

IN THIS ISSUE

Bishop Crutchfield:
'Lives depend on it'
3A

Mission Hearts
helps Haiti's deaf
community
5A

Youth gather for
learning, worship,
celebration
6A

School of
Christian Mission
8A



Hank Godwin, director of the 2011 Ozark Mission Project camp at Lakewood UMC North Little Rock, shows campers a photo from an early meeting of the people who helped create OMP. The late 1980s-era photo shows, from left, Mary Beck, Merriam Beck, Laverne Keahey, Charlotte and Renee Swafford (standing), Amanda Moore, Mark Lasater, Laura Haas and Allan Bruner.

AUM PHOTO BY AMY FORBUS

Q&A: 25 years of mission through OMP

Ozark Mission Project (OMP) is a home-grown ministry that began in 1986 with 35 volunteers and campers at a single weeklong camp.

Now, volunteers come from as far away as Nebraska to be a part of OMP's Arkansas summer mission experiences, which this year included 12 camps and almost 700 campers.

This year, OMP celebrates its 25th year in ministry, and will mark the milestone with an Oct. 29 celebration at Lakewood UMC North Little Rock. OMP executive director Nancy Mulhearn spoke recently with *Arkansas United Methodist* editor **Amy Forbus**.

For those who may have never experienced OMP, will you give our readers a brief description?

OMP is about bringing youth and adults together to go out and serve in a community those who need home repair, those who need visiting, and sharing God's word and God's love, and to know they're valued as a child of God.

How long have you been involved in OMP?

I started out in 1989 as an adult driver, and I did that for about five years. Then I was asked to be a volunteer program person, and I did that for two or three years.

And then one year a need came up for a director

about a week before camp started, and I didn't know any better! So that's when I started directing. I did that for five or six years.

In 2000, my husband's job transferred us to Oklahoma. At that time, I was chairperson of the steering committee, so I had to resign from it when we moved.

A year or two after I left, Renee Henson became the person in charge, so program meetings and committee meetings moved to the Ft. Smith/Van Buren area. I was only two hours away, in Tulsa, so I drove back to meetings.

In 2004, OMP decided to hire an executive director. I applied and was hired, so for two years I was executive director while living in Oklahoma. Then, fortunately, my husband's job allowed us to move back to Conway in 2006. So of course, I moved back here with the job and have been with it ever since.

In addition to creating the executive director position, what kinds of things have come along with OMP's expansion?

Developing the committees—not that we have more committees, but that the committees are more involved in the whole process. The program committee is more involved in planning worship, in planning activities on

[See Q&A, page 10A]

ARKANSAS REMEMBERS

Marking the anniversary of 9/11 attacks

BY MARTHA TAYLOR
Arkansas Conference

September 11.

8:46 a.m., 9:03 a.m., 9:37 a.m., 10:03 a.m.

This date and these times changed the United States of America. The attacks on the World Trade Center towers, the Pentagon and the downing of Flight 93 over Shanksville, Penn., left the country stunned and families shattered.

This year's anniversary of the attacks falls on Sunday, and United Methodist churches in Arkansas are planning to commemorate the day that ended nearly 3,000 lives and to remember the men and women who responded that day without regard to their own safety.

In Fort Smith, five churches and 90 singers from different Christian denominations have partnered to create a community-wide Peace Service of song and scripture readings. The service will take place at 3:00 p.m., Sept. 11 in the sanctuary of First UMC Fort Smith.

One of the event organizers, Nancy Vernon, said choir members were moved to tears during rehearsals.

"Ten years is such a short time when you think of it," Vernon said. "The music is so beautiful and the memories are so poignant."

Vernon said they have singers ranging from high school juniors and seniors to octogenarians. The combined choir includes voices from Southside High School's Johnny Reb singers, the Western Arkansas Chamber Choir and representatives from First UMC, First Presbyterian and St. John's Episcopal Church.

[See 9/11, page 2A]

Starting from scratch

BY DEENA MARIE HAMILTON
Special Contributor

Y'all, I'm just gonna be honest with you: I've been through some major transitions. I went from being the pastor of a church to being a church member.

I'm starting from scratch. I'm realizing that I need to go back to the basics. I am re-evaluating my relationship with God and others, because change is good no matter how difficult it may seem at the time.

I reflected on my own need for change as I went to visit and worship with some friends for fellowship.

A community came alive one sweltering summer evening at the Community Fellowship presented by Duncan and Pulaski Heights United Methodist Churches.

I felt like I was transported back in time to a country church where everybody was hot, but it didn't matter because we were quenched by the Word and worship. It was the most beautiful thing I've ever experienced.

It reminded me of the time when church was about family. And when I say family... I'm not talking about our biological parents, but the host of family that we inherited when we chose fellowship in the church. Somehow we have gotten away from that, but we're working on it because events like this are taking place.

The senior pastor of Pulaski Heights, the Rev. Britt Skarda, delivered the message, and he said something that moved me to shout. He basically said that we need to acknowledge whose Kingdom it is, whose Kingdom we serve in, because without Christ as our focal point, what we do in Kingdom-building will be ineffective.

He continued by saying that young people in this day and age believe in God and accept Christ as their personal Savior, but don't have much faith in the church. Unfortunate as this may sound, I see that it is true because my own daughter is in this stage of her young adulthood. But what I do know is that eventually she will return to the church because she grew up

surrounded by the extended family of the church.

I know, because I went through the same thing. And as I matured in my faith, the church was the first place that I ran to, and I've been running for God since.

I personally believe that the family is one of God's most effective means of grace to offer the love of



Deena Marie Hamilton

Christ to the world. If we don't realize that we are all in this together, we will continue to spin our wheels and be ineffective in making disciples for Christ.

How can we add to God's family when we ourselves struggle with each other as members of the family of God?

As a united family, we should be teaching, demonstrating and replicating the teachings of Christ. Through our faith-based practices, we should be reproducing the character, ways and mission of our Lord and Savior. Making disciples for Christ should be both our aim and our end result.

'As we examine the needs of the community and how we want to evangelize, remember it's all right to start over.'

Even though times change, God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. We've come this far with what little faith we have, leaning on the Lord. But greater things are yet to come through us. Through the Spirit and our

own imaginations, we can be the church that God has called us to be.

As we examine the needs of the community and how we want to evangelize, remember it's all right to start over. God gives us many gifts and graces to empower us to evolve with the changing needs of the community.

God is faithful and grants us infinite mercy. When we know we need to start from scratch, God will always lead the way.

Be blessed and empowered!

Hamilton fellowships and works in family ministries and mission at Wesley Chapel and Duncan UMCs in Little Rock. She can be reached at pinktitration14@gmail.com.



EDITOR'S CORNER

BY AMY FORBUS

For the first time since my arrival last year, the "editor's corner" column truly takes up just a corner of the page. And that's a good thing.

We have less space available for my ramblings because so much is happening with the Arkansas Conference.

Youth have found spiritual nourishment through Junior and Senior High Assemblies and the biennial National Youth Harambee. United Methodists of all ages participated in a benefit event for Methodist Family Health. In Letters to the Editor, our disaster response coordinators have provided a crucial reminder of our duties during National Disaster Preparedness Month.

The news includes Arkansans reaching outside of our Conference, too. On page 3A, it's the Congo, Russia and the Middle East; on page 5A, Haiti. On our cover, it's caring for our nation as we remember a tragedy that changed the way we see the world.

I have a soft spot for our other cover story, too: Though I've only attended one time—so far—I can tell you that my experience at Ozark Mission Project turned out to be no small influence in my faith formation. Happy 25th anniversary, OMP!

There's more to tell, but I'm about to run out of what little space I have... So I'll let these pages speak for themselves. Read, learn, be inspired by the work of your sisters and brothers in the faith.

9/11 (continued from page 1A)

Two churches in Little Rock have invited internationally-recognized speakers to be part of their worship services.

The Rev. Dr. Tony Campolo will be preaching Sept. 11 at 10:45 a.m. worship at Trinity UMC, 1101 N. Mississippi in Little Rock. Campolo will lecture at 2:30 p.m. that day and will be available for a book signing.

"Our church is aware that the world has changed dramatically, especially in the decade since 9/11," said the Rev. Betsy Singleton Snyder, senior pastor at Trinity. "Rev. Campolo will speak to the social, economic, technological and global changes that have impacted the church and the way the church must learn to adapt quickly to these changes."

Brian McLaren will be the guest preacher during the 8:15 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. worship services at Pulaski Heights UMC in Little Rock on September 11. McLaren is a

well-known author and Christian activist, who has appeared on numerous radio and television news programs and was named by *Time* magazine as one of America's 24 most influential evangelicals.

McLaren's visit is part of the T.J. and Inez Raney Preaching Series and coincides with the presentation of the church's fifth annual Bishop Hicks Peace Awards, which are given to individuals or institutions for their efforts to promote peace with justice. This year's recipients are Freddie Nixon and Philander Smith College. Brunch will begin at 11:45 a.m. and the public is welcome to join McLaren for a discussion and book signing.

Interfaith activities

The Rev. Steve Copley, director of Arkansas Justice for Our Neighbors, is a member of an interfaith group that has planned a brief Sept. 11 service of peace at the William J. Clinton Presidential Library in Little Rock. The 2:30 p.m. gathering will include remarks by Gov. Mike Beebe and

Little Rock Mayor Mark Stodola, as well as readings on the theme of peace by young adults from many different faith traditions.

Copley said religious leaders from Jewish, Muslim and Christian traditions and perhaps others will walk together to the front of the gathering and read a special prayer that has been written. At press time, Arkansas Area Bishop Charles Crutchfield planned to participate in the event.


"There are many different cultures and faiths represented in our state and in our country," Copley said. "It's important to come together to speak words of peace, faith and hope. With the devastation and pain experienced on Sept. 11, 2001, it's important to share in a time of hope and healing."

Resources can be found on the General Board of Discipleship website, www.gbod.org, for the 10th anniversary of Sept. 11. Churches will find preaching, teaching, music and prayer materials, as well as images and videos.

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Submission Deadlines

Issue Date	Submission Deadline
Oct. 7	Sept. 21
Nov. 4	Oct. 20
Dec. 2	Nov. 15



AN OCCASIONAL WORD from the Bishop

BY CHARLES CRUTCHFIELD

Dear Friends:

We have much to be about this year in our church in Arkansas. There will be a called session of the Conference Oct. 29 to adopt the final budget for 2012.

I trust the session will be quick and to the point, but we will have time to hear some progress reports from the several task forces appointed to help us carry out the Imagine Ministry proposals that were adopted by the Annual Conference.

There will be a temptation all year to focus all our energy on just what we are doing in Arkansas. As the old Gospel hymn says, "Yield not to temptation...."

Our mission field is local *and* it is world-wide. The United Methodist Church has pledged to raise \$75 million dollars to help eradicate malaria. There will be a major opportunity for us to participate in eliminating this scourge as a significant threat to our brothers and sisters across the world. Lives depend on it.

Our Annual Conference has been engaged in a strong program of well-digging in the Congo. This effort must continue. Clean, accessible water is critical to the Congolese people. Lives depend on it.

The Annual Conference has been challenged to raise funds to help purchase a new airplane for Wings of the Morning. This mercy flight mission in the Congo enables critically ill persons to get to medical facilities, delivers vital medical supplies and provides transportation for mission teams, doctors and church leaders to inaccessible areas of the Congo. This is an incredibly thrilling

opportunity to make a difference. Lives depend on it.

Our Conference is also a partner in another important life-saving operation—a spiritual life-saving operation.

Some years ago, the Conference decided to be an important factor in the restoration of spiritual renewal in Russia. As a part of the Russia Initiative, we have been asked to support Moscow Seminary.

This school is the source of trained, United Methodist leadership for the present and future in Russia. The young people who are being educated at Moscow Seminary are filled with a vital passion for doing the work of ministry which leads to salvation in Jesus Christ. It is challenging. It is exciting. It is important. Lives depend on it.

As we forge ahead with all we must do locally, let us remember the words of John Wesley: "The world is my (our) parish."

Lives depend on it.

Faithfully,

Charles Crutchfield



Called session of the Arkansas Annual Conference

Saturday, Oct. 29, 2011

Horner Hall, Hot Springs Convention Center

Encounters with those working for peace in the Middle East

BY ALLYNE SOLOMON
Special Contributor

This was not a normal sightseeing trip.

I had accepted an invitation to travel to Israel and Palestine with the United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) Peace with Justice delegation. During the July trip, we visited several Advance projects and schools.

The groups we met with are all Advance Projects supported by money given through the United Methodist Church. They do great work in hard circumstances. Until then, I had never realized how many projects our church supports.

Though it wasn't our primary focus, we did some sightseeing. Some of the many places we visited were the Mount of Olives, Garden of Gethsemane, the Wailing Wall, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Via Dolorosa, the Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem Bible College and Dar al-Kalima College, a liberal arts college that teaches film, music, jewelry making, glass work and tour guiding.

As we traveled, we noticed that there were two sets of roads. The road we used was smooth, had perfect lanes and was bordered by green grass. The other road had walls running along it with barbed wire fences.

GBGM missionary Janet Lewis explained that the roads upon which we traveled belonged to the Israelis.

Only Israelis were allowed to drive on those roads. Palestinians cannot drive on them without permission. The terribly maintained roads with walls, barbed wire fences and potholes were for Palestinians. Lewis called it a "Jim Crow roads system."

Meals are an event. It was a good thing we walked a lot; otherwise, we would have all gained weight! The table was never empty. It is their custom to make sure guests never go away hungry, and they do not allow doggie bags. Evening meals lasted two or three hours while we dined and socialized.

We met many amazing people and were blessed to have met them. At the Wadi Fukin Community Center a 22-year-old man, Adel, shared part of his story. He was excited because that day, he had finally taken his high school exit exams.

In January of his senior year, Israeli soldiers had burst into his parents' home and taken him away. He was interrogated and imprisoned for four years with no trial, no verdict and no charges. It was explained to us that Israelis do this to Palestinian youth in hopes that they will leave the country. Many do, but Adel did not. Upon his release, he chose to complete high school and is planning to attend college.

Going to Israel and Palestine and walking in the area where Jesus ministered was unforgettable. At times, I was overwhelmed and found myself not being the best Christian I should be. At other times, my sense

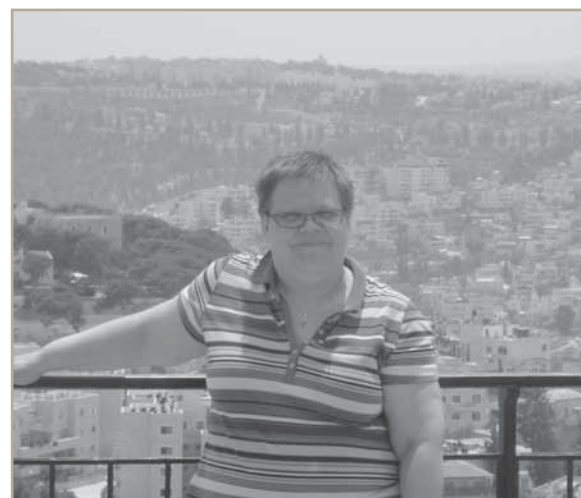
of social justice was stirred to the point that I wondered how the world can be so blind and not see the human rights violations here. Palestinians are not the only ones suffering. The poor and outcast of Israel also suffer.

We went to Wi' Am Conflict Resolution Community Center in Bethlehem. The Center sits against the wall that Israel has built around the town. The center's programming, including a morning children's program, deals with conflict resolution among families, friends and community.

We ate lunch with the director, Zoughbi, and three of his four children. Marcella, his oldest daughter, is going to college in the U.S. Her major is in business management, specializing in NGOs (non-governmental organizations). As she and I talked, I asked where she wanted to go because with that degree, the world is at her fingertips.

Marcella replied, "When I graduate I want to come back here, and work with my dad to make this place better." I still tear up when I remember that. This was the sign of hope I was looking for. This young woman could see the possible in a seemingly impossible situation.

We had different guides during our visit, but our last guide made a deep impression upon me. He was a young Israeli man who, after he had served his mandatory time in the military, wanted to do human rights work in Israel. This is not looked



Allyne Solomon, pictured here at the Mount of Olives, was part of a team that traveled to the Holy Land to talk with people who feel the impact of Middle East conflict in their daily lives.

COURTESY PHOTO

upon favorably within his culture, so to earn a living, he became a tour guide. When he is not guiding tourists through the area, he works on human rights issues.

As we talked, I learned that he had given up his Jewish faith because he could not keep his faith and treat Palestinians and others so harshly and cruelly. He said, "I am an Israeli, but not of the Jewish faith. I have lost my faith."

Our group knew this was a door God had opened, and we needed to walk through. We talked to him about his feelings and asked why he felt this way. In turn, he asked us, "Why do Methodists care about this Palestinian/Israeli issue?"

It was a God thing—not just for me, but for the whole group. We told him our founder, John Wesley, instilled in us a social justice conscience. Wesley took on the issues of his day in England and then in the

Americas. As United Methodists we want to change the social justice climate. It is in our DNA.

He wanted to know what made us Methodists. We explained four tools we use in our faith journey—tradition, experience, reason and scripture—to determine what we as Christians should do. It became a long conversation with him.

The next day we happened to see him in Jerusalem and he said to me, "I tried to get online last night and look up the Methodist church, but my Internet was down. I want to learn more about your church." Janet, the GBGM Missionary, will be getting him more information. It warms my heart when I think of it.

Solomon is a GBGM Church and Community Worker in Arkansas' Lower Delta Parish Community Outreach. She may be reached at allynesolomon@yahoo.com.

Documentary by retired pastor garners film festival screening

BY MEGAN HEYL
Special Contributor

"At the Crossroads," a documentary focusing on the challenges churches face in an evolving society, will be shown at the Maranatha Christian International Film Festival, held Sept. 2 and 3 in Rochester, N.Y.

Retired United Methodist pastor the Rev. Bob Hager, producer of "At the Crossroads," resides in Paragould. Having majored in Radio/TV in the 1960s, Hager had always wanted to work in film, but found God's calling too strong to ignore. He became a pastor in the 1970s, serving for 36 years. Upon his retirement, he enrolled at Arkansas State University to further pursue his passion for film.

"At the Crossroads" came about during a broadcast documentary course Hager took in spring 2011. All participating students were asked to pitch an idea for a documentary. During his ministry, Hager had noted the changes throughout society over the last 50 years; however, he did not see the same changes in the church.

"I began to ask why," Hager said when recalling his last ten years as a pastor. Using his own experience as inspiration, he started to conceive the story for his film.

He pitched his idea to

instructor Jesse Abdenour, and it wasn't long before Hager learned that his documentary was among those selected to be produced. He quickly began working on the project with director Galen Perkins, a graduate student at ASU. The two finished the film by the end of the semester.

Hager said he hopes never again to work on a film with such a small window of time available. "Neither of us had any idea how hard making the film would be," he said. "I couldn't have done it without Galen."

The documentary covers the impact that a changing culture has on local churches. Following the Fellowship Bible Church of Jonesboro, Ark., the film shows the church's struggles in adopting new methods for approaching contemporary society. In the film, they demonstrate their work in outreach through missional teams.

Hager envisions "At the Crossroads" as the first part of a three-part documentary. The first part covers the crisis experienced by churches resistant to evolving with the times. The second part, on which he hopes to begin work in the next few years, will cover the health of the church. The final part will explore the church reengaging culture.

Hager will attend the Maranatha Festival both days to

speak and answer questions about his film. The festival, founded by Bryan M. Little, features work exclusively from Christian filmmakers.

Hager has submitted "At the Crossroads" to many local film festivals. The Ozark Foothills Film Festival of Batesville has already given word that they will be showing it during their next event in the spring of 2012.

For more background information on the documentary, including selected clips, visit www.pastorasperson.com/crossfire.

Heyl, a member of Brookland UMC, is a junior at Arkansas State University, where she majors in journalism and is active in the Wesley Foundation campus ministry.

ABOVE: The Rev. Bob Hager prepares a digital audio recorder before conducting an interview for his documentary, "At the Crossroads."

PHOTO BY GALEN PERKINS

RIGHT: Arkansas State University graduate student Galen Perkins works on editing part of "At the Crossroads," a documentary he directed with the Rev. Bob Hager as producer.

PHOTO BY BOB HAGER



Kaleidoscope Kids Auction set for Sept. 16



Servina Children & Families

The 13th Annual Kaleidoscope Kids Auction is slated for 6:30 p.m. Friday, Sept. 16 at the Junior League of Little Rock's Woman's City Club Building, 401 Scott Street in Little Rock.

All proceeds will benefit Kaleidoscope Grief Center, a program within the Methodist Family Health Continuum of Care and Arkansas' only grief center for children and families, as well as Methodist Counseling Clinics statewide. The event will include heavy hors d'oeuvres, beverages, music and more than 100 live and silent auction items. Tickets are \$75 for individuals, \$125 per couple.

For information, contact Ashley Coldiron at 501-661-0720 ext. 7304 or acoldiron@methodistfamily.org, or visit methodistfamily.org.

Sept. 17 Imagine Justice Summit features Church and Society keynote speaker

In conjunction with the Arkansas Conference of the United Methodist Church and the Arkansas Board of Church and Society, the Imagine Justice Coalition of Arkansas will host the Imagine Justice Summit on Saturday, Sept. 17, 2011, at Philander Smith College in Little Rock.

With content based on Micah 6:8, "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to

love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" the summit will deal with justice issues that affect everyone.

Bishop Jonathan Keaton had originally been scheduled to deliver the keynote address, but is unable to attend; in his stead, the event now features Susan Burton, who serves as program director for seminar design, education and leadership formation at the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS). Bishop Charles

Crutchfield also will speak and preside at Holy Communion.

Registration begins at 8:30 a.m., and the event concludes at 4:00 p.m.

The Imagine Justice Coalition includes the Arkansas chapters of Black Methodists for Church Renewal and Methodist Federation for Social Action.

For details, contact Liza Godwin, lizagodwin@sbcglobal.net, or view the brochure online at arumc.org.

VOLUNTEERS IN MISSION

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

Disaster response team sign-up

To learn how your church can help those affected by this spring's storms and flooding, contact Conference disaster response coordinators Byron and Janice Mann at rainmaker@arkansas.net. They will add your team to the volunteer list and keep you aware of opportunities to help.

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.

Help the LR Wesley Foundation

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 (mobile).

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

National Disaster Preparedness Month

September is National Disaster Preparedness Month, and we would like to share some things that will help us be prepared should disaster strike. Everyone—individuals, families, churches, businesses—should have a plan. We recommend visiting www.ready.arkansas.gov for information on personal, family and community preparedness.

We want everyone to know that United Methodists have many opportunities to serve when disaster strikes. Early Response Teams provide a caring Christian presence and help with debris removal, clean-up and prevention of more damage. Spiritual and Emotional Care Teams help people facing the unique emotional and spiritual challenges that accompany disaster. Local churches can prepare to help their own communities through our “Connecting Neighbors” training. Volunteers in Mission Teams help rebuild the homes and lives of survivors.

Individuals and churches have opportunity to support the

United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) with special offerings, disaster kits or by volunteering at Sager Brown Depot. The same goes for Arkansas Rice Depot, one of several disaster response partners right here at home. We also encourage everyone to contribute to “One Great Hour of Sharing,” which allows UMCOR to reach out to those affected by disaster.

For more information on any of these options, contact us at rainmaker@arkansas.net.

Byron and Janice Mann
Arkansas Conference Disaster Response Coordinators

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.

‘Blessing of the backpacks’



The number of students present swelled to near 50 for a “Blessing the Backpacks” service on Sunday, Aug. 14 at First UMC Corning. The Rev. Ann Ferris welcomed students and teachers to the altar railing for the special ceremony that was part of morning worship. Students who did not already have a backpack were given one before the service. A celebratory back-to-school potluck lunch followed the worship gathering.

PHOTO BY JIM CLIFTON

Ft. Smith ministry engages with deaf community in Haiti

BY WINEVA HANKAMER
Special Contributor

Two things were distinctly visible from the sky as the airplane in which I traveled, along with a volunteer team from the organization Mission Hearts, approached Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

One was the beauty of the western third of the island of Hispaniola, where Haiti resides, with its unusual shape and miles of seacoast and green scenery. The other was the destruction caused by the earthquake of Jan. 12, 2010.

Our team was easily able to spot the brightly colored wooden houses that serve as temporary shelter for residents of the “deaf village,” our destination. Mission Hearts, which arose from an outreach program of Mission United Methodist Church in Ft. Smith, Ark., assists deaf and disabled communities around the world in times of disaster.

After the earthquake in Haiti, some 400 deaf individuals, and families with deaf members, gathered dazed and displaced near the presidential palace, the roof of which still perches perilously at an angle. They were sought out by Friends of Deaf Haiti, a group of hearing-impaired Haitians who live in the United States.

The deaf settled together, at first in donated and makeshift tents. The United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) made two grants to Mission Hearts to cover the cost of food, especially rice and beans, a staple for this singular community. That might not sound like much to the average North American reader, but it is life in Haiti.

Now, through the deaf leadership of this settlement and donations of time and money from organizations including Mission Hearts, Healing Hands, Friends of Deaf Haiti, the 410 Bridge and the International Red Cross/Red Crescent, the community is getting much-needed medical help and food.

In the 18 months since the earthquake, the deaf community has worked hard to keep their little village near the Port-au-Prince airport



Nicole Zatzkin, co-director of Mission Hearts, and Chris White, a registered nurse, teach a first aid class at St. Vincent's School of the Handicapped and Deaf in Port-au-Prince.

PHOTO BY DEE MATHES

crime-free, clean and organized.

Their tents eventually gave way to the brightly colored rows of temporary wooden houses we spied from the airplane, and the settlement has been equipped with latrines, showers and potable water.

Determined to improve their

in Haiti had a hard time believing that a deaf person could attain an education, especially a deaf woman.

We held a medical clinic for two days in the deaf camp, during which we saw a lot of infections, dehydration, asthma, weakness and a broken foot. Through the generous

donation of medicines from churches, including First UMC Huntsville, Texas, and team members, we provided antibiotics and eye and ear washes, as well as a class in first aid.

Our group also trained four women to make paper bead jewelry. Each one pledged to teach another woman so they can begin to sell this jewelry and make money for food and other necessities. One of the four deaf women was appointed as leader in that project.

The hope and spirit of the people of Haiti, and particularly of the deaf community in Port-au-Prince, can serve as an

inspiration to all of us. We can reach out to each other in hope. We can follow Jesus' command, “feed my sheep”—even if it's just with rice and beans.

The Rev. Hankamer is a deacon in the Texas Annual Conference, chair of Texas Partners in Mission and a former consultant of the UMC Deaf and Hard of Hearing Committee. She traveled to Haiti in July 2011 as part of the Mission Hearts team from Mission UMC Ft. Smith. This article originally appeared at umcor.org.

2012 opportunities with Mission Hearts in Haiti

- Feb. 5-13: Youth Camp for Deaf Village/ Infant-care workshop/First Aid Class/Medical Service
- June 17-25: Youth Camp for St. Vincent's School for the Handicapped and Deaf

The June mission is open to teens ages 16 to 17 with a signed parental permission form and a letter of recommendation from their pastor or youth leader. Students ages 14 and 15 may travel with the mission team, but must be accompanied by a parent. For additional information, contact Dee Mathes at hands@pinncm.com or Nicole Zatzkin at NicoleZatzkin@gmail.com or visit missionumc.com/missionhearts.html.

lives and care for their children, residents of the deaf village are building a community feeling that inspires awe. They do whatever they can to make life better. They no longer live in isolation but in a new kind of neighborhood, with the common goal of recovery from the earthquake.

Our team included deaf role models for the deaf community in Haiti. When we introduced our nurse, a profoundly hard-of-hearing woman who would be considered deaf in Haiti, mouths dropped and eyes widened with surprise. The deaf



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At summer Assembly, teens learn to live their faith

BY CAITLYN HENDRICKSON
Special Contributor

Every summer toward the end of July, United Methodist teens from all over the state start packing their bags and heading out toward a college campus to the Arkansas Conference Council on Youth Ministry (ACCYM) event called Assembly.

Whether a student attends Junior High Assembly or Senior High Assembly, they will find ways to build a stronger relationship with God, such as a worship band, guest speakers and small groups.

Junior High Assembly is normally the first of the two Assemblies. Each day is full of new activities such as small group Olympics, movie nights and games. Although things change every day, there are also routines built. For example, every morning starts and ends with worship.

Also, the youth at Assembly spend time in assigned small groups. Throughout the week, these groups become close to one another and to God by learning about each other, exploring scriptures, and having conversations about their own personal faith.

"I met true friends and saw God speak through the people I met," said Alex Hendrickson of First UMC Little Rock.

Hanna Barton of First UMC Conway learned "how important it is to be a Christian outside of church, youth and events; and how hard that

can be sometimes," she said. "But if people way back when could sneak out of their houses at night and possibly go to jail to go to church, I can be Christian outside of the church. I have it easy compared to them."

Senior High Assembly is set up much of the same way as Junior High Assembly. The main difference: During Senior High Assembly, youth get to choose workshops in which they are most interested. Some of the sessions include Worship, Drama, Purity for Girls, Purity for Boys, Hot Topics and Art.

Assembly has traditions that carry on from year to year. Youth participate in activities like talent shows, ice cream socials, as well as Catacombs.

Catacombs is a simulation game where youth learn what it means to stand up for their faith and totally trust God, even in situations where they may face incredible adversity, such as trying to find their place of worship while being hunted by "Roman guards" (played by ACCYM members).

"The experience I had during the Catacombs worship was one of my favorite experiences ever, if not my favorite," said Jake West of First UMC North Little Rock. "In that worship, I felt God's unconditional love so strongly that I couldn't hold it in."

"When the guards arrived in the catacomb, no one feared them. They tried to get them to join worship and eventually they did," West said. "That moment was so

touching to me that I was overwhelmed with how strong the faith is of some people, and it seemed to spread. It was one of the best feelings I have ever had."

"My experience at Assembly was extremely refreshing," said Madison Schallhorn, ACCYM president. "It reminded me just to let go and trust that God is going to handle the things in my life. I don't have to have control over everything."

"I had Todd [Lovell] as a small group leader, and he taught me all about what it means to be Methodist. I learned things that were in the [Book of] Discipline that shaped who I was as a Christian and especially a Methodist. I rediscovered what things were important to me and why they were important in my life."

As you can see, Assembly is something unlike anything else. Many youth say it is the best part of their summer. It is an event that is personally very close to my heart. I have been attending since I entered the seventh grade and I look forward to it every year. This event is where I had my first "God experience," and where I made some of my best friends.

Every year I am amazed by the pure love that surrounds me there. To me, as well as to other teens around the state, Assembly is home.

Hendrickson is a member of First UMC Little Rock and the Arkansas Conference Council on Youth Ministry. To learn more about Conference-wide youth activities, visit accym.org.



Youth attending the 2011 Senior High Assembly at the University of the Ozarks kick off their morning with some high-energy dancing.

PHOTO BY CAITLYN HENDRICKSON

ACCYM event dates set for 2011-2012

Refuge: November 4-6, 2011 at Camp Wyldewood in Searcy

A weekend event for students grades 6-9, Refuge is an opportunity to come together to relax and be refreshed through worship, small groups, fun, fellowship and building relationships.

Veritas: February 24-26, 2012 at the Rogers Convention Center

Veritas brings together Arkansas youth in grades 7-12. It draws approximately 1,000 attendees to celebrate, worship, learn, experience, and be energized to serve God.

Mitto: December 26, 2011-January 1, 2012

A new Conference mission opportunity for grades 9-12, Mitto launches this year in central Arkansas, and will rotate among districts around the state thereafter. Look for details in an upcoming issue of the *Arkansas United Methodist*.

Choir Tour: June 24-July 1, 2012

Youth go out to minister to others through music, drama and testimony. The choir is open to youth in grades 9-12. Want the tour to make a stop in your town? Contact Emily Johnson, emily4oaks@aol.com, to invite the choir to your church.

Junior High and Senior High Assembly (separate, simultaneous events): July 22-26, 2012, University of the Ozarks

Assembly provides a summer break, allows for greater relationship building between youth and helps strengthen and nurture them in their relationship with Christ.

YSF Lock-In: August 3, 2012 at Wild River Country

This fundraiser for Youth Service Fund (YSF) makes more money available for youth ministry grants to local churches, both within and outside of the Arkansas Conference. It is ACCYM's second-largest Conference event and the only event sponsored by YSF.

'LET'S PULL TOGETHER' Harambee celebrates gifts of ethnic UM youth



Youth spent time in Bible study as well as celebration through chants, worship and dance at the 2011 gathering of National Youth Harambee, held July 20-24 at Philander Smith College. Sponsored by Black Methodists for Church Renewal (BMCRC), the biennial event celebrates the gifts, talents and willing hearts of ethnic United Methodist youth. The word "harambee" is a South African term meaning "Let's pull together." With the theme, "Running with Passion Towards Leadership and Purpose," this year's event drew 160 young people from all five U.S. jurisdictions.

AUM PHOTOS BY AMY FORBUS



Paul's Fourth Missionary Journey

Follow the Journeys of Paul with Rev. Siegfried Johnson, Senior Pastor of St. James United Methodist Church, Little Rock, on a Mediterranean Cruise visiting sites in Italy, Greece, and Turkey. We depart on May 4, 2012 to

Rome and board Celebrity's newest ship, The Silhouette, following an itinerary including Naples, Corinth, Athens, Ephesus, Rhodes, Santorini, Crete, Venice, and more. For more information and brochure contact Rev. Johnson at sieg@stjames-umc.org.

More than 750 take part in Walk for Children and Families

BY JANE DENNIS
Special Contributor

Triple digit temperatures on Aug. 5 failed to deter more than 750 participants who stepped out in support of Methodist Family Health (MFH) at its 5th annual Walk for Children and Families.

The event drew a hearty crowd, including dozens of church youth groups and participants of all ages, for a hike across the Big Dam Bridge over the Arkansas River at North Little Rock's Cook's Landing. Walkers either raised funds or paid \$20 each to take part in the festivities. Additional funds came from individual donors and corporate sponsors.

The combined efforts raised more than \$85,000, which will pay for a much-needed security fence around the 13 cottages on the Methodist Children's Home campus in Little Rock.

The Walk offered a festive atmosphere for all involved. With the Arkansas River as a backdrop,

participants enjoyed free pizza and ice cream, along with humorous cutout displays for photo opportunities. Damascus Road, a contemporary praise band from First United Methodist Church Arkadelphia, provided music. In addition to water and cooling towels, all registered participants received a Walk for Children and Families T-shirt.

Volunteers from MFH and its sponsor partners worked behind the scenes to keep things running smoothly. Andy Altom, CEO of MFH, and board member Mike Millar joined those stationed at the midpoint of the bridge to cheer on walkers.

"This Walk and all of its success is due to so many factors and so many wonderful people and groups," said Maggie Beeler, MFH's assistant director of development and Walk coordinator.

"Even though it was a hot afternoon, smiles were on all the faces, and everyone grasped why they were out at the Big Dam

Bridge—because they care about kids who need our understanding, love and support the most," she said. "The time and energy it took for all the participants to take part in the Walk was very much appreciated by all the MFH board, staff and families."

The Walk for Children and Families is one of the year's major fund-raisers for Methodist Family Health, which serves as the management company for Methodist Children's Home, Methodist Counseling Clinics across the state, Methodist Behavioral Hospital in Maumelle, Arkansas CARES and Kaleidoscope Grief Center.

Each day, Methodist Family Health provides comprehensive behavioral healthcare services to more than 1,400 children and families across Arkansas.

Dennis, a former editor of the Arkansas United Methodist, is director of communications for Methodist Family Health.



Youth from White Hall UMC and other United Methodists of all ages were among the more than 750 participants in this year's Walk for Children and Families at the Big Dam Bridge.

PHOTO BY JANE DENNIS

THANK YOU.

Methodist Family Health's Walk for Children and Families was a huge success again this year thanks to our dedicated participants, volunteers and generous sponsors. We offer our heartfelt appreciation to everyone for taking steps with us to support our ongoing mission of providing compassionate care to children and families in need.

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'All Things Made New'

School of Christian Mission educates, inspires

BY FRED MARTIN
Special Contributor

With a variety of music, studies, worship and learning, participants at the 2011 Arkansas Conference School of Christian Mission (SCM) were immersed in the theme of this year's school, "All Things Made New."

SCM convened July 27-30 on the campus of Hendrix College in Conway. Seventy-four first-time attendees were among the 281 participants enrolled for the event. The Arkansas Conference Board of Global Ministries, Arkansas Conference United Methodist Women and the United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas sponsored the event, and the Elizabeth Thornburg Workman Fund provided many scholarships.

Doni Martin, a member of First UMC Corning, served as dean and led the planning team and staff during the four-day event.

"All Things Made New" challenged us to understand God's intention to bring hope and wholeness to the world through Jesus Christ," she said. "Each day we learned more about how we could express our theology of mission through prayers, study and songs."

The focus on mission took on a visible form as participants arrived Wednesday afternoon. Food items for the Arkansas Rice Depot's "Backpacks for Kids," delivered from local United Methodist Women units around the state, filled the lobby of the Mills Center.

The three study choices, "Haiti: Challenges and Hope," "Coming Out on the Side of Grace: Forgiveness and Reconciliation" and "Joy to the World: Mission in the Age of Global Christianity" guided participants on a path to move with faith into a life of hope, abundance and joy.

Daily worship and plenary sessions intertwined with the three studies, highlighting the biblical



The Rev. Clyde Hughley, an instructor for the "Haiti: Challenges and Hope" study at the 2011 Arkansas Conference School of Christian Mission, shares a first-hand experience of residing in Haiti. Of the 281 people who attended the school, 74 were first-time participants.

PHOTO BY JAMES HENDRICKS

basis for each, as well as giving examples of ways to use information from the studies in relationships with others.

In recent years, music leaders have been involved in Regional Schools of Christian Mission at the same level as study leaders, to better incorporate music into the conference studies each year. The song services included hymns, songs of praise and the introduction of new music to reinforce study topics.

As adults studied their selected courses, children entering kindergarten through sixth grade studied "Krik, Krak: The Story of Haiti." The youth attended the "Forgiveness and Reconciliation" study.

Youth participants collected funds for their mission project by helping with luggage as participants arrived and departed the event, and by waiting tables at mealtimes. The money they collected as tips from these tasks purchased school supplies for a low-income school and Arkansas Children's Hospital.

"Morning Praise" opened each day at 7:10 a.m. These worship sessions drew large groups together

for a time of singing, praise, devotion and prayer to begin each day's activities. Plenary sessions gave participants the opportunity to share information, education, worship and fellowship.

In two of the four plenaries, children and youth took the stage of Staples Auditorium. The children sang "Animal Choir," the highlight of the song service. Youth spoke of being challenged to form a closer relationship with Christ.

During the final plenary and worship service, the group shared together in a celebration of Holy Communion. The offering benefited UMW Mission Giving and the Board of Global Ministries.

The Arkansas Conference School of Christian Mission 2012 will be held Aug. 1-4, 2012, at Hendrix College. Mary Blassingame will serve as dean. The study topics are determined at least three years in advance, and next year's studies will include "Living Sacramentally and Walking Justly," "The Roma of Europe" and "Poverty."

Martin is a member of First UMC Corning and a past registrar of SCM.



Older elementary, mid-schoolers serve during Destination: Jonesboro

Elizabeth Reisbeck makes a balloon animal for students attending the block party at First UMC Paragould. Reisbeck and 24 other adults, youth leaders and students hosted the party as part of Destination: Jonesboro, the summer mission trip for older elementary and middle school students sponsored by the Northwest District. The two dozen helpers represented First UMC Bella Vista, First UMC Siloam Springs and Elm Springs UMC. In addition to hosting the block party, students served a meal at Mission Outreach in Paragould, interacted with students and adults at Fisher Street UMC Jonesboro and worked in the Witt House, a food pantry ministry of First UMC Paragould.

PHOTO BY KAYLEA HUTSON

Ark. older adult ministries win grants from denomination

Two ministries that provide care for older Arkansans with dementia have each received a grant of \$2,500 from the United Methodist Committee on Older Adult Ministries, part of the denomination's General Board of Discipleship (GBOD).

The Caring Place, a ministry of First UMC Hot Springs, provides services each Monday through Thursday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Founded in 1992 with six participants, it has grown to serving 64 individuals.

The Hot Springs ministry has inspired a similar program at First UMC Magnolia that also received grant funding from GBOD. The Caring Place of Magnolia, which will celebrate its third birthday in October, provides care on Thursdays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., and has the

capacity to care for 12 individuals.

Lynn Reeves, director of the Hot Springs ministry, says the grant will help fund a new media center, which will feature a big-screen television for displaying song lyrics.

"We do a lot of music of all types," Reeves says, noting that music often provides an important connection point for persons with dementia. In addition to playing music selections from all eras, The Caring Place also hosts live music groups and special entertainers (such as an Elvis impersonator) who will use the media center equipment.

Part of the grant awarded to The Caring Place of Magnolia will help pay for training volunteers and caregivers, says the Rev. Barbara Lewis, director of that ministry. The other portion will go toward bringing dementia expert Teepa Snow to speak at an event planned for April 2012.

Both Caring Places received startup funding from the Brookdale Foundation, an organization with a mission to enhance the quality of life for America's elderly.

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COMING UP

September

Community garden workshop at Mount Eagle Sept. 9-10

“Sowing the Seeds... Helping to reduce hunger insecurities through faith-based community gardens” will take place Sept. 9-10, 2011 (7 p.m. Friday to 3:30 p.m. Saturday) at Mount Eagle Retreat Center.

Individuals and local church teams will explore theological underpinnings and gain practical skills to begin or expand community garden programs as one response to feeding the hungry in Arkansas. Workshops include Theological Conversations and Worship – Why we care; Gardening 101 – Where to begin; Developing a Team that Works – Who needs to be involved; Hands-on Experience – Tour the ‘almost organic’ garden at Mount Eagle; and Developing Goals and Funding Your Garden – Have a plan when you leave.

To learn more or to register, visit mouteagle.org.

Parish and Community Development Grant apps due Sept. 10

Requests for Parish & Community Development Grant funding must be submitted by Saturday, Sept. 10, to receive consideration at the committee’s fall meeting.

Funds are available to help launch ministries or to repair, upgrade or help build facilities that house those ministries. The maximum grant for each church or ministry is \$5,000.

To download a grant application form from the Conference website, visit arumc.org/forms.

Forms with incomplete or missing information will not be considered. The next opportunity for application will open in the spring of 2012; applicants who cannot meet this fall deadline are invited to apply at the next opportunity.

Beth Moore simulcast at Central UMC Fayetteville Sept. 10

Thousands of women on Saturday, Sept. 10, will gather in their own churches to hear Beth Moore’s Living Proof Live Simulcast event. Central UMC Fayetteville, 6 West Dickson Street, will host the simulcast in the Great Hall of its Activities Center from 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Moore, a successful Christian author, is known for her ability to apply biblical Scripture to everyday life. The event offers powerful messages that will challenge and encourage participants to dig deeper into a more intimate relationship with God.

Tickets are on sale now at centraltolife.com/simulcast, or through the church office at 479-442-4237. The \$15 ticket price includes lunch and childcare if requested. Deadline is Sept. 6; seating is limited.

Christian educators’ event in Houston Sept. 16-17

Renewing Equipping Affirming Preparing (REAP), hosted by Memorial Drive UMC in Houston, Texas, will feature as its keynote speaker the Rev. John C. Holbert, professor of homiletics at SMU Perkins School of Theology. REAP is open to all Christian educators in the South Central Jurisdiction, which includes Arkansas.

Workshop topics include age-level ministries, spiritual formation, technology and more. For details or to register, visit ghles.org.

Camp Aldersgate Fish Fry moves to a Sunday—Sept. 18

Camp Aldersgate’s 28th annual Fish Fry is set for Sunday, Sept. 18, from noon to 3 p.m. (note the change from Saturday to Sunday). In addition to fun, fellowship and fish, they also will have a “country store” filled with homemade goodies. Ride the free shuttle from the Baptist Medical Center parking lot, or pick up your to-go meal at the corner of Kanis and Aldersgate Roads. All proceeds support Camp Aldersgate, Arkansas’ only non-profit uniquely dedicated to serving children with disabilities, youth and senior adults in a camp environment.

In 2010, Camp Aldersgate served through its summer medical camp program 357 campers with disabilities ranging from diabetes and autism to muscular dystrophy and spina bifida. It also served more than 340 campers through weekend respite camps. Its Seniors Day Out program began in the 1970’s, and last year served 54 senior adults.

Fish Fry tickets are available for advance purchase at campaldersgate.net. For information, visit the event Facebook page, facebook.com/campaldersgatefishfry, or contact Tisha Gribble at 501-225-1444 or tgribble@campaldersgate.net.

Timothy and McNeil UMCs host revival Sept. 18-21

Timothy UMC Camden and McNeil UMC will hold a joint revival Sunday through Wednesday, Sept. 18-21.

The Rev. Mark Lasater, director of the Wesley Foundation at Southern Arkansas University, will preach Sunday and Monday nights at McNeil, with refreshments following Monday night’s service. Rod Hocott, Conference minister for youth and young adults, will preach Tuesday and Wednesday nights at Timothy, with refreshments following Wednesday’s service. All services begin at 7 p.m.

First UMC Little Rock hosts Dave Ramsey simulcast Sept. 30

First UMC, on the corner of 7th and Center Streets in downtown Little Rock, will serve as the Little Rock-area host for Dave Ramsey’s EntreLeadership simulcast event Friday, Sept. 30 at 8:15 a.m. EntreLeadership is a small-business training program designed to equip community business owners and leaders to transform their businesses into organizations where people love to work.

EntreLeadership’s lessons are based on biblical principles and challenge believers to live out their faith in their work interactions. Nonbelievers are also drawn to the message because the principles simply make sense.

The cost is \$29 per person and includes a workbook. To purchase tickets or request promotional materials to share with your church, please contact communications director Lesley Andrews at 501-372-2256 or landrews@fumclr.org.

October

Vessels for the Lord conference in Rogers Oct. 1

Central UMC, 2535 West New Hope Road in Rogers, will host a Vessels for the Lord event from 8:30 to 3:30 on Saturday, Oct. 1, featuring the Revs. Treccie Cook, Dorothy Jones and Mary Welch. There is no admission charge, but a love offering will be taken. A light breakfast and lunch will be provided.

A time of prayerful preparation for the spiritual atmosphere of the Saturday conference will take place on Friday night, Sept. 30, from 6:30 to 9:00 p.m. Attendees can expect to be blessed through fellowship, good food, special music, spirit-filled messages that can be applied to daily life, powerful prayer time, Holy Communion and moving of the Holy Spirit.

For information, contact Nancy Scott at 501-337-0065 or cnscott@suddenlink.net, Kimberly Workman at 479-659-2298 or visit the Vessels for the Lord website, vesselsforthe lord.org.

Wesleyan Leadership Conference, Nashville, Tenn. Oct. 13-15

The 2011 Wesleyan Leadership Conference Oct. 13-15 will explore the vision, message and method that helped John Wesley lead a revival among the people called Methodists.

Sponsored by the United Methodist General Board of Discipleship (GBOD), the event features Dr. Elaine Heath from SMU Perkins School of Theology in Dallas. She will discuss her vision for new models of Wesleyan community.

For more information, contact Steve Manskar, GBOD’s director of Wesleyan Leadership, at smanskar@gbod.org, or register at gbod.org/wesleyanleadership.

Faith and Health Conference in Memphis Oct. 20

The 10th annual Faith and Health Conference for Clergy and Congregational Leaders takes place Thursday, Oct. 20, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., at Church Health Center Wellness, 1115 Union Avenue in Memphis. The conference focus is “Dying Well.”

Dr. Thomas G. Long, Bandy Professor of Preaching at Candler School of Theology, Emory University, will deliver the keynote address. His most recent book is *Accompany Them With Singing: The Christian Funeral*. The conference also features Richard Payne, M.D., Professor of Medicine and Divinity and director of the Institute on Care at the End of Life, Duke Divinity School. The event is preceded by a worship service at 7 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 19, at St. John’s UMC, 1207 Peabody Avenue.

The Faith and Health Conference is sponsored by Methodist Le Bonheur Healthcare, the Church Health Center, St. John’s UMC and Methodist Theological Seminary. Admission is free, but limited to the first 300 registrants. Register online at churchhealthcenter.org/conferenceregistration.

Village UMC ‘Time of Renewal’ with Stan Cosby Oct. 16-17

Village UMC, 200 Carmona Road in Hot Springs Village, will host its sixth annual Time of Renewal on Sunday, Oct. 16 and Monday, Oct. 17. The Sunday schedule includes services at the regular worship times of 9:30 and 11:00 a.m., with an additional service at 6:30 p.m. Monday includes an 11:00 a.m. gathering with luncheon following and a 6:30 p.m. service.

Dr. Stan Cosby, senior pastor of St. Stephen UMC Amarillo, Texas, will speak at the event. Cosby has a Master of Divinity degree from Asbury Theological Seminary and a Doctor of Ministry degree from Oral Roberts University. He is a published author and has traveled the world as a missionary speaker and evangelist.

Call 501-922-1030 to make a reservation for the Monday luncheon. For additional information, contact the office or visit villageumc.org.

Hispanic Heritage Month event at Lakeside Pine Bluff Sept. 25



Youth of Lakeside UMC Pine Bluff perform a dance as part of the church’s 2010 Hispanic Heritage Month celebration. This year’s event, scheduled for Sunday, Sept. 25, will again include food and live entertainment. The celebration begins at noon, following the congregation’s 10:50 worship service. In addition to raising money, the celebration provides an opportunity for building relationship. “It gives us the opportunity to bring together two cultures,” says the Rev. Alicia Frye, associate pastor for Hispanic ministries. Hispanic and Anglo volunteers work together to make the event happen.

Tickets may be purchased in advance through the church office, 870-850-0142, or at the door. Carry-out meals also will be available for purchase. All funds raised are used for missional programs such as ESL (English as a Second Language) courses, outreach, translation services, food pantry inventory and school supplies.



House painting is a typical assignment for Ozark Mission Project campers, but the work days also include time to visit with the people whose homes they repair. Campers share their lunch as well as a short mealtime devotional with the neighbors they serve.

AUM PHOTO BY AMY FORBUS

Q&A
(continued from page 1A)
Sunday, and in the evening activities during camp.

So you’re going to get a pretty consistent experience from camp to camp all summer.
Yes, exactly.

How has OMP changed over the years?
We’ve added two middle school camps, and also a college age mission trip, which we do in January on semester break. The college group has gone to Rio Bravo, and to New Orleans several years to help with the Katrina and Rita survivors. In 2012, we’re making plans to go to Joplin.



Nancy Mulhearn

Another thing that has changed is the tool trailers. In previous years, churches had to bring ladders and lawn mowers and all that stuff. OMP has purchased three trailers, and we move the community tools around from location to location. I think the tool trailers have helped us be much more user-friendly from a youth director and church point of view. Our training has improved. Our college staff training is really in-depth. They come in on a Friday and stay until Wednesday. We do a church training, where churches who sign up for OMP meet with us and we go over our training manual, go over changes from the year before, just to bring everybody on board. We need to be reminded of why we’re coming to OMP and what our purpose is. So we train our churches, we

train our college staff, we train our volunteer staff. Our directors have meetings so they’re all on the same page, which helps with consistency.

So there’s really a lot of advance preparation.

Oh, yes, it’s year-round. We’ll start in September with our first program meeting for next summer—planning the theme, the T-shirts, the lapel pin, the morning watches, the evening worships. As soon as camps end and we are finished crunching numbers, we start on the next year.

What are some things that have stayed the same?
The importance of the relationship with the neighbor. *[Editor’s note: At OMP, all people the campers serve are called “neighbors.”]* And the importance of our evening worship service—we’ve coordinated so our morning worship devotion, our lunch devotion, which goes with them to the job site so they actually share a devotion with their neighbor as they’re sharing their lunch, and then the evening worship service—all three use the same Scripture passage, so that they’re delving deeper into that Scripture than just hitting it one time.

On the lighter side, the games we do are intentional. When campers arrive, we do ice-breakers and warm-ups and things like that. As Sunday goes on, we do consensus, where they have to communicate and listen to each other, so they’ll start putting it into practice before they even get on the job site where decisions have to be made. We have a wonderful safety record that we are so proud of, and we watch very carefully. Safety is of prime importance, both for our campers and our neighbors.

Another thing that has stayed the same is the layering of OMP. We start with the youth campers, then we have adult drivers who help oversee the youth campers, then we have a college staff that oversees the work and the evening activities of the driver and the youth camper. Then the next layer is the volunteer staff—adults that oversee the college staff. So we’re very intentional about layering our leadership. We’re also very good about empowering our college staff after they’ve been paid staff, to go on and be volunteer staff, co-directors and directors.

So do you have a handful of folks who have come back and directed after being paid staff?
Yes, we have a lot. More than a handful. In fact, we had a director and co-director at West Memphis, at El Dorado and at Rudy. They’ve graduated from college and are now in the workplace, coming back to direct. They’ve made OMP a part of their lives. Then we’ll have those who have been directing for 10 years, they’ll take on a new co-director and train them, so that they can go on to be a director.

What can attendees expect at the October celebration?
We have a reunion committee of seven people who have been planning. There will be service opportunities, a slide show, dinner, sharing of OMP stories from campers, staff and neighbors, worship and Communion. We’re creating a journal, too. Right now, it’s over 200 pages. We’re including quotes from neighbors and campers, and it’s going to be available to purchase at the reunion event.

About the Oct. 29 celebration

Lakewood UMC, 1922 Topf Road in North Little Rock, will host the Ozark Mission Project 25th anniversary celebration.

Doors open at 3:30 p.m., and all guests are welcome. The event is free, but the planning team requests that attendees pre-register by Oct. 21.

To learn more or make a reservation, visit ozarkmissionproject.org.

Sharing OMP’s impact

While Ozark Mission Project provides tangible improvement to the homes of its neighbors, it also offers benefits that last longer than a paint job or a day of yardwork—for both the neighbors and the workers.

The excerpt below comes from a letter written in 1987 by Betty Gean Eifling of Grady UMC, after she attended OMP. She felt so strongly about her experience that she sent the letter to her entire family.

“We talk a lot about being people of faith,” says Eifling’s pastor, the Rev. Lee Zuehlke. “This is an un-solicited letter written to family about what it means to this woman to put faith in action.”

Eifling discovered recently a copy of her letter, and she shared it with her prayer group. Her pastor shared it with the *Arkansas United Methodist*, and with Eifling’s permission, we share this excerpt with our readers.

July 8, 1987
Dear Family,
This is a report on my Ozark Mission Project - namely because I don’t have anything else to write about - unlike other relatives who have made trips to Europe, Australia, and other faraway places. For those of you who may not know what Ozark Mission Project is, let me explain. It is a church sponsored camp for young people, ages 13-18, to work for the elderly, poor or handicapped, performing jobs these people are unable or have no resources to do for themselves. I signed up as an adult leader from our church. My experience that week reaffirmed my faith in the young people of this land. We were divided into “family” groups which worked together the entire week. I had one young man and three girls in my “family.” They worked hard and without complaint in the ever-present heat and humidity and the sometimes present wasps. Our first day was our easiest—we trimmed trees and washed windows. Tuesday and Wednesday our assignment was to paint a house which was in terrible condition. We had to scrape most of it before we could paint. I must say it looked like a different house when we finished. Thursday, we went to an apartment where everything was arranged so a wheelchair could be maneuvered; however, the elderly woman who had just moved there was not in a wheelchair. She was a dwarf, which meant she couldn’t reach her sink or stove or anything else. We made her some steps to walk up and stand on to get to her sink, and a low shelf to place utensils on. On Friday, we did yard work for an elderly woman with diabetes who had just had four toes removed. She had a big yard which had grown up with weeds higher than my head. It really looked pretty when we got through. Another aspect of our mission was to share our lunch each day with the person we were working for. We carried an ice chest with sandwich materials and a jug of tea and water each day. The people really enjoyed having somebody to visit with them as some almost never have anybody to talk to, and probably never any young people. Do you all remember when we were in our younger years growing up, before we had electricity, and we had a 50-pound block of ice delivered a couple of times a week? We didn’t get to use any ice except at meal time. I still remember how refreshingly delicious that iced tea was on a sweltering summer day—it has never been the same in an air-conditioned environment. Ice tea tasted that good again! Not one home we were in had any sign of air conditioning. Some of our jobs were a good hour and a half from camp, so we spent some time commuting. (I almost learned to like LOUD rock music.)

Older adult ministry group working on survey, conference

BY MARTHA TAYLOR
Arkansas Conference

While the dog days of summer cause lethargy and fatigue in some, the members of the Conference Adult and Older Adult Ministry Councils have been hard at work revising surveys and making plans for a 2012 conference.

The Older Adult Ministry Council, chaired by the Rev. Dave Smith, has begun making contact with every local church to ascertain who is responsible for coordinating older adult ministries in each church. Council member Doug Collins heads up the effort, aided by two volunteers: Joe Whalen, a member of Lakewood UMC, and Bettye Johnson, a member of White Memorial UMC.

Whalen, retired study director for Market Strategies International,

one of the top twenty marketing research firms in the U.S., has donated his time to revise the 2010 survey. The 2011 version will be available at each district conference, and is open online through September at arumc.org/OlderAdult.

"We are making an extra effort to get churches that are large enough to have an older adult ministry coordinator to respond to this year's survey and to encourage United Methodists who are 50 years old and older to respond to the individual survey," said Whalen. "We have made it as easy as possible for people to participate in this year's survey."

Most of the survey questions are multiple-choice and address whether people feel there are needs in their community for certain services and whether those needs are being met, either by the church

or another organization.

Johnson, who is working on her master's degree in information technology, has been processing the information gathered by district coordinators. She also will enter data from surveys received at the Conference office. The group's goal is to have 200 churches and 1,000 individuals respond to the surveys.

Partnership with adult ministries

Another initiative, a spring conference for adult and older adult ministry leaders, has brought two committees into partnership. The conference will be hosted by both the Older Adult and Adult Ministry Councils, and is funded through a grant by the United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas (UMFA).

The conference will include presentations and workshops by noted Upper Room author Missy Buchanan and Carol Krau, director of adult formation and discipleship for the General Board of Discipleship in Nashville, Tenn. The conference will be held Saturday, March 10, 2012, at St. James UMC Little Rock.

Using technology

The two committees are also looking into either producing or purchasing videos dealing with subjects of interest and concern to older adults or their children and caregivers. Funding for this project was provided for in the UMFA grant.

While the project details had not been finalized at press time, the group feels they are on the cutting edge of where Imagine Ministry is

headed—using technology to connect churches and people. They envision having the video content shared with local churches via the Internet, with the hope that local churches would create opportunities for fellowship and learning based around the video content.

"The video project is exciting because we would be able to share content across the state," said Collins. "We could make information and learning opportunities available for any church that wants it and in such a way as to encourage them to bring adults and older adults together to create networks of support and ministry."

Taylor serves as the director of communications for the Arkansas Conference, and as pastor of discipleship for FaithSpring UMC.

Bishop names transition team, task forces

Bishop Charles Crutchfield has named a transition team to implement the Imagine Ministry plan approved by the 2011 Annual Conference:

Mackey Yokem, convener; Jim Kimzey, project manager; Phil Hathcock, Director of Connectional Ministries; Todd Burris, Conference treasurer; Will Choate, Steve Coburn, Carolyn Galbreath, Nathan Kilbourne, Fonda Kirkman, Karon Mann, Janet Marshall, Brenda Norwood, Buddy Ratliff, Clef Vaughan, Brittany Stanton Richardson Watson, Asa Whitaker.

In addition to the transition team, the Bishop has appointed several task forces to examine specific areas of ministry and how they will function in the new Conference structure.

Ethnic Ministries: Roy Smith,

convener; Maxine Allen, project manager; Deborah Bell, Amy Jo Carr, Kathy Conley, Troy Conrad, Rex Dickey, Terry Gallamore, Tommy Halsell, J. Harris Moore, Jim Polk, Tammy Jo Teltow.

Children and Youth Ministries:

Sara Pair, convener; Jay Clark, project manager; Pat Bodenhamer, Natalie Clark, Ben Crismon, Michelle Moore, Jimmy Mosby, Bud Reeves, Madison Schallhorn, Greg Schick, Karen Swales.

Young Adult Ministries:

David Freeman, convener; Rod Hocott, project manager; Clark Atkins, Wayne Clark, April Cotton, Sarah Dickey, Justin Ledbetter, Elaine Lilly, Ronnie Miller-Yow, Jason Molitor, Becca Phillips, Don Riggan, Dede Roberts, Alex Ross.

Center for Clergy and Laity

Excellence in Leadership: Kurt Boggan, convener; Stan Adams, Heather Spencer Clawitter, Adria Kimbrough, Don Riggan, Michael Roberts, Karen Skarda, Carness Vaughan, Beverly Watkins.

Center for Social and Personal Holiness: Susan Ledbetter, convener; Liza Godwin, Lu Harding, Richard Lancaster, Edna Morgan, Andrew Thompson.

Center for Technology: Jim Argue, convener; Chuck Coffelt, Jeff Collins, Charles Donaldson, Jordan Johnson, Matthew Johnson, Baker Kurrus, Brian Swain.

Each of these groups has already begun work, and will present brief updates at the Oct. 29 Called Session of the Annual Conference in Hot Springs.

Can We Talk? event Nov. 18-19 to feature Bishop Palmer



Bishop Gregory Palmer

"How does the Call to Action impact African American churches?" is the question to be discussed at Can We Talk?, an event hosted at Philander Smith College Nov. 18-19, 2011.

Bishop Gregory Palmer (Iowa Area), a former president of the worldwide United Methodist Council of Bishops, will be the keynote speaker and preacher. In addition, Saturday's events include a roundtable discussion with bishops from throughout the South Central Jurisdiction.

Can We Talk? is an established and safe forum in which African Americans can enter and then exit a "no holds barred" dialogue about God's preferred future for the African American church.

Visit arumc.org and look under "Upcoming Events" for the Can We Talk? brochure and online registration form. An early registration rate applies for forms received by Nov. 1.

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Vilonia UMC would like to hire a part-time youth director. This person would have responsibilities for 8th-12th grades. Send resume to Rev. Belinda Price viloniaumc@windstream.net.

Give the gift of mobility to disabled children and adults in developing countries by supporting The Red Thread Promise's All Terrain Wheelchair (ATW) program. \$350 sends an ATW across the globe to someone in need. For more information visit www.redthreadpromise.org (keyword: wheelchair) or call 817-320-6522.

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

Jonesboro church presents scholarships, stipends



life of the congregation and who are entering college or returning to college or graduate school may apply. Those attending vocational schools also qualify, and there is no age limit for the awards.

St. Paul UMC Jonesboro presented recently its annual scholarships and book stipends for members of the congregation who are pursuing education beyond the secondary school level. Two \$1,500 scholarships and nine \$500 book stipends were awarded. Recipients include (front row, from left): Krystal Walker and Lauren Harrison, scholarship recipients; Lindsey Harrison and Dena Mueller, stipend recipients. Back row: Stipend recipients Chris Hannah, Meleah May, Lindsey Ashburn and Tami Freeman. Michael May, Michael McFarlin and Steven McFarlin, not pictured, also received stipends.

Students who are active participants in the

COURTESY PHOTO

Cherokee Village kids gather quarter-ton of non-perishables for food pantry

Children at Cherokee Village United Methodist Church picked up on the challenge given at "Shake It Up Café" Vacation Bible School: to "carry out God's recipe for living." They responded by building a wall of non-perishable food items to donate to the North Sharp County Ministerial Alliance Food Bank. The total weight of their VBS food collection: 466 pounds.

Cherokee Village's VBS is as much a ministry to the adults as it is to the children; retirees line up for the opportunity to work alongside the church youth group to make a workforce of almost twice as large as the number of children. This year, 47 adults and teens worked side-by-side to minister to the needs of the 25 kids.



TOP: Cherokee Village UMC children built a wall of non-perishable food items for North Sharp County Ministerial Alliance Food Bank as a VBS mission project.

ABOVE: Adult helpers unload at the food bank the 466 pounds of food collected by Cherokee Village kids. Pictured are the Rev. Stan Jagow, pastor of Spring River Presbyterian Church; Ralph Julien, Missions Leader for VBS; and the Rev. Jimmy Anderson, president of the Ministerial Alliance and associate pastor of Cherokee Village UMC.

COURTESY PHOTOS

Meet Brian McLaren Internationally Known Author & Christian Activist

www.brianmclaren.net



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Reservations by Sept. 6: 501.664.3600

Explore new ways of being a Christian that take the Church from an inward-focused institution to an outward-focused movement once again.

Pulaski Heights United Methodist Church
4823 Woodlawn, Little Rock

Sunday, September 11

Worship Services – 8:15 & 10:30am

11:45am Church-Wide Brunch, Book Signing and Discussion

Presentation of the Annual Peace Awards on the 10th anniversary of 9/11

7pm Lecture & Book Signing

Monday, September 12

11:30am Lecture

12:30pm **Clergy Luncheon**, Book Signing and Discussion

7pm Lecture & Book Signing

Conference Elders: Plan to attend the Monday mid-day events on your way to the Gathering of the Order of Elders, 4pm, at Camp Tanako, Hot Springs.

Free Childcare at All Events for Those Who Request It.

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REPORTER

THE UNITED METHODIST

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State of conflict

Alabama UM clergy
fight immigration law | 3B



9/11 and religion

The attacks remain
a complex influence | 6B



Wesleyan Wisdom

Congregational vitality
must be reform focus | 7B

Section B

September 2, 2011

Russia partnership

U.S. conference enters a new mission field

STORY & PHOTOS BY MELISSA LAUBER, SPECIAL CONTRIBUTOR



Sandy Ferguson, director of missions for the Baltimore-Washington Conference, lights a candle in a church in Voronezh, Russia. Ms. Ferguson and others visited this summer to strengthen a partnership between United Methodist churches in Russia and the U.S. Baltimore-Washington Conference.

VORONEZH, Russia—When he was a younger man, the Rev. Igor Volovodov worked at a factory in the Soviet Union. One of his additional duties was to prove and reinforce atheism among his fellow workers, so he did research, talking with believers.

Mr. Volovodov grins, recalling how his research led him to become a Christian. Today, he serves as superintendent of the Central Black Soil District in Russia.

His story is reflected a hundred times over. Ten years ago, for instance, the Rev. Irina Mitina was translating for a group from Oklahoma. She had been brought up an atheist, learning that “Lenin is our father, and there is no God.” But the words she translated and the love she witnessed from the Oklahoma group spoke to her soul.

She became a Christian, and started a Bible group in a café, creating the first United Methodist community in the 450-year-old city of Voronezh. “Christ is the answer to every question,” she said. It’s a proclamation to build a church on.

The United Methodist Church began ministering in Russia in 1991. Today there are 125 churches in the Eurasian episcopal area; 11 are in the Central Black Soil District. In 2008, Bishops John Schol and Hans Växby created a partnership between the Baltimore-Washington Conference (BWC) and the Central Black Soil District.

The district, which is the size of Texas and lies 350 miles south of Moscow, is often referred to as “the heartland of

■ See ‘Russia’ page 5B

Q&A: Indiana’s strategies for church growth

The United Methodist Church keeps shrinking in the United States, but some areas contradict the trend. The surprise this year was Indiana. At the Indiana Annual Conference gathering this summer, delegates learned that membership was 200,620, up 3,271 from the past year. Average worship attendance was 117,750, up 1,013.

This was the first time United Methodism in Indiana has shown growth in both those categories in more than 30 years. **The Rev. Mark Gough**, director of church development for the Indiana Conference, answered questions from managing editor **Sam Hodges** about the turnaround.

What’s your short explanation for why the Indiana Conference grew this year?

As we developed the structure of the new conference (the North Indiana and South Indiana Conferences became the Indiana Conference in 2009), we purposely developed a structure that supported the mission: “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The bishop, directors, superintendents and all conference leaders began to talk about, “How is what we are doing supporting the mission?” This raised the issues of membership, professions of faith and worship attendance as key indicators of how we are doing.

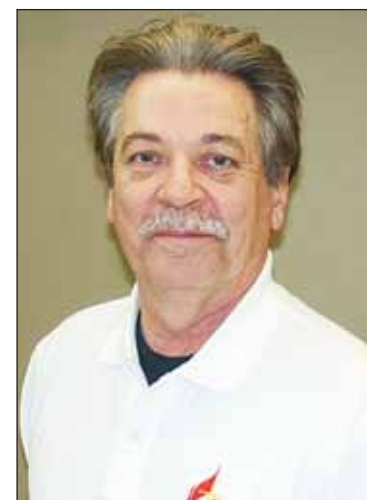
You have an unusual approach to using conference staff for church or congregational development. Talk about that.

We believed it was important to put feet on the ground. Our six-member church development staff is busy supporting and teaching best practices all the way around, including: starting new worship services, new congregations, visioning, multi-site ministry, and church revitalization. This team is proactive about supporting the mission. We also have been clear to state that the mission of each local church is “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”

How do the members of that team advise a church without getting too bossy or intrusive?

We are bossy and intrusive but with a smile. We also try to present the facts about how effective or ineffective they are in making disciples. Time is short and we need to stay focused on making disciples. Our first question to leaders of a local church that is plateaued or in decline is: “How is what you have been doing working for you?” You can’t expect to do the same things and get different results.

Explain the “Fruitful Congregations Journey” and how it
■ See ‘Growth’ page 2B



Rev. Mark Gough

FAITH WATCH

Retired UM Bishop Bryan dies at age 97

Retired United Methodist Bishop Alonzo "Monk" Bryan, who led the denomination's Nebraska Area from 1976 to 1984, died on Aug. 20. He was 97. Ordained in 1939, Bryan served churches in the Central Texas and Missouri Conferences, including 19 years at Missouri UMC in Columbia, Mo. He joined the World Methodist Council in 1951 and attended most World Methodist Conferences until recently.



Bryan

Worship rates drop for less-educated whites

While regular worship attendance has decreased for all white Americans since the early 1970s, the decline is more than twice as high for those who are less educated, according to a study by the American Sociological Association. Participation dropped from 50 to 37 percent among whites with only high school degrees, and from 38 to 23 percent for high school dropouts. Meanwhile, attendance by those with at least bachelor's degrees dipped from 50 to 46 percent.

Quran-burning pastor plans Sept. 11 rally

Terry Jones, the Florida pastor who presided over the burning of a Quran last March, plans to hold a rally in New York City on the 10th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. Mr. Jones told MLive.com that his church, the Dove World Outreach Center in Gainesville, Fla., "will continue to point out the multiple dangers" of the Islamic holy book.

Earthquake damages National Cathedral

Capstones from three spires of the Washington National Cathedral fell in the Aug. 23 earthquake that rocked the East Coast. Experts were assessing the full extent of damage and prospects for reopening the cathedral. The United Methodist Building on Capitol Hill escaped damage, officials said.

■ **GROWTH** Continued from page 1B**helped with the improving numbers, if you think it did.**

We are too early in the process to say that this has improved the numbers. We believe this will be big help in the coming years. The Fruitful Congregations Journey is a leadership development program. Step one is to meet with lay leaders and the pastors of the local church. Step two is to do a weekend consultation to help the local church become outwardly focused, with specific steps to move forward. Step three involves a coach helping the local church move forward to complete the steps to growth.

What sort of presence does Bishop Mike Coyner have in the Conference, and has that been a factor?

The bishop is the most important factor. His leadership of focusing on the mission set the priority. Every place he speaks he focuses on three important issues: first, the mission; second, Wesley's three simple rules ("Do no harm, do good, stay in love with God"); and, third, the five practices of a fruitful congregation. He has also is focused on training leaders to focus on the mission.

Are you able to pinpoint whether your growth is occurring mostly in rural areas, suburbs, cities?

The growth was across the state and in every area. It is very interesting that when we first saw the final numbers, we assumed that the large

churches grew and that was the key. What we discovered when we dug into the information is that some of our largest churches declined, but the (growth) trend was across the board. Large, small, rural, suburban and urban, we had churches in each category that grew. My learning from this is: When you focus on the mission and make some changes to implement the mission, every church can grow.

Is there a formula—say in worship style—that can be applied to help churches grow?

The method of starting additional worship services has been the best practice for new growth. We discovered that worship is cultural and needs to be designed to reach the culture in the church's mission field. The key is to make worship about the mission.

Is there one church success story—in terms of growth, or reversing losses—that you would want to mention?

Barnes UMC, Indianapolis is an African American church which started two multi-site worship services and grew their congregation by 275 in average worship attendance. St. James West UMC in Evansville, with a part-time lay pastor, started a new Monday evening service for young persons and grew by 120.

The conference saw growth in membership and attendance, but not in Sunday school attendance. What's the problem there, and is there a strategy for turning that around too?

Most of our growing churches have moved to small groups for adult education and are not making Sunday school a high priority.

Has Indiana put into place the "dashboard" system of metrics? If not, is it something you're

PHOTOS COURTESY INDIANA CONFERENCE

Bishop Mike Coyner of the suddenly growing Indiana Conference baptizes one of the newest members during the recent Annual Conference session in Muncie, Ind.

considering?

We are part of the (UMC's) Vital Congregations project. This project emphasizes, and provides software for, improved keeping of statistics.

The conventional wisdom is that the UMC is shrinking especially fast in certain geographic areas, including the North. Is geography destiny, or do you think other Northern or Northeastern or Western Conferences can grow too?

Every area can grow. We just need to focus on the mission.

give to a conference that's trying to figure out a way to get back in the "black" numbers-wise?

It is all about the mission. When we focus on making disciples and keep that the first priority, we grow the membership.

Finally, when you got the good news about membership and attendance, did you pop a bottle of champagne?

No, we popped a bottle of Dr Pepper. Then we were skeptical, so we checked the numbers. Then we got back to work.

What one piece of advice would you

shodges@umr.org

Correction

In the Aug. 26 Reporter article titled "Faith-based investors want meeting with News Corp.," Dave Zellner, chief investment officer for Wespeth, was incorrectly quoted as using the phrase "best government practices." He said "best governance practices."

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The Rev. Charles Harrison (left) leads Barnes UMC in Indianapolis, which has grown through adding multi-site worship. He's pictured with Bishop Mike Coyner, honoring him for leading a faith-based anti-violence effort.

UM CONNECTIONS

First Parish gathering open to young clergy

Applications are being taken online for the First Parish Project, a Nov. 11-18 support and training event for beginning clergy at the Hinton Rural Life Center in Hayesville, N.C. The continuing education program is intended for pastors who are 35 or younger, serving their first full-time pastorate at a small membership church. Open to clergy of all denominations, it's aimed at developing effective pastoral leadership in churches averaging 100 or less at the main weekly worship service. For information, visit www.hintoncenter.org/html/first_parkish_project.html.

Tampa news briefing planned for 2012 GC

United Methodist Communications will host a news briefing Jan. 19-21 in Tampa, Fla., to prepare journalists, delegates and other interested parties for the 2012 General Conference. The event will provide information about issues to be considered by the denomination's legislative body when it meets in Tampa, April 24-May 4. To register online, visit <http://gc2012.umc.org/prebriefingregistration>. The early bird discount for registration ends after Sept. 30. Up to four delegates from each conference may attend.

Bishop Craig honored by Council of Churches

Retired United Methodist Bishop Judith Craig, bishop in residence at the Methodist Theological School of Ohio, was recognized this summer by the National Council of Churches for her contributions to church and society. Other honorees at the NCC's Circle of Names reception in Cleveland, Ohio, were former Cleveland Mayor Jane Campbell; Bishop Elizabeth Amy Eaton of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; Edith A. Guffey, associate general minister of the United Church of Christ; the Rev. Tracey Lind, dean of Trinity Episcopal Cathedral in Cleveland; and the Rev. Georgina Thornton, pastor of Grace AME church in Warren, Ohio.

Alabama UMs debate state's immigration law

BY SAM HODGES
Managing Editor

Who would have thought five years ago, or even five months ago, that Alabama would be the epicenter of United Methodist activism on immigration?

But recently more than 150 UM clergy in Alabama signed a letter protesting a state law, which was due to take effect Sept. 1, that is widely viewed as even tougher than Arizona's in its approach to combating illegal immigration.

Bishop Will Willimon of the North Alabama Conference joined Catholic and Episcopal bishops in the state in filing suit to block enforcement of the law, arguing that it could criminalize ministry outreach to Hispanics.

This summer UM clergy in Alabama have written op/ed pieces on the issue, joined protest rallies, and been quoted in the *New York Times*. They continue to hold public information meetings about the law.

That the denomination's profile has been raised in Alabama seems clear.

"This has been a great opportunity for the church to speak up and speak out," Bishop Willimon said.

But United Methodists have not spoken with one voice. Indeed, among the legislators who passed the law were UM laity and one retired UM pastor—Rep. Mac Buttram.

"I stand behind my vote," Mr. Buttram, a Republican from Cullman, said. "I have no qualms."

'Essential tenets'

About 120,000 illegal immigrants were in Alabama in 2010, according to a Pew Hispanic Center estimate.

Many Republicans in the current legislature, including Mr. Buttram, promised in their 2010 campaigns to crack down, arguing that illegal immigration was adding to the state's education and health care costs, and taking jobs from legal residents.

The new law requires law enforcement, under some circumstances, to verify the immigration status of those stopped for traffic violations. It requires public schools to check children's immigration status, and it requires employers to use the federal E-Verify program to check workers' immigration status.

Under the law, it's a crime to transport or harbor knowingly illegal immigrants. Transporting more than 10 is a felony, a concern for churches that use buses in ministry.

The law prompted not only the bishops but the U.S. Justice Department to file suit, arguing that Alabama was trying to pre-empt federal authority in immigration matters.

The UM clergy, in their joint letter, maintained that the law would burden law enforcement and education officials, and predicted that it would draw law suits, possibly costing the state millions in legal fees even as it's cutting agency budgets.

Their letter, citing Old and New Testament passages, maintains that the law "contradicts the essential tenets of the Christian faith."

"It's pretty clear if you go through the gospel, the theme of welcoming the stranger is consistent," said the Rev. Matt Lacey, pastor of Woodlawn UMC in Birmingham and a leader of the UM clergy effort. "This law is so much against that."

The bishops' suit (prepared by lawyers working pro bono) says clergy have reason to fear that the law could criminalize the administering of sacraments to known illegal immigrants. The suit also argues that the law, if enforced, "will make it a crime to follow God's command to be Good Samaritans."

It's the threat to ministry that concerns the Rev. Mitchell Williams, pastor of First UMC in Cullman, Ala.

"We have a Hispanic ministry," he said. "We deliver kids to school every day."

Mr. Williams is not on the front lines of the immigration law protest. But after talking with his staff parish relations committee, he joined the opposition, and not just rhetorically.

"There was overall agreement that we should minister to anyone who comes our way," he said.

Of Alabama's immigration law, Mr. Williams added: "I don't want to be the harshest in the nation. I don't think that that serves our state well."

Proud bishop

Mr. Buttram, the UM pastor-turned-legislator, and Mr. Williams have remained friends through the controversy, and Mr. Buttram has high praise for First UMC Cullman's Hispanic ministry. "They do a great job," he said.

But Mr. Buttram does not believe that ministries face a threat from the new law unless they're deliberately concealing illegal immigrants.

State Sen. Bill Holtzclaw, a United Methodist layman who helped pass the law, agrees. And he believes the clergy criticism is out of line.

"It implies that we're going to have some enforcement aspect of this that's going to happen at a church," the Madison, Ala., Republican said. "It's really fanning the flames of fear."

Mr. Holtzclaw said he heard from bricklayers and carpenters who were sure they were losing out to illegal immigrants willing to work for less. He



UNITED METHODIST NEWS SERVICE PHOTO BY LYN COSBY

United Methodists joined other religious protesters in a June 25 Birmingham rally against Alabama's new immigration law.

argues that the UM clergy and churches opposing the law are "enabling" a system that he says has illegal immigrants working under oppressive conditions.

But opponents say passage of the law sent a hostile signal to Hispanics generally, and has made illegal immigrants fearful of coming to churches or government agencies for help, even in emergencies such as the April tornadoes that hammered north Alabama.

Some UM clergy are outspoken in their criticism of legislators who, as professing Christians, backed the law. Mr. Buttram, with his clergy background, has hardly escaped the fire.

"I've had conversations with Mac about this. To be blunt, I believe Mac put his Christianity on the shelf when he was campaigning for this," said the Rev. R.G. Lyons of Birmingham, another leader of the clergy effort.

Mr. Buttram responded: "I certainly won't call anybody else's Christianity into question in their approach as to what they feel is right."

U.S. District Court Judge Sharon Blackburn held a hearing on Aug. 24 to consider the different suits against the law, but did not rule immediately. She seemed reluctant to accept the bishops' contention that the law would impede their right to freedom of speech and assembly, and their ministry outreach. "The bishops saying it is so and believing it doesn't make it so," she told the bishops' lawyers, according to news accounts.

Where rank-and-file Methodists stand on the immigration issue is a question without a definitive answer. Bishop Willimon said his mail has run about 50-50.

But he's proud that so many UM clergy have joined the fight against the law.

"They are dedicated enough to know that their job is to speak the gospel as it is given to them, not simply to seek consensus," Bishop Willimon said.

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ABOVE: The Rev. Irina Mitina, pastor of Resurrection UMC in Voronezh, plays the keyboard. LEFT: The Revs. David Simpson and Galina Kolesnikova confer about Scripture with an interpreter during a recent trip to build on the partnership between United Methodist churches in Russia and the Baltimore-Washington Conference.



ABOVE: Two worshippers who grew up in the Russian Orthodox Church attend services at the new Revival UMC in Latnaya, Russia. RIGHT: Alexandra, Maria and Anna gather for worship at Revival UMC in Latnaya, a 12-member congregation which is involved in prison ministry and caring for orphans. The church, which meets in a room in the pastor's home, has almost completed a new brick facility.



The Rev. Charles Harrell (at right) leads the Baltimore-Washington Conference's Russia Initiative.



LEFT: Alexander Navrazhny paints a cross and flame on a sign for Camp Voronezh. **RIGHT:** Jo Lewis of the Virginia Conference (left) makes butterflies with Vova, 10. Arts and crafts, games, sports and Bible study were part of a three-week camp held at a Russian school.

■ RUSSIA Continued from page 1B

Russian Methodism” and “a cradle of pastors,” said the Rev. Charles Harrell, leader of the BWC Russia Initiative. “United Methodists here face unprecedented challenges and opportunities.”

Seven members from the Baltimore-Washington Conference traveled to Russia July 10-25 on a familiarization trip to learn more about these opportunities and to discover how they might develop meaningful partnerships in what has been described as “one of history’s most fertile mission fields.” They were joined by four members of the Virginia Annual Conference, which also has a partnership with churches in the North Caucasus region of Russia.

The aim of the partnerships, Mr. Harrell explained, is to link churches in the Baltimore-Washington Conference with congregations in the Black Soil District, sharing prayer, mission and resources. To enable the Russian churches to fulfill their visions, the support of multiple churches will be needed.

In Russia, the Rev. David Simpson of Bethany UMC in Ellicott City, Md., learned that “their vision is not stymied by what feels visible or possible. It’s driven by what God is expecting.”

Apparently God is expecting a lot, says the Rev. Tatiana Nazintseva of Transfiguration UMC in Hoholsky. “What is my dream?” she asked. “I have so many because God has so many.”

Ms. Nazintseva and her husband, Vladimir, added a small room for worship onto their house. Twenty people gather each Sunday in the village church. With a \$300 monthly salary, making ends meet is often difficult. Vegetables, canned from the garden, ensure their three children always have food on the table. But the couple has big dreams for their ministry, including starting a daycare center for the children of the village.

Leah Maloney, the music director of Trinity UMC in Prince Frederick, Md., had the opportunity to worship at Transfiguration on the familiarization trip. She noted the poverty and humility she encountered, but was especially moved by the spirit of sacrifice and love that radiated from the pastors and church members.

“We tend to think of Russia as a ‘superpower,’ but one of this church’s goals was to provide indoor plumbing so that the older members wouldn’t have to go out in the winter’s cold to use the toilet in the outhouse. Their faith seems to be refined in the fire of their circumstances. Their faith is intense and life-giving,” Ms. Maloney said. “They’re willing to give up their own com-

fort to build a church and share the love of Christ.”

Mr. Simpson had a similar experience. While on the trip, he was invited to preach at Revival UMC. The 12-member congregation, made up of three older women, a handful of former prisoners and others from the village of Latnaya, met in a room in the house of the Rev. Galina Kolesnikova. The house had only one bench for sitting and was humble beyond imagining, Mr. Simpson said.

Ms. Kolesnikova and her husband, Alexander, built a new brick church building next to the house with the help of a church in Mississippi. They began the project six years ago and the facility is still not complete, but in honor of the Americans’ visit, the first worship service was held there, with Mr. Simpson as the guest preacher.

“When I was growing up our countries were adversaries,” Mr. Simpson told the congregation. “I never dreamed I would have this honor. As we were driving here, the emotion welled up and my eyes began to weep,” he said.

“I’m persuaded this day is possible because somebody had a dream. They dreamed peace



The Rev. Igor Volodovodov, a district superintendent, also pastors St. Peter and St. Paul UMC in Voronezh.

would prevail, they dreamed more about feeding our children than arming weapons. . . . Miracles will happen in this place.”

As part of the 12-member church’s outreach, Ms. Kolesnikova works with orphans, delivering clothing and gifts to about 100 children ranging in age from 7 to 17. She also serves as chaplain at a maximum security prison that houses 2,000 men. It is a place of great cruelty, she said. But it is also a place where God is present and baptisms have been performed.

Mr. Simpson hopes that Bethany UMC, which has an active prison ministry of its own, will find ways to help Revival and its latest project to build transitional housing for men getting out of jail.

Missional evangelism is key, said Ms. Mitina, pastor of Resurrection UMC, whose church has active ministries serving the disabled and international students in Voronezh. But so too, it is sharing Christ’s love.

This is difficult in a country in which the citizens are born into the Russian Orthodox Church. “It is an identity,” Ms. Mitina explained. “Other religious groups are often viewed as cults.”

At Camp Crystal, where the BWC group stayed while in Voronezh, part of the facility had been rented to an Orthodox church. When the BWC members toured the camp, one of the Orthodox women cautioned the children to stay away from them. She was uncertain what the United Methodists might say, explained Irina Efremova, the camp director and former president of Russia’s United Methodist Women.

The Russian Orthodox Church is closely aligned with the state, Mr. Harrell noted. This can create complications.

Recently, for example, the Rev. Rausa Landorf, pastor of Grace UMC in St. Petersburg, had her church building taken away when the government refused her permission to continue renting the building her congregation used.

But this hasn’t stopped her ministry. She continued Camp Spring this year, bringing 40 abandoned, abused and neglected children to a 20-day camping experience at a village school. The children slept in geography and science classrooms, spent the days doing arts and crafts, sports and Bible study and the evenings in worship.

The experience was intentionally long, “to allow the old to come out of the students and the newness of the Holy Spirit to enter,” Ms. Landorf said. “We help them meet Christ and learn his

way and his will. We let them swim in God’s love.”

Ms. Landorf grew up a Muslim. Before she was 35, she had never heard of Christ. She learned about God in an Orthodox church and her new faith caused her to begin loving and caring for all the children who crossed her path. Few organized religious groups wanted her and her ragtag band of children, but the United Methodists took her in, she said.

“I’m thankful for the United Methodist Church,” she said. “We learned from you how to be a big family.”

After a day of spending time with the children, the BWC group joined them in worship. As the service drew to a close, she invited the children to come forward to receive a blessing from the clergy present.

They all came forward, and so did the counselors, some seeking multiple blessings.

“You can’t just play with God,” Ms. Landorf said. “Religion isn’t just about saying, it’s about doing too.”

Mr. Harrell is hopeful that several more churches in the Baltimore-Washington Conference will be inspired by this sense of “doing faith,” and include the Russia Partnership in their global outreach.

While in Russia, the BWC group met with Mr. Volodovodov, who explained that the Central Black Soil District has three priorities: to plant and grow new churches through “missionary” efforts; education and leadership development; and social outreach.

These priorities go hand-in-hand with the Russian Roadmap, adopted by the churches of the Eurasian Area calling for a focus on quality ministry, social outreach, mission, self-sufficiency, education, and evangelism and growth.

“Church-to-church partnerships are the key to accomplishing this,” said Sandy Ferguson, director of Missions for the BWC.

Mr. Volodovodov agreed. “I believe God is at work through personal contact,” he said.

“If you want to lose your heart,” said Mr. Harrell, “come to Russia. You’re going to fall in love.”

For information about the BWC Russia Initiative, email the Rev. Charles Harrell at charles@trinityumchurch.org or visit http://bwcumc.org/ministries/russia_initiative/.

Ms. Lauber is the editor of *UMConnection*, the newspaper of the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

How are UM disciples called to transform world?

BY BILL MARTIN
Special Contributor

The theme of the 2012 General Conference is “Make Disciples of Jesus Christ to Transform the World.” It summarizes the official mission statement of the United Methodist Church (*Book of Discipline*, ¶ 120).

What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus Christ? How does that discipleship result in activities designed to transform the world?

One thing that disciples do is to take the words of their Master seriously. United Methodist disciples often appeal directly to words attributed to Jesus for guidance about stands and actions that can make a difference in the world. We look to these words as they are remembered and updated in the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

One such word is the parable about the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25. We focus on the words directed to the “sheep” who “inherit the kingdom”: “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me” (Matthew 25:31-46 NRSV).

This story provided inspiration for a mandate in our historic General Rules. An example of “doing good” was “giving food to the hungry, . . . clothing the naked, . . . visiting or helping them that are sick or in prison” (*Discipline*, ¶ 103).

A Church resolution describes homeless persons today as the hungry, strangers, naked, sick and imprisoned. We are to support “ministries of compassion,” like “church-based soup kitchens, transitional housing programs, shelters, food pantries, clothes closets, and rent and utility assistance programs.” The Church should advocate for “comprehensive national housing legislation,” and local congregations should participate in “community organizing efforts to empower neighborhoods and influence government at every level” (*Book of Resolutions*, No. 3261).

One resolution promoting a higher quality of health care for everyone quotes the words about looking after the stranger, those who need clothes, and the sick. Another

resolution on health care supports “access to adequate medical services to ensure a balance of physical, mental, and spiritual well-being” for Native Americans. Remembering the words “I was sick and you took care of me,” our Church asks the Congress of the United States to spend more on “Indian health facilities” (*BOR*, Nos. 3207, 3337).

An appeal to Matthew 25:35, clearly to receiving the stranger, un-

‘One thing that disciples do is to take the words of their Master seriously.’

dergirds a statement on “Welcoming the Migrant to the U.S.” It calls on United Methodists, among many actions, to “oppose the building of a wall between the United States and Mexico,” to support “legal status for all undocumented migrants,” and to “call the United States government to immediately cease all arrests, detentions, and deportations of undocumented immigrants, including children, solely based upon their immigration status until a fair and comprehensive immigration reform is passed” (*BOR*, No. 3281).

The words about the sick and the imprisoned provide part of the foundation for a resolution encouraging implementation of the principle of restorative justice in a great variety of ministries. The resolution also quotes the words about “the least of these.” A congregation that takes it to heart could well decide to provide “victim-offender mediation” and “ministries with juvenile detention centers and domestic violence centers.” It might form “partnerships with victim assistance groups, advocacy groups, jail and prison ministry groups, [and] ex-offender assistance groups,” and it would work for “legislative support for restorative justice programs” (*BOR*, No. 5034).

The words about feeding the hungry underlie an official statement that sets the goal that large numbers of United Methodist congregations each year will become covenant churches supporting Bread for the World. This organization works “to eradicate the causes of hunger/poverty” and “to effectively change public policy.” The resolution also appeals to the words

about “the least of these” (*BOR*, No. 4055).

The whole passage, especially the reference to “the least of these,” helps to call our denomination directly to confront world hunger. United Methodists who seriously respond will find themselves engaged in a myriad of activities locally, nationally and internationally. To take just a few examples, they will support “community organizing to effect change in systems that keep people poor and powerless,” “reduction of military spending and reallocation of resources to programs that provide human services,” “Fair Trade activism,” and “policies that enable family farms to compete in the global market” (*BOR*, No. 4051).

The parable’s naming of “the least of these” provides support for ministry to persons with HIV/AIDS. An extensive list of “strongly recommended” steps encourages the Church “to be in ministry with, and to respond fully to, the needs of persons, families, and communities whose lives have been affected by HIV/AIDS.” United Methodists in the United States are to “advocate for increased levels of funding for HIV/AIDS” and contact their congressional representatives to urge support for funds and agencies that confront the HIV/AIDS pandemic (*BOR*, No. 3243).

Naming “the least” also strengthens a statement addressing numerous problems that Mexico and the United States face along their border. United Methodists are “to do what we must to bring healing in the midst of pain, and to restore to wholeness those whose lives are shattered by injustice and oppression.” Through our General Board of Church and Society we will “network on fair trade, labor and human rights, agricultural . . . and environmental concerns” with churches in Mexico and Canada (*BOR*, No. 6052).

Impressively, this one parable encourages United Methodist disciples to become involved in prison ministries and the reshaping of national justice systems; in care for the sick, the poor, the starving, and the homeless; in support of national policies on a variety of issues; and in activities that will improve international relations. Small steps, perhaps, by one relatively small denomination, but steps that at least point in the direction of transforming the world.

The Rev. Martin is an emeritus professor of religion at Oklahoma City University and a retired Elder in the Arkansas Conference.

9/11 impact continues shaping U.S., religion

BY ROBERT HUNT
Special Contributor

The events of 9/11 had a profound and complex effect on American views of religion. While the media have highlighted an apparent rise in intolerance, particularly as directed against Muslims, it appears that this is primarily the identification of a new enemy in the ongoing culture wars. Islam and Muslims were simply added to the existing list of supposed threats to America and the American way of life, displacing momentarily political progressives, mainline Christianity, gays, and Latinos among others.

After a decade, however, Muslims are no longer a hot center of conservative fear and it appears that intolerance as a political tool may be on the wane. Still, widespread ignorance of the meaning and nature of “Sharia Law” continues to provide individual legislators at the state and national levels an opportunity to score points with some members of their constituencies.

At the same time, American curiosity about Islam has vastly increased. It has been met with a wide array of books, websites and media commentary that ranges from the bigoted and inflammatory to the well-informed and carefully considered. I continue to respond daily to requests for lectures on Islam from church groups, academics and civic organizations. Virtually all, including those who are politically conservative, are conscious that the cable news networks in general and Fox news specifically have served them poorly in terms of factual accounts of Islam and Muslims. They are anxious for information that comes without a political agenda but are uncertain where to find it.

No room for naiveté

The events of 9/11, the wars that followed and the growing awareness of so-called “political Islam” have at least temporarily destroyed American naiveté regarding the political dimension of all religions. These accomplished more in this regard than progressive Christians with liberation theology and the evangelical Christian right were able to do over several decades. And this has had several related if nearly contradictory effects.

For many Americans it has made

the promotion of religious tolerance a greater priority than it has been for decades, with a shift of focus from addressing the problem of bigotry against Jews to the problem of bigotry against Muslims. Attacks on Islam by the Christian right have given radical atheists a whole new armory for attacks on religion in general, allowing them to lump all religious “fundamentalists” together as a threat to rationality, tolerance and freedom of thought. And however they approach religion, from populist intolerance of non-Christian religions to the formation of offices to manage cultural and religious diversity, local and state governments have found it necessary to recognize a religious dimension to the politics of everything from the sale of alcohol to the approval of building permits.

Finally, 9/11 and the events following have spurred a new interest in dialogue, and have changed its character.

Accepting differences

Most of the new interest in promoting interreligious dialogue has come from Muslim groups, who obviously have a great deal at stake in presenting themselves to non-Muslims in a positive light. This in turn has shifted the focus of interreligious dialogue from finding the spiritual commonalities implicit in older pluralist approaches, to identifying and accepting religious difference both between and within religions. Increasingly dialogue has shifted from being a path for spiritual seekers to a tool for achieving social cohesion and building civil society.

Whether any or all of these trends continue remains in question. The latter half of the 20th century was widely characterized as a time of religious resurgence, but in reality American institutional religion continues to wane, with evangelicals following rather than resisting mainline Christian trends.

Recent surveys suggest that the growth of Islam will not change this significantly. It is primarily growing through higher birth rates and immigration. As Muslims assimilate to American and European society, current evidence suggests that Islam may well follow the same path as Christianity and Judaism.

Dr. Hunt is director of global theological education and a world religions specialist at Southern Methodist University’s Perkins School of Theology. This piece was originally published by Patheos.com.



Bill Martin



Robert Hunt

WESLEYAN WISDOM

A look at Connectional Table recommendations

BY DONALD W. HAYNES
UMR Columnist

Readers misunderstand this columnist's role in the United Methodist connection often enough to deserve an explanation of who the real Donald Haynes is. Reader, beware! Some of your emails force me to clarify that my role is mainly a "voice in the wilderness"—or, perhaps, a fly in the ointment.

I'm an elder who has served his church wherever he was sent in various capacities from 1954-1999, and since retirement, I have served five times as interim pastor. Currently, I'm pastor of a small rural church.

It is from this vantage point that I read the latest report of the Connectional Table to the Call to Action Committee, which will make rather dramatic proposals for change as the 2012 General Conference convenes. Like the folk philosopher of the 1930s, Will Rogers, "all I know is what I read in the paper." But I hope that passing on their recommendations to you in the local church and in positions of connectional influence might enhance the dialogue.

According to these recommendations, the so-called "bureaucracy" of the church would be reduced sharply, both in numbers and in payroll. We would fold all existing boards and agencies into four: Congregational Vitality, Leadership Excellence, Missional Engagement, and Justice and Reconciliation.

But with what bottom line effect? What will the trickle-down impact be?

The new name recommended for the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, the "Office of Leadership Excellence," has a good ring to it. With the fall I start teaching a seminary class of the "recently called." What do I say to them? Do we need those whom God is calling? If Lovett Weems and other prognosticators are accurate, and I think they are, our impending "death tsunami" of loyal laity will reduce many of our parishes to a critical mass unable to support a pastor. Is it excellence or excising for which we are preparing?

The underlying assumption seems to be that we are preparing the way for the demise of guaranteed appointment and more quick and compassionate exit procedures for clergy who have mediocre measurable perform-

ance. On a practical level, it might well mean more part-time local pastors who like those in our Pentecostal and Baptist sister communions have to supplement their income from secular employment, retirement benefits or spouse income. Part-time local pastors or retired pastors will be more effective than the very uncreative resort to old circuit patterns.

Lopsided emphasis?

My first surprise in reading the recommendations is that the present General Board of Global Ministries and General Board of Church and Society would anchor two of the four new agencies, when the majority of observers have for a long time felt that the Board of Global Ministries has a philosophy and an agenda.

We have a sharply diminished number of traditional "missionaries" in the field. Since the days of the early-1930s debate between Hendrik Kraemer and William Hocking, the Methodist philosophy of missions has had more emphasis on socioeconomic and political agendas than on evangelizing. Our board adopted the theological position of Professor Hocking from Harvard, who called for the affirmation of indigenous religions. We moved overwhelmingly toward educational, medical, agricultural and socioeconomic-political emphases. We rejected the position of Kraemer who wrote a book on the uniqueness of Christianity.

In the developing nations since the end of colonial empires, the Board of Global Ministries abroad has reflected a philosophical ethos identical to that of the Board of Church and Society in American culture. How much connectional structure do we need for social justice advocacy? Do we not need stronger local churches who will "stir up the gift of God" to provide more foot soldiers "to serve this present age"? Do we need the Global Ministries and Church & Society boards and their respective advocacy agencies to occupy a full half of our connectional leadership and half of our fiscal support for board and agency costs? Would it not be more equitable to place these two giant boards and the agencies reflecting their philosophy under one umbrella? I do not write this as a cheap shot, but as a reality check.

My second surprise is that we are placing most of the praxis ministries of the local church in one "office"—Congregational Vitality. This means evangelism, nurture, worship and stewardship will all be in one board while missional engagement and social justice/reconciliation has two! How can

we assume this to be a move toward effective general church resourcing for the local church? Already local churches are "doing their own thing" with literature, worship and ministry paradigms. The vertical connectionalism from the local church to Nashville or New York or Washington is only a shadow of what it was a generation ago.

Effect on local church

If the new paradigm is to be helpful, congregational vitality must be our focus. Elton Trueblood, the great Quaker, repeatedly insisted in his writings that every church must have a base and a field. The congregational base must be strong enough numerically, spiritually and financially to support "field ministries" in the culture or overseas. If our local churches become too weak to develop leaders and provide monetary support for missional engagement and social justice/reconciliation ministries, those cultural impact ministries will gradually die from asphyxiation. Whom are we kidding to think we can continue to "make a statement" in the marketplace if the muscle of our local churches is feeble and weak?

Let's get real. We have literally thousands of local churches, some of them historically strong and large, that will not have a giving base alive and in attendance 10 years from now if we cannot bring people to Christ and into the mainstream of Christian discipleship. Who will sing in the choir, teach the Sunday school classes, deliver meals on wheels, go on mission building teams, or support with their money the outreach ministries of the church? Indeed, unless they have endowments, how many of our churches will reach a point they cannot paint the columns and repoint the Gothic mortar and replace the fallen slate from the roof?

If we are to grow again, we must plant more new congregations, but we must rethink the cost of this endeavor. There will be less and less "conference and district" money to buy land, support a pastor for up to five years, and subsidize the building of a first unit. In the planting of congregations, we need a paradigm shift. Almost every American town, even in areas of population decline, has seen a rise in independent and fundamentalist churches and the decline of older mainline, theologically moderate churches. This is not because these independent churches have a superior theology. No one has a more theologically and emotionally healthy theology than the grace theology of United

Methodism. Why then do they grow while we shrivel?

Regaining passion

Each of the independent churches' new congregations is an entrepreneurial experiment—"root hog or die." There is not a paternalistic hand to feed them. Secondly, they have a passion for evangelistic methodology. Their people brag on their preachers and churches. They have lively music, usually a band their first month of opening. Every week they have members bringing friends and neighbors. They use social networking like Facebook and Twitter. Their sermons are often shallow but delivered with "fire in the belly." The preacher speaks the language of contemporary culture—illustrations, idiomatic expressions, current events, and dealing with "our demons." Are we preaching from heart to viscera? Does our message on Sunday morning sound like it came from the Internet or from our experience this week with God and humankind?

We tend to stereotype and stigmatize those churches, and disparage them with political imagery, but they look disturbingly like the early Methodists, United Brethren and Evangelicals in the days when we were growing while the older Congregationalists and Anglicans were slipping. We were stereotyped and caricatured but our circuit riders and

class meeting leaders were connecting with common people and caring for the wounded.

If our new structure of connectionalism is to help us recover our declining numbers and influence in the culture of "our towns," our clergy must be re-tooled in "shoe leather connecting." We have a message: God is love, inculcates a proactive, seeking love, fills us with a "blessed assurance of forgiving grace," and disciples a faith community for supporting each other on our journey. Let every "call to action" keep the vitality of the local church in ministry as its focus.

Church-ianity has less and less appeal; the cookies aren't that good and the committees make us weary in well doing. The hope of our future is an infusion of "Christ-ianity." Or, as Len Sweet puts it, "a Jesus manifesto" to rescue the perishing.

"Down in the human heart, crushed by the tempter, feelings lie buried that grace can restore. Touched by a loving heart, awakened by kindness, chords that were broken can vibrate once more." How can our denomination infuse that new blood into our corroded arteries?

Dr. Haynes is a retired member of the Western North Carolina Conference. He is the author of *On the Threshold of Grace: Methodist Fundamentals*. Email: dhaynes11@triad.rr.com.



Donald Haynes

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Churches aid Joplin students in return to school

BY EMILY SNELL
United Methodist News Service

JOPLIN, Mo.—Life in Joplin is not the same as it was May 21. But, the city took a big step toward normalcy as students started back to school while the rebuilding effort by families and churches continued.

“It’s a very exciting day here in Joplin,” said Vanessa Vigneaux, administrative assistant at First United Methodist Church, describing the return to classes in this southwest Missouri town.

Families were happy to go back to school, she said, so they could develop at least a sense of normal life again.

“It’s not the norm,” Ms. Vigneaux said, “because they might be in a FEMA trailer or they might still be living with a relative, but at least they’re back with their friends . . . and maybe not having to think that their house is gone.”

The Rev. Max Raney, pastor at Byers Avenue UMC, agreed.

“Normally, kids don’t want to go to school,” Mr. Raney said, “but . . . it’s been such a hectic summer.”

Though students returned to a normal school schedule, many did not attend classes in the building they thought they would last spring before the devastating May 22 tornado.

High school juniors and seniors attended school in the mall. Others went to a warehouse or older school buildings that were previously out of commission.

“Even though they’ve been displaced from their schools, they’re all excited to get back,” said Jeannette Perry, a volunteer at Royal Heights UMC.

The United Methodist Committee on Relief, the denomination’s relief agency, has designated so far one \$10,000 emergency grant to aid victims in Joplin, and officials in the Missouri Annual Conference say they plan to request more. United Methodist churches in the conference and across the United States donated at least \$800,000 to tornado relief efforts.

Hopeful but frustrated

The EF-5 tornado killed 160 people, injured at least 750 and destroyed or damaged 10 schools in the Joplin School District. The tornado, with winds of more than 200 miles per hour, was recorded as the deadliest single tornado since modern record-keeping began in the U.S. in 1950.

The storm destroyed or damaged three United Methodist churches. Byers Avenue had minor roof damage. St. James United Methodist was destroyed.

St. Paul’s United Methodist sustained extensive damage to its family life center, and its sanctuary was destroyed. Rebuilding of the sanctuary has not yet started, but the family life center is being repaired.

When considering his congregation’s mindset about life in Joplin now, the Rev. Aaron Brown of St. Paul’s UMC said, “I would describe it as



PHOTO COURTESY WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

A neighbor used duct tape to present a message of “hope” after the May 22 tornado in Joplin, Mo., ripped off four letters from the Joplin High School sign.

thankful and hopeful and frustrated.”

Mr. Brown said people know God is working but the timeframe for rebuilding causes frustration. He said 98 families in the congregation lost their homes and at least 70 more homes had significant damage.

“Nothing happens as quickly as you want it to with rebuilding,” Mr. Brown said. “This process is slow for a lot of folks.”

The congregation now meets for worship at Ozark Christian College in Joplin. Since the fall semester is under way, the church each week must set up and take down its worship service.

“We’re really blessed,” Mr. Brown said about being allowed to meet at the college, “but it’s not our home.”

Despite their own needs to rebuild or repair, many churches worked with schools and families to prepare them for the upcoming academic year.

“We’ve been working all summer getting supplies,” Ms. Perry said. “We’ve been helping people in Joplin get everything they needed for homes and giving out backpacks and school supplies and all kinds of things for kids.”

Contributions pour in

Ms. Vigneaux said her church was a partner with McKinley Elementary School through the Bright Futures program, an initiative that allows the Joplin community to support its schools, teachers, staff and families.

She said volunteers from the church made cinnamon rolls for teachers and went to the school to greet students and parents.

Vendors and organizations across the country sent supplies for families and schools, Ms. Vigneaux said. “It’s overwhelming the amount of stuff that has poured in here,” she said.

Mr. Raney said his church is planning to do a “jackets for Joplin” event, providing winter clothing for families in need. Anything left afterward will be given to the school system, he said.

“It’s nice to see the piles of debris gone,” Mr. Raney said, “but we still have this big void. It’s just going to take a while.”

Ms. Snell is a United Methodist Communications intern and a senior at Lipscomb University in Nashville, Tenn.



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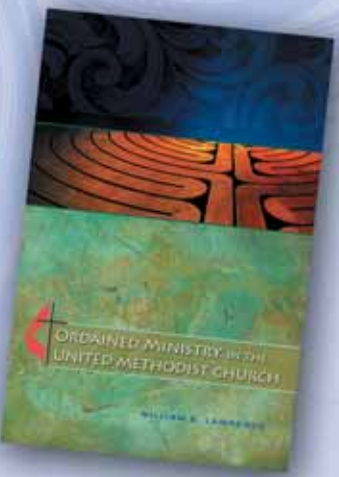
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