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North Central District Superintendent the Rev. Rodney Steele, right, visits with district trustee and lay speaker Gary Seeds of Vilonia, whose home and property sustained damage from the tornado that struck the area on April 25.

AUM PHOTO BY AMY FORBUS

Spring storms, floods, tornadoes hit state

BY AMY FORBUS
Editor

To say it's been a tough spring for families across the South is more than an understatement. And a May 25 storm is the latest in a month-long string of severe weather, tornadoes and flooding that caused damage and loss of life throughout Arkansas.

The latest storm was a mile-wide tornado that hit the small town of

Denning, Ark., May 25, killing at least four people, including Teena Evans, a single mother who was a member of Ozark United Methodist Church.

The Rev. Mike Morey, superintendent of the West District, said pastors in the Franklin County area continue to check on their members, and the Rev. Keith Dodson of Ozark UMC described the local hospital as "overrun with injured people."

In the town of Ozark, the American Red Cross has set up for disaster

[See SPRING, page 6A]

Destroyed home rebuilt with help from area UMCs

BY KAYLEA HUTSON
Special Contributor

When Jeannie and David Ham look at their lives, one word comes to mind: blessed.

That is a change from the morning of Dec. 31, 2010, when a tornado demolished their home in northwest Arkansas.

In an instant, everything they knew was gone—including the house David Ham had called home since the age of 5.

The couple found themselves starting a new year facing the task of rebuilding their home, without insurance and with less than \$500 in their combined bank accounts.

Their prospects changed when a group of volunteers from the Northwest District of the United Methodist Church offered the help needed to build a new home.

Since mid-March, approximately 240 volunteers

representing more than 20 congregations helped raise the house from slab to a completed two-bedroom, one-bath structure.

The home, located in rural Summers, was dedicated by volunteers on Saturday, May 7.

"People came from everywhere to help," David Ham said, adding that he's thankful for everyone who helped build the home.

Approximately 90 percent of the labor needed to complete the project was donated. This allowed the Hams to use monies raised by selling their cattle, along with funding provided by FEMA, the United Methodist Committee on Relief and other churches, to purchase the supplies needed for the project.

"It's a blessing that there are still good people in the world," Jeannie Ham said. "It's been amazing. I wouldn't want to go through this again to get a new



David and Jeannie Ham stand in the doorway of their new home, built by volunteers throughout northern Arkansas. The Hams' home was destroyed during the Dec. 31, 2010 tornado which struck northwest Arkansas.

PHOTO BY MELISSA GUTE, for the Siloam Springs Herald Leader

house, but so much good has come from [the tornado] since it happened."

Beyond the physical labor, Jeannie Ham said knowing a group

of people were praying for them and offering moral support was inspiring.

"This is the house that God

[See HOME, page 7A]

Lord have 'Mercy Me'

BY DEENA MARIE HAMILTON
Special Contributor

I am a huge fan of the Christian band Mercy Me. They are my favorite band of all time!

My favorite CD of theirs is *Almost There*. Those worship and praise songs inspire me to stay in the race even when I want to quit because working for the Lord can be overwhelming. I'm strengthened by those songs.

So, when it was posted on Facebook that they were coming to Little Rock, y'all already know that I was there front row center! Not only that, but I got to meet the band! I was beyond excited. When I finally met them, I screamed, "I can't believe that I am looking at you!" Of course they laughed at me when I said that, but the members of the band were gracious and took pictures with me.

The experience was wonderful, and the lead singer, Bart Mallard, gave a compelling testimony. He said, "Churches may be full, but the world is not changing." As he continued with his soliloquy, I got awkward looks as I shouted "Preach!" and "That's right! Amen!"

He continued to tell us that when things are crappy in our lives that God is still holy, and that if we truly had Christ in our lives that our worship would be unconditional and life-changing even when our circumstances aren't.

But what I wish I could have told Mallard is that the world is changing. You just have to look a little deeper and see that God's people aren't just sitting and watching the days of their lives pass them by, but people are using the power and authority of the Holy Spirit to make the world different.

As I left the concert, I thought of my friends in the mission group at Lakewood United Methodist Church. This compassionate group of people is changing the world one person at a time. They faithfully participate in the Broadway Bridge Project every month. This is a collaborative effort of several churches started by Elizabeth Dowell to fill a physical and spiritual void in

the lives of homeless people.

I was invited to go with my friends at Lakewood one Thursday, and the experience was inspiring. It was something that touched my heart because everyone joyfully prepared food, gathered clothes to pass out and was ready to offer the love of God with acts of kindness and compassion.

They offered words of encouragement and communion to people who wouldn't normally feel welcomed in church, because God loves everyone everywhere.

One of the mission coordinators, Sue Winkley, said, "This is a great ministry, but it's not for the faint of heart. Everyone who participates in this needs to understand that this is a mission to spread the word of God. We can't expect these people to change what they are doing because some are addicts or mentally ill and they don't want to change. We let them know that there are people who care about them and bring God's word to them."

In the 21st chapter of John, Peter was upset that Christ asked for the third time, "Do you love me?" so he answered, "Master, you know everything there is to know. You've got to know that I love you." Christ told Peter to feed his sheep.

Times may change, but the mission is the same. We still struggle with the challenge to do what Christ commissioned us to do.

'If we truly love

God the way

we profess, we

must show it in

our actions.'

If we truly love God the way we profess, we must show it in our actions. That effort can lead to life-changing, unconditional and soul-saving worship that changes the world.

It's in God's mercy that we do what we do to advance the Kingdom. Even though there are congregations that have answered the call, we

still have failed to be an obedient church. We admit that when we say our Communion consecration.

I've preached over the years that God does not expect perfection, but he does expect an excellent effort. All we have to do is put forth the effort and trust God. It's through God's mercy that we can change the world, not just make a difference. Be blessed and empowered!

The Rev. Hamilton serves as pastor of McCabe Chapel UMC in North Little Rock. She can be reached at rev.deenamarie@gmail.com.



BY AMY FORBUS

EDITOR'S CORNER

Not a building, not a steeple

"The church is not a building, the church is not a steeple, The church is not a resting place; the church is a people..."

I learned that song as a child. A child who attended worship in a gigantic stone building, decked out in high, dark wooden arches, marble Corinthian columns and a choir loft that, to a 5-year-old, seemed like you had to take a secret passageway to get there.

After years of singing that song, I went to camp and experienced one of the ways that the church is not a building. In the open-air chapel at Tanako, the church gathered.

More years of singing, and I found myself at Hendrix College, my voice reverberating off the walls of a gorgeous chapel. As beautiful as that place was, it wasn't church. Church was a group of friends willing to talk theology late into the night.

And church was choir rehearsal—not the one I had to participate in as a qualification for my scholarship, but the one my roommate dragged me to my sophomore year, at First UMC Conway.

Church was a Wednesday night supper gathering around a folding table in the fellowship hall. I found church in my friends Ann and Lamar, Zettie and Jim and Miss Erma, who saw me through my last two years of college and my wedding.

After my move to Texas, I attended worship in pretty buildings, but it was sometimes hard to find the church there—even if I'd taken the membership vows.

Then, one Sunday in Lent of 2000, we walked into an unassuming structure, with a modest steeple, on Old Denton Road in the Dallas suburb of Carrollton. We went back the next week, and the next.

On Easter Sunday, the choir welcomed anyone who wanted to come sing Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus" with them at the close of worship.

I didn't realize how I'd missed that experience.

I'd begun to find the church again.

That congregation was where I truly realized that the church is most definitely *not* a building. When my husband and I joined, we knew we also were joining what would turn

out to be a four-year process of binding arbitration with the building contractor, resulting from the fraud committed in the construction of that church's facility.

But we were OK with that. Because that building, with its shifting foundation and roller-coaster hallway, its walls that didn't line up with each other, its cracks and its patches, was not the church.

And years later, when we moved into a new, solidly-constructed building next door to the old one, that building wasn't the church, either.

We were.

Now, as reports of death and destruction pour in from Joplin, Mo., in the aftermath of the May 22 tornado, I mourn for those who have lost possessions, homes, buildings and lives.

In his May 24 blog entry, "The Building of the Church," Missouri Area Bishop Robert Schnase reflects on the dichotomies he experienced before and after the tornado struck Joplin. As he travels the state to help congregations celebrate new buildings, he sees—and mourns—the destruction of others.

Three members of Webb City UMC died in the tornado. The district office is damaged beyond repair. St. Paul UMC in Joplin lost its worship center. The entire facility belonging to Joplin's St. James UMC is gone.

Bishop Schnase points out that the city is named for the Rev. Harris Joplin, a 19th-century Methodist preacher who made his home there

and hosted worship, prayer and singing in his home.

"[The Rev. Joplin's] ministry was one of hospitality in the truest sense, and he used his own humble dwelling as a tool for ministry," Bishop Schnase writes. "As far as I know, the building he used no longer exists, but the church community he founded provided the seeds from which dozens of area congregations have sprouted."

He quotes the same song I quoted at the beginning of this column. And he adds another: "The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ our Lord." Powerful reminders that it doesn't take a building to make a church.

After more than six months here in Little Rock, John and I are still visiting multiple United Methodist congregations. One of them meets for worship in a 90-year-old rented storefront. Another worships in a decades-old cathedral, and at the same time, in a much newer structure a few paces away.

Too often in our culture, we refer to these buildings as "the church." While the buildings do make a difference for ministry, they aren't actually churches. Sometimes having to care for a building can even impede the work of a church.

If a tornado flattened your facility tomorrow, would your church be gone?

I hope and pray it wouldn't.

To contact me, send an e-mail to aforbus@arumc.org.



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Issue Date	Submission Deadline
July 1	June 16
Aug. 5	July 18
Sept. 2	Aug. 18



AN OCCASIONAL WORD from the Bishop

BY CHARLES CRUTCHFIELD

Dear Friends:

When we arrive at Annual Conference this year, we will be faced with a great deal of debate and voting.

Some of the action will focus on proposals that are germane to the Annual Conference itself. Some of the action, particularly in relationship to selection of General and Jurisdictional Conference delegates, will relate to the world-wide church.

I have been so pleased that in years past, not only when we have elected delegates, but also when we have engaged in discussions and debates about resolutions and issues, the demeanor of the Conference has, with one or two exceptions, been gracious, civil, thoughtful, informed, respectful and focused on the issue at hand. I have been impressed that passions and emotions have been present without being inflammatory.

All this is to say: In spite of disagreements, we have been able to live together as the Body of Christ. Thinking alike is not mandatory, but living as a community of faith is.

I have just returned from a

quick trip to Russia, where I spoke at the graduation ceremonies of the United Methodist Seminary in Moscow. I was also privileged to preach at a small, struggling, courageous United Methodist Church in a Moscow suburb.

Even though there is no official repression of our church, the environment there is still difficult. The challenges of a nation trying to deal with its past and taking steps—sometimes two forward and one back, then two back and one forward—toward forming an open democracy was readily apparent. It made me appreciate even more the gift of open discussion we have in our country and our church.

Democracy is hard. Gracious candor in the midst of debate is difficult—but at least we do not need to fear retribution for disagreeing with one another.

How fortunate we are to be the heirs of a system of thought born on the hills of ancient Athens, codified in English tradition in 1215 with the Magna Carta, enshrined in our own

Constitution and honored (when we are at our best) in our contemporary political process.

Regrettably, sometimes the body politic and sadly, even the church, mimic not our best but our worst. I have been so proud of our Conference. I think we have done it well as we have wrestled with difficult issues and decisions.

It is my earnest hope and prayer that as we approach our duties at Annual Conference, we will hold each other in prayer, seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in how we act and vote, and keep our focus on the mission and ministry of the church and of all God's people.

In the language of Mr. Wesley, I pray we experience the means of grace to be found in Holy Conferencing. I trust you will join me in that prayer.

Faithfully,

Charles Crutchfield



APPOINTMENTS

The following changes have been confirmed as of press time May 26. Visit arumc.org/appointments to see changes as they are announced.

Confirmed appointment changes:

- Alzheimer/Wabbaseka—George Mitchell
- Atkins/Bell's Chapel—Rebecca Wiseman
- Bayou Meto/Lodges Corner—Mary Welch
- First Bella Vista, Sr. Pastor—Jamie Alexander
- First Benton, Assoc.—Mark Norman
- Berryville—Floyd Ray
- Blackrock/Lynn/Powhatan—Michael Bolin
- Carthage Charge—Al Harrell
- Cleveland/Overcup—Sara Bayles
- Concord (Lonoke)—Bill Steele
- Corning—Ann Ferris
- Dover—Roy Beth Kelly
- First El Dorado, Assoc.—Michael Blanchard
- England—George Crumbly
- First Fordyce—John Fimple
- Geyer Springs/St. Luke (Little Rock)—Candace Barron
- Greenbrier—Kevin Lyon
- Haven (Hot Springs)—Malik Saafir
- Hawley Memorial/Wesley (Pine Bluff)—Jackie Gregory
- Henderson (Little Rock)—Robin Moore

- Highland Valley (Little Rock), Assoc.—Brittany Richardson
- Humphrey—Paul Woolley
- Judsonia/Kensett—James Wilson
- Leslie/Marshall—Cherie Baker
- Mansfield—John Noggle
- McCabe Chapel—Johnnie Davis
- Mt. Zion (Lonoke)—Wes Howard
- Old Austin—Von Dell Mooney
- Parkview/New Hope (Benton)—Natasha Murray-Norman
- Plumerville—Keith Coker
- Trinity (Little Rock)—Betsy Singleton-Snyder
- Salem (Conway)—Leon Gray
- South Central District Superintendent—Mike Morey
- Square Rock/Mt. Pleasant/Parks—Suzanne Wilson
- Sulphur Springs—Willis Findley
- Waldron/Birdsview—Dianne Miller
- Ward/Sixteenth Section—Rick Meadows
- Wheatley/Salem—Bill Cato
- White Memorial/Marks Chapel—Clyde Hughley

Retirements:

- James Robert Wilson—Earle

Other changes:

- Dede Roberts—adding North Central District to Central District Charge
- Mackey Yokem—adding West District to Northwest District Charge

How can United Methodists believe in Hell?

BY WILLIAM O. "BUD" REEVES
Special Contributor

Isn't it supremely ironic that the ones who preach on hell shouldn't, and the ones who have the theological basis to do so don't?

The conservative evangelical world, most of whom derive their theological heritage from Reformed theology (also called Calvinism), has recently been set on its ear by Rob Bell's book *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*.

Bell is the pastor of Mars Hill Church, a large, multi-campus ministry based in Grand Rapids, Mich. The book argues for universal salvation—that a God of love would not consign anyone to eternal punishment because it would be against God's nature.

Bell says the belief in conscious, eternal torment is "misguided and toxic and ultimately subverts the contagious spread of Jesus' message of love, peace, forgiveness and joy that our world desperately needs to hear." He has been criticized by a number of conservative scholars and theologians.

But Bell has the logic right.

Reformed theology emphasizes the sovereignty of God. The Almighty is all-powerful. Salvation is accomplished by God's action in Jesus Christ and by God's election of those who are to be saved. God chooses the elect.

If God is a God of love, and God has ultimate power, then everyone should get saved, because that's what God wants. Not to do so would be contrary to the loving nature of God. Therefore, judgment and subsequent

punishment are meaningless. Hell is not an option. Everybody wins!

The problem with universal salvation is that it is not consistent with Scripture. Jesus spoke many times about the



Bud Reeves

judgment of God and the fate of the wicked. The Book of Revelation describes a lake of fire reserved for the Devil, his angels and sinners. Universal salvation historically has encouraged antinomianism, the rejection of morality in the light of irresistible grace, which was anathema to John Wesley.

Once again, I am glad I am not

a Calvinist! Those of the Wesleyan heritage, sometimes called Arminians, emphasize human free will in partnership with a loving, yet powerful God. Salvation is not totally God's choice; faith is a human response. Therefore, salvation is not a divine decision, but a relationship between God and people.

God is love, so God limits divine sovereignty to allow the human response of faith, hope and love. This divine self-limitation enables a relationship through the incarnation of Jesus Christ—God made human.

Salvation as relationship allows human choice and also requires responsibility. God loves us first, but humans must choose relationship with God. God's grace is primary, but we are justified by our faith. We are forgiven by God's mercy, but we are responsible for good works (Ephesians 2:8-10). The continuing relationship between God and a person is the process of sanctification, a particular emphasis of Wesleyan Methodism.

However, being endowed with free will, humans can choose not to relate to God or to stop relating to God. We can turn away and even fall out of a relationship with God.

Unfruitful branches are cut off and thrown into the fire, Jesus said. We can persist in our resistance against grace until we die, at which point we will experience the judgment of God.

In addition to the quality of love, God is also just and holy, and these attributes do not allow a relationship with sin. If we turn to God in faith, this is not a problem; God forgives us. But if we persistently choose badly, we will be separated forever from God.

Separation is not God's choice or desire; quite the opposite. As C.S. Lewis wrote in *The Problem of Pain*, the doors of hell are locked from the inside. For one of God's children obstinately to refuse God's grace must be very sad and painful for God, like a father with a prodigal son. God is always open to our return, but if there is no turning, God must let us go.

So as a Wesleyan Christian, I believe hell is real. The Biblical imagery conveys the horror of separation, and to use Niebuhr's phrase, it should be taken seriously, but not literally. Indeed, a "lake of fire" and "outer darkness" are mutually exclusive. But you get the point.

However, as a United Methodist, I do not preach about hell. Wesley

himself only had a couple of sermons on the subject. I emphasize the good news of grace and love. My lack of attention to eternal judgment is in part a reaction against the emotional manipulation of "hellfire and damnation" preaching. It is also a choice to focus on the positive aspects of faith.

If salvation is relational, there are two implications for Christians:

1) We are responsible for our relationship with God (Philippians 2:12-13). Prevenient grace ultimately should lead to holiness.

2) There should be an urgency in our witness. It is critical that we share the good news of Jesus, because those who do not turn to God can be lost from God forever.

Romans 6:23 says, "The wages of sin is death." That is the tragic possibility. But the rest of the verse is good news: "...the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Eternal separation from God is possible, but by the grace of God and our responsible witness, nobody inevitably has to go there.

The Rev. Dr. Reeves serves as pastor of First UMC Hot Springs. He can be reached at brobud@fumchs.com.

Ministry of native Haitian improves life, shows God's love

BY AMY FORBUS
Editor

Richard Jean-Baptiste was in his third year of medical school when his country was literally shaken apart.

Now the director of Shelter of Hope Ministries, he works to provide schooling, food and health care to the next generation of Haitian citizens.

A native and current resident of Haiti, Jean-Baptiste spoke on May 8 to the Foundations Sunday school class of Pulaski Heights United Methodist Church while on a month-long visit to the U.S. Little

Rock's Theresa Hoover and Pulaski Heights UMCs were among several U.S. congregations on the itinerary for this trip sponsored by Houston's Lakewood UMC.

Haiti already struggled with extreme poverty, and Jean-Baptiste described the January 2010 earthquake as the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. The tent cities that resulted from the destruction of so many homes highlighted the level of need that existed before the quake.

Jean-Baptiste felt called to make a difference. He had come to know Christ at age 24, thanks to the

ministry of Youth With A Mission International (ywam.org). "They transformed me there," he said.

When the quake hit, he was in line at the bank, but he had just stepped outside to make a phone call. That phone call probably saved his life, as the earth began to shake and the bank building collapsed while he stood outside.

Jean-Baptiste immediately began helping pull people and bodies from the rubble. Soon, he and other medical students found themselves promoted to the role of doctor. Many physicians, who had stayed home that day because of a



Richard Jean-Baptiste (third from left, seated) visited with the Foundations Sunday school class at Pulaski Heights UMC. Stops at Pulaski Heights and Theresa Hoover UMCs in Little Rock were part of his month-long trip to the U.S. from Haiti to share about the work of Shelter of Hope Ministries.

AUM PHOTO BY AMY FORBUS

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.

Ramp construction team needed

Mission UMC Ft. Smith has a building in need of a wheelchair ramp. If your VIM team is interested in this task as a weekend project, contact Don Weeks at the phone or email address listed above.

Disaster response update

To learn how your church can help those affected by this spring's storms and flooding, watch for updates at arumc.org, or contact Conference disaster response coordinator Larry 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).

labor dispute, died in their homes. The few doctors who survived were busy trying to find their own families, which left an entire country with essentially no medical services.

The Clinton Foundation sent the first medical teams post-disaster, and Jean-Baptiste joined with them to provide help and to learn from them.

For months, he lived in a tent near the hospital, so he can testify first-hand that people living in tent cities deal with mosquitoes, floods, looters, sexual assault and more problems.

He also gained clarity about his calling to become a missionary doctor, but for now, his medical education is on hold so he can focus on helping children in Haiti through Shelter of Hope Ministries.

Shelter of Hope's vision is:

- To disciple the people,
- To educate the mind,
- To evangelize the soul,
- To heal the body and restore the land for the people of the community and also nearby areas for a better tomorrow.

Haiti's widespread poverty means that the majority of Haitians rely on natural resources for cash. Deforestation has become a problem because people make charcoal out of the trees to have something to sell at market, which is sometimes a five-hour walk away.

Shelter of Hope reaches out to people through a twice-weekly hot meal program, which provides a place for children to go two days a week while their parents are at market. The hot meal program feeds 30 kids for \$3 per day, per child. Breakfast is usually bread, peanut butter and juice; lunch usually consists of rice and beans. Before each meal, they have music and a Bible program that teaches on God's love.

Shelter of Hope also offers a discipleship program and year-round classes in English as a second

language (ESL). Jean-Baptiste picked up English at age 14 by hanging out with missionaries. It became a valuable job skill, as foreign medical teams would use him as a translator. This experience is one reason teaching ESL is a priority for the ministry.

He says a larger goal of Shelter of Hope is to let people know that "there's a life. There's someone who loves them. It's God."

To drive the point home, Shelter of Hope provides Bible school as well as Protestant worship services.

Unlike the U.S., Haiti has no public education system, so school at any age isn't free. The ministry seeks sponsors to help children receive an education. Shelter of Hope currently has 19 children enrolled in school, and another 15 waiting for sponsors. A sponsorship of \$30 per month covers classes, uniforms, school books and supplies, de-worming medicine and access to a nurse.

Several doctors Jean-Baptiste helped post-earthquake purchased land for him in Guignace, Ti Roche. He hopes to build a missionary medical clinic there. Shelter of Hope plans to have the capability to host volunteer medical teams by 2013. Such teams are crucial in Haiti because at state hospitals, a person with no money is a person who receives no care.

Other plans for the future include training Haitians to be missionaries, establishing a water well and sanitation system in Gadere and employing a clinic staff of about a dozen people.

Pulaski Heights UMC has a United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) work trip to Haiti scheduled for June 23-July 1. Ten people will travel together on the UMCOR trip, says Katy Dunn, a Pulaski Heights staff member who is part of the group. The travelers expect to have a chance to see the future site of the medical clinic.

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Hardy UMC builds much-needed ramp to make Emory Chapel accessible

BY AMY FORBUS
Editor

When the North District office sent out an e-mail letting its churches know that one of their own needed help, Hardy UMC responded.

Emory Chapel UMC, a Newport congregation with an average attendance of 18 people, had two members who could not attend worship because of accessibility issues. One had suffered a stroke, and another deals with limited mobility for other reasons. Neither could safely navigate the steps at the front of the building.

The Rev. Brien Hall, pastor of Hardy UMC, saw the district's message and began asking members of the Hardy congregation whether they would take on the project. A group of men agreed, and they began to make plans.

On their first trip to Emory Chapel, the Hardy UMC team made

some calculations and realized that the job would take more than an afternoon of work, and more materials than they had originally estimated. But they weren't deterred—just delayed a little, Hall said.

"Once you sign on for something, and you see the need, and what needs to be done, you do it," he said.

After learning what was required for a ramp to comply with city building codes and Americans with Disabilities Act guidelines, the Hardy team devised a plan to build large segments of the ramp off-site. They used Hall's garage as the construction location, and a church member's trailer to haul the pieces 70 miles to Emory Chapel.

The Rev. Jimmy Mosby, pastor of Emory Chapel UMC, worked on the installation alongside the Hardy team. He said the whole congregation appreciates the dedication and effort put forth by

the crew from Hardy UMC.

"They have done such a quality job. It is unreal... it is a first-class ramp," Mosby said. "We just can't say enough about all of their work and the grace they showed."

"It all worked out," Hall said, "and we were very happy that they were happy."

He noted that the Hardy team even got to know some neighbors of Emory Chapel, who enjoyed watching the action from their front porches.

"It was really just wonderful to be able to meet some of the people," Hall said. He saw one church member in her nineties shed tears of joy, because the new ramp meant she could return to worshipping with her church.

"We have a big belief here in the Hardy church that if we share what we have, we'll always have plenty to share," he said. "And God, so far, has taken care of us."

BELOW and RIGHT: Members of Hardy UMC work together, along with Emory Chapel UMC pastor the Rev. Jimmy Mosby, to build a wheelchair ramp to make Emory Chapel's front door accessible for people who cannot navigate stairs.

LOWER RIGHT: The completed ramp.

COURTESY PHOTOS



Members of Christ of the Hills UMC Hot Springs Village helped Haven UMC prepare its new building for occupancy. Haven's previous building was lost to fire in 2008.

COURTESY PHOTO

Haven UMC in new location *Other area churches pitch in to provide interim space, prepare building*

BY AMY FORBUS
Editor

March 5, 2008 saw the destruction of a building, but not of a church.

Three years ago, Haven UMC in Hot Springs lost its facility on Park Avenue to a catastrophic fire. Since then, they have met in multiple locations.

"We had temporary services for about two months at the First UMC Hot Springs Christian Life Center," said the Rev. Clyde Hughley, Haven's pastor, "and met for about 18 months at Pullman UMC Hot Springs."

"In the Spring of 2010 we were able to remodel to fit the style of a useful 'house church,'" he said. They met in a house that still stood on the Park Avenue property.

But on May 15, Haven UMC entered a new phase of ministry when it began meeting for worship in its new building, which formerly housed Highland Presbyterian Church.

The new location, 107 Burroughs Street, first became a possibility in the fall of 2010, when Hughley heard that the Presbytery of Arkansas might have an available building in Hot Springs. Haven UMC

finalized the purchase on March 18 and began readying the facility for use.

He noted that Christ of the Hills UMC in nearby Hot Springs Village, as well as Diamondhead UMC, Bismarck UMC and the St. Paul/Adkins Memorial Charge in Malvern, provided quite a bit of hands-on assistance with painting and other improvements.

"Many of our sister churches in Hot Springs have been so helpful to us during this time," Hughley said.

The Christ of the Hills Mission Commission designated Haven UMC as a Volunteers in Mission project. After only one announcement from the pulpit, 25 members of Christ of the Hills stepped forward to begin repainting Haven's new sanctuary.

"It has been so, so long since we had a place to call home, and we are looking to see God do great things for His glory through Haven," Hughley said.

"I am so thankful to see how He has continued to see fit to use this small group of believers (of which I have been blessed to be a part) to be a light to the community of Hot Springs."

Paul Bridges of Christ of the Hills UMC contributed to this report.



Orange-shirted Volunteers In Mission help distribute cleaning buckets and other supplies at a one-day assistance center event May 4 in Hot Springs Village.

PHOTO BY CAROLYN RILEY

Spring storms (continued from page 1A)

response in the fellowship hall of Ozark UMC. The church's outreach coordinator has opened its food pantry and a number of members stand ready to provide help in whatever way possible. Altus UMC is working with the Red Cross to serve as a hub for disaster assistance, as well.

"The biggest need is for people to be patient.... Many times people will just run down to try to help, with good intentions, but bad things happen," Dodson said, mentioning that downed power lines are not yet secure. He advises checking with the Red Cross or local churches before entering the area.

In addition to Denning, Altus and Etna, the city of Clarksville, in Johnson County, was hit with either a tornado or straight-line winds, leaving most of the city without power.

At press time, parts of the city of Alma, in Crawford County, were still without power because of damage sustained in a May 23 storm.

Northeast floods

Northeast Arkansas began experiencing difficulties April 23 with heavy rain saturating the ground and filling rivers. The communities of Imboden, Ravenden, Black Rock and Hardy were among the first towns to see rising waters. Roads were closed and residents evacuated, with more rain on the way.

While the Black River continued to rise, eventually cresting at just over 28 feet, several tornado sightings occurred and heightened concerns among residents praying

for a break in the severe weather.

For the town of Pocahontas, one levee breach of the Black River was all it took for homes and businesses to take on water. Residents navigated the east side of town in boats, while those on the west side of town were stranded.

The towns of Corning, Portia and parts of Walnut Ridge, Paragould and Jonesboro saw flooding, with base camps set up at the UMCs in those communities. The Rev. Bob McMillan helped out in the Spring River area, traveling between Imboden and Portia.

Churches in the district quickly responded to the call for flood buckets, blankets, food and other supplies, delivering materials to the Jonesboro district office or to Walnut Ridge UMC.

Hundreds of homes are damaged, and with floodwaters slowly receding, early responders predict assistance will be needed far into the future.

Eastern Arkansas

Early May brought extensive flooding from the White River to communities in eastern Arkansas, with high water closing Interstate 40 in both directions for several days.

The Rev. Mike Topham, pastor of First UMC Des Arc in Prairie County, says that residents are still cleaning up. In addition to providing a home for the Red Cross disaster center, the church has distributed cleaning buckets from the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) to people trying to get their homes back into livable shape.

More than 130 houses in the area have been condemned because

of flood damage, and those families are waiting on federal relief funding so they can start over. About 140 houses have lesser damage, but for those homeowners, it's a race against mold.

"They're pulling their carpets out, their floors out, wallboards out, spraying it down with bleach and trying to get the mold. It's starting to come up in the houses already," he said.

Some United Methodist congregations already have sent teams to help. Beebe UMC arrived mid-May, and Trinity UMC had scheduled a late-May work weekend in coordination with Prairie County officials.

VIM support

Arkansas Conference Volunteers In Mission (VIM) has sent teams to Marked Tree, Hazen, Des Arc and Hot Springs Village to help homeowners and often running one-day distribution centers for cleaning buckets and other essential items.

Vilonia, which was hit by a tornado April 25, is ready to receive VIM teams.

In some areas, though, "we're waiting for flood levels to go down," said Larry Gentry, conference disaster response coordinator.

In the meantime, churches are asked to help by sending supplies. Although more than 400 buckets have been distributed, there is an urgent need for additional buckets. Those not used in this clean-up effort will be shipped to UMCOR's Sager-Brown Depot in Baldwin, La., to help other affected areas of the country.



Vilonia UMC pastor the Rev. Belinda Price, foreground, comforts a parishioner taking a break from sorting through damaged personal property following the April 25 tornado.

AUM PHOTO BY AMY FORBUS

"We will be working on this [flooding and storm recovery] probably for the next year," said Don Weeks, Arkansas Conference VIM coordinator.

In addition to handling the disasters here in Arkansas, some teams have expressed interest in providing hands-on help in the wake of the tornado that hit Joplin, Mo., on May 23. Weeks said that UMCOR-trained Early Response

Teams (ERTs) will be sent first. "We have notified the Missouri Conference disaster coordinator that we are ready to go to Joplin when invited," Weeks said on May 25. "They're aware that our ERTs are standing by."

The first ERTs expect to be called to the area the week of May 29.

Lauren Wiseman contributed to this report.

How to help

To help fund the relief efforts, give to "U.S. Spring Storms," Advance #3021326, online at umcor.org.

To assemble relief supplies, follow the instructions for cleaning buckets at umcor.org (choose "Relief Supplies" from the "How to Give" menu). Completed kits may be delivered to affected areas or the Arkansas Rice Depot in Little Rock.

To receive a disaster relief assignment, United Methodist work teams should check in with the appropriate district disaster coordinator:

- Central District: Jamey Bentley, interim
jamey@canvascommunityonline.org or 501-412-0498
- North District: Paul Seay
pastorpaul1@gmail.com or 870-297-8878
- North Central District: Rick Gartner
rlgartner@att.net or 501-733-6763
- Northeast District: Dan Walker
danandpeggy@suddenlink.net or 870-897-1605
- Northwest District: Denni Palmer
umteach@hotmail.com or 479-248-1290
- South Central District: Dooley Fowler
doocook@sbcglobal.net or 501-337-7364
- Southeast District: To be supplied; contact district office in the interim at 870-367-3365.
- Southwest District: Janice & Byron Mann
rainmaker@arkansas.net or 870-703-8359
- West District: Troy Conrad
pastortroy5@mac.com or 479-739-7047

Home rebuilt (continued from page 1A)

built, is basically the way I look at it," Jeannie Ham said.

Stepping out in faith

Lex Wetzel said members of Prairie Grove United Methodist Church in Prairie Grove, Ark., weren't looking to build a home as their first mission project.

Instead, volunteers initially set out to complete several small projects in the wake of the Dec. 31 tornado as they began to form a new monthly mission outreach initiative.

However, while looking for projects, a member of the church learned about the Hams' need for a home.

Wetzel and others suddenly found themselves developing blueprints for a 1,200-square-foot home and making plans for its eventual construction.

While Wetzel coordinated construction efforts, Dan Dunn, a volunteer from Highlands United Methodist Church in Bella Vista, worked to find volunteers to complete the structure in a short amount of time.

"The fact that we were able to finish this house in eight weeks is

nothing short of a miracle," Wetzel said.

Wetzel said he saw God at work in this project, because many times volunteers arrived at the site to help at the specific time their particular skill set was required for a certain task.

"I didn't call any of them, everyone called me—and it was amazing," Wetzel said.

The project also pushed the Prairie Grove church to new heights, with almost half of the congregation—75 individuals—participating in the project in some way.

"When God wants this done, it will be done," Wetzel said.

"Sometimes God just wants you to show up to see what happens."

Help in unexpected ways

Among the volunteers helping to complete the project was a group of students from a Catholic high school in Rochester, Minn.

Dunn said organizers from the group contacted him about helping during their spring break after plans for their Mississippi mission trip fell apart. Over a two-day period, 80 students picked up debris around

'Sometimes God just wants you to show up to see what happens.' —Lex Wetzel

the Hams' farm and helped with the initial stages of construction.

In all, Dunn said, volunteers—ranging in age from high-schoolers to 85-year-old retirees—completed the home in 18 working days across the eight-week time frame.

"I think people who worked on it got as much out of it as the [Hams]," Dunn said. "It just feels good to do something for somebody else."

A look ahead

Now that they have completed the Hams' home, volunteers from Prairie Grove UMC are organizing their future efforts.

Wetzel said they hope to concentrate on smaller projects like building wheelchair ramps, repairing leaking roofs or weatherizing homes for people with disabilities or on a fixed income.

He eventually hopes the effort will become a district-wide initiative, completing projects throughout Northwest Arkansas.

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



ABOVE: The Rev. Matthew Johnson, left, speaks at the dedication of the new home built for Jeannie and David Ham.



LEFT: Jeannie Ham shares a hug with one of the volunteers who helped rebuild her home after it was leveled by a Dec. 31 tornado.

PHOTOS BY MELISSA GUTE, for the Siloam Springs Herald Leader



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'Get Up & Give' 2011 effort a success



Helpers from Keo UMC sort donated items into bins at Methodist Family Health's 2011 Get Up & Give celebration.

PHOTO BY ALYSSA ANDERSON

During its Get Up & Give campaign for 2011, Methodist Family Health collected items for clients who arrive at one of the organization's behavioral healthcare facilities without basic necessities.

Local churches and mission groups from across the state provided such items by participating in "40 Days of Collecting," which coincided with Lent, the 40 days leading up to Easter.

Methodist Family Health's Little Rock counseling clinic on May 1 served as the final drop-off location, where volunteers enjoyed a celebration, complete with live music from FaithSpring UMC's praise band, while they sorted donated items.

In addition to more than 100 large bins of toiletries and other necessities, cash donations to Get Up & Give 2011 totaled nearly \$3,000.

CLASSIFIEDS

PLACE YOUR CLASSIFIED in the *Arkansas United Methodist* for 50 cents per word, no limit. To schedule your ad, call 501-324-8005 or mail to: *Arkansas United Methodist*, 800 Daisy Bates Drive, Little Rock, AR 72202; or e-mail mtaylor@arumc.org.

Children's Minister Position available at Sardis United Methodist Church. Sardis UMC is a growing church located in the Benton/Bryant area looking for a dynamic leader to oversee ministries to children and their families. 30 hours per week. Send resume and three references to Karen Guinn at mkmhguinn@sbcglobal.net.

Geyer Springs UMC in LR hiring office manager for 16-20 hours per week. Secretarial and financial duties. **Accounting experience required.** Microsoft Office and Quickbooks preferred. Resumes and references to geyersprings.umc_pastor@comcast.net. More information call 501-920-3300.

Director of Youth Ministries: A full-time Northwest Arkansas opportunity beckons for a gifted and enthusiastic, Spirit-led individual to serve as the Director of Youth Ministries. The Director coordinates youth discipleship training, mission and service projects and Sunday morning and weekday ministries for youth and their families. A college degree is required; preferred candidates should have a degree in related field and/or previous experience in youth ministry. Send resume and references to Rev. Rex Dickey, First United Methodist Church, 201 NW 2nd St., Bentonville, AR 72712 or rex@fumcbentonville.org.

Home Study: Save \$\$\$ Christian Bible College, P.O. Box 8968 Rocky Mt., NC 27804 Phone (252) 451-1031; www.christianbiblecollege.org

PEOPLE OF FAITH

Teltow named to Native American caucus

The Rev. Tammy Jo Teltow was elected for a second term as executive secretary of the Native American International Caucus of the United Methodist Church (NAIC) at the March executive board meeting held in Tucson, Ariz.

In addition to the executive position, she will serve as the NAIC's chairperson for the South Central Region of the U.S., consisting of Arkansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Louisiana, Kansas, Nebraska and Texas.

Teltow serves as pastor of Lamar UMC in Lamar and Mount Olive UMC in Clarksville.

The 19,000 United Methodists who identify themselves as Native people are a small part of the denomination in the U.S., but ministry involving Native American people is the focus of significant legislation before the General Conference of the UMC in 2012.

The NAIC is the legislative and advocacy arm for Native American United Methodists. Its mission is to sensitize the UMC about customs & religious expressions of Native Americans; to educate & inform the UMC of critical issues that effect Native Americans; to engage members of the UMC in these critical Native American issues; and advocate for full participation of United Methodist Native Americans at all levels of the church and in the life of the church.

For more information about the NAIC, visit naicumc.org.



Tammy Jo Teltow

Candidates for ordination receive M.Div degrees

Five individuals from the Arkansas Conference have earned Master of Divinity degrees this spring from four different seminaries.

Saint Paul School of Theology in Kansas City, Mo., presented Master of Divinity degrees with specializations in evangelism on May 13 to Lee Myane and Natasha Murray-Norman, pictured at left.

Murray-Norman also received the Barbara Byrd Award, presented to a student with high scholarship and potential for leadership in the church.

Other Arkansas Conference candidates for ordained ministry who received Master of Divinity degrees this spring include:

- Zeke Allen, Memphis Theological Seminary, May 14;
- Ben Crismon, SMU Perkins School of Theology, May 14;
- Andrew Fiser, Vanderbilt Divinity School, May 13. (Fiser has transferred his candidacy to the Tennessee Conference.)



Lee Myane and Natasha Murray-Norman

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Allen, Womack chosen to receive seminary scholarships

Josh Allen of Beebe and Dane Womack of Conway have been named United Methodist Foundation Seminary Scholarship recipients for 2011. They will attend United Methodist seminaries for the next three years and have made a commitment to return to the Arkansas Conference to seek ordination as elders when they complete their educations.

“I’m excited to have these two young men who have been called to God’s service as our new seminary scholarship recipients,” said Jim

Argue, Jr., President of the United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas. “With many pastors retiring in the next 10 years, the Seminary Scholarship initiative offers the potential of strengthening our local churches and the work we do in our state.”

Currently, Allen works at Methodist Family Health in Little Rock and also has served as a youth pastor.

“As a teenager, I fell in love with the works of John Wesley,” he said. “I feel called to participate

within the United Methodist Church as an elder, living out the Gospel for the improvement of life in both communities and the individual. Ultimately, I feel called to dedicate my life to the advancement of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the worship, love and Glory of God.”

Allen plans to attend Iliff



Josh Allen

School of Theology in Denver, Colo. Womack currently serves Plumerville United Methodist Church and teaches math at Russellville High School. He will attend Duke Divinity School in Durham, North Carolina.

“My great-grandfather retired as a United Methodist minister and



Dane Womack

my family has always been involved in the local United Methodist congregation,” said Womack. “I am familiar with our history and I am excited about what is to come. I wonder, what does the future hold for the Arkansas United Methodist Church? What part will I play in this story?”

One of the largest United Methodist foundations in the country, the United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas manages more than 500 trust accounts with combined assets in excess of \$104 million.

COMING UP

June

Young adult gathering at First UMC Hot Springs 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.

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. In-person registrations will be accepted on June 5 and 6, the Sunday and Monday of Annual Conference. Cost to participate is \$10, which includes a t-shirt.

Dallas youth choir to perform in Little Rock June 10
Variations Youth Choir and Handbells, a touring group from First UMC Dallas, Texas, will perform at First UMC Little Rock on Friday, June 10, at 7 p.m. The program includes selections of sacred music, as well as music from *Shrek*, *Spamalot* and *Seussical*. Admission is free.

First UMC is at 8th and Center Streets in downtown Little Rock.

Choirs invited to perform at First UMC Nashville June 25
First UMC Nashville is assembling a choir to perform in a worship service on June 25, 2011, at 6:30 p.m. The service is part of a Worship Weekend led by singer/songwriter Regi Stone. Individuals or groups interested in being a part of the choir should contact Kristi Eggers at 870-223-3156 or kristiwhiteeggers@yahoo.com as soon as possible.

Participants will receive sheet music and a CD, which they may copy for rehearsal purposes. Choir members are invited to Friday evening dinner, Saturday morning breakfast and rehearsals following both meals.

A love offering at the Saturday worship service will benefit Howard County Christian Health Clinic, which serves the uninsured population of that area.

This event is fully funded by the Lucy Stone Lecture Series, so participating churches’ only cost will be reproducing the music and CD. For more information on Regi Stone, visit registone.com.

‘The Two Tenors’ at Asbury UMC Little Rock June 26
Barry Craft and Jacob Taylor, The Two Tenors, will appear at Asbury United Methodist Church in Little Rock at 3 p.m. Sunday, June 26. They will present a sacred concert in white tie and jeans. It is free and open to the public.

In 1993, tenor Barry Craft saw Luciano Pavarotti perform with British rock singer Sting on television. Observing these two artists using drastically different musical styles, Craft had an idea: What about having two singers with different backgrounds and styles—one traditional and one not-so-traditional—perform a sacred concert together?

Around the same time, churches were caught up in disagreements over traditional versus contemporary worship styles.

“Our concert proves that both styles of worship can co-exist and can still tell the Christian message regardless of the musical style,” Craft says.

An American-trained artist, Craft has earned the reputation as one of the most sought-after singers of the current generation. He has performed for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II of England and for members of the Royal Family of Japan, as well as President Kovac of the Slovak Republic. Craft holds vocal performance degrees from the University of North Texas and Texas A&M University in Commerce.

Jacob Taylor is a versatile artist whose voice is suited to both traditional and contemporary singing styles. Taylor began playing trumpet in junior high school and began his work with The Two Tenors as a guest trumpeter at the age of 16. He recorded his first CD at age 17, and has toured Japan, Europe and Canada as a singer, trumpeter and guitarist.

Asbury UMC is at 1700 Napa Valley Drive in Little Rock.

July

Junior High Assembly July 20-23
Build on your relationship with Christ, relationships within your youth group and form new ties with others across the Conference by attending Junior High Assembly 2011, scheduled for July 20-23 at University of the Ozarks in Clarksville.

The Rev. Mark Norman, associate pastor of First UMC Benton, and Wayne Kerr of Houston, Texas, will serve as worship leaders.

For general information, contact Rod Hocott, rhocott@arumc.org or 501-324-8008. To ask specific questions about the event, contact Be Guinn, tsc@aristotle.net or 501-944-3294; Jay Clark, jclark@phumc.com or 501-944-8400; or Angel McPeak, amcpeak74@gmail.com or 479-883-0420.

Visit arumc.org/register to sign up for the event.

For details, visit accym.org, or join the group “Arkansas United Methodist Youth” on Facebook.

Senior High Assembly July 23-27
“Here Comes the Son!” is the theme for 2011 Senior

High Assembly, July 23-27 at University of the Ozarks in Clarksville. The focus of the week involves seeking out spiritual gifts and learning how to take them out into the world. Participants will dig deep to discover their spiritual gifts, look at the differences and similarities of everyone’s gifts and how they all come together to form the Body of Christ. The Rev. Will Choate, pastor of Argenta UMC, and Wayne Kerr of Houston, Texas, will serve as worship leaders.

For general information, contact Rod Hocott, rhocott@arumc.org or 501-324-8008. To ask specific questions about the event, contact Natalie Clark, squirt4893@yahoo.com or Denise Wilson, dhwilson@centurytel.net or 501-339-8693.

Visit arumc.org/register to sign up for the event.

For details, visit accym.org, or join the group “Arkansas United Methodist Youth” on Facebook.

2011 School of Christian Mission July 27-30
“All Things Made New,” the 2011 School of Christian Mission, is scheduled for July 27-30 at Hendrix College in Conway.

Study topics include “Coming Out on the Side of Grace: Forgiveness and Reconciliation,” “Joy to the World: Mission in the Age of Global Christianity” and a course on Haiti that incorporates a focus on the impact of the 2010 earthquake.

The Arkansas Conference Board of Global Ministries, Arkansas Conference United Methodist Women and United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas co-sponsor the event. Doni Martin serves as this year’s dean.

In addition to courses for adults, the school also includes programs geared toward children and youth.

Participants must register by July 15. To download a brochure and registration form, visit arumc.org/acscm.

If you have questions about the School of Christian Mission, contact Beth Cobb at 479-719-0350 or bethcobb@att.net.

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Be sure to recycle your copy of the *Arkansas United Methodist* when you’re through reading it (or share it with a friend).

BOOK REVIEW: Gen-X compilation provides insight

Generation Rising: A Future with Hope for The United Methodist Church

Edited by Andrew C. Thompson

Abingdon Press, 2011

BY MARCIA DUNBAR
Special Contributor

The United Methodist Church, along with many other denominational churches, is seeing a decline in numbers. The time of non-denominational mega-churches is declining, too, and the whole situation leaves many Generation X folks in limbo.

Part history lesson, part call to action, *Generation Rising: A Future with Hope for The United Methodist Church* speaks for the 30- and 40-somethings of the United Methodist faith.

Edited by Arkansas native the Rev. Andrew C. Thompson, the book compiles writing from twelve different Generation X authors with one thing in common: a desire to see United Methodism strengthened once again.

Generation Rising addresses the call for something more felt by many in today's world. Thompson defines a crossroads where we find ourselves: "The word of God promises that those who respond in faith will be empowered to act in faith. And it calls us toward dedication to a whole way of life."

In this consumerist society of I-Want-What-I-Want-When-I-Want-It, this promise seems daunting. *Generation Rising* uses our history to reshape a future founded in the traditions and structure upon which United Methodism was first built. Each chapter addresses major components of our beliefs, values and structure in a way that is steeped in tradition, yet infused with today's world.

This book contains proof that Gen-X Methodists aren't pulling away from or trying to change the foundation of the church, but rather trying to provide joists and beams that

connect generations for its future. We find ourselves in a time where many people seek something more, but they aren't quite sure what "more" is or what it looks like.

An underlying theme: We have to be ready to accept change. Contributor the Rev. Timothy Reinhold Eberhart addresses the lack of authentic worship with one another and writes of how "Generation X longs for Holy Communion."

In this communion, all are welcome. It matters not where you were born or where you were raised or what you look like. It matters that people come together to share in the love and grace of Jesus Christ, to be accountable to one another in a loving and honest way and help support each other through prayer, service and sharing community.

The Rev. Joy Moore supports this emphasis on sharing community in her chapter, "Preaching: Telling the Story in a Sound-Bite Culture." She writes, "We need to recognize that the Bible opens up a world showing us how to *live life now*."

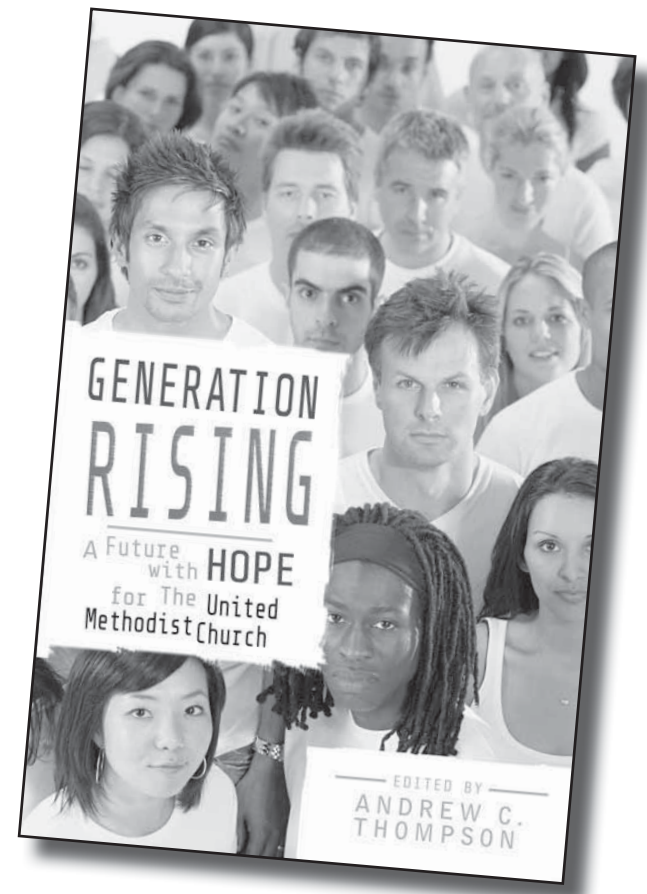
The Bible is not antiquated; it is the story for us all now. The pastor's task is "equipping the people of God with the story that shapes their imaginations in such a way that they live differently in the world."

Generation Rising moves on to discuss such topics as becoming responsible for the gifts that God has given us, reaching out to others in need, becoming ecologically responsible and using our talents to serve God. According to contributor the Rev. F. Douglas Powe Jr., being United Methodist means we are "one of the most inclusive denominations racially, theologically, and ethnically."

How exciting! We have so much to offer those seeking more, but we have to make the commitment to our faith in order to be the church God wants us to be.

In the chapter focusing specifically on young adults, contributor Julie O'Neal shares her own struggles to connect with a congregation. She writes, "Young people are looking to the church to be a place of love, affirmation, and accountability." I think that through her writing, she shares her hope for the denomination as a whole.

Generation Rising: A Future with Hope for The United Methodist Church should be read by those seeking insight into



the Gen-X movement, by those who want to better understand the church we want to reshape and by those seeking to live the life that God has intended for us.

At the end of each chapter, discussion questions allow the reader to seek a deeper understanding of how each topic affects his or her life. They are also wonderful questions to challenge and share with our congregations and small groups—a great start to building a stronger future for our faith.

Dunbar serves as director of evangelism for St. James UMC Little Rock.

Does your church have a focus? Is it beyond its walls? Outreach with a weekly, bi-weekly or monthly newspaper, detailing programs and stories of interest to people in and around your neighborhood. Regularly scheduled communication boosts participation and connects your church directly with children, youth and families in your area. Let the creative team at UMR Communications help you

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Dollars for Scholars program helps 22 Arkansas students in 2011-2012 academic year

Twenty-two United Methodist Higher Education Foundation Dollars for Scholars scholarships were awarded recently to Arkansas students attending United Methodist-affiliated colleges and universities.

"For each recipient, the students' local churches give \$1,000 and the United Methodist Higher Education Foundation matches that contribution, then the United Methodist Foundation in their Conference gives \$1,000 and the college contributes \$1,000 for a significant \$4,000 award," said Jim Argue Jr., president of the United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas.

"Previously, all the Arkansas recipients were from Hendrix College, and we are excited to see that students from Philander Smith College, Oklahoma City University and Perkins School of Theology also will receive the scholarships this year."

Dollars for Scholars recipients 2011-2012

Philander Smith College:

LaQuita Beasley, April Cotton, Adjoa Darkwah, Ra'Shawn Martin, Lindsey Newberry, Tasha Washington, all from Wesley Chapel UMC Little Rock; and Mychael Jones and Deneetra Williams, Theresa Hoover UMC Little Rock.

Hendrix College:

John Breshears and Mary Breshears, Oak Forest UMC Little Rock; Diana Brown and Patrick Brown, First UMC Pine Bluff; Christa Campo, Winfield UMC Little Rock; Benjamin Fish, Mabelvale UMC; Meredith McKinney, First UMC Batesville; Rebecca Perez and Katelyn Searvogel, First UMC Sheridan; Jillian Petersen, St. James UMC Little Rock; and Elizabeth Pond, First UMC Conway.

Oklahoma City University:

Blakeley Knox and Byron Knox, First UMC Fort Smith.

SMU Perkins School of Theology:

Brenda Wideman, Sequoyah UMC Fayetteville.

OBITUARIES

CONWAY

Helen Marie Warren Casteel

Helen Marie Warren Casteel, 80, of Conway, passed away on May 7, 2011.

She was a retired public school teacher and the wife of the late Dr. Charles Casteel, a United Methodist minister.

Born on April 28, 1931, in Wrens, Ga., to the late John Sharp Warren and Bertha Rayner Ash Warren, she attended school in New York City and in Centreville, Miss. She graduated from Hendrix College in Conway with high honors, and received a Master's degree in biochemistry from the University of Oklahoma.



Helen Casteel

While at Hendrix, she met Charles Casteel, and they married in 1952. She accompanied Charles as they served Methodist churches throughout North Arkansas. She taught school in Dardanelle, Batesville, Mountain Home and North Little Rock.

She is survived by her children, Warren Casteel of Plano, Texas, Gerald Casteel of McKinney, Texas, Sue Casteel of Olathe, Kan. and Laura Campbell of Thibodeaux, La.; grandchildren, Brittany Southerland and Bradley Casteel of McKinney, Texas; a great-granddaughter, Olivia Jane Southerland, and an extended family. She was a member of First United Methodist Church in Conway.

Following interment on Tuesday, May 10, at Crestlawn Memorial Park, a public memorial service was held at First UMC Conway. A reception to celebrate her life followed the

service.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that memorials be made to Mount Eagle Christian Center, 935 Beal Road, Clinton, AR 72031, or online at www.mounteagle.org.

MOUNT IDA

Terry Lynn Scott

Terry Lynn Scott passed away on Sunday, May 22, his 57th birthday, at St. Joseph Hospital in Hot Springs, Arkansas.

He is survived by his wife, Tami, a son and daughter-in-law, Jarrett Scott and his wife, Annie; a daughter, Mekenna Scott; and a granddaughter Bracken Scott. He was preceded in death by his parents, Gertie and Jeff Scott, and his brother, Jerry.



Terry Scott

Terry spent 22 years as an insurance consultant at S&P Insurance Partners, LLC. Through years of his service of ministry as associate pastor of First UMC Mount Ida and Joplin UMC, Terry lifted spirits and taught others his ultimate sermons: Loving and Taking Care of Each Other.

Terry taught us all by his own faith in Jesus' plan; he lived life as an example of God's gift, strength during trials and sickness and a miraculous love for life.

Services were held on Thursday, May 26, 2011, at First United Methodist Church Mount Ida. Burial followed in the Mount Ida Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, memorial gifts may be made to Mount Ida First United Methodist Church and Joplin Methodist

Church as well as Harrison House Transplant Family Housing, UAMS, 704 S. Valentine Street, Hot Springs, AR 72205.

TEXARKANA

Bobby Nixon Manley

Bobby Nixon "Bob" Manley, 84, of Texarkana, Ark., died Thursday March 3, 2011, from injuries received in an automobile accident.



Bob Manley

Born on June 13, 1926, in Cooper, Texas, he was the former pastor of Holly Springs United Methodist Church and a retired dairy farmer.

He was a veteran of the U.S. Navy, having served in World War II. He was preceded in death by his wife, Margaret, and his brother, James Manley.

He is survived by one son and daughter-in-law, Michael and Barbie Manley of Houston, Texas; one sister and brother-in-law, Trunell Manley Gerber and her husband, Carl, of Queen City, Texas; two grandchildren, Robert Michael Manley, Jr., of Texarkana, Texas, and Lori Manley Harrell and husband, James, of Hooks, Texas; three great-grandchildren, Michael Lynn Manley, Angel Harrell and Jaime Harrell; two step-grandchildren, Chuck Fricks and his wife, Erica, of Texarkana, Texas, and Lori Akin and her husband Chris, of Texarkana, Ark.; and a number of nieces and nephews.

Funeral services were held Tuesday, March 8, 2011, with Dr. Herbert Wren officiating. Burial followed at Chapelwood Memorial Gardens in Bowie County, Texas.

Searcy men construct 'Crosses for Christ'

BY MARY KAY JAMES
Special Contributor

St. Paul United Methodist Men in Searcy are having an influence on their community, White County and the nation through their Crosses for Christ ministry.

In December of 2010, Lee Stephenson, then president of the St. Paul's men's group, contacted Travis and Patty Arnold of Russellville regarding their practice of constructing and giving away small crosses to place in front lawns as a symbol of Christian faith and a

reminder that we are one nation under God.

After several conversations with the Arnolds, Lee began discussing this project with his fellow United Methodist Men. In mid-December, they decided to make 100 crosses and give them away during Christmas week.

Stephenson's own large, heated work building provided the setting for building the crosses. One member acquired scrap lumber from construction sites, and local paint stores donated paint. One person compiled information about the

crosses, including contact information, to be rubber-banded to each cross. Local banks donated rubber bands.

The project took on a life of its own as more and more retired United Methodist Men became involved. Some were retired contractors, others skilled with power tools. One construction foreman came early and stayed late when his crews were not working. One man designed a template so the wood could be placed and power stapled quickly.

Sawhorses and long pipes provided the ideal solution for several hundred freshly painted crosses to dry. A bond of brotherhood began to grow as the men met each Tuesday and Thursday morning to pray and work together for a common goal.

The first 100 crosses were quickly distributed within the St. Paul congregation, and requests for more began pouring in. In February, March and April of 2011, more than 1,000 of the crosses were distributed through the local ecumenical men's group, Sons of Thunder.

Those who attended the United Methodist Women's North District "Spring Day Apart" in April at St. Paul UMC carried home 126 crosses. Churches in Searcy and neighboring towns have requested bundles of



Murfreesboro church milestone

The United Methodist Church of Murfreesboro on May 1 celebrated the 170th anniversary of its 1841 founding. Members dressed in period clothing, and the celebration included special music. Those who have held membership in the congregation for 50 or more years received certificates honoring their commitment.

A potluck dinner in the Family Life Building followed the service, with photos and church history information on display.

PHOTO BY BARBARA SWEEDEN



United Methodist Men from St. Paul UMC Searcy at a "Crosses for Christ" work day. For more photos, visit spumcsearcy.com and click on Photo Albums.
PHOTO BY MARY KAY JAMES

crosses. Requests have even come from other states via Facebook. Front page coverage in the local newspaper brought more requests. Glen Norman, current president of United Methodist Men, continues to lead the ministry.

Persons from other churches and communities continue to

request crosses and information on construction, so the men have no plans to end this project.

St. Paul UMC will give away more Crosses for Christ in the display area at Annual Conference 2011.

James is the communications coordinator for St. Paul UMC Searcy.

TRANSFORMING THE WORLD

Kids’ birthday party helps build Congo well

First United Methodist Church of Fort Smith completed recently a series of fundraisers which together brought in \$8,400 for the Congo Water Wells Project. The Chancel Choir and Children’s Choir led the fundraising effort with activities at Music Camp and a Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper.

Among those who contributed to the wells project were Faith Rossi and Mercy Trahan, who both attended Music Camp and are members of the First UMC children’s choir.

The two third-grade girls hosted a joint birthday party, asking their guests to bring donations to the Congo Wells Project instead of birthday gifts. The party raised \$890 for the project, which covers the cost of digging wells to provide clean drinking water for villages in the Democratic Republic of Congo.



Third-graders Mercy Trahan, left, and Faith Rossi celebrate their part in building a water well in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Their joint birthday party helped achieve the \$8,000 fundraising goal for First UMC Fort Smith.

COURTESY PHOTO

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Celebrating Confirmation

We want to share the celebration of Grace UMC in Conway with the Conference. We recently marked the completion of our 2010-2011 Confirmation Ministry with a service that included ten youth confirming their earlier baptisms and five more being baptized and confirmed.

It was both a family and church-wide effort that lasted throughout the school year, culminating with fifteen wonderful youth desiring to affirm their faith and grow in discipleship.

May we, as United Methodists, remember our own covenant to our Lord, as well as the ministries of the church. May we glorify God in all that we say and do.

Let us also keep the youth

and congregations throughout Arkansas in our prayers, as other confirmation ministries are in full swing or preparing for a new beginning.

David Sutton, youth minister
Grace UMC Conway

Letters to the Editor policy:
All letters must be signed (name and city/church) and include the writer's telephone number or e-mail address.

The editor reserves the right to edit letters for style and length. Letters longer than 200 words will not be considered for publication.

The Arkansas United Methodist will not print letters containing personal attacks.

The Arkansas United Methodist reserves the right to publish Letters to the Editor in print, on the web, or both.



Peace of Mind

Rev. Tony and Barbara Hill want to make the transfer of their estate to their four children and five grandchildren as easy as possible during what they know will be a difficult time in the future. “I’ve seen lots of families torn apart because there was no will, and we’ve seen for ourselves the different it makes,” said Tony, who will soon move from being senior pastor at Lakeside United Methodist Church in Lake Village to Osceola United Methodist Church.

“My mother did it the right way. She had a will, a living will and plans for her burial,” said Barbara. “It made things much easier in a time of grief.” Barbara and Tony want to do the same, and a tool that is helping them gather information to work with an attorney on their estate plan is the will planning document from the United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas. The will planner is available online at www.umfa.org. A free printed will planner is available by calling Janet Marshall at the Foundation at 501-664-8632 or by emailing her at jmarshall@umfa.org.

“Using the will planner made us think about a lot of things we would not have considered,” Tony said. “We’ve talked about how to make the division of our property fair for our children and what charitable gifts we may be able to make.”



The United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas

5300 Evergreen Drive • Little Rock, Arkansas 72205
501-664-8632 • Toll free 877-712-1107 • Fax 501-664-6792 • www.umfa.org

REPORTER

THE UNITED METHODIST

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On dying well

A theologian's perspective | 6B



'Upper Room Family'

Ministry unites readers worldwide | 6B

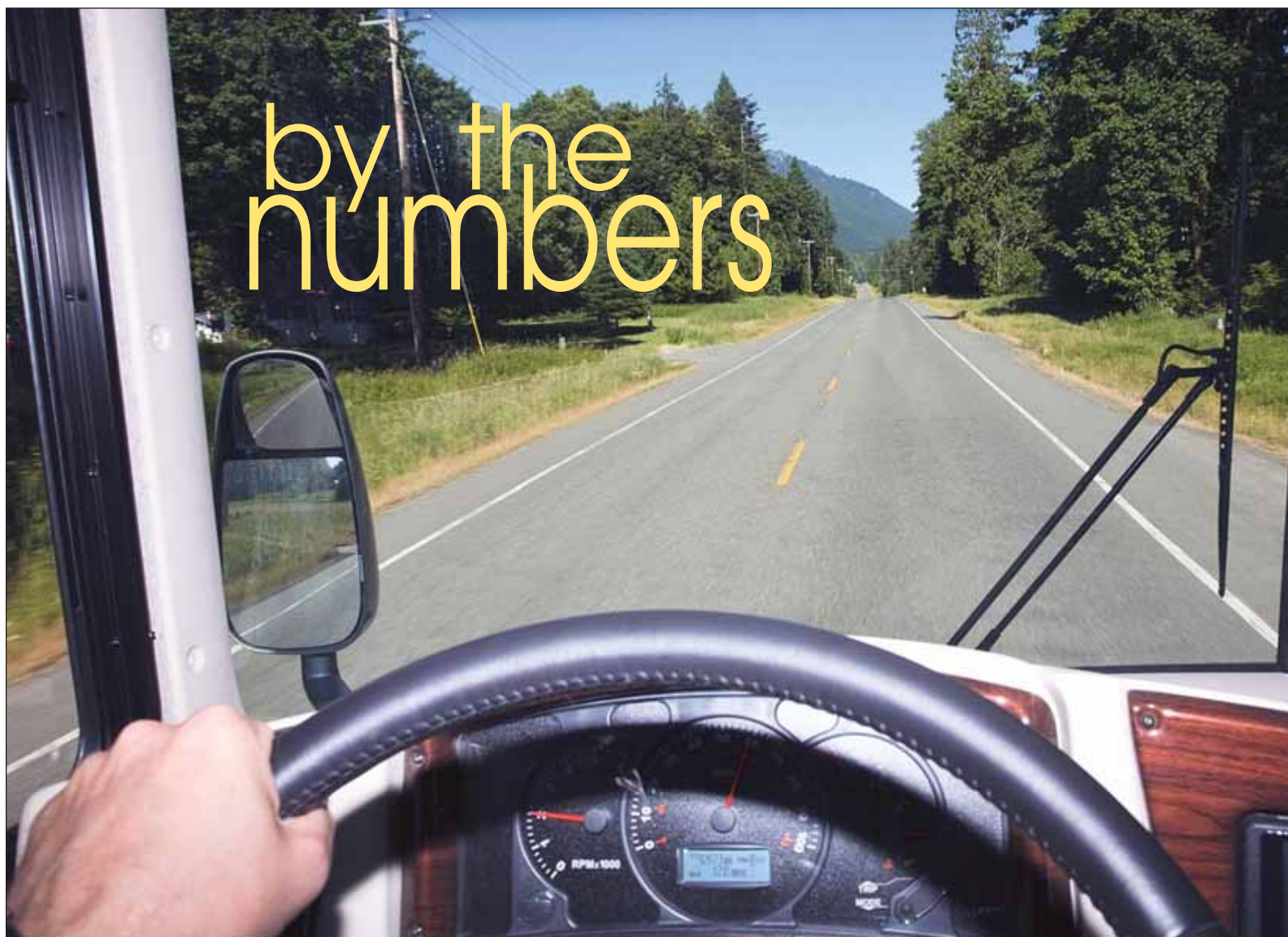


Church bullies

Why they shouldn't be ignored | 7B

Section B

June 3, 2011



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Will "dashboards," online systems for tracking church attendance, membership and giving, help the United Methodist Church better navigate the road ahead?

United Methodists debate use of church 'dashboards'

BY MARY JACOBS
Staff Writer

At a meeting of the board of trustees at Emory University a few years ago, trustees pored over the college's "dashboard"—a detailed view of 30 different numerical measures of the university's vitality.

For Bishop William H. Willimon (North Alabama), a member of the board, it was an epiphany: Why not track vitality in the same way in the United Methodist Church?

By 2009, North Alabama had implemented an online Conference Dashboard. Every Monday, churches log in their numbers for attendance, baptisms, giving and other measures.

Pastors—and anyone else—can see how their numbers stack up against other churches.

Now, Bishop Willimon logs in every Tuesday to see which churches reported the greatest increases—and which had the biggest drops. Dials and charts on the dashboard give a quick glimpse of how the numbers are trending.

Bishop Willimon's experiment may soon become standard practice at annual conferences across the U.S. Similar "dashboards" cropped up around the same time at a handful of other annual conferences—including Florida and Illinois Great Rivers—and now the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) is rolling out

VitalSigns, a tool modeled after the North Alabama dashboard—and encouraging every annual conference to adopt it.

Detractors say that dashboards are a mistake—a worldly tool that will turn pastors' focus from ministry to "making the numbers."

But advocates assert that dashboards offer a desperately-needed tool, in the face of steep declines in the denomination's membership, to create accountability for pastors, mobilize laity and boost congregational vitality.

"We're hoping to begin to change the culture that says 'Numbers aren't important,'" said Bishop John Schol (Baltimore-Washington), who's work-

ing on the VitalSigns rollout. "Numbers are about souls."

Always counting

Take a look at the North Alabama Conference Dashboard, and you'll see that it names names and publishes the numbers—good, bad and ugly—for all to see. For the week of May 22, for example, Canterbury UMC in Birmingham reported two baptisms, topping the list for year-to-date baptisms at 39, while First UMC in Huntsville topped the list of "churches with biggest loss in worship" with 228 in attendance.

Keeping track of these numbers is nothing new for Methodists. John

■ See 'Dashboard' page 3B

Methodists share in Joplin's pain

BY FRED KOENIG
Special Contributor

JOPLIN, Mo.—Within a few minutes of the May 22 tornado that ripped through Joplin, the Rev. Aaron Brown was at St. Paul's United Methodist Church. He saw that the 9-year-old sanctuary was obliterated, but his attention quickly turned to what had been a peaceful neighborhood across the street, now turned to acre upon acre of rubble.

"I just went out into the community and did what I could to help find people," said Mr. Brown, St. Paul's pastor.

Others came to the church, and with Mr. Brown they opened up the moderately damaged children's wing of St. Paul's as a triage unit, since nearby St. John's Hospital had been destroyed. Volunteers cared for the wounded until ambulances could transport them to medical facilities elsewhere.

More members of St. Paul's arrived at the church on May 23, a Monday, despite stormy weather and blocked roads.

"As they came in, I just sent them out into the streets of the community and told them to help our neighbors wherever they could," Mr. Brown said.

In a horrific tornado season across the South and Midwest, Joplin—named for 19th-century Methodist minister Harris Joplin—will be remembered as one of the most unfortunate locations. More than 120 people were killed by the May 22 tornado there, including, according to Missouri Conference Bishop Robert Schnase, several United Methodists.

St. Paul's lost its sanctuary, and St. James UMC of Joplin was destroyed. The denomination's nearby district office was damaged extensively.

Bishop Schnase posted a statement to the conference website, detailing losses, but also offering encouragement.

"United Methodists will rebuild in Joplin," he said. "Within the first

■ See 'Joplin' page 2B

FAITH WATCH

RNS receives grant, launches partnership

Religion News Service announced plans to become a nonprofit in partnership with Religion Newswriters Association and its affiliate, Religion Newswriters Foundation. RNS, long a source of news for the *United Methodist Reporter*, received a three-year, \$3.5 million grant from the Lilly Foundation to help with the transition. RNS will keep its headquarters in Washington, D.C., but promises to expand coverage, particularly to markets where religion coverage has dwindled with shrinking newspaper staffs.

John Paul II statue debuts to bad reviews

A new statue of Pope John Paul II is getting lousy notices. The Vatican complained that the 16-ft. statue designed by Oliviero Rainaldi, and placed outside Rome's Termini Train Station, doesn't look much like the late pontiff. Some observers told the Associated Press that the statue looks more like Italy's World War II dictator Benito Mussolini.

Many atheist scientists identify as 'spiritual'

A Rice University study of atheist scientists found that more than 20 percent consider themselves "spiritual," Religion News Service reported. Elaine Howard Ecklund, who led the research team and is an assistant professor of sociology at Rice, said, "This challenges the idea that scientists, and other groups we typically deem as secular, are devoid of those big 'Why am I here?' questions."

Burger King ex-boss aids C.S. Lewis college

The former CEO of Burger King will lead development efforts for C.S. Lewis College, to be in Northfield, Mass. Charles Olcott will serve as executive vice president for the Christian college's foundation. The school is named for the famed British author and Christian apologist. Mr. Olcott has held other top posts and in recent years has been administrator of Bethany Church in New Hampshire.

—Compiled by Sam Hodges

■ **TORNADO** *Continued from page 1B*

hours, United Methodist congregations were at work locally to help and United Methodist Volunteers were lining up. Within the first day, the Missouri Conference Disaster Response Teams were coordinating with other agencies to help and representatives from the United Methodist Committee on Relief were on the ground in Joplin.

"Bishops from other conferences have called me to offer support, and several have generously offered large financial gifts to help rebuild. The responses have been humbling."

Church turned rubble

On Tuesday, May 24, Southwest District Superintendent Sandra Nenadal made it to her Joplin office to retrieve confidential files. She had been there the night before, but hadn't seen the full extent of the damage in the dark.

"This back wall is just perforated," she said.

A small group was helping her retrieve sensitive items. When a computer was picked up, cups of water poured out of it. The glass door and windows were broken out, the roof was damaged, and everything in the office was soaked.

Across the parking lot, a young man walked up to a large nondescript pile of rubble with two walls partially standing.

"This is my church," Trey Tripp said.

The spot he referred to was St. James UMC. The church had been growing, from fewer than 30 people in worship to averaging more than 50 last year. Every year the church raises thousands of dollars for a designated mission, such as Heifer Project International.

Mr. Tripp lives in nearby Webb City, and his home is fine. His father lives in Joplin, and his house is undamaged also. But the church is a total loss.

"This is a shame," Mr. Tripp said as



PHOTO COURTESY MISSOURI CONFERENCE

The May 22 tornado that hit Joplin, Mo., destroyed the sanctuary of St. Paul's United Methodist Church, leaving volunteers to scavenge for anything salvageable.

he looked over the ruins. "We've done a lot of work on this place."

Sadness and gratitude

On the same Tuesday, at St. Paul's, people had arrived to begin cleanup. The tower of the steeple was a hollowed-out shell, but it still stood, and could be seen from the epicenter of the destruction at the hospital, where national media set up camp all week.

The family life center was missing a section of roof, but was salvageable. The children's wing appeared undamaged at first, but a closer look showed pieces of lumber had pierced the walls.

Flo Dahms was picking up pieces of the church building from the yard and putting them in the trash pile. She

lives about four miles away, and came on the back roads to avoid road blocks. She hadn't ventured any further into town.

"They don't need people down there looking around," she said.

She was saddened by the news that two people from the church had lost their lives and that others had lost their homes. She was worried about those the church hadn't been able to contact. But she was also grateful that she was able to help, and that the church would be there for people in need.

"We're doing fine, and we will do fine," Ms. Dahms said.

'Call after call'

The Rev. Ben Bainbridge was at the Salvage Yard on Main Street when the tornado came. This ministry of St. Paul's UMC is a no-alcohol bar/night club that operates from 6 p.m. until midnight Thursday through Saturday, and has worship services on Sunday at 6 p.m. The tornado came at about 5:30 p.m. Sunday, and there were about 20 people at the Salvage Yard.

"By the time we knew something bad was coming, it wasn't safe to send people home," Mr. Bainbridge said.

Instead they pulled people in off the street as the tornado approached. Then they gathered in a small interior room without windows, lit candles and prayed.

The Salvage Yard is about five blocks from the massive destruction. After the tornado passed, Mr. Bain-

bridge's phone started ringing.

"It was call after call of people screaming and crying," he said.

Mr. Bainbridge then took the young people from the Salvage Yard over to the center of destruction, which is a neighborhood of St. Paul's UMC, to try to find their parents.

"I was up all night, checking on people I know to see if they were alive and safe," he said.

A church home

On Tuesday morning, May 24, Gary Parker could be found at Christ Community UMC, one of the churches in Joplin that wasn't damaged. Mr. Parker cheerfully unloaded a large truckload of bottled water that showed up at the church as an unexpected donation.

A member of the church for 10 years, Mr. Parker, like several others, said he was just doing anything he could to help. But Mr. Parker's situation was different from that of most of the volunteers.

The church was his new address. "I've lost everything," Mr. Parker said of his home on Wisconsin Street. "I'm staying here now. I gave the insurance company the church phone number, and I'm having my mail forwarded here."

"Where else is there to go?"

Mr. Koenig is editor of publications for the Missouri Conference. The Associated Press and United Methodist News Service contributed.

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■ DASHBOARD Continued from page 1B

Wesley tracked membership numbers assiduously and cited numerical growth as an indicator of spiritual vitality. Many church members will recall the old wooden register boards that were once posted at the front of church sanctuaries, with movable numbers that tallied attendance and giving from week to week.

And most of the data posted on the dashboards has been tracked in the past—but generally ended up buried, and largely unheeded, in conference journals.

Before the dashboard, “We had three full-time people who did nothing but compile the numbers in the conference,” Bishop Willimon said. “But by the time we got them, they were 1-2 years out of date. It was very hard to make decisions based on those dated numbers.”

What’s changed, with the implementation of dashboards, is that now the numbers are published widely and in “real time.”

“One of my beefs with the general church is that we’ve had this fairly disturbing data for years, but you’d be hard pressed to think of any major change we’ve made in response to the numbers,” Bishop Willimon said. “Now I can honestly say that these numbers have become part of how we work.”

Bishop Willimon says he mostly focuses on the positive numbers—writing or calling pastors of churches with significant upticks, some of whom he might not otherwise know about. But he also moved a pastor, after just one year, in an appointment where attendance dropped 20 percent in the pastor’s first seven months.

Pushback

Not surprisingly, the dashboards are generating pushback from pastors and seminarians.

The idea of dashboards “is both exhilarating and terrifying,” said Jason Byassee, a research fellow at Duke Divinity School who’s beginning a pastoral appointment in the Western North Carolina Conference. “It’s creating anxiety, a worry that the dashboards are designed to shame people they think are lazy pastors.”

As the Detroit Conference begins implementing GCEA’s VitalSigns dashboard, the Rev. Jerry DeVine, director of Connectional Ministries, said that some pastors have complained about the addition of yet another administrative task.

Some worry that dashboards will make ministry “all about the numbers.”

In his experience as a former district superintendent, Dr. DeVine said, “When there were positive numbers, the clergy in my district would love telling me about them. When they were not so good, they’d say, ‘I’m not a

numbers person.’”

Others wonder whether numbers can really measure what matters most.

“Lately I’ve been preaching a lot about friendship with the poor,” writes the Rev. Tom Arthur, pastor of Sycamore Creek UMC in Lansing, Mich., in a recent blog post on dashboards. “How do you measure that?”

The right measures?

The first time someone showed the North Alabama dashboard to Amy Laura Hall, she burst into tears. The associate professor of Christian ethics at Duke Divinity School has been a sharp critic ever since.

She calls dashboards a “union busting” tactic—targeting clergy and their guaranteed appointments, and compares them to the metrics enacted in public schools by the No Child Left Behind Act that, she says, similarly target teachers with tenure.

“Pastors won’t be able to preach what their congregations need to hear without thinking about the numbers,” she said.

Bishop Willimon isn’t buying that argument.

“That’s an old-fashioned Methodist alibi—‘We’re dying because we’re so prophetic and truthful,’” he said. “The words you’re looking for there are actually ‘boring’ and ‘old.’”

“The question is what can the numbers really tell us?” Dr. Byassee said. “It’s easy to get people in the building. Put up a sign that says ‘Free Beer’ and they will come. Attendance figures don’t tell us to what degree the church is loving Jesus.”

Still, Dr. Byassee agrees that ignoring numbers completely is naïve too. No church would lose track of its bank account balance, he noted—that’s ‘baseline stewardship.’

“More data doesn’t make more wisdom,” he said. “But it is harder to get wisdom without data.”

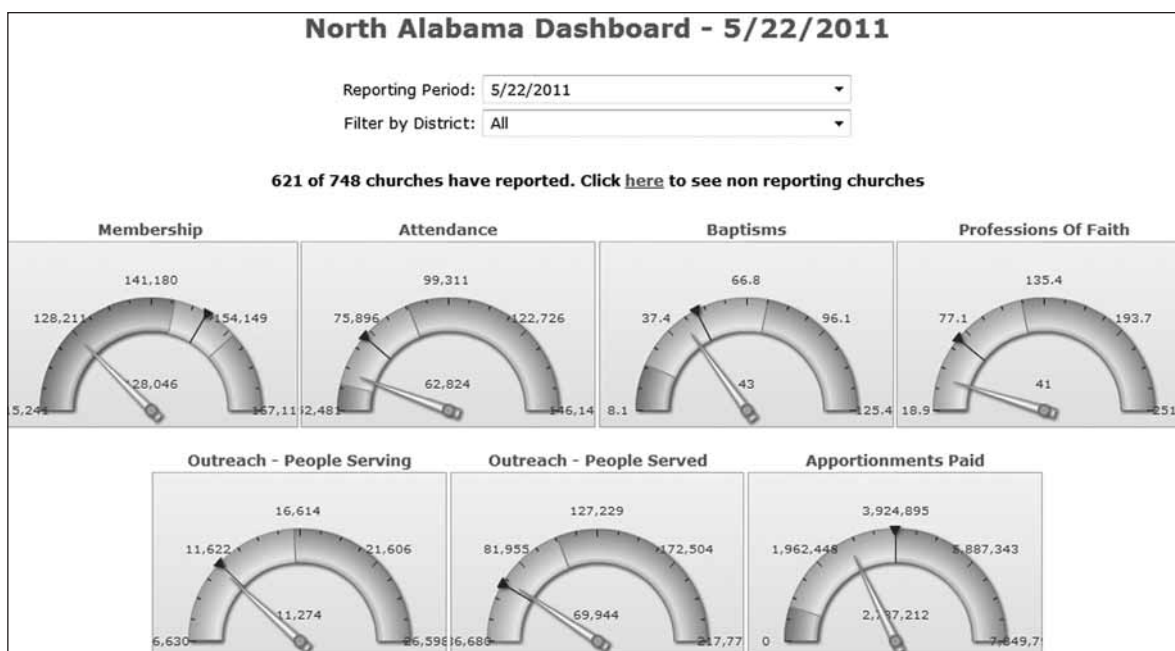
Advocates note, too, that laypeople are less likely than clergy to dislike the dashboard concept.

“Lay members are accustomed to accountability in their work,” said Bishop Timothy Whitaker (Florida). “They’re not threatened by it. They know they perform better when there’s a system of accountability.”

Metric madness?

Dr. Hall also claims that dashboards use the same kind of metrics that businesses use to sell products, and in doing so, “routinize ministry in ways that are antithetical to Christian teaching,” she said. “Metrics distort the way we are called to see one another in Jesus Christ.”

She also accused church leaders of using dashboards to bring in much-needed money and new people.



Bishop Will Willimon uses the North Alabama Conference website for weekly “dashboard” updates on conference statistics. Individual church stats, at times unflattering, are posted too.

“This is public shaming of pastors who don’t bring in new members,” she said.

The Rev. Robert “Bob” Phillips, directing pastor of First UMC in Peoria, Ill., doesn’t see it that way, even though his church showed up poorly in one metric—the highest net loss of membership in the conference—for one week in May.

Membership in his church is down, in part, because the church is working to remove outdated names from its rolls—and his bishop and DS know that, he said. And FUMC Peoria also turned up near the top of another list, as one of the highest payers of apportionment dollars in the conference.

“The key here is the level of trust that pastors have in their bishop,” he said. “With trust, the dashboard is a genuinely helpful metric to measure where we’re headed and where we need to go. Without trust, a dashboard could become a game of ‘gotcha.’”

Equipping clergy

Dr. DeVine says that the Detroit Conference embraced the dashboard concept as part of another program, the Vital Church Initiative, that trains pastors and lay leaders on building church vitality.

“We also felt we can’t ask pastors to raise the bar if we’re not there to equip them to do that,” he said. “If we are asking them to start measuring themselves, we are ready and willing to support and equip them through training that goes beyond what they learned in seminary.”

Dr. DeVine compares dashboards to the pedometers that some people wear to track their daily physical activity and to motivate themselves to move more.

The dashboard “is an invitation to a wellness program,” he said. “It’s not

intended to be punitive or oppressive.”

Like pedometers, he admits, dashboards won’t solve problems—only provide a tracking measure.

But they do encourage church leaders to focus on areas that need attention, says the Rev. Jeff Stiggins, executive director of the Center for Congregational Excellence in the Florida Conference.

While comparisons among churches and pastors are inevitable, Dr. Stiggins says, the dashboards’ main purpose is to allow congregations to focus on their own progress.

He said he’s seen “story after story”

of congregations that turned their focus on ministry to people outside of the church, spurred by the metrics they report. Before the conference instituted its dashboard, no statistics were collected that related to that type of outreach, allowing churches that had become “self-absorbed” to go unchallenged.

“If you ask the right question long enough, it becomes the way people pay attention,” Dr. Stiggins said. “Otherwise, it’s like playing basketball without keeping score.”

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RUSH OF RELIEF



TOP: Removing uprooted trees has occupied many of the students who come to Tuscaloosa to help. **ABOVE:** Volunteers eat their meals at First United Methodist Church in Tuscaloosa. **RIGHT:** The Rev. Creighton Alexander, director of the Wesley Foundation at the University of Alabama, sent Facebook and text updates using his smartphone while the power was out in the days following the storm.



Student volunteers aid in Alabama response

BY MARY JACOBS
Staff Writer

If there's a "silver lining" in the terrible storms that struck the Southeast on April 27, it's the story of how the United Methodist connectional system quickly mobilized churches and volunteers to provide disaster relief.

One powerful example comes from the Wesley Foundation at the University of Alabama. Heeding an invitation issued by "Bama Wesley" just days after the storm, dozens of student volunteers from Wesley Foundations at colleges and universities around the U.S. have already traveled to Alabama to help with cleanup and relief.

Although it's located in Tuscaloosa—one of the areas hardest hit by the swath of tornadoes—the Wesley Foundation's building escaped major damage. So the Rev. Creighton Alexander, the foundation's director, put out a call via Facebook and email inviting students at other Wesley Foundations to come, help with the relief and cleanup work in Tuscaloosa and stay at the Wesley facility. (The Foundation was without power for days, but he was able to get the word out by way of his cellphone.)

Students answered the call. Mr. Alexander says the Foundation has already hosted eight groups, and he expected a total of at least 20 groups will visit over the summer. Students are coming in from the campus ministries at the University of Oklahoma, Purdue University, Mercer University in Macon, Ga., LaGrange College, Winthrop University, Texas Tech, Ole Miss and others.

Andrew Ferdon, 21, a civil engineering major at Purdue University, joined a group of 17 young people, 14 of them students from Purdue's Wesley Foundation, that traveled to Tuscaloosa in early May.

"When we heard about the storms, we decided we'd like to go to help, but most of the agencies we called needed trained individuals," he said. "But Creighton said he'd love to have us."

Mr. Ferdon said there was a week between final exams and the time when most students would start summer school or summer jobs. They gathered chain saws and other tools and headed to Alabama.

The Purdue students brought more than just willing hands and strong backs. Churches in the Lafayette, Ind., area—Asbury UMC, First UMC-West Lafayette and Trinity UMC—donated

\$3,000 to cover expenses and to help with relief work.

"I feel like I've been blessed in my life," Mr. Ferdon said. "That blessing gives me a challenge to help others, and this was just an opportunity to help."

Connections in place

For the past few years, Mr. Alexander has participated in Refresh, an annual gathering of United Methodist campus ministers sponsored by the Foundation for Evangelism. Connections made at those gatherings, he said, made it easy for him to extend an invitation to other Wesley Foundations to come to Tuscaloosa.

Many adult United Methodist volunteers are pouring into Tuscaloosa; many of them staying at FUMC Tuscaloosa. The Wesley Foundation was not only able to utilize student volunteers—most of whom did not have prior emergency response training—but also provided those students with a faith-inspiring experience.

"I know it's a little weird to say this, but we're having a blast," Mr. Alexander said. "The students are doing a great job of taking care of people, and they're having fun doing it."

Volunteers are sleeping in a



PHOTOS COURTESY WESLEY FOUNDATION, UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

LEFT: The first group of students to arrive to help at the University of Alabama's Wesley Foundation. **RIGHT:** Volunteers coming from other Wesley Foundations around the U.S. were shocked at the level of devastation they found in Tuscaloosa.

makeshift dorm, on cots, sleeping bags and inflatable mattresses. They eat their meals at FUMC Tuscaloosa, and worship together on Tuesday evenings.

Gabriela Law, 21, a biochemistry and molecular biology major at Mercer University in Macon, Ga., traveled to Tuscaloosa in mid-May along with eight other Mercer students.

"At first, it was overwhelming," she said. "I had no idea that there was this kind of destruction."

Still, she left Tuscaloosa uplifted. "The way the community is coming together is really impressive," she said. "To see God bringing people together through a horrible situation is amazing, and it's something you want to be a

part of."

Wesley hosts the students in its facility, and the Southwest District of the North Alabama conference puts them to work on projects around the area. Some students helped staff a supply distribution center at nearby Hargrove Memorial United Methodist Church; others have spent their days clearing away trees.

Mr. Ferdon says he's mastered the chain saw in Tuscaloosa, noting the area seemed to have a lot of trees—and most of them were felled wherever the tornadoes ripped through.

Zac Head, a sophomore at the University of Alabama, lives in Tuscaloosa. His home escaped major damage. After

the storm, he and a friend carried sandwiches, chips and bottles of water to people in the areas most affected.

He says the influx of fellow Wesley Foundation students was encouraging, and for those Alabama students, like him, who were not displaced, the opportunity to help has proved to be healing as well.

"The best word for the situation here, in the first few days, was chaos," he said. "But as long as we're helping others, I know that God will help me through this situation."

Plenty left to do

There's room for more groups of students, Mr. Alexander said, who'd

like to come to Tuscaloosa later this summer. (To inquire, email him at creightonalexander@gmail.com.) He says volunteers can expect to do hard, physical work—they're still focused on removing trees and sorting debris—and promises there will be plenty of work to do throughout the summer.

"The Southwest District is doing an incredible job of coordinating volunteers," he said. "No one is going to be idle."

The work is hard, but the fellowship among students has been memorable.

"We connected with kids from several different schools," Mr. Ferdon said. "It was cool meeting kids from

other parts of the country who have the same willingness to do God's work."

"This generation, they really want to help," Mr. Alexander said. "Their compassion and passion to help is inspiring."

mjacobs@umr.org

How to help:

Those who can't come but would like to pitch in for resources to help the students in their relief work may donate at www.bamawesley.org.

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Q&A: Reviving art of dying well

Stanley Hauerwas is the Gilbert T. Rowe Professor of Theological Ethics at Duke Divinity School. In 2001, he was named by *Time* magazine “America’s Best Theologian,” and the same year he delivered the prestigious Gifford Lectureship at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland.

Dr. Hauerwas has written prolifically across disciplinary lines: from political theory to medical ethics, always in search of reflection on the character of a Christian life. His books dealing with medical ethics include *Suffering Presence: Theological Reflections on Medicine, the Mentally Handicapped, and the Church* and *Naming the Silence: God, Medicine and the Problem of Suffering*. He has also co-edited a compilation of theological reflections on what it means to grow old in modern society, entitled *Growing Old in Christ*.

He recently spoke with **Sarah Stoneking** of *Church Health Reader* on death and dying well.

Very generally, what is a good death?

I’m 70 and I think about death everyday. I think it’s a great gift that God gives some of us—to grow old in a way that our deaths are unavoidably present. That’s a gift: that you get to live into your dying. That is part of what we would like to have possible for everyone.

In America death has unfortunately become associated with: You’re dead when your doctor can no longer do anything for you. I want to think that our deaths can be claimed as part of a community of friends that are able to be present to us as we die. That means that you don’t have to do everything necessary to keep your body alive.

What would that look like in a congregation?

Presence, first and foremost. Presence and prayer. Too often we substitute technology for presence. Death scares us. We don’t want to be around it. But one of the gifts we give to one another is to be present to one another as we die. Learning to die is like everything else: It’s learning. You need to see people do it.

There was a whole tradition of *ars moriendi*, the art of dying. I think that we have to recover something like that. As I was saying, you have to be taught how to die. And somehow it got lost. I don’t know why. It’s always been at the heart of Christianity that we are taught to



“Friendship with God is the good that should form both how we live and how we die,” says Stanley Hauerwas.

die in a way that we can be happily remembered. It’s a lovely thing to be happily remembered. I hope I’m going to die in a way that my friends can happily remember me.

How would that preach?

Well, it needs to be preached. People never hear sermons about dying. Learning how to make that not a forbidden topic would be a very important thing for the contemporary church.

When I lecture to lay audiences, I ask them how they want to die. For people in our society the response is fairly consistent: They want to die quickly, painlessly, in their sleep and without being a burden. They want to die painlessly, in their sleep, and quickly because when they die they don’t want to have to know they’re dying. So now they ask physicians to keep them alive to the point that when they die they don’t have to know they’re dying—and then they blame physicians for keeping them alive to no point.

In *The Book of Common Prayer* in the Great Litany, there’s the prayer, “save me from all oppression, conspiracy, and rebellion; from violence, battle, and murder; and from dying suddenly and unprepared.” In the Middle Ages, what people feared was not death, they feared God. They prayed to be saved from a sudden death because they wanted to have time to repent and have their lives appropriately positioned to face God. Now we just fear death.

Could you trace the history of how Western society has approached viewing medicine and its relationship to death?

I think medicine had offered up until the last hundred years or so, basically, care. You probably were not going to get much better but we could teach you how to live with your illness. Now medicine, allegedly because of scientific breakthroughs, is about cure. That puts an extraordinary pres-

sure on physicians to do more than they can. The fact of the matter is, you’re not going to get out of life alive, but people want to ask of physicians more than they can deliver and it’s very tempting to try to deliver that.

The idea of creating a dialogue on what patients should expect and should not expect in medicine is very interesting. Many current writings and commentaries on medicine tend to deal with the ethics of care for physicians, they don’t approach the ethics of being a patient.

Right, I think so-called medical ethics has put far too much emphasis upon the physician and not the patient. I think patients need to be trained to know what to ask for. And just like we need to learn how to die, we need to learn how to be sick. Currently people, I think, ask far too much out of physicians.

You co-wrote a book, *Growing Old in Christ*. Do you think you’re growing old in Christ?

I’m trying to grow old among Christians who are helping me to grow old in Christ. I praise God for making that possible.

The essay Laura Yordy and I wrote in that book on friendship and what it means to grow old within friendship is crucial for me. Friendship not only with other elderly people but across generations—it’s very important to have friends across generations. Christians, like anyone, do not want to die.

Life is a wonderful gift that we are obligated to live out in service to our fellow brothers and sisters. But it’s not the overriding good. Friendship with God is the good that should form both how we live and how we die. When we learn how to be friends with God we learn something about what it means to die well.

Reprinted by permission of *Church Health Reader* (www.chreader.org).

Worldwide community: *Upper Room* launches regional family reunions

BY SARAH WILKE
Special Contributor

I’m getting ready to go to a family reunion and I can’t wait. The packing and planning, the anticipation, the emails and text messages flying back and forth as travel arrangements are made.

What makes the gathering later this month so special is that I will be joining brothers and sisters in Christ who are part of the *Upper Room* family in Latin America and the Caribbean. These



Sarah Wilke

are the faithful servant leaders who are translating, printing, and distributing the Spanish and Portuguese editions of *The Upper Room* daily devotional guide, as well as sustaining Emmaus and Chrysalis communities in Mexico, Puerto Rico, Brazil, Argentina and the Dominican Republic, among other countries.

I’ve never met this branch of our family before, but we have been planning this time together in Brazil since I joined the staff as publisher in July 2009. For five days we will pray and worship in community, work to improve our business and ministry models, and plan for the future.

This will be the first of five regional family reunions *The Upper Room* will host during the next two years. Other gatherings are planned in South Africa, Greece, Australia and India. *The Upper Room* daily devotional guide is available in 40 languages and in over 100 countries.

Just think: Millions of people—more than we can measure—are reading the same meditation, studying the same Scripture text, and praying the same prayer every single day. This little book serves as a place where the world meets to pray, and this powerful “take a moment to spend with God” movement has formed a worldwide family.

In trying to grasp the scope of this movement, I cannot help but think of the original upper room, the place where the resurrected Christ appeared, behind locked doors, and showed the disciples his hands and pierced side (John 20:19-29). Thomas was not with the disciples for Jesus’ first visit. He did not believe until Jesus came again and said, “Put your fingers here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side.

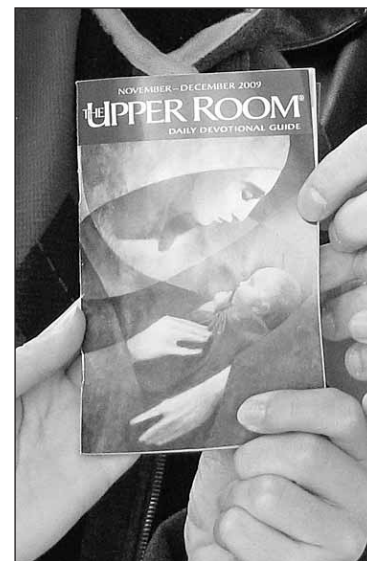
Stop doubting and believe.”

I understand Thomas’s doubt. It’s hard to imagine that millions of people around the world are connected to a ministry in Nashville, Tenn. I doubted a fledging French edition could be published and distributed during the recent civil strife in Côte d’Ivoire, but it was. I was uncertain that funds would become available to provide copies to spiritually hungry persons in Cuba, or folks struggling for hope in Louisiana or Haiti, but they were. My hard-to-believe list goes on. Gratefully, living with doubt leads us to prayer and community.

Like Thomas who needed to see Christ for himself, I need to see and be with this worldwide family. The personal connections will banish the doubts and bolster my belief. I want to hear, firsthand, their stories of struggle and great joy. I want to see how they participate in God’s work in the world. I want to experience their passion and strength, knowing that this will better equip me for my own role. By praying with this family, I know I will learn more about prayer.

The global family of Upper Room Ministries, Emmaus and Chrysalis ministries bears witness to the risen Christ’s awesome presence in the world today. You, too, can be a part of this powerful international movement through your own prayers, and I invite you to connect to these gatherings as we file ongoing updates at www.upperroom.org.

Ms. Wilke is publisher of *The Upper Room* and associate general secretary of the General Board of Discipleship in Nashville, Tenn.



COURTESY PHOTO

Each day, the *Upper Room* devotional guide is read by more than 2.5 million people.

How to recognize, respond to bullying in local churches

BY LAURIE HALLER
Special Contributor

It was 6 a.m. in Chobe National Park in the southern African nation of Botswana. We had just entered the park when we came face to face with a most extraordinary sight. A wild dog streaked by us in the bush in hot pursuit of an impala. Following along in a Jeep, we watched the impala change direction and the dog slowing down. Yes! The impala won, I rejoiced.

After rounding a corner, it all became clear. The impala ran straight into a waiting pack of wild dogs, which dragged the impala right in front of our Jeep. With methodical precision, they literally ripped the impala apart and ate it alive.

Watching five wild dogs attack a poor impala turned my stomach, yet it is a natural and necessary part of nature. What causes my stomach to churn even more is en-

countering human bullies who intimidate, manipulate and shred other people to pieces for no reason other than to flaunt power and satisfy damaged egos. This kind of behavior is a consequence of our separation from God and our best selves: *"For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life."* (Ephesians 2:10)

Bullies can be found everywhere people are. Yes, there are even bullies in the church. In fact, the power that bullies hold over good and faithful disciples of Jesus Christ is one of the prime reasons that many of our churches are unhealthy and dis-eased.

• Ted, the church treasurer, intentionally delays paying the pastors and staff, withholds ministry shares, and diverts special giving to the general fund. Why? Because it's a way for him to exert power when he has little control over the rest of his life. No one has ever confronted Ted.

• Jim has been the chair of the staff parish relations committee for 20 years precisely because he can control the pastor, which he delights in doing. Ever wonder why no pastor has stayed more than four years in Jim's church? When the pastor becomes trusted and beloved, Jim becomes jealous and "arranges" for a crisis that results in a pastoral move. No one has the courage to break the pattern.

• Amanda, the church council

chair, has a way of intimidating people by her demeanor, words and actions. Other church council members are fed up with her childish behavior, but no one will stand up to her. They simply stop coming, and nothing is accomplished.

• Holly has unilaterally decided to be in charge of the sanctuary. No matter how the worship design committee sets up the chancel with banners and other visuals for worship, they arrive on Sunday morning to discover that Holly has rearranged everything to suit her. The committee would rather tiptoe around Holly than confront her.

One of the biggest misconceptions Christians have is that when people ask Jesus Christ into their life and become a disciple, they will automatically give up their bullying ways. In reality, bullies may have a deep faith but still be emotionally immature and unhealthy.

Do you know any church bullies? Church bullies misuse power in order to silence, abuse or hurt others. They relate to people through coercion, sarcasm, ridicule, blaming, fear, harassment, over-reacting and manipulation. This can happen in many ways, including dominating conversation at meetings, sabotaging church council votes, wielding Scripture as a weapon, verbally attacking others, withholding their pledge, and destructive gossip in the church parking lot.

All shapes and sizes

We cannot deal with bullies until we first understand them. Bullies often slander others because they are jealous of and/or feel threatened by the competence of their victims. Bullies hurt people because they are hurting themselves. They often lack self-awareness and self-integration, carry baggage from their past, have low self-esteem, thrive on conflict, demonstrate a lack of inclusivity and sensitivity, and take authority which is not theirs.

Bullies target those who are vulnerable because they have often been bullied themselves and that's the only way they know to relate to other people. They crave acceptance but only know how to get it by intimidating others. Bullies are obsessed with power and authority but are not self-differentiated enough to trust their insecurities to God and recognize that true authority comes from servanthood.

Bullies come in all shapes and sizes: men and women, young and old, clergy and laity.

How do we break the cycle of bullying in the church and restore emotional health to our congregations?

- Provide training for clergy and church members to name bad behavior in gracious but firm ways.
- Ensure that the nominations committee does its work well. Every committee needs a strong, capable chairperson who uses established processes such as a written agenda and decision-making procedures. This prevents bullies from hijacking meetings.

'In reality, bullies may have a deep faith but still be emotionally immature and unhealthy.'

- Establish a church-wide conflict resolution policy that is widely circulated and followed (i.e., the Rule of Christ in Matthew 18) so that victims of bullying know where to go with their concerns and bullies are prevented from having their way.

- Do not elect bullies to positions of leadership.

- Offer classes on emotional intelligence, communication skills and reconciliation so that all church members can grow in emotional as well as spiritual maturity.

Should church leaders ever ask a bully to leave the church? I don't usually encourage a pastor or lay leaders to ask anyone to leave the church because I believe that, through God's grace, all people can change, even bullies. However, when bullies know that their behavior will no longer be tolerated, they often choose to find another church where they can wreak havoc.

I've seen five wild dogs tear apart an impala: a gruesome sight but a necessary expression of nature's survival of the fittest. I've also witnessed a bully viciously attack a fellow church member: far more ugly because it runs counter to the image of God which is in each of our hearts.

And, praise God, I've observed church leaders break the power of bullies by their calm and direct response.

The Rev. Haller is the Grand Rapids District Superintendent of the West Michigan Conference. Reprinted from her blog, *Leading From the Heart*.

REFLECTIONS

A long-term marriage offers joy, takes work

BY BISHOP WOODY W. WHITE
UMR Columnist

A recent newspaper article caught my attention and proved to be most interesting. The headline indicated that more long-term marriages are ending in divorce. The article went on to illustrate by pointing to some prominent public figures whose marriages ended in separation and divorce after more than 20 years of what appeared to be strong and unbreakable bonds of matrimony.

The article did not offer statistics, only these high profile examples. But it did cause me to pause and reflect, especially since I read it as we approached June, still a popular month for weddings. I wondered how many couples preparing for their wedding day saw the same article.

The common thinking used to be that if a marriage endured the first seven years, it was on its way to survival. Of course, such a conclusion proved to be without foundation. However, observing couples end a marriage after 25 or more years is quite unsettling.

Whatever else marriage requires, it does require hard work. The result is well worth the investment. No relationship demands so much of individuals as does the lifetime covenant and commitment of marriage. For some couples, the relationship develops with ease and few challenges along the way. For many others, it is filled with pitfalls, including the vagaries of time, and requires constant tending, review and assessment.

Two people vowing to live together "till death do us part" is pretty risky, especially when they are still growing and developing in so many ways. Add the overwhelming power of physical and sexual attraction to the dynamic, and the importance of love in the relationship might get less weight than it deserves, causing problems spiritually and relationally.

Couples, as they mature into the marriage relationship, discover the hard work required to shape a lasting and mutually supportive and satisfying life together. Since each person changes with time, so does

the relationship. Thus, the work of marriage does not stop after seven years or 27. Neither does its joy and sense of fulfillment. A marriage should never be taken for granted, nor should one's spouse!

I am certain I could and should have been a better spouse. My wife recently said to me quite matter-of-factly, "Woodie, you know you have a lot of quirks!" I was stunned. She had never said that before. In fact, over the years she has kept her personal criticisms of me to a minimum.

Yet, she was absolutely correct. As I reflect on our years of marriage, my wife has been remarkably patient, understanding, and most especially forgiving. We brought to our relationship incredible flexibility, which helped.

We have 15 siblings between us! This taught us something about adjusting to diverse personalities. She had three older brothers, which prepared her well to navigate the male ego!

Two people coming into a marriage bring distinct personalities, unique histories, often competing values and expectations. Without Christ at the center, the relationship can be a daunting task indeed.

A lasting marriage requires listening to one another, being willing to compromise, and working at understanding another point of view. And, at least on my part, it has often required saying, "I'm sorry." Thankfully, my wife has been willing to say, "I forgive you."

I suppose there is no automatic number of years after which a marriage is "safe," so that it is no longer necessary to be sensitive to a spouse's needs, concerns or feelings. Each day provides an opportunity for enhancing or damaging the relationship.

For all those couples about to begin a life together, as well as those already well into one, marriage is a blessed gift of God. But it requires a commitment to living together faithfully, and that means doing the work necessary to keep the marriage strong.

Oh, yes, on June 3 we celebrate our 50th wedding anniversary. And I am still working at it!

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



Laurie Haller



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