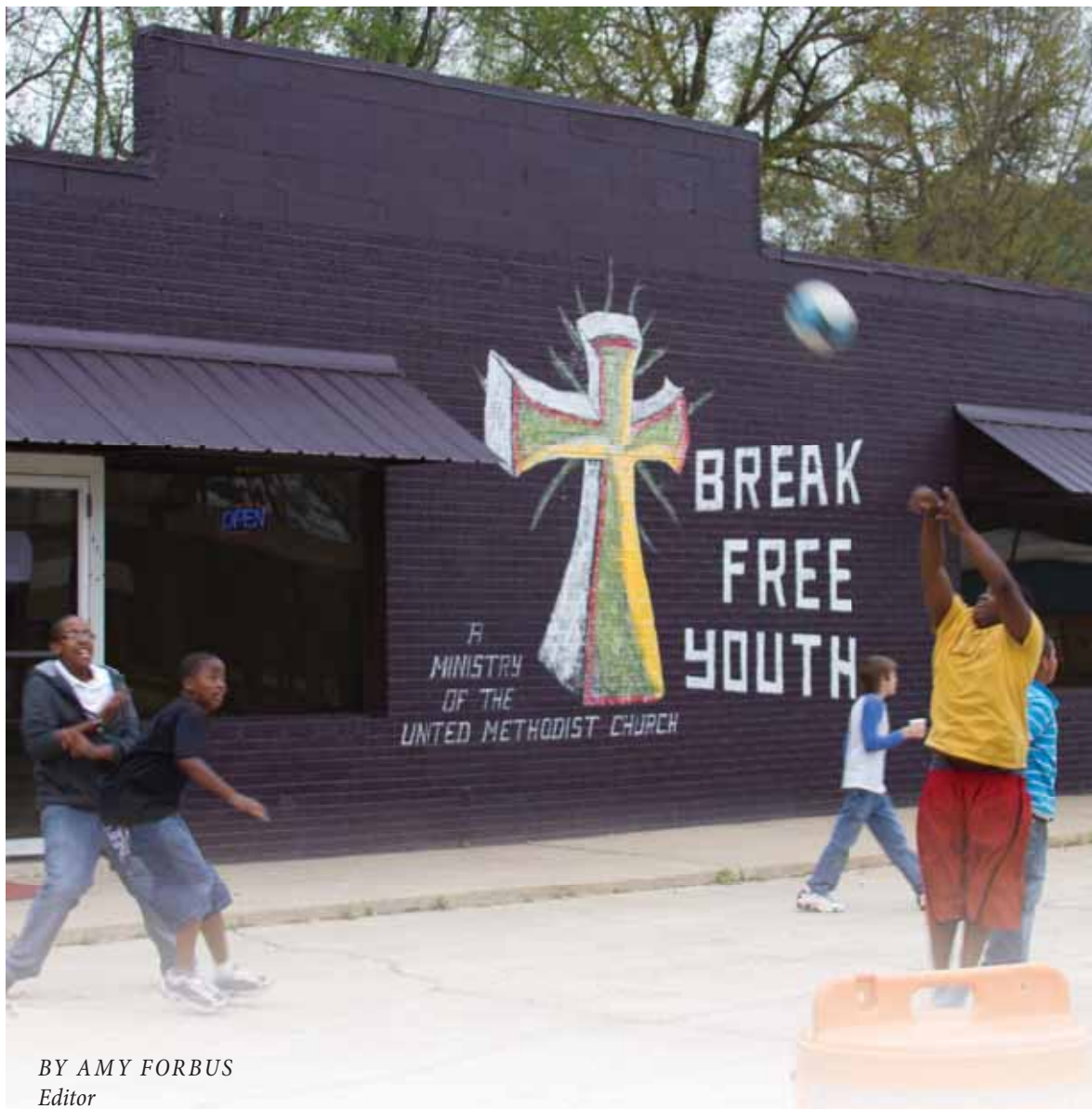
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After-school ministry provides gathering place



BY AMY FORBUS
Editor

HAMBURG, Ark.—Teens challenge each other to games around table tennis, pool and air hockey tables, or sink into a couch to play video games. One sits down to spend some time at an open computer.

After stopping by the kitchen to grab a snack, three youth have a seat in one of the nearby restaurant-style booths. US-2 missionary Lauren Woods stops by the table to catch up on their day, then heads outside to visit with another group of kids playing basketball.

It's a typical Wednesday afternoon at Break Free Youth Center, a ministry of First United Methodist Church in the small southeast Arkansas town of Hamburg.

Answering a need

With a population of fewer than 3,000—and falling, according to U.S. Census data from 2000 and 2010—Hamburg has few options for after-school activities.

"If they're involved in baseball or football or basketball, that's fine, but those who are not involved in that have no choices," says the Rev. David Moore, pastor of First UMC.

Moore says drug problems are common in the southern part of the state, and he feared that Hamburg teens would turn to drugs, sex and alcohol in the absence of constructive and safe activities. So First UMC decided to offer some healthful and safe options for after-school fun.

[See AFTER-SCHOOL, page 6A]

President of Moscow Seminary visits Arkansas

BY AMY FORBUS
Editor

LITTLE ROCK—The Rev. Dr. Sergei Nikolaev grew up in an atheistic Soviet household. He could not have predicted the path his life would take after the fall of the Iron Curtain, but looking back, he sees two opposing influences that contributed to where he is today.

His maternal grandfather was a strident and outspoken atheist. His father's father, though, was a quiet man, a beekeeper, who had a strange habit before meals. Sergei's parents dismissed it as eccentric behavior when his grandfather would cross himself and pray.

So what do you get when you cross a bold atheist with an introverted Russian Orthodox beekeeper? According to Nikolaev, you get a Russian United Methodist preacher.

Now serving as president of Moscow Theological Seminary of the United Methodist Church, Nikolaev stopped recently in Little Rock while on a visit to the U.S., greeting clergy and laity who attended an April 11 reception in his honor at Pulaski Heights UMC.

Help for Russian UMC

Pulaski Heights is among the Arkansas congregations that have supported the Russia Initiative through the United Methodist

[See MOSCOW, page 5A]



Sergei Nikolaev, president of Moscow Theological Seminary, greets those gathered at a Little Rock reception held in his honor.

AUM PHOTO BY AMY FORBUS



College students gather for evening worship in the Wesley Foundation at Arkansas Tech University.

COURTESY PHOTO

Ministry by the numbers

BY JASON MOLITOR
Special Contributor

There has been a lot of talk lately about budgets, and rightfully so! Money is tight, and budgets easily take center stage. The Imagine Ministry team has been working hard to bring forth proposals for much-needed change within our Conference. For some, it is difficult to get beyond the “How much is this going to cost?” line of questioning.

I admit that I look at those numbers, too. I want accountability for how funds are being used because, as one of the recipients of your apportionment dollars, that is what I have grown accustomed to providing.

For four years, I was the director of the Wesley Foundation serving Henderson State and Ouachita Baptist Universities. Since 2009, I have had the privilege of directing the ministry that helped me discern my calling within the United Methodist Church: the Arkansas Tech University Wesley Foundation. With that history, you see why I have been conditioned to justify how money is spent.

In recent years, there has been much talk about our campus ministries and whether we as a Conference are being good stewards of our apportionment dollars by supporting our Wesley Foundations at the current level. Let's look at some numbers.

Several churches currently average between 268 and 330 in worship attendance: Highland Valley, Grace Church in Conway, Clarksville UMC, and First UMCs in

West Memphis, Marion, Texarkana and Rogers. Their staffing budgets, as listed in the 2010 *Arkansas Conference Journal*, fall between \$193,000 and \$527,000.

I mention those churches not to criticize or to attack; I trust that those churches are being good stewards of their resources to effectively make disciples for Jesus Christ. If asked, each pastor could justify the budgeting, and we would celebrate the great ministry being done.

Now, let me celebrate something with you. ***During the 2009-2010 school year, the Arkansas Tech University Wesley Foundation had an average worship attendance greater than or equal to the churches named above.*** Our total budget—salaries and operating expenses—is \$305,000, which is less than the amount spent on staffing alone in several of the above-named churches.

We have many of the same weekly ministries that exist in local churches, including Bible studies; a weekly outreach to 68 at-risk children and youth who are paired one-on-one with college student mentors; and a dozen discipleship groups.

We also have ministries not so common in local churches: a small group for freshmen transitioning in faith and campus life; a traveling team that leads worship in area churches; and a drama ministry that produces two major plays a year.

First and foremost, these life-touching and transforming ministries occur by the grace of God. Apportionments provide 28 percent

of our needs, and the rest comes from many generous church groups and individuals we call Friends of Wesley.

And it's just a sampling of what God is doing in the lives of young adults at the Wesley Foundations throughout the Arkansas Conference. As we continue to

examine the effectiveness of our ministries, I have no doubt that talk will continue about budgets, and whether our apportionment dollars support

ministry that fulfills the UMC's mission.

I see that mission being carried out in visible and tangible ways through Wesley Foundations. We are on the ground, in the mission field, making disciples. We are seeing lives transformed in the name of Christ.

So when someone brings up our Wesley Foundations, I hope that instead of wondering if they are a good use of our resources, we utter a prayer of thanks. A prayer thanking God that our church values young adults enough to provide a place for them to connect and grow in faith, so that they too will claim their place in God's Kingdom work.

Vital ministry is occurring at all of our Wesley Foundations—ministry that is, at the very least, equally as important as the ministry of our local churches in transforming the world. And if we look strictly at budget numbers, all nine of them give the Kingdom an excellent return on the investment.

The Rev. Molitor serves as director of campus ministries for the Wesley Foundation at Arkansas Tech University.

**‘We are on the ground,
in the mission field,
making disciples.’**



Jason
Molitor

EDITOR'S CORNER

BY AMY FORBUS

Storms and uncertainty

I've been sensing a theme in life lately: upheaval.

Floods and storms have blown through our state, ripping away possessions, buildings, trees and, in some cases, human lives.

Yes, it's Arkansas. I grew up here, and I have early-childhood memories of huddling in my grandparents' cellar while Pepaw stood watch at the top of the stairs, waiting for the funnel cloud to appear.

All these years later, it did appear. My sister and brother-in-law sustained significant damage to their business the night of April 25. But we are all thankful that what really matters—the people—stayed safe.

Upheaval is happening with more than the weather. It's working its way across United Methodism, too. Arkansas isn't the only Conference involved in some serious self-examination right now.

United Methodists at more than 1,000 sites worldwide participated in an April 6 Leadership Summit webcast, which you can still view at umleadershipsummit.org. I attended one of the gatherings, and have been following the discussion.

For me, the questions asked of summit participants seemed both difficult to tackle and easy to dismiss as too broad, too institutionally-focused, too *this* or too *that*.

“What must change to redirect the flow of attention and resources to increase the number of vital congregations?”

In a word, everything. Perhaps the real question is where to begin.

“What changes in leadership, organization and practices do you believe will be most important to make in the next few years in your annual conference? What are you prepared individually to do, and as a group to do, that will support change and set in place new ways of working and tracking progress?”

Summit leaders gave us 20 minutes to discuss those questions. As you might guess, it wasn't enough time.

I do see our Imagine Ministry process attempting to address many of the same questions, though. The answers may not resonate with everyone. They may be easier to dismiss than to implement. They may seem too institutionally-focused to some, and others may think that any spiritual component seems forced, like a puzzle piece hammered into the wrong spot.

We keep hearing the same words: Fruitfulness. Vitality. Accountability. Discipleship. But we aren't sure they mean the same thing to each person who hears them.

With this storm all around us, perhaps we're being asked to relinquish the “stuff” of church as we know it. If something is threatening to blow away, maybe we should let it go. Didn't someone we know say something about that?

“For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”
—Matthew 16:25

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Submission Deadlines

Issue Date	Submission Deadline
June 3	May 19
July 1	June 16
Aug. 5	July 18



AN OCCASIONAL WORD from the Bishop

BY CHARLES CRUTCHFIELD

Dear Friends:

In her book *The Great Emergence*, author Phyllis Tickle shares an interesting observation. She says that about every 500 years the Christian Church has a garage sale to clear out the attic of the church. Following the sale, the church begins to “take off” as a cleaner, purer, more faithful entity.

Five hundred years ago, the Protestant Reformation shook the Church. Five hundred years prior to that, Christendom experienced the Great Schism and split into Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic branches.

Five hundred years prior to that was the rise of the monastic movement, the rise of the papacy, and the translation of the Bible into Latin. Five hundred years prior to that was the time of Jesus.

It is an interesting observation. Now, five hundred years after the Reformation, Christianity no longer dominates in Europe or America. The values of the Christian faith—centrality of faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; regular worship of God; recognition that God is at the heart of the universe; love of

neighbor; compassion for the poor, the stranger, the homeless, the ill; stewardship of the gift of creation; commitment to personal stewardship and so many more—are under attack.

The fire of evangelism has grown dim in our land. The growth of the Christian faith is now in Africa and Southeast Asia. The church, particularly in the U.S., finds itself in the throes of self-examination and soul searching.

The good news is: *Our faith was made for such a time as this.*

There is among many a renewed sense of purpose, and a renewed commitment to embrace the future that God is offering to us. Many are determined to reclaim our heritage as a movement empowered by the Holy Spirit that makes a difference in the life of one person, in the life of the community and in the transformation of the world for the sake of Christ's Kingdom.

This commitment does not mean we will go back to the comfortable church of our childhoods. It means we will risk being the church of the 21st century.

It will be uncomfortable. We will have to take risks. From time to

time, we will undoubtedly stumble or even fail. When failure occurs, we will **not** cynically say, “I told you so.” We will ask, “What did we learn? For the cause of Christ, how can we succeed next time?”

As I was entering the ministry, a very wise mentor who was nearing the end of his active career said a very confusing thing to me:

“I have been a part of the church where things come so easily to us—crowds throng in, buildings are built, success is everywhere. But your years will be the ones of challenge, and pain, and finally, hope. Your years will be the times of testing and ultimately the days of rebirth when the church will become young again. I’d give all this up just to be starting over again with you. Our faith was made for such a time.”

I would love to be able to whisper in his ear, “Now I understand.”

Faithfully,

Charles Crutchfield

APPOINTMENTS

The following pastoral appointment changes have been confirmed as of press time on April 29. Visit arumc.org/appointments to see appointments as they become official.

For District Superintendent changes, see page 5A.

Correction:

• Billy D. Wise, Dogwood Charge, will not be retiring this year. We regret the error in the April 1 issue.

Confirmed appointment changes at Annual Conference (effective July 1):

- Amboy, North Little Rock—Roger Armstrong
- First Bella Vista, Assoc.—Lee Myane
- Brookland/Union Grove—Bill Sardin
- Bryant—Hammett Evans
- Bull Shoals/Yellville—Donnie Hudson
- Cabot, Assoc.—Ben Crismon
- First Conway, Assoc.—Lynn Kilbourne (effective May 1)
- DeWitt/St. Charles—Daniel Kirkpatrick
- Faith (Little Rock)—Harriet Akins-Banman
- Goddard (Ft. Smith), Sr. Pastor—Steve Wingo
- Grace (Rogers)—Zack Underwood
- Foreman/Wade’s Chapel—Terry Sager
- First Fort Smith, Assoc.—Robert Cloninger
- Grace Community (Ft. Smith), Sr. Pastor—Jeff Jones

- Green Forest—Steve Brizzi
- Highland Valley (Little Rock), Sr. Pastor—Wade Shownes
- Kibler—Deanna McCormack
- Lakeside (Lake Village)—John Embrey
- Lonoke—Larry Martineau
- Marion—Tom Letchworth
- Melbourne/Cushman/Bethesda Campground—Donna Alberts
- Morrilton—Todd-Paul Taulbee
- Mountain Home—Rodney Steele
- Murfreesboro—James Wainscott
- First Paragould, Sr. Pastor—Bill Leslie
- Pulaski Heights (Little Rock), Assoc.—Aubrietta Jones
- St. James (Little Rock), Assoc.—Blake Bradford
- Sardis/Grace—Stephen Dickinson
- First Texarkana, Assoc.—Vida Williams
- Osceola—Tony Hill
- Prescott—Bill Fish
- St. Paul, Little Rock—Jerry Collins
- Salem (Benton)—Carlton Cross
- First Springdale, Assoc.—Rob Williams
- Trumann/Tyrone—Jeff Weaver
- Wesley (Russellville)—DeeDee Autry

Retirements effective at 2011 Annual Conference:

- Sara Bainbridge—First Bella Vista

Other changes (effective July 1):

- Danyelle Dittmer—transfer to Indiana Conference
- Josh Dittmer—transfer to Indiana Conference

Covenant community brings transformation to clergy, laity

BY MICHAEL ROBERTS
Special Contributor

A pastor served for years with the assumption that ministry was about “doing things for people” and “responding to every need.” This outlook led to burnout and thoughts of developing an exit plan. But as appointment season came, this pastor decided to give ministry one more chance.

He was appointed to a different church that had been in Connected In Christ (CIC), and immediately he noticed a difference. He described this church as a “church with leadership.” Lay leaders were speaking a new and exciting language—the language of mission, vision, and responding to God’s calling rather than their own desires.



Michael Roberts

The CIC Leadership Team supported him and suggested that he try to “see ministry differently.” They told him that it was not his job to fill every need. They challenged him to be an equipper of ministry rather than doing it all himself.

Thanks to this experience, combined with the blessing of joining a CIC clergy group, this pastor is no longer thinking about an exit plan. Instead, he is excited about developing his gifts for pastoral leadership.

Connection matters

The mission of CIC is to facilitate the connections needed for faithful and fruitful ministry. We work to connect pastors to pastors, laity and clergy together into leadership teams and these leadership teams to coaches. We see these key connections as the primary ingredients for developing more faithful and fruitful ministry.

To date, more than 230 pastors

and congregations have participated in our core group process, which consists of clergy retreats, team leadership seminars and coaching. In addition, we have also engaged in a partnership with the Board of Ordained Ministry to offer a special version of CIC for those who are pursuing ordination. And we have partnered with the Southwest District to develop a version of CIC targeting smaller membership churches, which we hope will serve as a model for other districts.

We continue to be inspired by the stories we hear about CIC’s impact. Pastors say that they feel more connected, more supported, and better equipped for ministry as a result of their involvement in CIC. Lay leadership teams report that they are more focused on the mission of the church, more hopeful about the future and better equipped to lead for faithful and fruitful ministry.

At a CIC Team Leadership Seminar last year, a layperson stood

up and publicly thanked her pastor. Until that moment of her adult life, she had never thought about all the pastor did to connect with people and help them connect to God. She had taken it for granted. As she sat down, the room erupted in applause. This is but one example of how these connections are changing attitudes and lives.

One key ingredient

As we used the grant the Lilly Endowment gave the Arkansas Conference for this ministry, we in turn gave Lilly an annual accounting of our stewardship, and also of what we are learning. One major lesson learned centers on the relationship between content and community.

Learning leadership skills and techniques is important, but it is not the primary ingredient for transformation. The primary ingredient is community. We might say that content informs, but conferencing in community inspires

us to action.

We built CIC on the belief that there is a direct connection between faithful and fruitful ministry on the one hand, and covenant community among the ordained on the other. While new ideas from speakers, articles, and books inform, it is a sense of collegiality that truly motivates us to lead the church into new ways of fulfilling our mission.

Pastors simply cannot excel in faithfulness and fruitfulness when isolated from their peers and distrustful of their colleagues. Thus, CIC puts a lot of energy into developing covenant community. And judging from the feedback we receive, it is worth it.

We want to thank the Conference for your continuing support of this ministry. We count it as a great blessing to be in partnership with you for this work.

The Rev. Dr. Roberts serves as director of Connected In Christ for the Arkansas Conference.

PEOPLE OF FAITH

Shorewood Hills members recognized for service

Ann Ashcraft and Austin Davidson, both members of Shorewood Hills UMC in the South Central District, were honored recently at the Malvern and Hot Spring County Chamber of Commerce annual banquet.

Ashcraft was presented with the Outstanding Community Service Award in recognition of her work with multiple community organizations, including the Extension Homemakers Council and Meals on Wheels. Davidson received the Outstanding Student Award.



Conference history museum gets new partners, home

BY LESLEY ANDREWS
Special Contributor

In an April 9 meeting, the Conference Commission on Archives and History, the Arkansas United Methodist Historical Society and the Arkansas Conference Museum Committee joined to form a single Annual Conference organization.

"While deeply indebted for contributions of the three separate entities, this restructure plan and relocating the Conference Museum to what is hoped to be its permanent home, will breathe fresh life into promoting the documenting and preserving the 'ministry of memory' in our conference," said Tyler

Thompson, chair of the Conference Commission on Archives and History.

The meeting also gave participants a glimpse of the United Methodist Museum of Arkansas' new home—a space in one of the oldest parts of First UMC's building downtown. (The conference archives will remain at Hendrix College.) A celebratory luncheon following the meeting featured Dr. Robert Williams, executive secretary of the General Commission on Archives and History, as keynote speaker.

After renovations are complete, the museum will be open to the general public. For more information, call the church office at 501-372-2256.



The Rev. Michael Mattox, pastor of First UMC Little Rock, signs the lease agreement for the United Methodist Museum of Arkansas to be housed at First UMC. Pictured, from left: the Rev. Ed Matthews, chair of the Museum Committee; Tyler Thompson, chair of the Conference Commission on Archives and History; Don Woods, First UMC church administrator; Mattox; Bill Worthen, executive director of the Historic Arkansas Museum; and the Rev. Don Nolley, chair of the United Methodist Historical Society of Arkansas.

PHOTO BY LESLEY ANDREWS/FIRST UMC LITTLE ROCK

Could your local church be eligible for a tax credit?

A message from the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits of The United Methodist Church, regarding the Small Business Health Care Tax Credit and UMCs

On December 2, 2010, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) released its final guidance (Notice 2010-82) on the small business health care tax credit (Tax Credit) contained in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA), for tax years 2010 to 2013. As written, PPACA limited the Tax Credit to costs relating to "health insurance coverage."

Thus, it was initially unclear as to whether small employers that participated in self-funded church plans were eligible for the Tax Credit.

Notice 2010-82 specifically provides that local churches and small employers can qualify for the Tax Credit even if they obtain coverage through a self-funded church health care plan like HealthFlex or their annual conference health plan. The Church Alliance's efforts to obtain recognition of self-funded church health care plans as "health insurance coverage" for purposes of the Tax Credit were successful.

Small church employers with employees enrolled in HealthFlex or other self-funded annual conference health plans, or both, may be eligible for the Tax Credit beginning with the 2010 tax year (claimed in 2011). Local churches in insured annual conference plans or that purchase insurance in the small group market may also be eligible. The Tax Credit is available for small employers, including tax-exempt employers, like local United Methodist churches, that employ 25 or fewer full-time equivalent employees (FTEs) and pay average wages of less than \$50,000 per FTE.

If a small church employer employed 10 or fewer FTEs and paid annual average wages per FTE of \$25,000 or less, the employer is entitled to a tax credit equal to 25 percent of the total premiums paid for a Qualifying Arrangement (limited in some cases to average statewide health insurance premiums). The percent credit decreases as the number of FTEs rises from 10 to 25 FTEs and the average annual wages increase from \$25,000 to \$50,000. There is no Tax Credit available to any employer who employs more than 25 FTEs and pays average annual wages in excess of \$50,000.

Eligibility for the Tax Credit depends on whether:

1. the church has fewer than 25 full-time equivalent employees (FTEs);
2. the church pays average annual wages less than \$50,000 (generally, not counting clergy wages); and
3. the church pays a uniform percentage of premiums under a Qualifying Arrangement for all covered employees that is at least 50% of the cost of single coverage (with a transition exception for 2010).

For additional information about the Tax Credit, visit the IRS's website at www.irs.gov/newsroom/article/0,,id=231928,00.html.

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 VIM coordinator, 501-868-9193 or 681-2909; dweeks@arumc.org.

Disaster response update

At press time, Larry Gentry, the Conference disaster response coordinator, was working with other early responders to assess the disaster recovery needs arising from flooding and storms during late April. To learn how your church can help those affected, watch for updates at arumc.org, or contact Gentry at 501-231-1212 to add your team to the volunteer list.

July trip to Rio Bravo

First UMC Dardanelle is sending a team to Rio Bravo, Mexico, June 20-26, on a construction mission to build casitas. They invite others to go with

them as they share God's provision with needy families. For information, contact team leader the Rev. Jim Benfer at jbenfer@centurytel.net.

Teams still needed for Cincinnati, Ark. tornado recovery

The people in the Cincinnati area of northwest Arkansas still need help recovering from the damage done by the Dec. 31, 2010, tornado. Fields must be clean of debris before residents' livestock can return to them for grazing. If you have a team ready to offer help, contact Kristin Marlatt at 479-422-4157. There is need for both skilled and unskilled laborers.

'This Olde Church'

This Olde Church pairs work crews and Arkansas Conference churches needing assistance with repairs and maintenance to their facilities. Visit arumc.org/vim for a listing of available projects, or to submit an application for help.

LR Wesley Foundation help

The Wesley Foundation at UALR needs help with general maintenance, clean-up, painting, etc. Contact Rev. Maxine Allen at mallen@arumc.org, 501-663-1153 (office) or 501-539-0280 (cell).

For more opportunities, visit arumc.org/vim.

Moscow Theological Seminary at a glance

Moscow Theological Seminary of the United Methodist Church was established in 1995. At the time, there were 25 United Methodist churches in Russia. The country now has 125 UMCs, and more than 85 of those churches have graduates of the seminary serving as their pastors.

Academics: The seminary offers a three-year residential academic program, as well as a four-year extension program with two-week sessions held twice a year. Students in the four-year program complete more coursework as they serve churches. A three-year Central Asia Program combines the approaches of the residential and extension programs.

A new modular system features short courses, much like summer intensive courses held at U.S. seminaries.

Arkansas connections: Freddie Nixon of Little Rock serves on the board of trustees, which meets twice a year in Moscow; Bishop Charles Crutchfield will speak at the seminary's 2011 commencement in May.

Mission opportunities: Construction of the 15,000 square-foot building was funded by donations, but there is currently no financial support for maintaining the facility. The seminary often defers needed maintenance. Work teams may stay in the dorm, and may also help out at orphanages and local churches during their visit.

Funding: Unlike U.S. seminaries, Moscow Theological Seminary receives no apportionment dollars. Two-thirds of the seminary's support currently comes from outside of Russia.

To provide financial help: Make your check payable to General Board of Global Ministries, with "#12174A – Moscow Seminary – Scholarship and Academic Support" in the memo line. Mail the check to GBGM Advance GCFA, P.O. Box 9068, GPO New York, NY 10087-9068. Or, visit advancinghope.org and search for "Moscow Seminary." Choose the search result that includes Advance number 12174A.

After you make your gift, send Dr. Nikolaev a notification at president.msunc@gmail.com.



Sergei Nikolaev and Bishop Charles Crutchfield visit with guests at an April 11 reception held at Pulaski Heights UMC. Both men spoke about ways Arkansas churches can support Moscow Theological Seminary.
AUM PHOTO BY AMY FORBUS

Moscow seminary president (continued from page 1A)

General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM), and had partnered with Church of the Return, a congregation built inside the walls of a Russian prison.

Church of the Return has had to close its doors because of new regulations following a riot at the prison.

As he introduced Nikolaev, Arkansas Area Bishop Charles Crutchfield offered encouragement to those who had supported Church of the Return, saying that Arkansas churches "will walk back through that door" if the congregation is ever permitted to resume its ministry.

Bishop Crutchfield also shared a conversation with his colleague Bishop Hans Vaxby of the Eurasia Area. When Bishop Crutchfield asked what else Arkansas churches could do to help the Russian UMC, Bishop Vaxby replied that supporting Moscow Theological Seminary is the single most important priority.

Also present was the Rev. Dr. Ned Dewire, who currently assists Moscow Seminary with development and fundraising. When Dewire served as president of Methodist Theological School in Ohio, that institution became the first in the U.S. to send visiting faculty to teach at Moscow Seminary.

Dewire emphasized that the seminary really is the center of United Methodist life in Russia, housing Bishop Vaxby's office, three congregations and a dorm that can accommodate 30 of the 50 students currently enrolled. He says United Methodists in the U.S. and Germany

have led the way in funding the seminary, which receives no money from apportionment giving.

Church and culture

Nikolaev spent time sharing details of United Methodist life in Russia, answering questions from those gathered.

The 1990s brought big changes, he explained. Russians weren't used to having choices at the grocery store, much less in belief and faith. From this new environment, one big question arose: "What makes life meaningful when the state isn't telling you how to live?"

For Nikolaev, a connection to God stepped into that void.

But Christians in Russia face unique cultural challenges, he said. For example, family members and friends often have a complete lack of understanding about a person's choice to live a life of faith.

When Nikolaev became a Christian—an English class taught by United Methodists was his entry point to the faith—he wrote to his family to tell them the news. He got no answer, but learned when he went to visit them that they were concerned for his mental health because of his belief in God.

Years went by before his mother sat in on a seminary course he was teaching. After class, she reported in surprise, "You don't teach anything bad there."

Many students arrive at seminary with only one mentor in their history, so the curriculum and community they find at seminary may provide their only significant

Bishop shares information concerning DS appointments

A number of persons have asked about the appointment of persons to the two vacancies on the cabinet that will occur at Annual Conference. The following is part of a letter sent by Bishop Crutchfield to the chairs of the District Superintendency Committees on April 18, 2011. The letter was written after it became clear that no further vacancies would occur on the cabinet.

"...The Imagine Ministry Team is recommending that we reduce the number of districts in our annual conference from nine to five. If you have read the IM report and recommendations you will see the manner in which we propose to resource the five districts. It will be an interesting, challenging, and I think, exciting process.

"The actual reduction of districts would not take place until 2012, giving us time to plan for an orderly transition from nine districts and nine district superintendents to five districts and five district superintendents.

"As of annual conference 2011, there will be two vacancies on the cabinet. Dr. Chester Jones is retiring and Dr. Rodney Steele is being appointed to Mountain Home UMC. Consequently, I plan to do the following:

- 1. Rev. Chester Jones will retire and Rev. Rodney Steele will be appointed to Mountain Home UMC.
- 2. Rev. Mike Morey will move from the West District to become the District Superintendent in the South Central District.
- 3. Rev. Mackey Yokem will take responsibility for both the Northwest and West Districts.
- 4. Rev. Dede Roberts will take responsibility for both the Central and the North Central Districts.

"My rationale is that I do not know what the annual conference will do with regard to the proposed reduction of districts, and I am reluctant to appoint two new district superintendents this year and then be confronted by the need to reduce by four next year. It is far easier to absorb two vacancies this year and two next year than to absorb four all at once. None of the current superintendents are required by age to retire next year. Consequently, if we need to reduce it is helpful to do the reduction in stages. Seeking to place four district superintendents in pulpits in one year would leave us with little or no flexibility in the appointive process. This reality is particularly apparent when you view the list of *potential* retirements in 2012.

"If the conference does not approve the reduction in districts I will, in due course, appoint superintendents to serve all the districts of the conference.

"While the Imagine Ministry Team did not arrive at its recommendations on the basis of financial considerations, the Conference Council on Finance and Administration has indicated the shortfall in financial support for the current districts across the past four years is significant. The conclusion *might* be reached that our current model is not sustainable regardless of the IM recommendations.

"Please note that the 2008 *Discipline of the United Methodist Church* gives to the annual conference the responsibility of determining the number of districts in a conference and to the Bishop the responsibility for providing for supervision of those districts."

opportunity to work out what it means for them to be United Methodist Christians.

Though outnumbered by atheists and Russian Orthodox Church members, Nikolaev says United Methodists have a special calling to be a witness to Russian culture.

He shared two ways in which United Methodists are already fulfilling that calling: The church's great respect for female leadership

stands out in an extremely patriarchal society, and in a country where one's employer can dictate how to vote in an election the church's democratic approach to understanding authority contrasts with the norm.

Nikolaev believes the Russian UMC provides a model of change for the surrounding culture.

"We are convinced that the future is in that direction for the Russian society," he said.



ABOVE: Lauren Woods, right, a US-2 missionary from the UMC’s General Board of Global Ministries, catches up with students having an after-school snack at Break Free Youth Center.

RIGHT: Youth enjoy outdoor sports in front of the center.

FAR RIGHT: Students spend time playing air hockey and pool.



After-school ministry (continued from page 1A)

Because only a portion of the church’s fellowship hall could be set aside for youth gatherings, the congregation began looking off-site for a space that would provide the welcome they wished to extend to the students in Hamburg.

They also looked off-site for leadership, applying with the UMC’s General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) for a US-2 missionary to head up the new ministry. Woods, a Florida native, was the answer to that request.

Woods says that when she arrived in Hamburg Sept. 1 following the first part of her US-2 training, she saw students just standing on the side of the road after school. There really was no place for teens to spend time together.

But that would soon change. The congregation already had leased storefront space on Main Street and spent many summer weeknights deep-cleaning and decorating.

“They wanted a place for kids to hang out, no matter what their economic background, their race or ethnic background... a place for people to come together and not be so separated,” Woods said.

Moore credits Church and Community Worker Allyne Solomon, whose ministry also is based at First UMC, with helping the church find multiple sources of grant funding for the ministry. An \$8,000 grant from GBGM made it possible for them to sign the lease agreement and get things rolling.

The congregation chose a

building near the local middle and high schools to underscore their desire to connect with students. Some church members did initially question the off-site location, which is seven-tenths of a mile from the church’s property.

“I’ve walked it. It’s not far,” Moore would tell those who voiced concern. “For now, it will do what we need it to do, and that is reach the kids.”

Offering hospitality

Currently open Wednesday through Friday from 3 to 8:30 p.m., the youth center begins to welcome students around 3:30. By then, Woods has set out chips, salsa and a few other snack options, and has begun to bake cookies in one of the ovens.

Inez Barnes is one of several members of First UMC who has made a regular commitment to help out at the youth center. She gives about an hour of her time each afternoon the center is open, joining Woods in baking cookies and welcoming teens as they stop by the snack table.

Barnes’ kids are all grown, and her grandchildren are too young to come to the center, but “it’s good to stay in touch” with this age group, she says. And the church has worked to make Break Free Youth Center a welcoming place for people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds.

“The kids like it, and it’s been good in lots of ways,” she said. “As I

heard one person say, ‘It’s more reflective of what our community is, the make-up that comes here.’ And that’s always good.”

When the center opened in August 2010, most of the youth who came were already affiliated with First UMC. But in the months since Woods’ arrival, attendance has increased to between 20 and 30 teens each afternoon.

On weekdays, the center’s main goal is to provide hospitality.

“What we’ve really seen is that it’s just great for them to be able to have a place that’s not like school, that’s not so structured and rigid,” Woods says. “We want them to be safe, so we have guidelines for that. But beyond that, we try to be open to what they want to do.”

Sometimes there’s a Bible study option on weekday afternoons, but it isn’t mandatory. Sunday night gatherings provide more opportunities for faith development, so Woods and other leaders encourage weekday attendees to return on Sundays.

Sharing Christ

Break Free Youth Center often hosts between 35 and 40 students for Sunday night youth group, up from an average of seven this time last year. The weekday ministry is

Woods’ main focus, but she also provides support for the Sunday night youth leaders, church members Gene and Julie Barnes.

The trio’s common goal is maintaining relationship with the students. “We’re listening to them and they’re hearing us,” Woods says. They already see some spiritual transformation happening with individual teens.

“We encourage them to come to youth on Sundays, and then those of them who come and haven’t been exposed to Christ before are definitely learning and, I think, absorbing what Gene and Julie say. They’re very wise and are good with explaining the important things in a way that [youth] can relate to.”

“We all try to keep in mind that it’s a process, and that our goal isn’t to make some kid say something that they’re not actually committed to,” she says.

Woods accompanies the youth to district and Conference events, which provide completely new experiences for many in the group. At Veritas, the Arkansas Conference’s annual youth gathering held in February, one of the Hamburg youth accepted Christ.

Some in the Sunday night crowd attend worship at First UMC

or other churches on Sunday mornings; others don’t. But increasing youth presence on Sunday morning isn’t their goal.

“We’re planting a seed, and that’s what’s important,” Moore said. “Somewhere down the road, these kids are going to say, ‘That Methodist church there at Hamburg reached out to me, and I want to give back.’ And hopefully, they’ll do it.”

It’s a formula that has worked with previous generations. A number of First UMC members involved with Break Free Youth Center remember fondly the Methodist youth groups of their own teen years, and want to provide the same opportunities for today’s teens. “The people are making it a success,” he says.

Sitting at a table in the back corner of the Break Free Youth Center, Moore pauses as laughter echoes across the room.

“Any time you can hear a kid laugh...” he says, watching the youth from a distance. “These kids, they’ve found a place where they can go, and they can be themselves.”



TOP RIGHT: Sue Stell, a member of First UMC Hamburg, delivers a batch of cookies she baked for the youth who come to the center.

RIGHT: One student stops by the snack table while another uses one of the center's computers.



Conference sponsors web ministry training



More than 40 participants gathered in Little Rock March 30 for an M2LIVE web ministry training session. Led by Matt Carlisle (pictured above) and Sean McAtee of Nashville, the day-long workshop focused on how a church's online presence—in social media as well as on its own website—can make a difference in evangelism and discipleship. The session included steps for evaluating a church's current online practices and a process for developing new ones.

The Arkansas Conference communications team plans to offer additional training opportunities in conjunction with a new mini-grant program to be launched at Annual Conference.

AUM PHOTOS BY AMY FORBUS



Rwandan students provide leadership for Hendrix genocide remembrance service

Rwandan students at Hendrix College shared their musical gifts during a Rwandan Genocide Remembrance Service held on Monday, April 11 in Greene Chapel.

As part of the service, Hendrix senior and Rwanda native Mireille Mutesi spoke on some of the atrocities that Rwandan communities faced during the genocide. The congregation heard a sermon on reconciliation from the Rev. Wayne Clark, and the Rev. J.J. Whitney joined Clark in leading the celebration of Holy Communion.

Hendrix currently has 27 students enrolled as part of the Rwanda Presidential Scholars initiative. The first class of four Rwandan students will graduate May 14. After commencement, the students will return to work in Rwanda or enroll in graduate school.



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Arkansas-born actor reconnects with God on film set



Jonesboro native Wes Bentley says he “found a reconnection to God” while on the set of his latest film.

PHOTO BY MICHEL LICHTENSTEIN

BY MARY JACOBS
Special Contributor

God pursues all of us. But if your brother, mother and father are all United Methodist pastors, that pursuit seems even more inescapable: You can run, but you cannot hide.

So says Wes Bentley, star of *There Be Dragons*, a film slated for nationwide release on May 6. After struggling for years with drug and alcohol addiction, he became sober a year-and-a-half ago, he said, following a “spiritual experience” while filming the faith-themed movie.

After growing up in the United Methodist Church, Bentley slipped into alcohol and drug addiction. In a video testimony, he recounted how he’d made “dark choices,” and rebuffed efforts of his family to stay in touch—but that changed while on

the set for *There Be Dragons*. (Wes Bentley was shooting another film and unavailable for interviews.)

“I had a very spiritual experience on this film,” he said. “And I found a reconnection to God.”

Wes Bentley’s father, the Rev. David Bentley, is pastor of First UMC in Rogers, Ark. His mother, the Rev. Cherie Baker, is a chaplain and an ordained elder in the Arkansas Conference. His older brother, Jamey Bentley, is pastor of canvascommunity UMC, a United Methodist congregation in Little Rock.

“To watch this turnaround happen, it was pretty spectacular,” said Jamey Bentley. “His focus in life completely shifted.”

A low place

Wes Bentley moved to Hollywood in 1997, winning good roles in *American Beauty* and in

Ghost Rider (in which he played Blackheart, the “son of the devil himself,” according to film promos).

But his personal life wasn’t so good.

“He had a couple of friends who were drinking buddies,” said David Bentley. “I think it started as a recreational thing, but then it took over all three of their lives.”

“Right before he got sober, I spent a couple of weeks with Wes,” said Jamey Bentley. “He was at a very low place.”

“I made dark choices and did bad things, all because I lost the relationship with God,” Wes says of that time.

When Wes auditioned for *There Be Dragons*, his mother was visiting him, and even helped read scripts with him.

At that time, she believes, Wes was ready to fight his addictions, “but he wanted to fix it without having to change anything,” Baker, who works with people struggling with addictions, added, “When your life gets unraveled, you can’t just tweak a piece here or a piece there. You cannot do it by yourself, and you don’t have to do it by yourself.”

When word came that Wes had won the part, “It was a remarkable moment,” she said. “We realized that it was going to be great for him, not just artistically and professionally, but it was going to make a difference with him at a profound level.”

There Be Dragons, directed by Roland Joffe (director of *The Killing Fields* and *The Mission*) is based on the life of Josemaria Escriva, a Catholic saint and founder of Opus Dei, a Catholic lay movement. Wes Bentley plays Escriva’s friend Manolo; the story follows their lives through the Spanish Civil War in the early 20th century. Escriva chooses to become a priest, while Manolo becomes a soldier, driven by jealousy and revenge. The \$35 million film is rated PG-13.

“Manolo was lost, I was lost,” Wes Bentley said. “Manolo was trying so hard to be something that he was nothing.”

Deathbed experience

On the film set, Wes Bentley met someone who had struggled similarly with addiction, and turned to that person for help. The two began attending nightly AA meetings as the filming proceeded.

Dwelling in his character in *There Be Dragons* also began to work on his heart. He spent three days

shooting a deathbed scene, wearing extensive makeup to look like an old man.

In the scene, Manolo looks back on his life and seeks forgiveness.

“As an actor you get these moments where you get to sneak into a moment of your life,” Wes Bentley said. “Maybe I snuck into a moment and saw, if

I was on my deathbed, what are the things that I hope I can be forgiven for? And if I know that now, can I stop myself from making more mistakes?”

“I think that was really an eye-opener for him,” said Jamey Bentley. “I suspect he didn’t want to end up being that old man.”

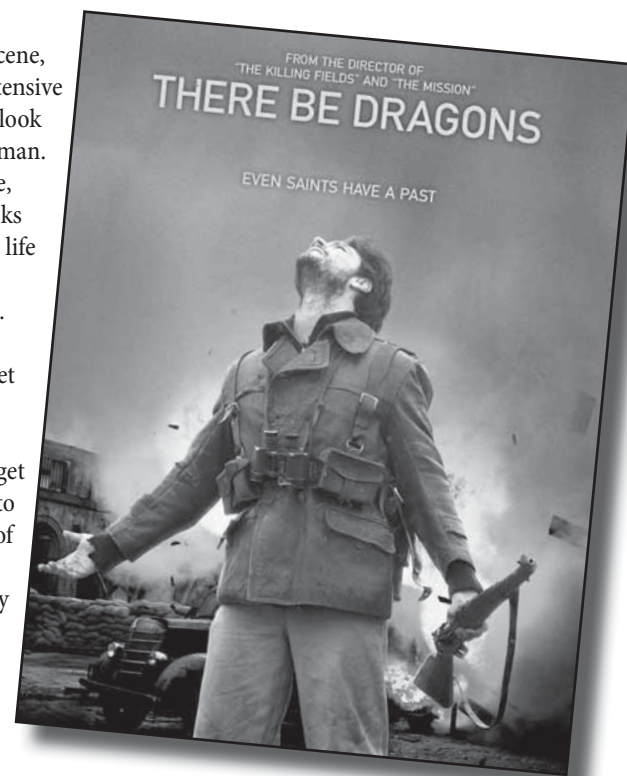
Wes Bentley started counting his alcohol-free days while on the set, and has stayed clean ever since.

“The power that God has, he’s the creator and you’re the creation, and the only way to connect again is by asking for it,” he said. “That’s humbling yourself and that’s giving God, showing who God really is and who you are.”

At a press junket in Madrid, Jamey Bentley overheard Wes tell reporters “that he knew that God was there the whole time, because he had a family that stayed strong with him the whole time. He joked that it was hard not to stay connected to God when your mother, dad and brother are all preachers.”

And for someone with a good Methodist name like Wes, the actor’s story tells a good Methodist story about grace.

“John Wesley had his



heartwarming experience at Aldersgate,” said Jamey Bentley. “Wes had his on the set of a movie.”

And yes, his family members are planning to use all this as sermon fodder.

“I’ve already preached about his story,” said Jamey Bentley. “What it tells us is, God is always standing on the front porch and waiting to accept us with open arms. We may think God has given up on us, but he never does.”

Jamey Bentley hopes that United Methodist churches will use the film as a teaching tool. The film’s creators have produced a website with discussion materials: www.DragonResources.com.

“We all have this connection [to God] that we can access, or we can let it go to waste,” said Wes Bentley. “I hope that’s something that people take from the film, because it’s really important to me. I know that’s something that I experienced.”

Jacobs is a staff writer for the national edition of the United Methodist Reporter (umportal.org), where this article first appeared. Reprinted with permission.



Wes Bentley counts among his immediate family three Arkansas Conference clergy: the Revs. Cherie Baker, David Bentley and Jamey Bentley.

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Peace with Justice provides opportunities to give, receive



BY DANIELLE DITMER
Special Contributor

Clanging and banging was heard throughout the sanctuary at Bell's Chapel United Methodist Church as children collected loose change for the Peace with Justice Special Sunday Offering.

Three weeks before this "noisy

LEFT: Sunday school teachers and kids from Bell's Chapel UMC used tin cans and kitchen pots to collect loose change in a "noisy offering" for Peace with Justice Sunday.

COURTESY PHOTO

COMING UP

Vessels for the Lord event May 13-14

All women and men are invited to attend a Vessels for the Lord conference on Saturday, May 14 at First UMC DeWitt, 608 Grandview in DeWitt, Ark. Registration begins at 8:30 a.m. on Saturday. A light breakfast and lunch will be provided. The Revs. Treccie Cook, Sue Howe, Dorothy Jones and Mary Welch will serve as leaders. There is no admission charge, but a love offering will be taken.

A time of prayerful preparation for the spiritual atmosphere of the Saturday conference will be held Friday night, May 13 from 6:30 to 9:00 p.m.

Attendees share in fellowship, good food, special music, spirit-filled messages that can be applied to daily life, powerful prayer time, Holy Communion and moving of the Holy Spirit. Contact Nancy Scott at 501-337-0065 or cnsccott@suddenlink.net, Laura Jo Prange at 870-766-4825, or visit vesselsfortheLord.org.

African Children's Choir in Conway May 18

At 6:30 p.m. on Wednesday, May 18, First UMC Conway will host the African Children's Choir. The 16 children in the choir represent the neediest and most vulnerable population in their home country of Uganda. The concert is appropriate for all ages, with lively music, drumming and dance. Free admission; a love offering will be taken.

CrossPoint in concert at Western Hills UMC May 22

CrossPoint, a southern gospel quartet, will perform at Western Hills UMC on Sunday, May 22, at 10:45 a.m. The church is located at 4601 Western Hills Ave. in Little Rock. Everyone is welcome to attend this free event.

BMCR annual dinner June 5

Black Methodists for Church Renewal will hold its annual Dr. Negail Riley Dinner at Haven UMC, 107 Burroughs Street in Hot Springs, from 5:00 to 6:30 p.m. on Sunday, June 5. Make your reservation and \$20 payment online along with your Annual Conference registration, or contact Jo Webber at 501-375-4895 or jwebber63wesley@aol.com.

Young adult coffee house June 5

Young adults attending Annual Conference are invited to a casual gathering at 9 p.m. Sunday, June 5 at the First UMC "Underground," 1100 Central Avenue in Hot Springs. Free refreshments provided. For further information, contact Rod Hocott at 501-324-8008 or rhocott@arumc.org.

Confessing Movement breakfast June 6

The 2011 Confessing Movement of Arkansas Breakfast will convene Monday, June 6 at 6:45 a.m. at Union Baptist Church, 219 Gulpha Street in Hot Springs. Dr. Chris Bounds, Professor of Theology at Indiana Wesleyan University, will be speaking. Make your reservation and \$12 payment online along with your Annual Conference registration, or contact Carolyn Elias at 501-525-2944 or CarolynEli@msn.com.

UMW lunch in Hot Springs June 6

United Methodist Women will hold their lunch gathering at Annual Conference on Monday, June 6 at 12:30 p.m. in the DeSoto Ballroom of the Austin Hotel, Hot Springs. Tickets are \$15 and may be obtained as part of online registration for Annual Conference, or from District UMW Presidents. For information, contact Judy Jacobs at 870-830-2602 or judyjacobs@centurytel.net.

5K Walk/Run in Hot Springs June 7

Sponsored by the Holy Healthy UMC Task Force, this year's 5K walk/run begins at 6:30 a.m. on Tuesday, June 7. Sign up as part of online registration for Annual Conference, or by mailing payment to 800 Daisy Bates Drive, Little Rock, AR 72202. Cost: \$10, includes t-shirt. In-person registration available June 5 and 6.

Church and Society breakfast June 7

The Board of Church and Society Breakfast will be held at 7:00 a.m. Tuesday, June 7, at Grand Avenue UMC, 841 Quapaw Avenue in Hot Springs. The Rev. Clayton Childers of the General Board of Church and Society, who serves as Conference liaison to the Imagine No Malaria campaign, will speak on "United Methodists Coming Together to Imagine No Malaria." Make your reservation and \$10 payment online along with your Annual Conference registration, or contact Doni Martin at 870-926-2107 or fredoni@centurytel.net.

New Celebration of Ministry awards luncheon June 7

Local churches and individuals honored with awards at Annual Conference will receive recognition this year in a new way. Honorees have the spotlight at a special Celebration of Ministry Awards Luncheon in Ballroom D of the convention center, scheduled for 12:10 p.m. on Tuesday, June 7. Make your reservation and \$24 payment online along with your Annual Conference registration. If you have questions or would like more information, contact the Rev. Phil Hathcock, phathcock@arumc.org.

offering" I announced to the whole congregation that it was time to start saving loose change. Wendy Petty, the children's church teacher, encouraged children to earn spare change by doing extra chores for their parents or neighbors.

On the designated Sunday, the children marched through the sanctuary collecting money in tin cans and metal pots, creating a "joyful noise to the Lord."

This is one of many creative ways United Methodist congregations can participate in Peace with Justice Sunday, which is scheduled for June 19 but may be observed at any time.

When you give to Peace with Justice Sunday, you support ministries in Arkansas, the U.S. and worldwide to promote equality;

access to resources like basic health care, food and childcare; and social justice.

The deadline for applying for a 2011 Peace with Justice Grant is May 31.

To download the application, visit arumc.org and click "Forms" under the Quick Links menu.

Applicants must be either a United Methodist or United Methodist-affiliated organization, or an ecumenical group working with least one United Methodist agency.

To learn more about Peace with Justice Sunday, visit umcgiving.org/peacewithjustice.

The Rev. Ditmer serves as pastor of Atkins and Bell's Chapel UMCs and as the Arkansas Conference Peace with Justice Coordinator.

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Full-time Director of Children's Ministry position available at St. James United Methodist Church in Little Rock. Person must have college degree and experience to direct a large church program of ministry to children and their families. They will train, nurture and equip volunteers, oversee the Sunday School program for ages 3-12, and will plan and support creative ministries for children and their families. Resumes and three references may be sent to the Rev. Fred Haustein, 321 Pleasant Valley Drive, Little Rock, AR 72212 or fredh@stjames-umc.org.

Greenwood UMC has the full-time position of Music and Worship Ministry Director. We are a 300 worship attendance congregation in the growing community of Greenwood, Arkansas. We are looking for a multi-talented person that can assist us in planning all aspects of traditional and contemporary worship. We are looking for someone with a bachelor's degree in music or worship ministry, or related educational and/or experiential fields. Persons interested in pursuing this position should send their resume and references to Rev. Craig Russell (craig_russell@ymail.com).

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Little Rock civil rights tour: Retracing the path to freedom

BY MARY JACOBS
Special Contributor

LITTLE ROCK, Ark.—The Rev. Maxine Allen warmly welcomes visitors as they step aboard the trolley, but starts the tour with a warning: “I don’t know how to do anything but tell you the truth about what happened.”

“What happened” was the fight against racial discrimination in Little Rock during the middle of the 20th century, including the dramatic desegregation of Central High School in 1957.

Many of the landmarks of that historic time are still standing, and for many, the memories are still fresh. So Allen, the first African-American woman to be ordained as an elder in the United Methodist Church in Arkansas, teamed up with Mary Hardin, a member of Duncan UMC in Little Rock, to create a “Civil Rights Tour” of Little Rock. Sandra Mitchell, a member of Theresa Hoover UMC, also assisted with the tours.

On April 2, Allen led the tour for attendees of the Religion Communicators Council’s annual conference in Little Rock. The same tour was offered earlier as part of the Spring 2011 board meeting of the United Methodist General Commission on Religion and Race.

The centerpiece of the tour is Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site, a key battlefield in the struggle for civil rights. In 1957, nine African-American students entered the previously all-white school, escorted by federal troops ordered by President Dwight Eisenhower. Covered by television cameras, the dramatic events brought worldwide attention to Little Rock, and highlighted the federal government’s commitment to eliminating segregation.

Allen, who is now minister of ethnic ministries for the Arkansas Conference, has many personal connections to the story. She was among one of the earliest to attend shortly after desegregation, graduating in 1968. Today, 2,000 students still attend Central High School—making it the only U.S. national park with an operating high school. About half of the students today are African-American.

The tour also takes visitors to a sculpture commemorating the courage of the “Little Rock Nine,” the students who broke the barriers at Central High School, located next to Arkansas’ state capitol.

While the Little Rock Nine symbolize the struggle, virtually the entire African-American community was involved.

“There was no strong public transportation system in Little Rock at the time, so people had to band together to transport them to and from the school,” Allen said. “There were thousands of people who supported those kids—the janitors and the cafeteria ladies, and the street sweepers and the pastors and teachers.”

Another brief stop on the tour is at Philander Smith College, the historically black, United Methodist-affiliated institution built in 1877. When the first black students attended Central High, they weren’t allowed to go to study hall or the libraries, which remained “White Only,” so Philander Smith provided space and tutoring help from its professors.

Along the tour, Allen also points out First Baptist Church of Little Rock, a central gathering place for the community and the spot where Dr. King spoke, and the predominantly black Arkansas Baptist College, which is purchasing properties in blighted areas around campus, including a car wash owned by the college that has engendered a few jokes about “auto baptism.”

The tour also takes a quick swing past Dunbar High School, built in 1929 with private donations a few years after Central High, using the same architectural plans but one-third the size. Ironically, Dunbar was designated as a “vocational school,” but had more teachers and administrators with advanced degrees than Central.

Another key stop is at the Daisy Bates House, home of Little Rock’s NAACP chapter president in 1957, a key figure in the civil rights



ABOVE: The Rev. Maxine Allen leads a tour of historic landmarks relating to the civil rights movement in Little Rock, Ark. RIGHT: Central High School is still an operating school attended by 2,000 students, and is part of the National Historic Site.

PHOTOS BY GEORGE CONKLIN

movement.

“Her home was the command post for the civil rights movement,” says Mary Hardin, who greets visitors at the house. During the desegregation of Central High School, Daisy Bates served as a mentor to the students, tutoring them during the weeks when they were barred from attending the high school. Her husband, L.C. Bates, edited the Arkansas State Press, the area’s black newspaper.

Hardin points to a bedroom where the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. stayed when he visited Little Rock. Furniture in the home was restored or purchased to recreate the home as it looked in the 1960s.

The lots next to the house remained empty, Allen says, to provide space for visitors to park—and for police and citizens to stand guard, after threats of violence over the Central High desegregation.

Allen has personal ties here, too—her aunt was Bates’ personal secretary, and her uncle was a pressman for the Arkansas State Press, until it went out of business in

1957. Advertisers pulled out in reaction to the desegregation, forcing the paper to close.

As the tour moves on through residential neighborhoods, Allen describes how “redlining” laws once allowed African-Americans to purchase property only in designated areas of Little Rock.

One of the last stops is at the Mosaic Templars Cultural Center, now a museum but once the focal point of the West Ninth Business District, the economic and social heart of Little Rock’s African-American community in the late-19th and early-20th centuries. With barbershops, churches, retailers, restaurants, physicians and pharmacists, the district once served the community when Jim Crow laws limited access to services elsewhere.

Allen remembers how her father would trace her foot on a piece of paper in order to purchase shoes for her, because the family

wasn’t able to shop at Sterling’s Department Store, even though her father worked there. While the Little Rock Nine was a defining moment, Allen says, “The bigger story is how African-American people were able to survive in spite of the Jim Crow laws.”

How did they do it?

“There was a deep level of spirituality, and the understanding that the community, while not monolithic, was unified,” she said. “And there was a sense that, despite the circumstances, we were going to make it.”

Jacobs is a staff writer for the national edition of the United Methodist Reporter (umportal.org), where this article first appeared. Reprinted with permission.



Mary Hardin, left, a member of Duncan United Methodist Church in Little Rock, tells visitors about the restored Daisy Bates House, a focal point of the civil rights movement.

PHOTO BY GEORGE CONKLIN



A sculpture near the State Capitol commemorates the courage of the Little Rock Nine, the first African-American students to attend Central High School in 1957.

UMR PHOTO BY MARY JACOBS

OBITUARIES

JONESBORO

Michael H. Winberry

The Rev. Michael H. Winberry, 61, passed away on March 25, 2011, at Lawrence Memorial Hospital in Walnut Ridge.

Born on Jan. 25, 1950, in Piggott, he was a United Methodist minister, having served at Grace UMC Rogers, Hoxie UMC, Bay/Pleasant Valley Charge, Manila/Community Charge, Brookland/Union Grove Charge and Bono/Shady Grove Charge. He also served on the board for the Wayland Spring Camp.



Michael Winberry

He was preceded in death by his mother, Marlis Winberry, and a daughter, Leslie Winberry.

Survivors include his wife, Julie Winberry of Jonesboro; four sons: Rick Gardner and his wife, Stephanie, of Bono; Landon Winberry of Bay; Josh Nelson and his wife, Tara, of Jonesboro; and Billy Whitted and his wife, Leah, of Walnut Ridge; a daughter, Erica Jones and her husband, Josh, of Paragould; his father and step-mother, Howard and Bonnie Winberry of Malden, Mo.; a step-brother, Wade Matthews of Bloomfield, Mo; a step-sister, LaDonna Mitchell of Malden, Mo.; and six grandchildren: Bryson Nelson; Mazey, Ty and Mya Gardner; Logan Jones; and Hayle Whitted.

Pallbearers were Billy Whitted, Wade Matthews, Karl Rudi, Josh Jones, Rick Gardner and Josh Nelson.

A funeral service was held at the Emerson Memorial Chapel with the Rev. Jimmy Dale Thresher officiating. Burial followed at the Piggott Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that memorial gifts be made to Wayland Spring Camp, United Methodist Church District office, P.O. Box 1765, Jonesboro, AR 72403.

POTTSVILLE

Barbara G. Johnson

Barbara G. Johnson, 63, passed away on April 2, 2011, at the Arkansas Heart Hospital in Little Rock.

She was born January 7, 1948, in Paris, Ark., to Jack Lloyd and Wanda Mae Benefield Hopkins. A graduate of the Fort Smith High School, she retired after 10 years of service as a third

grade teacher's aide with Magazine Schools. She was a member of Chickalah UMC and attended Pottsville UMC. She helped with the 1980 U.S. Census and was a member of the American Quarter Horse Association. Her greatest jobs were those of being a mother and grandmother.

She was preceded in death by her parents and her husband, the Rev. Larry L. Johnson, who served as lay pastor at Oak Grove and Chickalah UMCs.

Survivors include two daughters and a son-in-law, Larra Johnson of Pottsville, and Abbie and Jack Wilburn of Chickalah; a brother and sister-in-law, Jackie and Debbie Hopkins of Mulberry; a granddaughter, Ellie Kate Wilburn; and several nephews and nieces.

Memorials may be made to the American Diabetes Association, Little Rock Office, 320 Executive Court, Suite 104, Little Rock, AR 72205.

RUSSELLVILLE

Rosemary Thompson Hays

Rosemary Thompson Hays, 77, passed away on March 31, 2011, at Saint Joseph's Mercy Health Center in Hot Springs.



Rosemary Hays

She was born April 18, 1933, at Standard Umpstead, to William Llewyn and Flavia Ruff Thompson. She was a member of the First United Methodist Church at Russellville, the P. E. O. (Philanthropic Educational Organization) and Clown Alley.

She was preceded in death by her parents and her husband, the Rev. Dr. John Butler Hays.

Survivors include a son, William Patrick Hays of Alexandria, Va.; two daughters, Kimberly Hays of North Little Rock and Kathy Hays Edwards of Hot Springs; a brother, William Llewyn Thompson of Boulder City, Nev.; a sister, Julia Audigier Wiebusch of Lubbock, Texas; six grandchildren; her special friend, Earl Woker of Russellville; and numerous nephews, nieces and their families.

A memorial service was held Wednesday, April 6, at First UMC Russellville, with the Revs. Mike Fikes, David Hawkins, Clint Burleson and Roy Smith officiating. A private burial in Oakland Cemetery, Russellville, followed the service.

Memorials may be made to Heifer International, 1 World Avenue, Little Rock, AR 72202.

May 14 training offers resources for ministry with deaf youth, children

"We Are One," a conference focused on helping churches reach out to deaf and hard of hearing youth, is scheduled for Saturday, May 14 at First UMC Fort Smith.

"We Are One" is open to anyone who wishes to participate; youth leaders and district youth coordinators are particularly encouraged to attend. Registration begins at 9 a.m., with the opening session at 9:30. The workshop adjourns at 3 p.m.

Participants will gain an understanding of deaf culture, learn

how to reach deaf youth and explore ways to provide a rich experience for deaf and hard of hearing children and youth in their churches.

Presenters include Dee Mathes, youth coordinator for the South Central Jurisdiction UMC Congress of the Deaf and executive director of Mission Deaf Connection Center in Fort Smith; and Angel McPeak, West District Youth Coordinator.

This free training event includes lunch, but pre-registration is requested. Call 479-883-0420 to register.

Arkansas admins attend national gathering

Seven administrative professionals represented the Arkansas chapter of the Professional Association of United Methodist Church Secretaries (PAUMCS) at the 29th Annual PAUMCS Conference held in Knoxville, Tenn., April 7-11. The event included representatives from around the world.

Participants received ten hours of continuing education credit on subjects relevant to church employees, such as office safety, identity theft, domestic violence and sexual ethics. In addition to education, these conferences include worship and the opportunity to network with church professionals across the denomination. PAUMCS seeks to foster individual growth, professional development and spiritual enrichment for its members.

Cindy Parker and Julie Fowler-Berry received recognition as certified professional United Methodist Church secretaries after having attended the 2010 PAUMCS Institute. They join previously certified members Libby Gray, Connie Thomas, LaDonna Busby and Fonda Kirkman. Karen Branton will earn her certification in July 2011.

Several Arkansas members of PAUMCS serve as active leaders of the national organization. Libby Gray chairs the Professional Training Standards committee, of which Cindy Parker is also a member, and Fonda Kirkman serves on the Nominating Committee.



Seven members of PAUMCS represented the Arkansas chapter at the recent conference held in Knoxville, Tenn. Front row: LaDonna Busby, North District administrative assistant; second row: Connie Thomas, Northeast District administrative assistant; Fonda Kirkman, North Central District administrative assistant; Cindy Parker, South Central District administrative assistant; back row: Libby Gray, Conference Office administrator; Karen Branton, Central District administrative assistant; Julie Fowler-Berry, secretary for Grand Avenue UMC Hot Springs.

COURTESY PHOTO



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Have RV, will travel: NOMADS address needs at local churches

The United Methodist organization known as NOMADS—Nomads On a Mission Active in Divine Service—provides volunteer labor for United Methodist organizations. And last year, it encountered a problem.

“We have gained many new members in the past year, since all

the boomers are reaching retirement age,” said Carol Stoner, the South Central Jurisdiction’s representative on the NOMADS board of directors. “We had more people wanting to do projects than we had projects.”

Arkansas churches can help solve that problem by requesting help. It begins by completing an

application at nomadsumc.org.

Although it isn’t required, most NOMADS travel in recreational vehicles, which means churches don’t have to provide lodging—only a parking area where RVs are permitted.

Many NOMADS are full-time RVers and spend much of their time

traveling across the U.S., working on projects associated with United Methodist congregations. Most projects last three weeks, but they can be shorter or longer, depending

upon the specific needs of the site.

Churches can request help from NOMADS for more than just their own facilities. For example, a church with neighbors whose homes need repairs may get involved with a community outreach ministry and call NOMADS to provide labor.

To learn more about how a NOMADS team can make a difference where you live, visit nomadsumc.org. To request a team for a project, click the website’s “Request Help” button.



LEFT: Terry Lair adds a fresh coat of paint to the red flame of the United Methodist Church cross-and-flame logo that hangs on the exterior of Langley UMC, where NOMADS completed a work project in 2010.

BELOW: Jack Fenn installs plumbing in the kitchenette NOMADS added to Langley UMC during a three-week work trip to the Arkansas church.

COURTESY PHOTOS



The Confessing Movement of Arkansas

Invites you to BREAKFAST during Annual Conference

Monday, June 7, 2010 at 6:45 A.M.

Union Baptist Church, 219 Gulpha St.
(behind convention center & rear parking lot)

Reverend Dr. Chris Bounds
Guest Speaker

“Theological Reflections on Unity, ‘Amicable Separation,’ and Redemptive Discipline in The United Methodist Church”

Chris Bounds is Professor of Theology at Indiana Wesleyan University, where he has taught since 2002. Before coming to Indiana Wesleyan, he served for eight years as an ordained Elder in The Arkansas Conference of The United Methodist Church.

He earned a B. A. degree in Bible and Greek from Asbury University, an M. Div. degree with an emphasis in doctrinal studies from Asbury Theological Seminary, and an M. Phil. and Ph. D. degrees in Theological and Religious Studies from Drew University with a focus in systematic theology.

Chris has published articles in popular and scholarly venues including *The Asbury Theological Journal*, *Catalyst: Contemporary Evangelical Perspectives for United Methodist Seminarians East-West Church and Ministry Report*, *Expository Times*, *Good News Magazine*, *Religious Studies Review*, *Studia Patristica*, *The Wesleyan Theological Journal*, and *Wesley and Methodist Studies*. He has also contributed chapters or articles to popular and academic books.

He presently serves on the Board of Trustees at Asbury University, the Board of Directors for Good News: A Forum for Scriptural Christianity, the Board of Trustees for One Mission Society (OMS International) and as a fellow for Third Millennium Faith.

Chris regularly preaches and lectures on university and college campuses, as well as speaks at local church and denominational forums in The United States and in other countries. As a pastor and theologian, he has a passionate commitment to theological and spiritual renewal in the Church. He and his wife Tamara have been married for 16 years and have two children, a daughter – Maris and a son – Morgan.



Tickets for the Confessing Movement Breakfast are \$12 each.
Call or email Carolyn Elias at (501) 525-2944 or
CarolynEli@msn.com by Friday, June 3 to purchase tickets.

A very limited number of tickets will be available at Annual Conference.

BOCS Breakfast Hosts REV. CLAYTON CHILDERS

General Board of Church and Society

Assistant General Secretary for Leadership Formation

Conference Liaison to Imagine No Malaria campaign

UMs coming together to imagine NO Malaria

7 a.m. Tuesday, June 7, 2011
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United Methodist Church

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or call 870-926-2107

Conference Board of Church and Society

REPORTER

THE UNITED METHODIST

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Wildfire loss

Texas church hopes to rise from the ashes | 3B



Denominational shift

Why a Southern Baptist pastor joined the UMC | 7B



Where to go now?

Students 'torn apart' by university closing | 8B

Section B

May 6, 2011

From everywhere to everywhere



GBGM PHOTO BY MATT MORGAN

A General Board of Global Ministries church sanctuary construction project in Kenya, one of 125 countries around the world where the denomination's global mission agency has a presence.

UM agency aims to create global mission connections

BY MARY JACOBS
Staff Writer

Members of New Hope United Methodist in De Pere, Wis., had only been worshipping together for a little more than a year when they started doing mission in Bulgaria in early 2008. Even before New Hope was chartered—when the pastor was still working without pay—New Hope forged a partnership with a Methodist church in Russe, Bulgaria, with help from the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM).

The church sent teams to Russe in 2008 and in 2009, and then hosted a team from Russe in De Pere during the fall of 2009. For the past three

Christmas Eves, the two congregations have worshipped together virtually, using Skype to connect video cameras in each sanctuary.

GBGM leaders say New Hope's experience points to the future of United Methodist mission work: led by local churches in both the U.S. and overseas, leveraged by technology and empowered to do significant work, even on shoestring budgets. In the face of the "new normal" of shrinking budgets at all of the denomination's agencies, leaders say, GBGM's mission work is relying more and more on the expertise of pastors indigenous to the areas they serve, while at the same time connecting folks in the pews in the U.S. more intimately with the

emerging global church.

"This is no longer our parents' General Board of Global Ministries," said GBGM's president, Bishop Bruce R. Ough. "Increasingly, we do not see GBGM as doing the church's mission work, but rather being that agency that helps all parts of the UMC to be connected in mission."

"We see the agency more as a facilitator of mission," said Thomas Kemper, the agency's top executive. "This is a big shift that we are trying to implement in the thinking of our staff."

A new song

Ever since John Wesley wrote in 1739, "I look upon all the world as my parish"—a radical statement for his

time—mission work has been a key focus of Methodism. GBGM traces its institutional roots to the denomination's Board of Foreign Missions, formed in 1834. Today, as the worldwide mission agency of the United Methodist Church, its annual conferences, missionary conferences and local congregations, GBGM is preaching "the Gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed in 125 countries," according to its website.

GBGM staff and volunteers are working on almost every continent, with missionaries in Chile, Liberia, Russia and Nepal; programs offering theological training to pastors and lay leaders in Cambodia, Honduras and

■ See 'Global' page 4B

Q&A: Learning from Christian heroes of Asia, Africa

Christianity is growing in Africa and Asia, but who paved the way? In a new book, *Clouds of Witnesses: Christian Voices from Africa and Asia* (InterVarsity Press), Mark Noll and Carolyn Nystrom profile 17 Christian leaders in Africa and Asia of the 19th and 20th centuries who persevered in the faith in face of suffering and conflict. Staff writer **Mary Jacobs** spoke with Dr. Noll, a professor of history at the University of Notre Dame who was named by *Time* in 2005 as one of the 25 most influential evangelicals in America.

Why is it important for American readers to know about Christian saints who are worlds away?

I can answer that question by speaking to my own experience. Fifteen years ago, I was tasked to do a course on the recent world history of Christianity. In exploring places we don't know a whole lot about, I found great encouragement as a Christian believer. In the simplest terms, it was an awareness of tremendous courage and faith under pressure. Quite a few of the people we profiled were harassed and persecuted, and a few were killed for their faith. We don't think of modern Christianity in America as a religion worth dying for. But it is in

■ See 'Heroes' page 2B



Mark Noll

FAITH WATCH

June church trial set for lesbian UM pastor

A church trial for the Rev. Amy DeLong, a lesbian clergywoman in the Wisconsin Conference, has been set for June 21-23 at Peace United Methodist Church in Kaukauna, Wis. The presiding officer will be retired Bishop Clay F. Lee of Mississippi; at first scheduled for April, the trial was postponed after the original presiding officer, Bishop Bruce Blake, recused himself for personal reasons. The denomination's *Book of Discipline* states that "the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching" and bars practicing homosexuals from ordination.

Many find capitalism contradicts Christianity

Just 38 percent of American Christians believe capitalism and the free market are consistent with Christian values, according to a new survey by Public Religion Research Institute, in partnership with Religion News Service. Among all Americans, 44 percent see a discrepancy. Among Tea Party supporters, a solid majority (56 percent) said that capitalism and Christian values were not at odds.

Senate OKs Cook for religious freedom post

The U.S. Senate approved by voice vote the Rev. Suzan Johnson Cook as ambassador overseeing the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. The Senate's OK positioned Dr. Cook to become the first woman and African American to hold the post.

Holocaust survivors share family recipes

A new cookbook, *Recipes Remembered: A Celebration of Survival*, is the work of Holocaust survivors. The book collects more than 170 kosher recipes and 80 stories in an effort to document survivors' early lives. Celebrity chefs also contribute their interpretations of classic Jewish recipes. Proceeds benefit the Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, in New York City.

—Compiled by Sam Hodges

■ **HEROES** *Continued from page 1B*

many parts of the world.

The second lesson is instruction in seeing what's most important and what's not most important. We wrote about a very effective Indian woman, Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922), who all her life refused to identify with any Western denomination. She said, "Well, I'm a servant of Jesus, I don't need to be in the Church of England, I don't need to be a Baptist, I don't need to be a Catholic." She set up institutions for preaching, Bible translating and work-related education, and an orphanage in the early 20th century. They survive to this day in western India. When you see that, you have to pause and wonder, are some of the distinctions that we think are quite important maybe a little bit less important?

Also when you look at people in other settings, you realize the basic problems and strengths and weaknesses of humankind are pretty universal. Most of the people we profiled had their limitations, their weaknesses and their sinfulness.

Why should American Christians be concerned if we know only American and European Christian history?

We do live in a world that is global. It seems to me dangerous to be in a situation where we're limited to just what Americans know or what my type of Americans know. For Christian people who profess that the Christian gospel is for everybody in all places, it's particularly valuable to come alongside some people from different environments to see how they get along.

I think it's very easy, if we know only our own traditions and our own local stories, to think that what we've experienced is the only thing possible to experience. We did several sketches of believers in modern China, some who opposed the regime and some who cooperated, and yet everyone had a different life experience than anyone in the U.S. could imagine. This could

help Americans to see that what we take as normal is not necessarily universally normal. What we think of as odd or strange may be the normal in other parts of the world. It's like learning a foreign language. It's said that you don't really know your own language unless you try to learn another language. I would say you don't really know your own religious situation unless you've tried to see what the situations for others are.

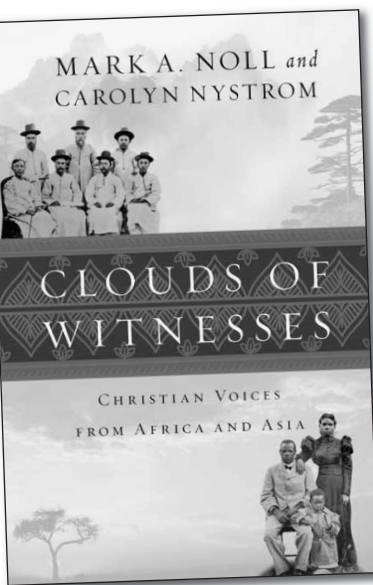
Talk about some of the "strange" stories you share in the book.

Sadhu Sundhar Singh of India (1889-1929) was a mystic who had contact with different British and

'The message that I take away is, the Christian faith is genuinely a world religion.'

—Mark Noll

American Christian groups, but he was always his own person. He made trips as a young man into Tibet, where he reported strange things: miracles along the road, like the apostle Paul, meeting someone who is hundreds of years old. When he later traveled in Europe, the stories got around and he became a kind of flashpoint of controversy. He was supported by major figures in the worldwide ecumenical movement and also attacked by both secular and Christian figures. He was his own person throughout his life. When it came time to wrap up the profile of him, it was time to just step back and say, people are going to have to make up their own minds about him.

Were there any saints whose weaknesses made you pause as to whether to include?

Yes, but I don't think I want to mention them. One of the explicit purposes was to provide information without making judgments.

But we did profile some people for whom I had only the highest admiration. For example, V.F. Azraih was an Indian from a lower caste who became a leader in the Church of England. He founded Indian mission societies and became the first bishop of the Church of England in India. He traveled internationally to several memorable ecumenical and mission conferences but remained a humble preacher, educator, helper and organizer all his life. He took care of orphans, he tried to help people find work, and was particularly concerned for the Dalits, the untouchables. Even when he was older and should've been retiring, he was out in villages, and unpretentiously doing the work of a bishop the day he died.

Tell me about some interesting characters from other parts of Asia and Africa.

One figure from Korea who is a very dedicated and energetic person is Sun Chu Kil (1869-1935). He's interesting because he was a leader of the Presbyterian Church in Korea, which was the first major Christian group to take off in modern times, and he was a very serious, hardworking pastor and preacher, but he was also a leader in the Korean national movement. Korea was under Japanese occupation during most of his adult life. He spent most of his time in church work, but he did contribute to the 1919 Korean Declaration of Independence, which was quashed. He was interested in Korean nationalism and yet was a pacifist. He didn't want to fight the Japanese but he wanted to make the appeal to self-determination. He spent most of his time in church work but he played an unusual political role as well.

Janani Luwum (1922-1977) of east Africa was a convert of the great East African revival of the 30s and 40s. He rose through the ranks of the Anglican Church and became a very faithful, humble bishop in northern Uganda. He had a huge territory to monitor and he did it on his bicycle. Eventually he became the chief bishop of the Church of England in Uganda, and was in that position during the time when Idi Amin took authority. With other Protestant, Catholic, and

some Muslim leaders, he organized protests against the murderous Idi Amin regime, until he was actually murdered by Amin or one of his henchmen. Interestingly, one of the young men that he inspired eventually was kicked out of Uganda during the Amin regime and went to England. Now he's the Archbishop of York, the second most important person in the Church of England.

This volume is a companion to one of your other books, *The New Shape of World Christianity*. Can you talk a little about that?

The earlier book tried to explain how developments around the world more recently relate to Americans. The argument was that in the United

States, in the 18th and 19th centuries, there developed a form of loosely organized, entrepreneurial Protestantism that took advantage of the environment. What I'm suggesting is that, for much of the rest of the world today, the environment is as it was in the United States in the 19th century. That is, there are no state churches, no

hereditary elite telling people what they have to believe or not believe and certainly no Christendom in the sense that Christendom had developed in Europe over the centuries. The point of that book was to draw attention to new circumstances in the world, where more people are in church in Africa on Sunday than probably in the U.S. and Europe combined, and maybe as many people are in church in China as in the United States. So that was a kind of re-orientation of thinking. And this newer book is really quite simple, presenting biographical information on significant Christian believers, not from the Western world, beginning in the late 19th century and coming up into the late 20th century.

What do you hope readers will take away from reading about these saints?

The message that I take away is, the Christian faith is genuinely a world religion. Although American Christianity remains very important, it's certainly not the only important, powerful expression of Christian faith that exists today.

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Spring wildfire destroys Central Texas church

BY SAM HODGES
Managing Editor

Rising from the ashes is something the Rev. Jim Senkel had to help a United Methodist church do in 2005, after a wildfire claimed its building.

Now he gets to face such a challenge again.

Mr. Senkel leads Cedar Springs UMC in the Central Texas Conference, which burned to the ground, probably on April 15, in one of more than 800 wild-



Jim Senkel

fires that have charred 1.5 million acres across the state since January.

"The two stone pillars that held up the front of the porch are all that's left," Mr. Senkel said, adding that church records survived because they were kept off site.

Cedar Springs UMC is about 75 miles west of Fort Worth, near Strawn, Texas. The church was founded in 1898, and its small sanctuary was more than 100 years old.

Mr. Senkel got a report of the church's burning on April 15, but

wasn't allowed in to see for himself until April 19.

Bishop Mike Lowry of the Central Texas Conference got in a day earlier. He posted a report on Cedar Springs UMC to the conference website.

"While small (average worship attendance of 10-12) it is made up of bold and tenacious disciples of the Lord," Bishop Lowry wrote. "They love their church and their community."

With wildfires still raging, and people busy protecting their homes or recuperating from the effort, Cedar Springs UMC did not have a worship service the following Sunday or on Easter.

Mr. Senkel said the church would resume worship services on May 1, at nearby First UMC of Strawn, Texas. The home church would meet at 9:30 a.m., and Cedar Springs would meet at 11 a.m.

Mr. Senkel said he and Cedar Spring members, in consultation with the conference officials, will soon begin discussions about the longer term future.

"This is not the end," he promised.

The church had about \$70,000 worth of insurance on the building and its contents, meaning extra funds

will be necessary to build back even a modest structure.

Two church members also lost homes to the fires.

Mr. Senkel, 62, is a local pastor who turned to ministry at 54, after a career in the oil business. On Dec. 27, 2005, he was pastor of First United Methodist Church in Cross Plains, Texas, when wildfire claimed its sanctuary and the parsonage where he lived.

There were more homes lost right around Cross Plains UMC than around Cedar Springs UMC, with its very rural setting. But the earlier episode was more confined.

"We had that fire on a Tuesday, and Wednesday everything was over and we were able to get together and start doing stuff and hold services the following Sunday," Mr. Senkel said. "Here we've had to continue to fight fires."

In both cases, Mr. Senkel said, the congregation suffered more than he did, especially those members who were raised in the church.

"I don't have all the memories they do," he said.

As the pastor who has twice had churches hit by wildfires, Mr. Senkel has found himself answering ques-



PHOTO COURTESY CENTRAL TEXAS CONFERENCE

Bishop Mike Lowry stands between stone pillars of burned Cedar Springs UMC.

tions on the theological implications of natural disasters.

He has a ready reply.

"As long as we live on this earth, which is a fallen earth, a distorted earth from what God created, we're going to have to put up with this stuff—until Christ comes back," Mr. Senkel said.

Some have teased Mr. Senkel about

being bad luck for churches. He notes that he was far from the scene both times.

"Maybe that means I shouldn't go places," he said.

shodges@umr.org

Carolyn Stephens, communications director for the Central Texas Conference, contributed.

Does the U.S. State Department suffer from a 'God gap'?

BY DANIEL BURKE
Religion News Service

The U.S. State Department has a "rigidly narrow" view of diplomacy that neglects religion's role in foreign affairs, a prominent Catholic ambassador charged on April 17 as he announced his resignation.

Other foreign policy experts have another name for it: Religion Avoidance Syndrome. And the departure of Douglas Kmiec as ambassador to Malta, they say, is symptomatic of a long-standing God gap in American foreign policy.



Douglas Kmiec

Dr. Kmiec, who helped shape an intellectual framework for President Obama's outreach to Catholics during the 2008 campaign, was slammed in a recent State Department report for spending too much time writing about religion.

Dr. Kmiec's focus on faith, "based on a belief that he was given a special mandate to promote President Obama's interfaith initiatives ... distracted from his attention to core mission goals," the State Department's

Inspector General wrote in a February report made public in early April.

Dr. Kmiec, a former lawyer in the Reagan administration and onetime dean of Catholic University's law school, announced he would resign on Aug. 15, which he pointedly noted is the Feast of the Assumption.

The Catholic intellectual fiercely defended his work in separate letters to Mr. Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Dr. Kmiec told Mr. Obama his work was "devoted to promoting what I know you believe in most strongly—namely, personal faith and greater mutual understanding of the faiths of others as the way toward greater mutual respect."

"If I may be forgiven a dissent from the view adopted by the Inspector General, it is that I doubt very much whether anyone could spend too much time on this subject," Dr. Kmiec wrote.

Dr. Kmiec also tied his work on religion to Ms. Clinton's promotion of "smart power," and said it had a "highly positive effect on our bilateral relations."

The Inspector General's office, he said, has a "flawed and narrow vision of our diplomatic vision" and "manipulated their policy dislike of the presi-

dent's policies, especially his inter-faith initiative, into an unauthorized 'outside activity,'" Dr. Kmiec told Ms. Clinton.

The State Department did not respond to requests for comment.

The controversy over Dr. Kmiec is part of a widespread aversion to religion within Washington's foreign policy establishment, said Thomas Farr, a former director of religious freedom at the State Department.

Dr. Farr said he has not read Dr. Kmiec's speeches, and that, as a fellow Catholic, he was disappointed with the ambassador's support for Mr. Obama.

But, Mr. Farr continued, Dr. Kmiec is correct about faith in Foggy Bottom.

"There is a deep-seated discomfort with dealing with religious ideas, concepts and religious actors," said Dr. Farr, who now teaches at Georgetown University.

"It isn't an animus necessarily," Dr. Farr continued. "It's simply a sense that religion is not relevant to foreign policy or ought not to be relevant to foreign policy."

With political tumult—at times fueled by religious beliefs—cascading through the Middle East and North Africa, the U.S. can ill afford to ignore

the role of faith in individual lives and popular uprisings, Dr. Farr said.

The State Department has taken small steps toward reckoning with faith, including a three-day course on religion and foreign policy offered this summer by the Foreign Service Institute, Dr. Farr said.

But the Inspector General's report on Dr. Kmiec could send a chilling message to other diplomats that religion lies outside their portfolios, said Randolph Marshall Bell, a State Department veteran who now directs the First Freedom Center in Richmond, Va.

CEO POSITION UMR COMMUNICATIONS

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UMR helps churches connect effectively. UMR shares a common commitment to Christian ministry with the United Methodist Church, operates in accordance with the denomination's Social Principles and also works in partnership with representatives from many faith groups. UMR's mission is to share God's story by publishing quality religion news and providing print and digital resources for communication and education. The UMR corporate office is located at 1221 Profit Drive in Dallas, Texas.

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PHOTO BY RICHARD LORD

Missionary Emmanuel Barte teaches auto mechanics as part of the Faith Engine Ministry in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

■ GLOBAL Continued from page 1B

Latvia; and initiatives that assist congregations in Thailand and Kazakhstan in planting new churches.

Some of GBGM's work follows a traditional model, in which church members provide financial support (through apportionments and donations) and the agency, in turn, sends missionaries and aid dollars overseas. That's the approach of the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), GBGM's disaster response arm, with notable success. Last year, United Methodists channeled almost \$44 million through the Advance to UMCOR for relief and recovery work in Haiti following the earthquake in January 2010. (The Advance allows church members to make designated donations to a wide range of specific mission and relief projects in the U.S. and overseas.)

But given the reality of shrinking denominational budgets, GBGM is faced with the challenge of finding ways to do even more with less.

At its spring meeting in Stamford, Conn., in April, board members took steps toward "becoming more flexible, effective and cost efficient," according to Mr. Kemper.

Directors voted to reduce the size of the board by two-thirds, from 92 to 30 members, and approved a proposal that would make the agency's Women's Division "structurally separate" but "missionary connected" to GBGM. (Both measures must be approved by General Conference in 2012.) The board also adopted a strategic plan relating to administrative operation, key performance areas and formal statements of theology and purpose. The changes come in part in response to the "Call to Action" initiated by the Council of Bishops, necessitated by current, daunting declines in church membership and revenue.

"I feel a little like the Jews exiled in Babylon, overwhelmed by their circumstance, cut off from their homeland and the Temple, caught up in a web of despair and weariness," Bishop Ough told the board in his president's address. "But the word of God is: 'Sing to the Lord a new song.'"

From everywhere

That 'new song' includes a refrain that's often repeated by Mr. Kemper: "A global church needs a global agency to send missionaries from every-

where and to everywhere."

At one time, "Methodist missionary" conjured up an image of an American missionary sent overseas to serve those in developing countries. Today, however, 40 percent of GBGM missionaries are from Africa, Asia and Latin America.

More and more GBGM missionaries are like the Rev. Ut To and his wife, Karen Vo To. Born in Vietnam, the couple lived in the U.S. for years, then returned to Vietnam in 2002. They hoped to establish 39 United Methodist churches—one for each of Vietnam's 39 provinces. Using John Wesley's class meeting, and backed by a dedicated group of lay leaders, the Tos launched home-based "cell groups."

Wesley's model exported well: Today there are 200 churches in Vietnam, and the couple hopes to establish another 100 in 2011.

"In Vietnam today, we do not have adequate church properties, but with our cell group ministries we can use private homes and meeting rooms for cell-group study, worship and outreach," Mr. To said in an article in the agency's publication, *New World Outlook*.

This grassroots approach has worked well. Since January 2009, GBGM helped organize 280 new worshipping communities—including 39 in Malawi, 17 in South Sudan, 33 in Laos and nine in Nepal—putting the agency past the halfway mark for its goal of starting 400 new congrega-



PHOTO BY PAUL JEFFREY

A group of neighbors in the Congo build a well together with assistance from UMCOR in Kamina.



PHOTO COURTESY OF GBGM

In February, Bishop Patrick Streiff (left) organized a mission consultation in Budapest, Hungary. At right is the Rev. Istvan Csernak, a United Methodist district superintendent in Hungary.

tions by the end of 2012.

Mr. Kemper credits the growth, in part, to a grassroots approach to planting new congregations, with indigenous pastors and committed laity handling most of the evangelization and congregational organizing. GBGM staff provide inspiration, training and initial organizing skills.

"We have learned that indigenous Christians are expert at evangelism and church planting," said the Rev. John Nuessle, GBGM staff executive for mission relationships. "Missionaries remain essential as initiators, facilitators and educators, but we are now 'growing' our pastors locally in many places."

By 2015, Mr. Kemper and Mr. Ough say they want to significantly increase the agency's missionary force and double the number of mission opportunities for young adults (ages 20-30), through two and three-year programs such as Mission Interns.

New leadership

These successes come after years of turmoil at the agency. In 2007, GBGM's board of directors dismissed the agency's top executive, the Rev. Randy Day; his successor, the Rev. Edward Paup, resigned in 2009 after serving only a year. In 2010, the agency mourned the loss of two key leaders: the Rev. Samuel W. Dixon Jr., UMCOR's top executive and Rev. Clinton C. Rabb, leader of United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM). The men died of injuries sustained in the earthquake in Haiti.

Mr. Kemper, a layperson and a native of Germany, became the agency's chief executive in March 2010; many staffers believe his leadership is re-invigorating the agency.

Bishop Ough agrees. "Thomas Kemper is a straightforward, efficient, trustworthy administrator," said Bishop Ough. "He is exactly what the board needed, and it has renewed people's confidence."

Mr. Kemper says he's steering the agency to focus on facilitating connections among people throughout the church and beyond. As an example, he cited a recent "roundtable" meeting,



PHOTO BY FELIPE CASTILLO

A meeting of the General Board of Global Ministries' Russia Mission Initiative was held recently in Oklahoma City.



LEFT: The Rev. Cecilia Harris (center) participates in the 2009 School of Congregational Development in Evanston, Ill., sponsored by GBGM and the General Board of Discipleship. BELOW: GBGM General Secretary Thomas Kemper (at left) and Bishop Bruce Ough say they hope to return to the “core work” of the United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries.

UMNS PHOTOS BY CASSANDRA M. ZAMPINI



hosted by GBGM, that brought together faith agencies working in Haiti, including representatives of UMCOR, the Church of the Resurrection, the British Methodist relief agency as well as ecumenical representatives from churches in Canada, Latin America and Haiti. GBGM hosted a similar roundtable to coordinate relief work in Sudan in August.

“First, everybody listens to the priorities set by the host country,” he said. Each agency chose areas where it was best suited to serve, and as a group, the roundtable made plans to share administrative costs needed coordinate the work—an essential piece that’s often harder to “sell” to donors.

Making connections

In April, missionaries from around the globe joined in the agency’s board meeting via Skype, and that virtual gathering was opened to United Methodists around the world via webcast.

The purpose of the webcast, according to Patrick Friday, director of GBGM’s In Mission To-

gether program, was to model ways that local U.S. churches—and folks in the pews—can use technology to make more meaningful connections in partnerships with churches overseas.

“In the past, you might start by sending resources and money, then send a team to the partner church,” said Mr. Friday. “But that limits the personal connection to the few people who can go overseas.

Instead, a growing number of U.S. churches, Mr. Friday said, are following the lead of New Hope UMC: using Skype and other relatively inexpensive technologies to connect to partner churches overseas. Members of both churches, while separated by thousands of miles, can “meet” for worship or Bible study.

“When churches do that, you really get to know each other’s stories,” he said. “When that happens, it’s about more than just sending money. It’s engaging in a hands-on way with the emerging church abroad.”

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GBGM—by the numbers

The General Board of Global Ministries is the global mission agency of the United Methodist Church, its annual conferences, missionary conferences and local congregations.

- **Proposed 2011 annual budget:** \$45,515,697 (excludes Health and Relief, Women’s Division and UMDf).
- **Proposed 2011 annual budget for UMCOR:** \$11,467,419.
- **Employees:** 288 employees, including those at its headquarters in New York City and those in the field.
- **Missionaries:** 211 missionaries who are GBGM employees—for whom the board has full financial responsibility; 82 missionaries GBGM supports in partnership with annual conferences, institutions, etc.; 110 persons who are not on the payroll but receive various forms of assistance; and 311 “Persons in Mission,” in home areas outside the U.S., who are supported by grants made through their partner church or central conference.
- **Number of nations where GBGM works:** 125.
- **Volunteers in Mission:** GBGM sends some 100,000 Volunteers in Mission into the field every year for short-term projects.
- **Website:** www.gb-gm-umc.org



UMCOR PHOTO BY MIKE DUBOSE

Patrick Sirius demonstrates the proper use of oral rehydration salts to people living in a makeshift camp in Gresier, Haiti.



PHOTO BY CHRIS HECKERT

A worship service was held when Global Ministries staff visited Advance project sites in Bolivia.

Is the UMC really committed to young people's ministries?

BY MICHAEL RATLIFF
Special Contributor

Almost every article written or speech given in the leadership arenas of our church includes a statement on the need to engage young people in ministry and leadership. Is this because the church is responding to God's call to make disciples of young people and provide room for them to join our mission to make disciples and transform the world? Or is it because we know that without younger people, the church is doomed to wither away into oblivion in the not-so-distant future?

If the church can reach out to share the saving grace of Jesus Christ with young people and invite them to be co-journeymen in the unfolding story that we are co-creating with God, we will find them ready and willing to take our hand and leap into an uncharted future. If, on the other hand, it is perceived that we are seeking simply to save the church by finding ways to get more young people in the door, the current trend of young people abandoning the UMC in search of meaning, belonging and a compelling mission will most certainly continue. If we do the first well, the concern about the second goes away. Believing that God's love is real and effectively inviting young people to share in that love will create a sustainable church into the future.

In the book *A Short History of Methodism*, we are told that "in 1784 American Methodists were asking in their *Discipline*, 'What shall we do for the Rising Generation?'" Two of the four recommendations are as important today as they were for the founding leaders of the Methodist Church in the United States, "Talk with them every time you see any . . . and Pray in Earnest for them."

Does every youth in your congregation know that there is at least one adult other than their parent who knows them by name and cares about what is going on in their life? Do they know that there is at least one adult who is consistently, daily praying for them (and knows them well enough to know what to pray about)? The Search Institute has identified the need for every young person to have at least three significant non-parent adults to support their development. The Transitions research project at Fuller Semi-



UNITED METHODIST NEWS SERVICE FILE PHOTO BY JOHN GORDON

Maddy Malone, a youth at St. Paul UMC in Omaha, Neb., participated in a 2009 box city event to experience first-hand hardships faced by people who are homeless. The Rev. Michael Ratliff urges congregations to see young people as partners in ministry.

nary has discovered that the key to keeping college students connected to the church is the development of meaningful relationships while those students are youths.

Can we do this in our church? Consider this information from our 2009 statistical data report. The statistics tell us that we have 421,000 youth and 188,000 young adults involved in ongoing formation and study settings in

tions where young people are loved, respected and seen as partners in ministry. However, the fact that over 10,000 of our churches report NOT ONE youth or young adult involved in ongoing spiritual growth experiences tells another story.

The recent Call to Action report suggests that we need more programs for children and youth. While there are places where this is true, the crying

'Their church wants them in leadership, but not if they are going to challenge the way things have been/are being done.'

the U.S. There are probably at least twice that many young people related to our churches, so can we know and pray for 1.2 million young people? Is there at least one adult for every youth and every young adult in your church who could get to know them and pray for them? Want to know what difference it could make? Watch this video: http://youtu.be/Ko6WM_7Ha2Q.

There is more we need to do. Young people consistently share that their church wants them in worship, but not enough to change worship to better relate. Their church wants them in leadership, but not if they are going to challenge the way things have been/are being done. Their church wants young people to come inside their buildings, but doesn't want those buildings to show signs that they were there. These statements are generalizations, and there are many excep-

need for our young people is to have meaningful relationships with caring adults who will openly and honestly share their faith journey and encourage our youth and young adults along the path to discover God through Jesus Christ and to discern a future that utilizes their gifts to transform our church and their world.

Sadly, we often hear that there are only 7.8 million of us in the United Methodist Church in the U.S. Let's instead look at how those of us who are adults represented in that number might join with the young people among us to change our world, and in so doing, change and grow our church as well.

The Rev. Ratliff is associate general secretary of young people's ministries at the General Board of Discipleship in Nashville, Tenn.

REFLECTIONS

Good marriages can cross barriers of race, ethnicity

BY BISHOP WOODIE W. WHITE
UMR Columnist

"What do you think of interracial marriage?"

The question caught me off guard recently, as it was raised totally out of context. The conversation in which I was engaged at the time had nothing to do with either race or marriage. Yet it was obviously on the mind of the person who posed it.

That question had not been put to me in years. I responded, "I don't." Then added, "I assume that is a matter of the individuals involved and their families." The person seemed satisfied, or at least had no desire at that moment for further discussion on the matter.

Questions persist

Years ago, of course, the question usually came up in discussions on race relations, especially from those who sought to make the point that this was an area where race "mixing" should draw the line. Historically, at least in black-white relations in America, it was the issue used to oppose integration of any kind, and to continue enforced segregation, legal and otherwise.

But the question coming to me as it did so recently served as a reminder that for many the idea of individuals marrying "outside" their race still leads to concern or even fear. Or even objection! It is especially so when those marriages occur between black and white persons. And frankly, more particularly, if such marriages take place between a black man and a white woman.

Decades ago, there were actually state laws forbidding marriages across racial lines. The Supreme Court declared such so-called "anti-miscegenation" laws unconstitutional in 1967, in the historic *Loving v. Virginia* decision. At the time, only 44 years ago, in 16 states such marriages would have been technically illegal. Indeed, I recall at least one instance where a United Methodist college forbade such marriages taking place in the college chapel.

Pastoral counsel

Perhaps the person who asked me about interracial marriage was not simply asking a hypothetical question, but may have had a more personal experience in mind. It would not be out of the question. Over the years, I have had to counsel parents or couples of

different races or ethnic groups contemplating marriage. I would imagine today it is a far more common experience for pastors than it was 20 years ago.

As an old popular song observed, "The times, they are a-changin'." American society is an incredibly diverse one. Even 11:00 Sunday morning is not as segregated as it was when the observation was made more than 50 years ago. Population forecasts envision a future America in which today's "minorities" will constitute the majority of the populace.

People of different races interact closely each day, and this will be increasingly the case. Opportunities for developing serious personal ties can then lead to loving relationships and eventual lifetime commitments. In fact, we already observe high profile persons in society who are the products of such marriages.

While such marriages and children of these unions are not typical, they are no longer rare. Various studies suggest a dramatic increase of interracial marriages in the United States. One study indicates that since 1960 such marriages have increased five-fold. Another reports, "... in 2000 about 7 percent of all married and cohabitating couples in the country" were interracial.

Lifelong commitment

Marriage is one of the most personal decisions individuals make in life. Making the right decision has both personal and social consequences. It is a lifelong commitment.

For United Methodists, it is much more. It is a sacred act.

I love the language in one of the older marriage ceremony rituals, which tells us marriage is "... instituted of God, and signifying unto us the mystical union which exists between Christ and his Church. It is therefore not to be entered into unadvisedly, but reverently, discreetly, and in the fear of God."

Sometimes such a love is found beyond one's racial or ethnic group.



Bishop Woodie White

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

Why a Baptist pastor became a United Methodist

BY MARTIN THIELEN
Special Contributor

Years ago, I served as an adjunct professor of worship and preaching at a Baptist seminary. One day while preparing for a class, I was making photocopies at a Nashville store. An employee noticed what I was copying and asked, “Are you a minister?”

“Yes, I am,” I replied.

He said, “Are you a Southern Baptist minister?” “No,” I replied, “but I used to be. I’ve recently joined the United Methodist Church.”

He looked at me for a moment with suspicious eyes and asked, “Are you divorced or are you gay?” “Neither one,” I replied.

He said, “Then why did you change denominations?”

I’ve been asked that question many times. I have tremendous appreciation for my old denomination. They introduced me to Christ and church. They loved and nurtured me. They gave me a great education. I earned a bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral degree at Southern Baptist schools. They also gave me tremendous ministry opportunities. I had the privilege of pastoring some large and interesting churches.

The Southern Baptist Convention also provided me with significant teaching opportunities. I was an adjunct professor of worship and preaching at one seminary, a guest teacher at several others, and a workshop and conference leader all over the country.

They also gave me an opportunity to serve clergy across the national convention. I spent four years working at national headquarters in Nashville as a worship and preaching editor, consultant, writer and teacher. The Baptist church gave me many gifts and incredible opportunities of service at a very young age.

Therefore, the decision to leave was one of the most difficult decisions I’ve ever made. The cost of the transition—loss of status, denominational opportunities and financial compensation—was huge.

So why did I leave? Theology and integrity.

Over the past 25 years the Southern Baptist Convention has made a dramatic shift from a conservative yet tolerant denomination, to a fundamentalist and intolerant denomination. I’m not saying that fundamentalism is wrong, bad or evil; I am saying that it’s not me.

I finally had to ask myself: Can I stay in this denomination and keep

my integrity? For me, the answer was no. I was still in my 30s. So I resigned my pastorate, and my family and I returned to Nashville, where I pursued Ph.D. studies at Vanderbilt University.

I began to search for a new church home. Over the next nine months I had serious dialogue with seven denominations. I spent almost a year thinking, praying and talking to others about this decision. Here are my top 10 reasons for becoming a United Methodist:

United Methodists affirm orthodox theology. I have never been comfortable with liberalism or fundamentalism. Although great theological diversity exists in the United Methodist Church, it seems to me that most avoid the extremes of ultra-conservatism or radical liberalism. Along with the majority of the church, I affirm the historic foundational doctrines of the Christian faith, such as we find in the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds. And I am very comfortable with the theological affirmations in the *Book of Discipline*.

United Methodists have a balanced method for doing theology. I’m speaking about the so-called “Wesleyan Quadrilateral” of Scripture, tradition, reason and experience. Although the United Methodist Church puts high priority on Scripture, it does not neglect the fact that our theology must also be informed by tradition, reason and experience. Some denominations claim that the Bible is their only source of authority. However, strict biblicism, by itself, is not enough. For example, what does the Bible teach about genetic engineering or national health insurance? The United Methodist theological approach represents a trustworthy balance for thinking about our faith.

United Methodists preach a theology of grace. The older I get, the more I believe that grace is the central issue in Christianity. I’ve grown weary of churches that emphasize law, judgment and condemnation. The UMC emphasizes God’s love, forgiveness and grace. This emphasis on grace feels extremely refreshing to me.

United Methodists are sacramental. Over the past decade, I have adopted a strong sacramental theology. I understand the sacraments to be concrete signs of God’s self-giving—God’s love made visible. I’m convinced that people desperately need tangible expressions of God’s love and grace, especially the water of baptism and the bread and cup of communion. Participating in Holy Communion has become a profound part of my spiritual life.

United Methodists emphasize worship. Worship is a high priority in the United Methodist Church and for

that I am grateful. We appreciate the great liturgy of the past but also have the freedom to use more modern expressions of worship. Worship leaders can use biblical, historic and traditional forms of worship, as well as contemporary expressions of worship. In short, we have the best of all liturgical worlds. I’ve come to believe that worship is the first priority of the church, so I’m glad that worship is of vital importance in the UMC.

United Methodists have an evangelical heritage and commitment. Unlike some mainline denominations, United Methodists affirm the importance of missions and evangelism. Although I’m not a revivalist, “soul-winner” type, I care deeply about reaching unchurched people and believe the church should unapologetically engage in evangelism.

United Methodists care about social justice. I have never been comfortable with the privatistic religion of most evangelical churches. When the evangelical church does discuss social issues, they usually limit themselves to abortion, homosexuality, gambling and alcohol. United Methodists are also dedicated to issues such as liberation, race, gender equality, poverty and environmental stewardship. Our denomination is committed to both evangelism and social issues.

United Methodists are inclusive. Our denomination makes a strong effort to be inclusive of all people regardless of age, race, gender, socio-economic standing and disabilities. I am especially pleased to see

women serving in pastoral roles. I’ve fought some tough battles in my old denomination as an advocate of women in ministry and have the scars to prove it. It’s wonderful to be in a church where such battles have already been fought and won. I also appreciate that the United Methodist Church is inclusive theologically. Conservatives, liberals and moderates are welcome. Theological diversity creates many tensions, but we need both liberal and conservative viewpoints to keep us in the broad middle.

United Methodists are connectional. Rather than each church being a “Lone Ranger” congregation, churches in the UMC are in the kingdom business together. I learned about this during my first appointment, when I was sent to a small struggling church in crisis. This fairly new congregation had dwindled down to about 30 people. It had a new facility and a half-million dollar debt. On my very first day I learned that the church was completely bankrupt. We didn’t have enough money to pay the light bill, much less the \$75,000 a year mortgage payment. If this had been a non-connectional church, it would have simply closed down.

I met with the conference finance committee and told them our situation: Either they came through with significant dollars or we closed up shop. They came through in a big way. They agreed to pay our mortgage for an entire year. That gave us time to heal the congregation, to significantly grow and finally to hold merger talks

with a nearby United Methodist Church. The result was the birth of a large, growing and dynamic church that continues to do great work in its community.

United Methodists warmly welcomed me into the family. When I moved back to Nashville, I got on the phone and called the bishop’s office. I didn’t know any better than to call the bishop, so I did. I told the secretary that I was a Baptist minister and was considering a denominational change, and that I would like to talk to the bishop. The amazing thing is that she put him on! We talked for almost an hour. He referred me to the Nashville district superintendent, who just a few weeks later asked me to serve as an interim pastor for a small church. Clergy and lay people throughout the Tennessee Conference opened their arms wide and said, “We’d love to have you as a part of our church family.” That meant a lot.

Some things in the United Methodist Church scared me, like the appointment system, and it still does. I was a free agent for a long time, so it’s hard to adjust to the appointment system. But I have no regrets.

No church or denomination fully lives up to its ideals. I know that the UMC is not perfect. But there are many good things about our denomination, and I’m glad to be a part of it.

Dr. Thielen is senior pastor at Lebanon (Tenn.) First United Methodist Church. His preaching and worship website is GettingReadyforSunday.com.



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Lambuth students struggle with school closing

BY KATHY L. GILBERT
United Methodist News Service

JACKSON, Tenn.—Nick Nelson's dreams were coming true when he won a bishop's scholarship last year from the United Methodist Memphis Conference for full tuition at Lambuth University.

The small, welcoming western Tennessee campus was near his home and family, he was forming close bonds with his professors and the 18-year-old was really learning how to live out his call to ministry in the United Methodist Church.

Then came some shocking news: Lambuth was closing its doors.

"It really tears me apart that I am either going to have to go back home to live or go somewhere five, six or nine hours away. From every perspective Lambuth was just the perfect place for me," he said.

Mr. Nelson is one of more than 400 students who will be looking for another college after June 30, when the 168-year-old United Methodist-related university ceases operation.

No way out

In December 2010, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) denied re-accreditation of the university, and in February denied Lambuth's appeal of its decision. Without approval by a federally recognized accrediting agency like the SACS, a college's students cannot receive federal financial aid.

The school successfully sued to seek an injunction delaying the agency's decision but the legal battles, coupled with years of financial hardship, led Lambuth's board of directors to decide April 14 that the struggling school could not continue.

"There was much weeping and gnashing of teeth when the students heard the news," said the Rev. Steven Fonville, who has been chaplain at the university for the last four years. Students, staff and faculty had been praying for a miracle, he said.

Mr. Fonville said for the past two summers, faculty and staff have gone as long as six weeks to two-and-a-half months without pay attempting to give the school an opportunity to find funding.

The final graduating class was to receive diplomas April 30. Seniors Amanda Hartmann and Maria Ghianni were to be in that final commencement.

"It's a hard decision to make peace with," said Ms. Hartmann. Her mother graduated from Lambuth in 1978 and she was the one person Ms. Hartmann dreaded calling after the students heard the news.

"I knew she would be strong for

me.... We just grew a lot in our relationship with each other since we shared the Lambuth bond," she said.

"It is a weird and slightly eerie feeling, and I am incredibly sad that this 168-year-old school is ending its history at the end of this semester," said Ms. Ghianni. "June 30th will be a sad day. But I also feel honored to have been a part of the great tradition of LU, and I am proud to be a part of the last senior class."

'Teach-out' plans

Dakota Bone, 18, is grateful to have had at least a year at Lambuth.

"From the time I came on campus I knew this was the place I needed to be," he said. He is pursuing a degree in organ music and his plans are to serve in a United Methodist church someday as the organist and choir director.

He will be touring Martin Methodist College in Pulaski, Tenn.—150 miles away—hoping to find another campus that will feel like family.

Martin Methodist is also a United Methodist-related high education institution and is one of the schools that has pledged to a "teach-out" agreement with Lambuth.

"These are specific agreements with other colleges or universities that provide avenues for students to transfer easily, to maximize the acceptance of their credits earned, keep them on track for their expected graduation date and keep their educational costs similar to what they are paying at Lambuth," said Bill Seymour, president of Lambuth.

Ted Brown, president of Martin Methodist, said he had been in conversation with Dr. Seymour for several months. "This whole process has been painful for me personally and for our



UMNS PHOTO COURTESY OF LAMBUTH UNIVERSITY

Students at Lambuth University prayed together for their school, but trustees still voted to close it, citing financial and accreditation woes.

management team. We all have a great respect for Lambuth—for its history, its connection to the church and for all the faculty and staff who have been so dedicated to Lambuth's success," said Dr. Brown.

"We want to be helpful given the circumstances—including the 'teach-out agreement' that is under consideration—but we certainly do this with genuine regret."

'So sad'

Mr. Nelson's backup plan is to go to the University of Memphis since it is close to home, but he doesn't like the

idea of a big school. He is looking at other Christian schools, including Martin Methodist, but hates the idea of being so far from home.

"Going to another small Christian school is out of the question because if my scholarship won't transfer I'm really up a creek because other schools are so expensive. I don't really have a lot of options.

"I am just really so sad," Mr. Nelson said. "I really wonder how much the average United Methodist knows about this. To me [Lambuth] is clearly the United Methodist Church in Tennessee. It has a really great campus, a

rich, long history. Just the whole situation is so disheartening."

Ms. Hartmann hopes the campus will always be used for education.

"Being on campus was like being in the Kingdom of God every day because here people are encouraged to grow in their faith—not just to do that blindly, but to ask questions to understand and really struggle with the big questions in life," Ms. Hartmann said.

"Lambuth will continue to live on in all the people that have ever walked through its doors. But it is still very sad."

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