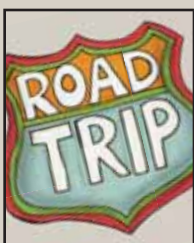


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Group discusses impact of change on African-American congregations

Bishop Gregory V. Palmer (Illinois Area), Danita Waller Paige of Theresa Hoover UMC Little Rock and the Rev. Ronnie Miller-Yow of Wesley Chapel UMC Little Rock were among the worship leaders at Can We Talk, a jurisdiction-wide gathering focused on the African-American church. The Arkansas Conference hosted this year's event.
AUM PHOTO BY AMY FORBUS

BY AMY FORBUS
Editor

LITTLE ROCK, Ark.—Proposals for change across the denomination drove discussion at a recent gathering of African-American church leaders at Philander Smith College.

At the Nov. 18-19 meeting, "Can We Talk," the main question that had United Methodists talking was: "How does the Call to Action affect African-American churches?"

The Call to Action is an effort to guide the United Methodist Church toward fostering more vital congregations and better fulfilling its mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. The denomination's Connectional Table has submitted legislation to the 2012 General Conference that if passed, will provide a plan for implementing the recommendations. For details, visit umccalltoaction.org.

The Rev. C.E. McAdoo, superintendent of the Southwest District of the Arkansas Conference, urged the more than 50 participants at the gathering to keep an open mind.

"If we come in with all the answers, why do we need to be anywhere?" he said.

Illinois Area Bishop Gregory V. Palmer, a leader in the Call to Action process, helped outline the recommendations.

The proposals include the integration of nine of the denomination's 13 general agencies into four offices, plus a shared services office. The four proposed offices are

designed with the denomination's Four Areas of Focus in mind. The denomination's four areas of focus as adopted by the 2008 General Conference are: improving global health; engaging in ministry with the poor; creating new places for new people and revitalizing existing congregations; and developing principled Christian leaders for the church and the world.

The offices would be subsumed under a new United Methodist Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry. Legislation submitted to General Conference calls for the center to have a 15-member board. That new board would oversee general funds that support mission and ministry.

"The question in the room whenever something new is going on is 'What were they thinking?' and I hope to explain some of that," Palmer said.

Concerns over change

A significant concern among Can We Talk participants was whether the smaller size of the proposed new leadership structure would allow for ethnic and racial minorities' voices to be heard.

"I'm not hung up on the number," Palmer said. "The focus on the '15' is potentially delusional."

He said the new proposed structure includes about 230 leaders, roughly one-third of the current number of directors on the church's general boards and agencies.

He also acknowledged such change does mean that "there is a vigilance that will be needed" to ensure diverse voices remain at the table.

[See TALK, page 4A]

Ingathering brings outpouring of God's love

BY KAYLEA HUTSON
Special Contributor

A spirit of thankfulness and service filled the air Nov. 19 as more than 140 volunteers from across the Arkansas Conference joined together for Ingathering 2011.

Individuals and groups, representing more than 30 churches, not only helped unload United Methodist Committee On Relief (UMCOR) kits and supplies from waiting cars and trailers, but also spent time completing a variety of projects for the host agency, the Arkansas Rice Depot in Little Rock.

It was all part of Ingathering, an annual event held on the third Saturday of November, designed to help those hurting throughout the state, the country and world.

"When there is a flood or earthquake in another country, the Arkansas Conference is there—maybe through a health kit or a cleaning bucket," explained the Rev. Pat Bodenhamer, one of the event's organizers. "When a new life is brought into the world in a village in a far off land, the Arkansas Conference is there to wrap that child in love through a birthing kit."

"When a child experiences the joys of learning how to read or write, we are there through a school kit."

That is exciting! It's a pretty amazing witness to share God's love through a bar of soap, or to be part of so many lives through a simple contribution of a toothbrush, fabric or a band-aid."

While financial and in-kind gifts vary each year due to the state of the economy, Bodenhamer said the Spirit is always present at Ingathering.

"The churches who still consider Ingathering a part of who they are make it all worthwhile," she said. "The volunteers from small to large churches working together to

[See INGATHERING, page 6A]



EDITOR'S CORNER

BY AMY FORBUS

Welcoming the unexpected

Mugsy had no clue what was going on. All he knew was that he had been where he was supposed to be, then he started digging, and then he had gotten himself on the other side of the fence.

He might've started out having fun with the turn of events, but the fun had ended. He had been out in the rain for a long time.

When the Golden Retriever wandered into our neighborhood, he had no way to tell me where he had roamed or what happened. I'm pretty sure, though, that if he had found somewhere to curl up the night before, it was in a filthy place. I've never smelled such an odor on a dog, and the dark, oily stain down one side of his body seemed to be the culprit.

I learned his name not from his identification, but from the veterinary technician who answered the phone when I called the number on his rabies tag. At that point, Mugsy was halfway home—but you couldn't have told him that.

From Mugsy's point of view, he was stuck in some crazy couple's garage. He drank some water, but didn't want the treats we offered him. He didn't want to go into the towel-lined crate that would keep him safe until his person could get there. He just wanted to whine and howl because things didn't make sense to him.

Not that things had been any better when he spent the night on his own out in the storm. But at least then he was in control, right?

Maybe control isn't all it's cracked up to be—for lost dogs, or for struggling people trying to hold things together ahead of the holidays.

Maybe one of the gifts God gives us is the comfort that he is looking out for us, regardless of how lost or grubby we get, or how upside-down life seems sometimes. We might be surprised to find that part of God's comfort is the reassurance that we don't have to take control of everything.

Lack of control doesn't mean we should just give up and sit down. If Mugsy had done that, he might not have made it home. But he kept going and somehow managed to cross two miles of Little Rock—including at least 15 lanes of traffic—without sustaining an injury. Then he encountered not one, but two dog-friendly people driving out of a neighborhood when he walked into it.

Mugsy only had to spend about an hour waiting. And the wait ended happily: with his person, grateful that he was safe, coming to claim him. The picture of bliss.

We all need a little bit—or sometimes a lot—of help. Often, we think we have control of a situation, or of our lives, when we actually don't have much control over anything.

We may not see the big picture, especially when we are lost or stressed out. But we can work with what we do know—that God is taking care of us. Even in the midst of rough weather and unpleasant surprises, we can treasure the gift of comfort that God wraps in unexpected packages.

To reach me, send an e-mail to amforbus@arumc.org.

Approaching the mystery of Christmas

BY WILLIAM O. (BUD) REEVES
Special Contributor

"Great indeed ...is the mystery of our religion." —I Timothy 3:16 (RSV)

What was the best Christmas present you ever received? Thinking back through a wonderful childhood of Christmas mornings filled with bicycles, toy trains and BB guns (I didn't shoot my eye out), I have many great memories.

But my favorite was the gift of an electric guitar when I was a neophyte musician at the age of 14. It was a Fender Stratocaster, the sweet dream of every wannabe rock star, a guitar that I still have and treasure.

What really made it significant was that my parents, going through a time of economic uncertainty, starting a new business in a new town, had made the sacrifice to buy me a top-of-the-line instrument. That, more than the guitar, still touches my heart.



Bud Reeves

My other favorite gifts would not be gifts that I received, but gifts we gave to our children as they were growing up. To see their faces light up with joy on Christmas morning was worth far more to me than anything I had under the tree.

I know Christmas is far too commercial and consumer-crazy, but I still love giving and receiving gifts (in moderation) at Christmas. To me, they are reflections of the Great Gift we celebrate—the birth of Christ. It still touches my heart that God so loved the world he gave his only Son. What a profound sacrifice!

I think of God as the ultimate Parent on Christmas morning. How delighted God is to give the Gift, and then to see his children enjoy it. When we find life in Jesus Christ, it thrills the divine heart; it makes the angels sing.

A great danger for God's children who have been many times to Christmas is that we become numb to the beauty and mystery of the Gift. We are inundated with the Christmas season, starting after Halloween, and by the time the day

comes, we are sick of it. Or at least tired and ready to get on with the New Year.

Can we hear again this year the wonderful mystery of Christmas?

"And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). The Word is the creative force of God, eternal before and after time, glorious in light at the right hand of the Father. And he becomes flesh! He takes on a human body through the womb of Mary, and God comes into the world he created as a helpless, vulnerable infant. Incredible!

The claim we make about Jesus is unique among the many paths to God. He is not merely a god appearing on earth, like a Greek god or a Hindu avatar. He is more than an enlightened teacher, like Muhammed or Confucius. He is God incarnate, "God in flesh" in the human being Jesus of Nazareth. He is the God-Man, fully human and fully divine, two natures in one person.

And he comes as a baby, wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. Great indeed is the mystery!

The mystery lives when it becomes real in us. Our God is an incarnational God, and we have the

privilege, the honor, and the calling to become "little Christs" as we make God's love known in the world.

When we help the needy at Christmas, when we comfort a person who is grieving through the holidays, when we sing "Silent Night" with such feeling that tears come to our eyes, God is becoming flesh in us. Throughout the year, when we engage our neighbors with the good news of Jesus, we are making God come to life, as surely as he came to life in Bethlehem long ago.

The apostle Paul felt it was his particular calling to "make the word of God fully known, the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages

and generations but has now been revealed to his saints." That's us! "To [us] God chose to make known how great...are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:26-27).

It has now been revealed: God is with us,

Emmanuel. Even better, Christ is in you. This is our hope of glory. This is the gift of God. This is the mystery of the incarnation. This is the best Christmas present ever.

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

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Volume 158 • No. 031 December 2, 2011
Martha S. Taylor • Director of Communications
Amy Forbus • Editor
Patrick W. Shownes • Communications Coordinator
www.arumc.org

The *Arkansas United Methodist* is the newspaper of record for the Arkansas Conference of The United Methodist Church. It is published once monthly, on the first Friday of each month, and four special issues during the year for a total of 16 issues per year.

Send correspondence & subscription updates to:
Arkansas United Methodist, 800 Daisy Bates Drive, Little Rock, AR 72202; or e-mail to Patrick.Shownes@psbshownes@arumc.org

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:
The United Methodist Reporter, PO Box 660275, Dallas, TX 75266-0275.

The *United Methodist Reporter* (USPS 954-500) is published weekly by UMR Communications, 1221 Profit Drive, Dallas, TX 75247. Periodicals Postage Paid at Dallas.

Arkansas Conference Communications
800 Daisy Bates Drive
Little Rock, AR 72202-3770
www.arumc.org 501-324-8000

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March 2	Feb. 16



AN OCCASIONAL WORD from the Bishop

BY CHARLES CRUTCHFIELD

Dear Friends:

The season of Advent is upon us. Christmas is coming.

The failure of the congressional “super committee” to reach agreement on our nation’s very serious financial issues has generated an avalanche of finger-pointing and blame casting. Political advantage in the aftermath of failure has been claimed by partisans of both parties. The stock market took a tumble.

The credit worthiness of the United States is again a matter of discussion.

The season of Advent is upon us. Christmas is coming.

Protesters are in the streets all over the world around the issues of economic inequality. Rioters in Egypt demand to experience the change they feel they have won. Demonstrators in Syria are dying for freedom. The world worries about unrestrained nuclear power let loose in the Middle East.

The season of Advent is upon us. Christmas is coming.

A child in Africa dies every 45

seconds of a disease that is preventable. Children in Somalia are dying of hunger. The average age of a homeless person in the United States is nine years old. The number of persons living below the poverty line in this country is increasing.

Thank God the season of Advent is upon us. Christmas is coming.

You see, it is for just such a world that Christ came—a world of sin and sickness and despair. We can live victoriously in just such a world because our strength is found in God, not in dysfunctional committees.

Our capacity to face the future is given to us in the birth, life, teaching, death and resurrection of a child born not in a palace, but in a manger. No silver spoon here, just a few wisps of hay.

Followers of Christ know that we are to faithfully care for one another—for the folks across the street and for the child in Africa. We know we are to lift up the dignity and value of all of God’s children, no matter the personal cost. We know the source of real power.

We have the opportunity. We

have the capacity to feed the hungry, to heal the sick, to respond to the poor, to practice compassion, to forgive, to love. It simply begins as we kneel beside a rude manger to adore the Gift of God. Then we rise to act out the same love God has shown us. Our faith was made for just such a world as this.

We do not have the time nor the luxury to play blame games or wring our hands in despair. God is calling us to act as individuals to respond to the world in which we live, to the people with whom we live. We are to be faithful in our way. God will always be faithful in God’s way.

Thank God the season of Advent is upon us. Christmas is coming. The child is born again in our hearts and in our lives. God’s grace and love abounds. And we are freed to give the gifts of God’s love to the world.

Faithfully,

Charles Crutchfield



Remembering the ‘God factor’ as we work to fight hunger

BY DEENA MARIE HAMILTON
Special Contributor

Being a pastor opened my eyes to such human need that once I become aware of need, I can no longer ignore it with a clear conscience. I’m convicted to my very soul. In my conviction, I went to go visit one of my most cherished friends and mentors, the Rev. Dr. Robin Moore, pastor of Henderson United Methodist Church.

The day of my visit, she preached on Matthew 14:13-21, about Christ feeding the multitude. I loved how she depicted the popularity of Christ. She said that he was the most famous celebrity in the world. The Pharisees and scribes sent the paparazzi out to get dirt on Jesus so that they could trap him.

She went on to say that the ruling religious leader ignored the unclean. Jesus did not only acknowledge them, but he looked them straight in the eye. But even through all the miracles and the authority and knowledge that people had experienced, there were still skeptics. I really couldn’t imagine that, but that’s what the Word and the pastor said. And the proof that Christ was not all talk is his huge following.

It was right before nightfall and folk were hungry. Philip looked and saw all these people and realized that even if he went to a Walmart Supercenter, he wouldn’t have enough money to feed them. There were 5,000 men, not including women and children.

According to Dr. Moore, Philip was being practical about the situation, and he forgot something important. Philip forgot about the God Factor, but thank God that Andrew didn’t.

Andrew believed that all he had to do was find something, and he knew that Jesus was gonna make it do what it would do. So he was able to scrounge up two anchovies and a few loaves of bread.

Now, I don’t want to focus on the end result. I want to write about Andrew’s faith. Andrew knew that Christ was the one to get the situation resolved.

Many people quote Philippians 4:13 that they can do all things through Christ who strengthens them. But my question for the hour

is: Why are there still hungry people in this world? People are starving physically and spiritually.

When the Rev. Stephen Copley invited me to be a member of the Arkansas Conference Hunger Task Force, my hope was regained because God allowed for me to be included in a group of individuals that wanted to make hunger a priority. At First UMC Little Rock, I walked in a room full of Andrews that believed that through us, God



Deena Marie Hamilton

can create the miracle of eradicating hunger. My fellow task force member, the Rev. Lynn Kilbourne, made a compelling reference in her article featured in the Aug. 5 issue of this newspaper. She cited Dr. Norman Wirzba, Professor of Theology, Ecology, and Rural Life at Duke Divinity School. The reference was that we plant the seeds, but God yields the bounty. This reveals the true meaning and character of humanity.

The Rev. Kilbourne went on to say that food helps us find our place in the world, and we must accept that food is a gift from God. By participating in food production, we get the opportunity to be a part of creation.

That’s why the task force recognizes the cultural and spiritual benefits of community gardening. This fosters a sense of community and it creates a deeper relationship with God and each other.

As we continue to celebrate the birth of Christ during Advent, let me put something out there: How can we go out in the community asking people to turn their hearts and lives to God when they’re malnourished?

Let us be the body of Christ for the world to help provide homegrown nourishment that opens up the door for us to help provide food for the soul. Be blessed and empowered!

Hamilton is the president and founder of New Horizons Foundation, Inc. She can be reached at pinktitration14@gmail.com.

Being mindful of a beautiful word

BY CHARLES MURRY
Special Contributor

Christianity’s witness contains an abundance of beautiful words. A few examples include “love,” “grace,” “truth” and “faith.” One word we often overlook in the list is “community.”



Charles Murry

One criticism of modern Christians by those who do not adhere to this faith is the over-emphasis on anthropomorphic images of God. To add a counterpoint, simply read the introduction to almost any translation of the Bible into English, and the translators will describe the difficulties related to the word “Lord.” And, this is just in the Hebrew Scriptures.

There are a myriad of names beyond “Father, Son and Holy Spirit” identifying the triune God in the New Testament, including Creator, Savior and Comforter; Deliverer, Messiah and Advocate; God, Holy One of Israel and Counselor. Take note: God, in God’s own holiness, is community. In community, God’s “three-ness” begets God’s “one-ness.” To be “in community” is to pattern our existence after God’s own being.

At the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, he assembled a band of twelve; that is, he immediately created a community. From the personalities of the twelve, we know being in community is difficult. There are disciples who want special privileges, such as being seated on the left and

the right. There are disciples who press for their own agendas, such as sending the children away. There are disciples who want Jesus to respond in ways consistent with their understanding of messianic roles, such as calling for fire and brimstone to rain down upon folk reluctant to believe Christ’s teachings.

Being in the church is being in community. In every definition of the word “church” (from church as denomination, to Church as holy, catholic and apostolic, to church as local congregation) there is an aspect of community.

When we worship, it is in community. When we offer hospitality and invitation, it is to welcome another to be in community. When we join together in mission and service, it is working in community. When we give, it strengthens the community. When we create a circle for Bible study and prayer, that too is community. Being in community through faith honors God.

A historic role of Christianity’s ordained persons is to “build community.” Lay persons are charged with making decisions for the good of the whole body. How do we do that? How do we “build community”? Remember our denomination-wide study of Three Simple Rules: to do no harm, to do good and to stay in love with God. That was John Wesley’s answer. At minimum, these rules form a starting point for living in community. At maximum, they may be the best answer ever.

The Rev. Murry serves as senior pastor of First UMC Conway.

Talk

(continued from page 1A)

"I don't have any doubt that those skills and competencies are there," Palmer said. "We are leader-full. We're not lacking in that."

Bishops' roundtable

The gathering also included a roundtable discussion led by three bishops: Charles Crutchfield (Arkansas Area), Robert Hayes (Oklahoma Area) and James Dorff (San Antonio Area).

Laity and clergy alike wrestled with tough questions during the two-hour session that covered a variety of topics, such as whether the financial implications of denominational decline actually serve as the primary motive for change; and how bishops plan to measure "congregational vitality."

"I think what we need is to remind ourselves that this is a work in progress," Hayes said of the restructuring proposal. "It's going to go to a legislative committee, and it's going to go before the General Conference. And if we don't make our voices heard between now and the beginning of May, well, then we're going to be responsible for not making known our anxiety at a time when we need to."

Some people expressed concern that the proposed changes seem



The Rev. Ronnie Miller-Yow, national president of Black Methodists for Church Renewal and pastor of Wesley Chapel UMC Little Rock, shares his perspective during the bishops' roundtable discussion of Can We Talk.

driven by fiscal concerns rather than ministry.

"There is downsizing, but that downsizing is done not just to save money, but in order to increase efficiency and increase effectiveness in mission and ministry," Dorff said. "But that needs to be communicated very, very clearly, because if all we're doing this for is to save money, then it needs to be looked at again."

Hayes said that the changes seem to focus on the question, "How do we retool, reboot ourselves to do more efficient, effective ministry with less?"

Discussion surrounding the concept of congregational vitality centered on concerns over how bishops will define a vital

congregation. The three bishops on the panel agreed that context plays a crucial role in determining vitality.

"For me, it comes back down to the annual conference," said Hayes. He plans to work with his conference's office of congregational development and the cabinet to determine what a vital congregation looks like in Oklahoma. "I can't let General Conference determine for me what's vital and what's not."

Crutchfield spoke of a 10-member, rural church that fits his definition of a vital congregation.

"It's worthy of our attention," he said. "It's not going to grow; it's going to die. But it's going to *live* until it dies. Are we going to affirm that? Of



Brenda Norwood, left, and the Rev. C.E. McAdoo explained the Call to Action and work of the United Methodist Church's Interim Operations Team during the Friday afternoon session of Can We Talk.

AUM PHOTOS BY AMY FORBUS

course we are.

"There's not going to be some sort of template that says, 'If you don't grow the church by five percent in membership every year, you are not vital.'"

The most critical component of a vital church, Crutchfield says, is committed laity.

"We know something about how to hold ministers accountable," he said. "We have got to find a way—and we have not found it yet—to hold laity accountable to their baptism.... It's not just the preachers."

Church turnarounds aren't common, Hayes said, because clergy trained to maintain congregations find themselves trying to revitalize

them, "creating a vicious cycle of burnout."

"Every bishop in the South Central Jurisdiction is looking for gifted black leadership," Hayes said.

The Rev. Ronnie Miller-Yow, current national president of Black Methodists for Church Renewal and pastor of Wesley Chapel UMC Little Rock, was gratified by the bishops' comments.

"I'm glad to hear the bishops take some ownership of the problem," he said.

"Somehow we've got to give a sense of security to the laity," he said, adding that the appointment system fosters a lack of trust, with laity reluctant to step out in faith because of fear that their new pastor will soon be appointed elsewhere.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Different perspective on called session

Thanks for covering the conference [Nov. 4 cover story, "Budget approved, updates received at called session"]. At the end of your article you stated that Steve Coburn "chastised" the members of the conference about their lack of trust. Actually, I think Steve just stated reality and called us to reconsider the issue of trust.

I, for one, identified with what he said as one who was attending with what I was against on my mind. I was guilty. I still know what I don't agree with but it made me open my mind to hear it without such a bias. This is a tough time for the Conference, and being able to frame things in a positive light is important.

While there are some things I disagree with, I am an Elder in

covenant with others to put the Kingdom of God before my opinions, whether they are right or wrong. Through your writing, please encourage us to work together. Thanks again for your work.

The Rev. Bobby Bell
Fort Smith

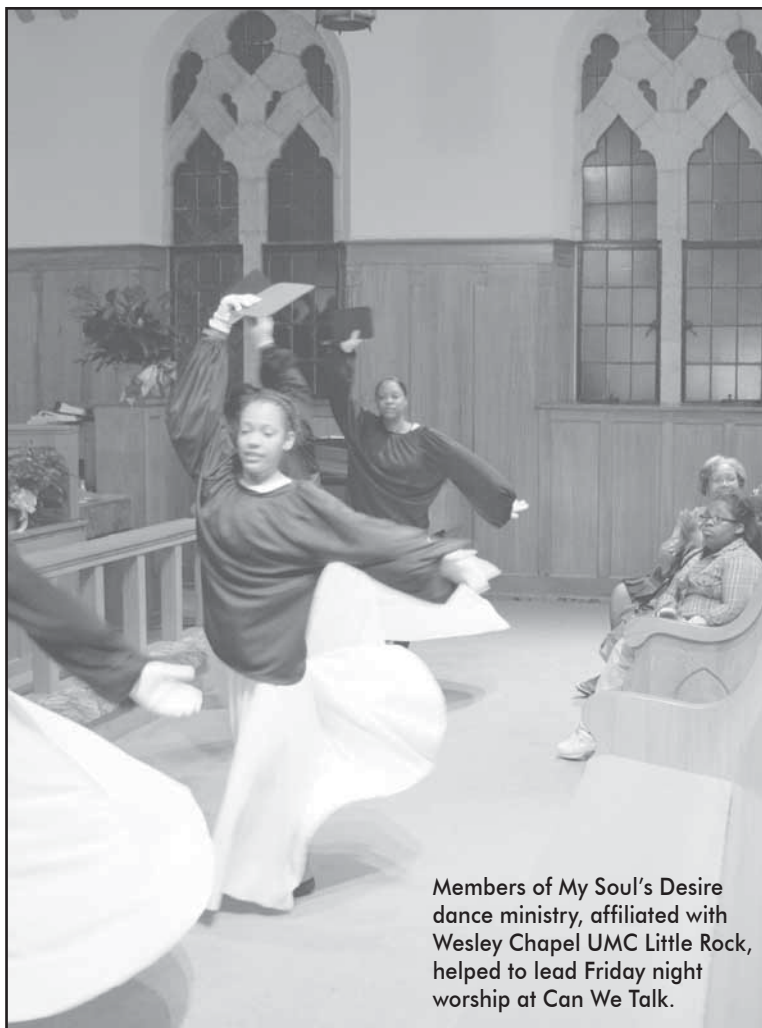
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Members of My Soul's Desire dance ministry, affiliated with Wesley Chapel UMC Little Rock, helped to lead Friday night worship at Can We Talk.

Looking ahead

Before adjournment, the group spent time drafting a document to name issues they would like to see considered leading up to the 2012 General Conference. The issues included the concept of cultural competency; accountability and empowerment of the laity; and concerns already presented by the caucus group Black Methodists for Church Renewal.

The group plans to submit the document to the Interim Operations Team, which was named by the Council of Bishops and the Connectional Table to serve as a catalyst for changes recommended in the Call to Action report. Bishop Palmer serves as convener of that team.

Now in its fourth year, "Can We Talk" has become an annual forum for African Americans to engage in dialogue about the future of the United Methodist Church. The fifth annual Can We Talk gathering is set for Oct. 19-20, 2012, in Houston, Texas.

Kimbrough to leave Philander Smith College

Philander Smith College announced on Nov. 1 that its president, Dr. Walter M. Kimbrough, has accepted the position of president at Dillard University, a United Methodist-affiliated historically African-American educational institution in New Orleans.

Kimbrough, 44, will finish the 2011-2012 academic year at Philander Smith College. His last day will be May 31, 2012.

“It is tough to leave a place you love, but in order for both Philander Smith College and myself to grow, we need new experiences,” Kimbrough said.

Since his installation seven years ago as the college’s 12th president, Kimbrough has received recognition for his innovative leadership of the institution. Programs he has implemented, such as the “Bless the Mic” lecture series that debuted in 2005 and the Social Justice Initiative launched in 2007, have raised Philander Smith College’s profile as well as that of its current leader.

Last December, Kimbrough was named to *Ebony* magazine’s Power 100, an unexpected honor that brought him attention on a national scale.

According to *Ebony*, individuals chosen for the Power 100 consistently challenge the status quo, forge new paths to opportunity and success, make an impact due to the sheer breadth of their sphere of influence, and display efforts that positively benefit African Americans.

Anyone affiliated with Philander Smith College would agree that Kimbrough meets those high standards.

During his presidency, Philander Smith College has seen an increased residential student population, moved to a more selective admission process and cultivated a stable faculty, innovative administrators and an engaged board of trustees.

“Philander Smith has made great strides under Dr. Kimbrough’s leadership,” said Bob Birch, chair of the board of trustees. “Graduation and retention rates have improved, entering freshman test scores are up, and two new dorms have been completed and fully occupied. We are very excited for Walter and his family to have this opportunity to advance to a larger institution. Dillard will likewise benefit from his guidance.”

Birch added that the board of trustees is working with Kimbrough during his remaining time on campus to begin the search for the college’s next president.

Philander Smith College appears poised to handle the transition. The 2011-2012 freshman class is the second largest in the college’s history, with 206 first-time students. The school’s total enrollment now stands at 730.

“It is bittersweet to leave now, but the timing is also right,” said Kimbrough. “Philander Smith



Walter Kimbrough

College is a wonderful institution with a rich heritage and even brighter future. I’m so grateful to have had this opportunity to serve as president. I’ve made memories that I will cherish for a lifetime.”

Philander Smith College is a private, residential, co-educational, four-year undergraduate liberal arts college affiliated with the United Methodist church and a founding member of the United Negro College Fund (UNCF). The college’s mission is to graduate academically accomplished students who are grounded as advocates for social justice, determined to intentionally change the world for the better.

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Bishop honored by Philander Smith College



Dr. Walter Kimbrough, president of Philander Smith College, introduces Bishop Charles Crutchfield, seated at left with his wife, Karen, as the honoree at the college’s President’s Luncheon, held Monday, Nov. 14.

An annual fundraiser to provide scholarship support for the institution’s students and help the college meet its annual United Negro College Fund goal, this year’s luncheon

carried the theme of “Celebrating Our Methodism.” In recent years, the college has looked to its Methodist heritage to help inform its campus-wide focus on social justice.

In his address at the luncheon, Bishop Crutchfield, who serves on the Philander Smith College board of trustees, quoted Methodism’s founder, John Wesley: “There is no holiness but social holiness.”

“It has been refreshing and challenging, and spiritually uplifting, to be a part of a community that takes its faith seriously,” he added.

Bishop Crutchfield praised the college for achieving “transformational change” under the leadership of Kimbrough and his team.

In addition to honoring him at the luncheon, the college in the spring 2012 semester will award a scholarship to a deserving student in Bishop Crutchfield’s honor.

Ingathering (continued from page 1A)

unload back seats of cars and trailers is exciting to watch—because they understand our rich heritage of connectionalism and missions.”

Teaching children, youth

For many, the event served as a beginning lesson in mission, as several families, children's and youth ministries used the event as a teaching moment. For others, it was part of a yearly service tradition.

Darlene Gates from Cabot UMC

brought members of Club 56, a ministry for fifth- and sixth-graders, to experience the project.

Gates said she wanted students to not only learn more about Ingathering, but also to see how others join together to help people in need.

“We want to help people, so we can spread God's love together, everywhere,” explained Julia Rogers, a fifth-grader at Cabot.

Jessica Nolan from Ward UMC brought her four children to

Ingathering at the urging of her mother.

“We've already had the speech about helping others who don't have anything,” Nolan said. “I hope this reinforces what I've been teaching them—and they all like to help others.”

Experiencing connection

The Rev. Jessica Durand, director of the Henderson State University/Ouachita Baptist University Wesley Foundation, brought 11 of her college students to

help with the effort.

Durand said it was a way for her students to give back to the Conference, which has done so much for their ministry through apportionments and other methods. She said she hoped the students would also see how there is always a way for people, regardless of age, to make a difference.

Bodenhamer said she hoped people walked away knowing they were part of a mission mindset that spans “across the street and around the world.”

Much of what is collected will

remain in Arkansas, stored at the Rice Depot. Other items will be taken to the UMCOR Sager Brown Depot in Baldwin, La.

Serving and fasting

For Tina Mosley, youth minister from Paris UMC, helping with Ingathering was a way to show young people how to be part of the mission experience from start to finish.

Her seven students not only spent the morning helping bag bulk rice, but they also were fasting for at

LEFT: Henry Traylor, a member of the St. James UMC Little Rock youth group, helps prepare rice bags for the Simple Pleasures gift baskets sold in the Arkansas Rice Depot gift shop. For every bag prepared by volunteers, the Rice Depot will earn \$2 in profit, which is used to help purchase food and other items.

CENTER: James Michau, a member of the Henderson State University Wesley Foundation, pours rice into a bag held by Evelyn Banks-Shackleford, a Church and Community Worker serving in Marianna. In addition to unloading Ingathering supplies, volunteers helped complete numerous projects for the Arkansas Rice Depot.

RIGHT: Jackson Kincade, a student from Cabot UMC, helps unload a bucket of relief supplies during the Nov. 19 Ingathering.

PHOTOS BY KAYLEA HUTSON



Why Ingathering matters: one woman shares her story

In 2008, Hurricane Ike hit the Gulf Coast and the town of Bridge City, Texas, where we lived. The storm surge generated by the hurricane traveled 30 miles inland to our community. Ninety-five percent of the homes in Bridge City were totally gutted from the surge. Ours was one of them.

Galveston, 200 miles away, also sustained extensive damage. With a population much greater than Bridge City, Galveston had received most of the aid and media coverage.

Three days after the hurricane, those who had evacuated were permitted to return to their homes. The stench of rotting fish greeted us two miles before we arrived at our house. Brought in by the storm surge, dead fish were everywhere.

We struggled to open our front door, but it wouldn't budge. Furniture had floated up against it and was piled in a heap. Water marks on the walls revealed there had been 52 inches of water in our house.

Lodging was a problem. There were no vacancies at hotels within a three-hour drive of Bridge City. Emergency workers and contractors had filled them up! We drove back

and forth each day and worked in our home until curfew. With our bare hands, we removed wet carpet, mildewed items and furniture covered in sludge.

Gloves, garbage bags, cleaning supplies, and disinfectant were not available. Stores, even miles away, were sold out of the things we so desperately needed. Clothes from our closets were wet and had begun to mildew. We had no means to hang them up without clothesline and clothespins. In desperation, people laid their clothes on the grass in an effort to dry them. Front yards looked like patchwork quilts.

Then, a miracle happened! A mission team from Arkansas was at UMCOR Sager-Brown Depot in Baldwin, La., when the call came in for flood buckets (now called cleaning buckets). They loaded up two truckloads and headed for Galveston, but their truck broke down on the way. They had made it as far as Vidor, Texas—directly across the street from Vidor UMC. And, Bridge City was just a few miles away!

The flood buckets were off-loaded in the church parking lot and distributed in Bridge City. Our pastor, the Rev. Kevin Kissel, and his

wife, Karen, from Faith UMC in Orange, brought flood buckets to us and helped us distribute them.

What a blessing it was to share the flood buckets with our neighbors. Some cried when they received them. Some couldn't believe this was a free gift. I've never felt prouder as a United Methodist than the day we distributed them. What a vital ministry this is!

I don't think people who fill these buckets realize what it means to be the recipient of one. For us, it was a true gift from God. I love the United Methodist Church! I'm grateful that we're a missions-oriented church.

A year after Hurricane Ike, we moved to Hot Springs Village. The first time we visited Village UMC, we knew that was where God wanted us. Soon after, we learned it was the mission team from Village UMC that had driven the truck that had broken down in Vidor. Because of them, and God, the community of Bridge City received the supplies they so desperately needed. And that, in itself, is a miracle!

—Patty Prince



Karen Kissel, right, shows the stock of supplies included in an UMCOR cleaning bucket to a Bridge City, Texas, couple receiving the gift.

PHOTO BY PATTY PRINCE

least 30 hours, as part of a multi-layered lesson concerning hunger.

Mosley's team collected pledges to support their efforts. A portion of the funds will benefit a local food pantry in Logan County, and the remaining funds will help the students travel to Sager Brown in July for a mission trip.

"It's important to volunteer and help the needy within our own state," Mosley said. "Hopefully they will understand some on the local level, and [here] on the state level, while at Sager Brown they will see how we help on a national and international level."

"I hope this will help them be more mission-minded."

Hutson serves as director of children's ministries at St. James UMC Little Rock.

Ingathering grants distributed

This year, for the first time, 14 hunger grants were awarded during Ingathering to ministries throughout the state.

"In these economic times, we were hearing heartbreaking stories about how food pantries were struggling to feed folks," Bodenhamer explained. "When this money came available, we knew that God was saving it for this moment in time."

Funded through the support of churches throughout Arkansas, grants totaling \$35,000 went to feeding programs throughout the state—both to emerging ministries and existing efforts. Grants not presented during Ingathering are being awarded at the district level and will be announced in a future issue of the *Arkansas United Methodist*.

A one-time initiative, Bodenhamer hopes the grant program can become an ongoing project, if donations continue.

Grants announced at Ingathering went to the following ministries:

- Argenta UMC North Little Rock: \$250
- Arkansas Justice For Our Neighbors, Little Rock: \$1,000
- Bull Shoals UMC: \$250
- Eastern Arkansas (sent to help in the aftermath of the Delta Blues Raid drug-trafficking and corruption arrests): \$1,000
- First UMC Marked Tree: \$500
- First UMC Mountain Home (Feeding the Children Fund): \$750
- First UMC Pine Bluff: \$1,000
- First UMC Searcy: \$1,000
- Harmon UMC Springdale: \$1,000
- Sherrill UMC: \$500
- St. Luke UMC Pine Bluff: \$500
- St. Mark UMC White Hall: \$1,000
- Theressa Hoover UMC Little Rock: \$1,000
- Trumann UMC: \$1,000



People from churches and organizations receiving hunger ministry grants attended Ingathering to claim their grant funding as well as to give and serve. From left, the Rev. Stephen Copley of Justice For Our Neighbors; Kathryn Throckmorton of First UMC Searcy; Ingathering coordinator the Rev. Pat Bodenhamer, who presented the grants; and Debby Bodenhamer of First UMC Mountain Home.



Faith Funds

Provide and Protect

Amanda and Joey Scott, both 31, were among the youngest to attend a United Methodist Foundation Provide and Protect Seminar at their church, Pulaski Heights United Methodist in Little Rock.

"We wanted to learn more about estate planning to provide for our children, Ella Kate and Anna Claire," said Amanda. "And I wanted to get information for my parents who own a family business and don't have an up-to-date will," added Joey, an instructor at Arkansas State University in Beebe.

After attending the seminar, the Scotts talked about leaving a portion of their estate to the Church, something they had not considered before. "We don't have a big estate now, but in 20 or 30 years we could be in a position to leave a gift through the Foundation," Amanda said.

They also explored the Online Wills Planner at www.umfa.org after the seminar. "How easy!" said Amanda. "I answered all the questions in about 15 minutes, and then forwarded the PDF and login info to Joey so he could make it more complete." After gathering information using the Online Wills Planner, the Scotts plan to send the document to an attorney to draw up their will.

If you'd like to schedule a Provide and Protect Seminar for your local church, contact UMFA Vice President of Development Janet Marshall at jmarshall@umfa.org or call her at the Foundation.



The United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas

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Multiple churches’ prayers surround pastor’s remarkable recovery

BY MARTHA S. TAYLOR
Arkansas Conference

The Rev. Dixon Platt had two choices that September afternoon in Memphis: play golf or go to the doctor. What he did that day ended up saving his life.

Platt, a local pastor serving the McCrory and Cotton Plant UMCs in northeast Arkansas and a student at Memphis Theological Seminary, had been experiencing headaches which were gradually getting worse. That weekend, while staying with his brother in Memphis, he had been unable to sleep because of the pain. Nothing he tried brought relief.

“Thinking back, I recalled having headaches for a number of years, often after extremely strenuous exercise,” Platt said. “But recently, they’d been increasing in intensity and frequency.”

So, after learning there were no available tee times, Platt scheduled an appointment with his primary care physician. After hearing Platt describe his symptoms, his doctor’s reaction was “to jump on it with both feet,” Platt recalls.

Just hours later, Platt had had a CT scan and MRI and was instructed to go to the Baptist Memorial Hospital emergency department. Within ten minutes of his arrival, he was in a consultation room meeting with a neurosurgeon. It was then that he learned that he was being scheduled for surgery to remove a tumor from his brain. The surgery was imminent.

Rallying support

Platt called those most important to him, starting with his wife, Judy, who was taking classes at Garrett Evangelical-Theological Seminary in Evanston, Ill.; his brother; and his district superintendent, the Rev. Kurt Boggan. Near the top of this list were his churches. He spoke to Ada Heath, the lay leader at McCrory, and what she did in the following 48 hours still touches Platt deeply.

First, Heath began contacting church members and asked them to pray for their pastor. As word

spread, the idea came to her to organize a prayer service for Platt. While she had helped in the past with worship services, this was the first time Heath had a specific person in mind for a pulling together a worship service.

Heath contacted members of the McCrory and Cotton Plant churches and posted information about the service on the church’s Facebook page. From this posting and word of mouth, members from Platt’s previous charge, Hunter, Central and Ellis Chapel UMCs, made plans to attend the service, which had been scheduled for the next evening. The night of the service, about 40 people gathered to pray.

Heath had placed a fleece blanket on the altar. She encouraged the attendees to walk to the altar to lay their hands on and sign the blanket.

The first individual to come forward did something unexpected. He placed his hand on the soft cloth, traced the outline of his hand on it, and signed his name inside the handprint.

“This wasn’t what I had thought of when I asked people to come forward,” Heath said. “But after that, every person did the same thing.”

One by one, each person there that evening came forward and drew a handprint on the blanket, as if to imbue the very fabric with their love and prayers for their friend and pastor. They prayed that it would bring comfort to Platt as he recovered.

The members had also arranged for the Platts to listen to the service from the hospital. From his bed, Platt heard the songs and prayers for healing. And the Heaths were able to deliver the blanket to Platt before his surgery.

“I was so proud of them,” Platt said. “That they took the initiative to organize the prayer service without

any prompting and included the members of churches where I had previously served, meant so much to me and Judy.”

‘One blessed man’

Platt’s recovery was remarkable. He was discharged from the hospital on the Monday following the Friday morning operation. He performed a funeral for a church member about a week later, and was back at school within two weeks. Church members took turns driving him to his appointments and preparing meals. Today, Platt is doing well and appears to have made a complete recovery.

“I got back on my feet so fast people in McCrory talk about the miracle God performed, and I can’t disagree,” Platt said. “When I saw my neurosurgeon the week after my surgery, he said, ‘Dixon, you are one lucky man.’ I told him, ‘Doc, I am one blessed man.’” His doctor heartily agreed.

“It made me feel loved and appreciated,” Platt said of the focused prayer effort on his behalf. “Sometimes church members don’t need you as much as you think they do.”

“I don’t think it changed us as a church,” Heath says. “That’s what we do—we take care of one another. But this was different because it was our pastor, and I do think it brought us together.”

And every time Platt looks at that fleece blanket laying across the couch in the den, covered in handprints, he remembers that the church was, is, and always will be about the people.

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

Ribbon-cutting for new museum location Jan. 14

United Methodists from across the state will find pieces of their past at the grand re-opening of the United Methodist Museum of Arkansas.

All Arkansas Conference United Methodists are invited to attend the ribbon-cutting and dedication service on Saturday, Jan. 14, at First UMC Little Rock, 723 Center Street. The museum is located on the ground floor, in the oldest portion of the church building.

The reception runs from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., with the 11:30 dedication led by Bishop Charles Crutchfield. Light refreshments will be served.

“Although the museum was formed in 1995, it has been something of a best-kept secret,” said the Rev. Ed Matthews, chair of the Museum Committee. He hopes that with the museum’s relocation, “United Methodists across the state will be encouraged to develop more interest not only in the Conference history and artifacts, but in local church history.”

The museum’s collection, covering the denomination’s history in the Arkansas area, spans two centuries and includes artifacts such as historic Bibles, hymnals and church furnishings; items used by early circuit riders; photographs and other art; and commemorative plates from churches across the Conference.

Funding for the relocation from Batesville and the extensive site preparation was made possible by a generous grant from the United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas.

To share with the museum artifacts of historical value, or to serve as a volunteer tour guide, contact museum coordinator Martha Sowell at 501-224-9333 or mars75@abcmglobal.net. Local churches wishing to invite a speaker to present a program on the museum and the history of Methodism in Arkansas should contact Sowell, as well.

To schedule a tour visit for a confirmation class or other study group, contact the Arkansas Conference office at 501-324-8000 or toll-free 877-646-1816 after Jan. 14.



ORGAN DONOR: Martha Sowell, coordinator for the United Methodist Museum of Arkansas, shows off the pump organ from the old Smyrna UMC in White County, Ark. She and her husband, Sam, have donated the instrument to the museum. Sam Sowell’s ancestors had ties to the Smyrna church, which is how the couple came to own the organ.

AUM PHOTO BY LESLEY ANDREWS

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COMING UP

December

Mrs. Santa’s Kitchen at Sequoyah UMC Fayetteville Dec. 10
Sequoyah UMC hosts its annual Mrs. Santa’s Kitchen on Saturday, Dec. 10 from 9 a.m. to noon. Items available for purchase include homemade cookies, candy, bread and gifts. All proceeds benefit local missions. Sequoyah UMC is located at 1910 Old Wire Road in Fayetteville.

Service of Light and Hope at St. James UMC Little Rock Dec. 10
A worship service for anyone experiencing loss, grief or sadness during the Christmas season will take place on Saturday, Dec. 10 at 5:30 p.m. at St. James UMC, 321 Pleasant Valley Drive in Little Rock. “A Service of Light and Hope” draws its name from two of the themes of Advent and Christmas, and the liturgy for this time of worship is based on those themes. The service will feature an opportunity for people to light a candle in memory of a deceased loved one, or as a prayer asking God to shed light on a situation of loss or pain.

Early registration for spring Faith & Environmental Justice retreat Dec. 15
Arkansas Interfaith Power & Light is holding a Faith & Environmental Justice retreat March 23-24, 2012 at Ferncliff Camp, just outside of Little Rock. Dodd Galbreath of Lipscomb University in Nashville, Tenn., and the founding director of the Institute for Sustainable Practices, will deliver the keynote address. Participants who register before Dec. 15 receive a 20 percent discount.
Workshop topics include energy efficiency, fracking in

Arkansas, creation care book studies, the science of climate change, social justice aspects of climate disasters, taking the message to houses of worship, green mission outreach and more. For details, visit arkansasipl.com or e-mail arkansasipl@gmail.com. Mail payment to Arkansas IPL, P.O. Box 268, Little Rock, AR 72203.

Longest Night Service of Hope and Healing at Lakewood UMC North Little Rock Dec. 21
On Dec. 21, the longest night of the year, Lakewood UMC will host a special worship service designed to acknowledge that the Christmas holidays do not feel joyous to those who are alone or missing loved ones. The Longest Night Service of Hope and Healing will begin at 6 p.m., and all are invited to attend. Lakewood UMC is at 1922 Topf Road in North Little Rock.

ATU Wesley Foundation seeks Christmas sponsors for kids by Dec. 30
The Wesley Foundation at Arkansas Tech University is seeking Christmas sponsors for each of the 84 children in its Age to Age ministry. A \$30 gift provides the opportunity for a child in the program to go Christmas shopping.
“They are instructed that they can buy anything they want with that \$30, and most of the time they buy gifts for family members,” says the Rev. Jason Molitor, Wesley Foundation director. In addition to the \$30, each child will receive a hooded sweatshirt donated by Medical Office Systems in Russellville. Since 1987, Age to Age has paired up college students with at-risk children in the Russellville community for tutoring, one-on-one mentoring and life skills development.

January

Chili for Children at ATU Wesley Foundation Jan. 27
The Wesley Foundation at Arkansas Tech University will host Chili for Children as the January fundraiser for its Age to Age ministry. On Jan. 19-20, they will make deliveries to corporations in Russellville, and on Jan. 27 they open their building at 1111 N. El Paso Avenue in Russellville for \$8 all-you-can-eat chili and desserts.
Since 1987, Age to Age has paired up college students with at-risk children in the Russellville community for tutoring, one-on-one mentoring and life skills development. One of the program’s goals is to have every Age to Age child graduate from high school so that college can become an option. For information, contact Lisa Roys, executive director of Age to Age, at 479-968-4159 or lisa@atuwesleyfoundation.org.

Jeannie Stone art show at St. James UMC Little Rock until Jan. 12
Award-winning artist Jeannie Stone, a member of Wesley UMC Russellville, is having a one-person show of her oil paintings in the gallery at St. James UMC Little Rock. The show began Nov. 6 and continues through Jan. 12, 2012.
The gallery at St. James is open and free to the public weekdays 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., as well as on Sundays before and after each of the morning services. Twenty-two of Stone’s paintings are on display and for sale, with 20 percent of the price going to the St. James art acquisition fund.
Located near Jones Hall on the St. James campus, 321 Pleasant Valley Drive, the St. James gallery is best accessible from Entrance 3.

Worship Fair 2012

Ancient Ways, Future Paths

presented by the
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Fellowship of United Methodists
in Music and Worship Arts

Friday, February 17
Plenary “What’s Ancient about the Future?”

Saturday, February 18
Workshops, Luncheon, Vendors

hosted by
Pulaski Heights UMC
4823 Woodlawn
Little Rock, AR

www.arkansasfummwa.org

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Schedule

Friday, February 17

5:00 pm Registration

6:00 pm Worship Service with communion

7:00 pm Plenary “What’s Ancient About the Future?”

Dinner available for \$10; seating available for those who don’t eat.

8:00 pm James O’Donnell Organ Recital

Saturday, February 18

8:30 am Registration

9:00 am Opening Worship

9:45 am Browse our vendor displays

10:00 am Class Session I

“Reconstructing Disneyland”

Worship & Song reading session

“Seeing God”

11:15 am Break

11:45 am Lunch, business meeting, vendors

12:30 pm Class Session II

See Session I classes

1:45 pm Break

2:15 pm Closing worship

Clinicians

Rev. Britt A. Skarda, Pulaski Heights UMC

Dr. Dean B. McIntyre,
General Board of Discipleship, Nashville

Rev. Les Oliver, FUMC Springdale

Recital by

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www.arumc.org

Arkansas United Methodist

Destination: Mission helps kids grow and serve

BY DENNI PALMER
Special Contributor

There are moments as a children's minister where you are dealing with squabbling preschoolers and fielding questions from fifth graders about why they need to go to Sunday school. Those moments are just part of the "stuff" that comes with being in Christian education (and make you question your sanity).

And then there are the moments that reset your course for the purpose that God has called you to do—teach the newest generation of Christians about how much God loves them and about how they can show that love to others.

One of those moments came during the Destination: Northwest

Arkansas mission trip this past spring break. If you have never heard of the Destination: Mission trips, they are designed for third- through eighth-grade students to do mission work.

The moment that reminded me we were on the right track came the first night. One of my students, Mollie, has certain foods that she will not eat, and chili is one of them. Dinner, of course, was chili.

There were no alternative dinner plans, and Mollie looked quite concerned as her place in line moved closer to the serving area. I asked her if she would just eat something, and reminded the group around her that the next day we were going to be serving a meal to neighbors who are grateful to eat whatever is served.

I watched from a distance as

Mollie took the bowl of chili and said "thank you" to the volunteer in the kitchen. She slowly walked back to the table and then took a bite. A few minutes later I walked past her and she stopped me to show me how much she had eaten. I texted a photo of her and her half-eaten bowl of chili to her mom, who thinks just that moment made the mission trip amazing.

Now when Mollie hears about chili, she doesn't think she won't eat it (she told me on the summer mission trip that she now likes chili). Instead, she tells other kids about missions. Kids and missions (and a bowl of chili)—amazing!

If you are interested in being a part of Destination: Mission trips, find this year's information at

**DESTINATION:
MISSION**
DRIVIN' INTO 2012



facebook.com/Destination.Mission.

The next trip, to the Fort Smith area, is scheduled for March 21-24, 2012. Pine Bluff will be the destination for the June 27-30 trip, and if we have enough interest, we will go ahead with a second summer trip July 25-28.

For more information about

United Methodist children's ministry in Arkansas, visit kidz.arumc.org.

Palmer, a diaconal minister, serves as director of Christian education at Elm Springs UMC.

Conference survey reveals habits, needs of older adults

If you want to communicate with a church-going older adult United Methodist, you will find that four out of five of them can be reached on the Internet.

Some 387 individuals reported in a recent conference-wide survey of people over age 50 that they have used the Internet at least once in the past week. However, only two out of five older adults used text messaging.

During the average week, almost all of the older adults in United Methodist churches in Arkansas speak to a friend or relative on the phone. More than four out of five go shopping at least once. Almost three out of four report that they visit someone else, but only half have someone drop by to visit them.

These are findings from the recent survey of older members by the Conference Council on Older Adult Ministries. The council conducted two online surveys between Sept. 1 and Oct. 31, 2011.

Doug Collins, a member of the council from Trinity UMC Little Rock, has been the driving force behind the survey project. He shared that the goals of the project were "to find ways that we can help the average church better understand the wants and needs of their older adult members so that they can better plan ways to meet those needs."

The results differ significantly from the 2010 survey in a few areas. In 2011, significantly fewer older adult respondents to the survey indicated that they had had someone visit them during the past week (54 percent, versus 67 percent in 2010), or that they had gone shopping (87 percent, versus 93 percent in 2010). Significantly fewer also reported that they had no problems hearing (72 percent, versus 84 percent in 2010), though more reported problems driving a motor vehicle (95 percent, versus 82 percent in 2010).

Copies of the Conference survey were completed online or distributed to older adults in local churches by the Older Adult Ministry Coordinator for that particular church. Approximately 300 older adults across the state

completed one of the questionnaires.

Among other findings from the survey, few older adults indicated that they had experienced any bad feelings or problems during the past week. However, almost half did say that they had problems remembering something or someone. More than one in four had experienced problems hearing, while one in five had problems seeing.

Almost all of the respondents reported that they attend a religious gathering weekly with relatively few being interested in having any religious services or items brought to their homes. However, "This doesn't mean that there isn't a need in some homes for things like a tape ministry, or a pastoral or lay visit," said Joe Whalen, a council member from Lakewood UMC North Little Rock who coordinated this year's survey, "only that relatively few older adults in any church have this need."

Respondents were given a list of eleven services or activities that could be undertaken either by the church or the community. They were then asked whether or not they feel there is a need for each service or activity in their community and whether that need is currently being met, either by their church or by the community at large.

Between 54 and 58 percent of the men and women thought that there was a need for a prayer ministry, a visitation ministry and medical and church transportation for older adults. Three out of five respondents think that a prayer ministry is currently being provided. Half believe that a visitation ministry is also available.

While three out of five think that church transportation is available, only two out of five believe medical transportation to be available. Among the remaining services, Meals on Wheels at 52 percent was the only service perceived by any real number of respondents as being provided.

A summary of the survey results is available online at www.arumc.org/aoa.

Chaplains take on Air Force Marathon

Chaplain (Lt. Col.) Donald Wilson, left, and Chaplain (Capt.) Ronald Feeser of the 70th ISR Wing in September completed the Air Force Marathon held in Dayton, Ohio. It was the first marathon for Feeser, an Elder in the Arkansas Conference. He and Wilson, a long-time marathoner, ended up training together and made a pact to run the first 20 miles together. Feeser completed the 26.2-mile run in 4 hours, 51 minutes.



"It was really how Chaplain Wilson stated," he said. "My training took me through the first 20 miles and my faith and determination got me through the last 6.2."

COURTESY PHOTO

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The Arkansas Conference Commission on Archives and History is seeking a part-time archivist to work on the Hendrix campus. Applicants should preferably be United Methodist, have a love of history, be knowledgeable of the Arkansas Conference clergy and churches, be user-friendly with computers and basic office equipment, and live in Conway or be willing to commute. Contact chairman Tyler Thompson at tylersq@comcast.net or 501-664-3788.

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OBITUARY

FORT SMITH

Rodney M. Patterson Jr.

Rodney Meredith Patterson Jr., 66, passed away Saturday, Nov. 5, 2011, in Fort Smith.

He was born Nov. 6, 1944, in



Rodney Patterson

Houston, Texas, to Rodney M. and ElFrieda Tietze Patterson. A retired local pastor in the Arkansas Conference of the United

Methodist Church, he had served Cavanaugh and Hackett UMCs in the Fort Smith area, St. John UMC Hope, Amity UMC, St. Paul UMC Malvern and as an associate

pastor at First UMC Ashdown.

He is survived by his wife, Judy Walker-Patterson of Fort Smith; a son, Michael Todd Patterson and his wife Susan of Rockland, Ca.; a daughter, Lori Lynn and her husband the Rev. Keith Dodson of Ozark; his brother, Dennis Wayne Patterson of DeQueen; and four grandchildren: Katie Patterson, Bekah Dodson, Joshua Dodson and Andrew Patterson.

A memorial service was held on Thursday, Nov. 10 at Ozark United Methodist Church, with the Rev. Keith Dodson officiating.

In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to Cancer Treatment Center of America in Tulsa, 10109 E. 79th Street, Tulsa, OK 74133.

Are leaders in your church getting *Interpreter*?

The *Arkansas United Methodist* is just one of the publications available to inform and inspire United Methodist leaders. Many of our readers may be interested in receiving *Interpreter* as well, and now is the time for churches to enroll their leaders for complimentary copies.

Interpreter is a magazine for lay and clergy leaders in local United Methodist churches across the U.S. Its articles seek to connect readers to God, other United Methodist leaders worldwide, and ideas and resources to use in ministry.

Published six times each year by United Methodist Communications, each issue includes a cover package of feature articles, plus other stories and articles providing ideas and resources.

Each congregation is eligible to receive 10 complimentary subscriptions for leaders (five print, five digital). Online enrollment for 2012 is available at enrollment.umcom.org. You can also subscribe as an individual or purchase additional subscriptions for leaders and future leaders in your congregation. You may enroll by sending or faxing a list of leaders to receive *Interpreter*. For help with any of these procedures, please contact United Methodist Communications Customer Service toll-free at 888-346-3862, or by e-mail at interpreter@umcom.org.

To receive a sample copy of *Interpreter*, call Customer Service or e-mail your request to interpreter@umcom.org.



Find the Arkansas Conference of The United Methodist Church on Facebook at facebook.com/arkansasumc

Peace with Justice grant deadline approaching \$50,000 awarded in 2011 to 18 ministries; apply by Jan. 6

Jan. 6 is the deadline to apply for a 2012 Peace with Justice grant from the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society (GBCS).

Funding for this Peace with Justice grants is generated through the Peace with Justice Special Sunday offering of the United Methodist Church.

One of six Special Sundays in the denomination, Peace with Justice “witnesses to God’s demands for a faithful, just, disarmed and secure world.” For 2012, Peace with Justice Sunday falls on June 3, though local churches may observe it at any time.

Peace with Justice grants are awarded annually. This year, GBSC distributed \$50,000 among 18 Peace with Justice ministries.

Grant applicants must be either a United Methodist congregation or other affiliated organization, or an ecumenical group working with and through at least one United Methodist agency or organization.

Applicants must work toward achieving at least one of the following objectives:

- Assist United Methodists in understanding and responding to violence and militarism, and in moving and leading nations and peoples to reconciliation, transformation and redemption;
- Involve and develop leaders among United Methodists and enjoin the general public in efforts to end conflicts, human rights violations and violent aggression around the world;

- Promote just national and international policies and actions (governmental and non-governmental) seeking to address poverty and restore communities; or
- Support policies that promote systematic economic justice and the self-development of peoples, in particular to respond to the disproportionate effect of injustices on racial, indigenous and ethnic persons.

GBSC’s board of directors will evaluate the grant applications. Preference will be given to institutions related to the United Methodist Church, then to first-time requests and, finally, to those including an advocacy component in their program or project.

Applicants may seek assistance in filling out the form, which is available on the GBSC website, www.umc-gbcs.org/grants. For assistance, contact Marvlyn Scott at 202-488-5643.

For more information, contact Mark Harrison, GBSC director of Peace with Justice, at 202-488-5645.

The General Board of Church and Society is one of four international general program boards of the UMC. The board’s primary areas of ministry are advocacy, education and leadership formation, United Nations and international affairs, and resourcing these areas for the denomination.

Contingent from Arkansas colleges inspired by Exploration 2011 event

Eight students of Arkansas colleges were among a congregation of nearly 700 young United Methodists at Exploration 2011, a national ministry conference for college students held recently in St. Louis, Mo.

Hendrix College provided transportation for the state’s representatives, including three students from Southern Arkansas University and one student from Arkansas Tech University.

Organized by the General Board of Higher Education of the United Methodist Church, the two-day event included workshops, prayer, worship services and small-group meetings. The church hopes to help some of the 18- to 26-year-old attendees determine whether their future will lead to a life in the ministry.

Programs like Exploration are critical for the future leadership of the United Methodist Church, according to the Rev. Wayne Clark, Hendrix College chaplain.

“Exploration is a crucial event for young adults to discern their call in the United Methodist church,” said Clark. “I am proud the General Board of Higher Education sponsors this event and invests time and money into this important task.”



A group of students from Arkansas colleges recently attended Exploration 2011, a national ministry exploration conference for college students. Front row, from left: the Rev. Wayne Clark, Hannah Allee, Gabe Breshears, Karyn Kuan and Allison Sauls, all of Hendrix College; back row, from left: Kendall Fort, Southern Arkansas University; Eric Hughes, Arkansas Tech University; Remi Reed and Akau Anyiath, both Southern Arkansas University.

COURTESY PHOTO

History brought to life at Batesville re-enactment, celebration

BY KAY BURTON
Special Contributor

In May of 1836, the Methodist General Conference appointed Bishop Thomas Morris to the newly formed conference of the soon-to-be state of Arkansas.

Morris left Cincinnati, Ohio, on horseback, headed for the Holston Conference in east Tennessee. There, he picked up some young circuit riders to accompany him across the Mississippi River and the swamps of eastern Arkansas to Batesville. Legend has it they dismounted and immediately convened the conference.

On Saturday, Nov. 12, 2011, Bishop Morris (portrayed by Bishop Charles Crutchfield) arrived on the lawn of First United Methodist Church Batesville astride a horse to re-enact the 175th anniversary of the first Arkansas Conference.

Two circuit riders, Phillip Asborne and Ansel Webber (portrayed by Billy Prickett and Webster McKinney) accompanied the bishop. The Rev. Burwell Lee (portrayed by the Rev. Bob Burton), who was the presiding elder at the time, and a group portraying original

members of the congregation met the bishop as he dismounted and convened the conference.

Worship on the lawn included singing, prayer, Scripture, a sermon and the business of the conference.

Months of work by co-chairs Robb Roberts, Joyce Prickett and Ron Lewallen culminated in a memorable event. Dr. Sharon Pittser led a team that brought hundreds of documents and artifacts into order for museum-worthy display and researched costumes and other items for the re-enactment.

Saturday's panel discussion covered the story of Methodism in Batesville and early Arkansas. An afternoon bus tour included the site of the original conference and historic homes and buildings around town.

On Sunday, Bishop Crutchfield preached both services. Special guests included former pastor the Rev. Vic Nixon and his wife, Freddie; Karen Crutchfield; and district superintendent the Rev. Charles Settle and his wife, Mary Ann.

The Rev. Burton serves as co-pastor of First UMC Batesville.



ABOVE: Bishop Charles Crutchfield, portraying Bishop Thomas Morris, and Billy Prickett, portraying circuit rider Phillip Asborne, ride into Batesville to re-enact the convening of the first Methodist annual conference in the territory of Arkansas.

PHOTOS BY KATIE MCLEAN



ABOVE: The Revs. Bob and Kay Burton, co-pastors of First UMC Batesville, were among those dressed in period attire for the 175th anniversary of the first Methodist Annual Conference in Arkansas.



RIGHT: Tommie McDonald (foreground) and First UMC Batesville music minister Alicia Harris sing as part of the festivities.



HENDRIX

The Hendrix College Choir presents the 47th Annual

Candlelight Carol Service Tour

December 15, 7:30 p.m.

Highland Park United Methodist
3300 Mockingbird Lane • Dallas, TX

December 16, 7:30 p.m.

St. Paul United Methodist
2223 Durwood Road • Little Rock

Reservations are not required.

REPORTER

THE UNITED METHODIST

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Flood recovery

UMC dollars, volunteers
rebuild in Tennessee | 4B



Set-aside bishop?

Keep bishops' focus
on annual conferences | 7B



Jimmy Creech

Ex-UM pastor keeps
pressing for change | 8B

Section B

December 2, 2011

Oil Patch MINISTRY



PHOTO BY DAVE GOLTERMAN

Oil drilling near Williston, N.D., has attracted an influx of people from around the U.S. who are desperate for jobs.

N.D. church faces local population boom

BY MARY JACOBS
Staff Writer

After a national news report on his hometown aired a few weeks ago, the Rev. Rod Tkach of Williston, N.D., fielded calls from people as far away as Texas and California—some fellow United Methodists—who wanted to know if he'd rent them space in the church as temporary housing.

"Sorry," Dr. Tkach had to tell them. "We're not zoned as a motel."

The callers had seen an NBC news story about once-tiny Williston, now home to an oil business boom—and an unemployment rate of less than 1

percent.

Dubbed "the town the recession forgot," Williston is drawing people from around the U.S. who are desperate for jobs. Some turn up with little more than a vehicle or a backpack. As a result, the population has exploded. Currently, countywide estimates are at 32,000, up from 20,000 five years ago.

While Faith United Methodist Church, Dr. Tkach's flock of about 120 souls, doesn't fret over the kind of economic woes that plague many other congregations, the boom has proved a mixed blessing. And the church is wrestling with the best way to cope and to minister to the influx.

"This has been a learning experience for the churches in Williston," he said. "When you've been here forever, and your mission is to go out to the world—what do you do when the world comes to you?"

Growing pains

In stark contrast to the rest of the country, jobs are plentiful in Williston. Many come to work in the oil industry. New drilling technology has made once difficult-to-reach oil in North Dakota's Bakken formation profitable to produce. Jobs at retail outlets and fast-food restaurants pay as much as \$15/hour—plus signing bonuses—

and most still can't find enough workers. Restaurants in Williston often close at 3 in the afternoon, for lack of enough employees to staff the dinner hour.

But what's not plentiful is housing. Even though oil companies like Halliburton have built temporary shelters for an estimated 9,000 oil field workers—called "man camps"—there's still a serious lack of shelter.

"A person can be making \$70,000 to \$90,000 a year here, and not have a place to live," said Dr. Tkach. Housing construction is underway, but with winter setting in, and temperatures al-

■ See 'Boom' page 4B

UMC's place in lobbying still strong

BY SAM HODGES
Managing Editor

Mainline Protestant denominations make up just 8 percent of the religious advocacy organizations in Washington, D.C., with Catholics and evangelical Protestant groups having much larger representation, the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life has found.

But the new study by Pew also shows the United Methodist Church ranked among the top 20 such groups in advocacy spending for 2008-2009.

The study notes too that the United Methodist Building occupies a prominent place in religious advocacy, given that it's just across from the U.S. Capitol and is home to several groups other than the UMC's General Board of Church & Society.

"The United Methodist Building is one of several of the major hubs of religious advocacy activity," said Allen D. Hertzke, a political science professor at the University of Oklahoma and primary researcher for the study.

Jim Winkler, top executive of the Board of Church & Society, agreed emphatically.

"The building is enormously important," he said. "In fact, the profile of the building has been raised considerably this year alone as a series of prayer vigils and press conferences for a just federal budget have been held in front of the building."

Millions for advocacy

Pew's study on religious advocacy—titled "Lobbying for the Faithful: Religious Advocacy Groups in Washington, D.C." and released Nov. 21—found that the number of groups engaged in such work has grown from under 40 in 1970 to more than 200 today, paralleling a general increase in the number of lobbying groups.

About 19 percent of the religious advocacy organizations are from a Catholic perspective, while Evangelical Protestant groups make up 18 percent.

■ See 'Lobby' page 2B

FAITH WATCH

Worship attendance linked with optimism

Regular attendance at church or synagogue may contribute to optimism, says a new study published in the *Journal of Religion and Health*. The study looked at religious practices of nearly 100,000 women and found a “strong connection” between worship attendance and optimism, said Eliezer Schnall of Yeshiva University.

Gay marriage foe re-elected as clerk

A town clerk in New York won re-election after refusing to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples. Rose Marie Belforti, a Republican, was again chosen for the part-time job in rural Ledyard. Religion News Service reported that she thanked supporters and told them they had chosen “religious freedom over religious intolerance.” Ms. Belforti earlier said her Christian beliefs kept her from issuing a marriage license to a lesbian couple.

Catholics to buy Crystal Cathedral

The glass building in Santa Ana, Calif., that has been home to the Crystal Cathedral will be sold to the local Catholic diocese. A federal bankruptcy judge approved the \$57.5 million deal. The diocese will use the building as its cathedral. “It will become a true center for our Catholic community,” said Bishop Tod Brown. The Crystal Cathedral congregation, hit by the recession and internal strife, will have to find a new meeting place in three years.

Amish men refuse signs for buggies

Failure to display orange triangle “slow moving vehicle” signs on their horse-drawn buggies could land some Amish men in a Kentucky jail. The men have refused to pay court fines. “We object to the emblem, because it’s a triangle and the triangle is the symbol of the Trinity,” said defendant John Hostetler in a Graves County District Court document.

—Compiled by Sam Hodges

■ **LOBBY** *Continued from page 1B*

Jewish groups account for 12 percent, followed by mainline Protestant and Muslim groups, each at 8 percent.

But the largest category is interreligious, with about one-quarter of the groups either representing multiple faiths or advocating on religious issues without representing a specific religion.

Combined annual expenditures for religious lobbying in Washington are conservatively estimated at \$390 million, the study found. In recent years, the largest individual spenders have been the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (\$87.9 million in 2008) and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (\$26.7 million in 2009.)

The UMC, through the Board of Church & Society, ranked 18th overall and first among Protestant denominations in 2008-2009, spending \$5.4 million in 2009, the study found.

Mr. Winkler said the board’s 2012 budget will be \$5.6 million, and funds a staff of 21.

“Six of the 21 are legislative advocacy staff, so the percentage of our budget that is dedicated to lobbying is pretty modest,” he added.

Mr. Winkler said growth by other groups would be the reason mainline Protestant representation seems small, but he also questioned whether Pew should have broadened its look at the UMC and other denominations.

“Within the UMC, the Women’s Division and the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits also advocate on Capitol Hill,” he said.

Range of issues

The Pew study found that the groups address about 300 policy issues, with nearly two-thirds of the groups advocating on both domestic and world issues.

Domestically, the top concerns are the relationship between church and state, the defense of civil rights and liberties for religious groups and other minorities, bioethics and life is-

sues (abortion, capital punishment and end-of-life issues) and family/marriage issues (definition of marriage, domestic violence, and fatherhood initiatives.)

The study found that the most common topics internationally are human rights, debt relief and other economic issues, and the promotion of peace and democracy.

In a brief history section, the study notes that the Methodist Episcopal Church (forerunner to the UMC) was among the first denominations to do advocacy in Washington, establishing the Board of Temperance, Prohibition and Tolerance in 1916.

Construction of the board’s Capitol Hill headquarters (now known as the United Methodist Building) was finished in 1923.

Currently, Mr. Winkler said, the building is home to offices of the Board of Church & Society, the Women’s Division, the United Church of Christ, the Episcopal Church, the Seventh Day Adventists, the Muslim Public Affairs Council, the Islamic Society of North America, Churches for Middle East Peace, Church World Service, and the National Religious Campaign Against Torture.

Mr. Winkler (who was jailed this summer in a Capitol protest over the federal budget) and the Board of Church & Society have been criticized by some conservatives within the UMC for what they see as a liberal focus in lobbying.

“I can tell you that the vast majority of board members and practically all of the staff are liberal to very liberal in their own political views,” said the Rev. Rob Renfro, a former Church & Society board member and current president of Good News, an unofficial conservative caucus of the UMC. “So, not surprisingly, they lobby for the most liberal causes in the most liberal way.”

But the study notes that Church & Society has worked with evangelical Protestant groups, including joining



UNITED METHODIST NEWS SERVICE PHOTO COURTESY GENERAL BOARD OF CHURCH & SOCIETY

The United Methodist Building, a short walk from the U.S. Capitol, is home to the lobbying offices of United Methodists and a range of other faith-based groups.

forces with the Southern Baptist Convention’s lobbying arm in pushing for the Prison Rape Elimination Act in 2003.

The UMC’s advocacy extends to a sign on the lawn of the United Methodist Building. The sign has carried such messages as: “United Methodists oppose torture,” “We be-

lieve the budget is a moral document” and “Killing people for killing people is wrong.”

Mr. Winkler said, “Two weeks ago a member of Congress told me that his colleagues regularly read the message we post in our front lawn sign.”

shodges@umr.org

LETTERS

Good News didn’t start Society

Thank you for your excellent article (Nov. 25) which very accurately describes the relationship that has developed first between Mr. Thomas Kemper and myself, and more recently between GBGM and The Mission Society. I do want to correct one item, however, namely the supposed connection between Good News and The Mission Society.

Though such a link has been widely assumed to have existed, in point of fact Good News had nothing to do with the founding of The Mission Society. Further, though there have been individuals over the years who personally had connections with both organizations, myself included, Good News has not at any time since The Mission Society’s founding until now had any connection with this agency. The Mission Society was established as an outgrowth of an ad-hoc meeting of some 33 UM pastors and laypersons who gathered at a St. Louis airport hotel on Nov. 28, 1983.

That meeting was called by the Rev. Drs. L. D. Thomas of First UMC, Tulsa, and Ira Gallaway of First UMC, Peoria. Neither of them had any con-

nection with Good News.

Dick McClain
President/CEO

The Mission Society

I read with interest and compassion S. Vance Goodman’s column in the (Oct. 21) *Reporter*. I can only imagine the struggle she is going through.

While pastor for 16 years at FUMC, Abilene, I counseled with many college students struggling with their sexual identity.

I have some good news for homosexuals like Ms. Goodman who want to be United Methodist ministers but feel they can’t. You may be ordained—as long as you are celibate. Our *Book of Discipline* calls for fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness.

There are many who live a happy life in singleness remaining celibate.

The Rev. Charles Whittle
Fort Worth, Texas

The Reporter welcomes brief, civil letters. Send to news@umr.org or The United Methodist Reporter, 1221 Profit Drive, Dallas, TX, 75247.

THE UNITED METHODIST
REPORTER

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THE UNITED METHODIST REPORTER (USPS954-500) is published weekly by UMR Communications Inc., 1221 Profit Drive, Dallas, Texas 75247-3919. Periodicals postage paid at Dallas, Texas and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to THE UNITED METHODIST REPORTER, PO Box 660275, Dallas Texas 75266-0275.

THE UNITED METHODIST REPORTER has provided denominational news coverage since its beginning as the Texas Methodist newspaper in 1847. The Reporter has no official ties to the United Methodist General Conference or to any of the denomination’s general boards or agencies. This newspaper aims to provide readers with a broad spectrum of information and viewpoints consistent with the diversity of Christians.

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■ **BOOM** Continued from page 1B

ready dipping into the teens, no relief is likely before spring.

As a result, some resort to living in tents or cars. But winters in Williston are rough; last year the area had over 100 inches of snow, and temperatures as low as 40 or 50 below. (Williston's mayor asked NBC to air a follow-up report, imploring job seekers not to come to Williston unless they've secured housing.)

The influx has stretched Williston's infrastructure to the limit. Crime rates are rising. Restaurants are jammed and long lines queue up at the Wal-Mart, which is also understaffed and often understocked.

Traffic is congested, as lines of big semi-trucks hauling oil roll through every day. Accidents are on the rise. Dave Hauser, the church's lay leader, lost a friend just a few days ago, killed in a head-on collision with a dump truck.

"It's just not as safe here as it used to be," said Mr. Hauser, a longtime resident.

"One of the challenges we face is having a heart of hospitality, because the needs are so great," said Dr. Tkach.

Influx and exodus

"We got in our 'wagon' and headed west in search of opportunity," says Jessica Ford, a transplant from Wisconsin and now a member of Faith UMC. "We're attempting to live the American dream." She and her husband, Brian, arrived in the RV that now serves as home. With no running water, they schedule their days carefully so that they can shower at a health club in town.

Both lifelong United Methodists, the couple met at their church in

Boyceville, Wis.; they found Faith UMC within weeks after arriving in Williston. Now Brian Ford plays piano and organ at the church, and Jessica, who earned a lay speaker certification in Wisconsin, has preached a couple of times. (She's blogging about their experience at www.nd-adventure.blogspot.com.)

While the oil boom brings new

'Every Sunday,
I know that I'm
going to a place
where I know
everybody. . . .'

—Jessica Ford

folks like the Fords to Faith UMC, it has also sent many longtime members packing, especially retired members. With housing prices at an all-time high, many are choosing to sell and move. Others don't have a choice. Apartment rents have doubled and even tripled in the last year or two, and some long-term elderly residents on fixed incomes have been forced to move.

"Our influx has been matched by our exodus," said Dr. Tkach. "We have farewells for people at the same time as we're welcoming new people. Some of our core people, who've been at the church for 40-50 years, are getting out."

Housing is the biggest need in Williston, and the church has few options to help. A few church members

have taken in boarders, Mr. Hauser says, but most are leery of opening their homes to strangers. Still, Dr. Tkach said he's proud of the way his congregation is responding.

"While there is a grieving over losing the town they once knew, some of my key leadership comes out of that older generation, and they are saying, 'We've got to seize the moment,'" he said.

And new people have brought new energy. A music teacher from Michigan now serves as the choir director; a young man from Texas, an oil company employee, plays guitar for the church's contemporary worship praise team.

David Nordenstrom, a home-builder from Minnesota, has become the "go to guy" for building issues at the church. He moved to Williston in search of work after demand for new homes evaporated in his hometown of Mora, Minn. His wife and two grown daughters are still in Mora; he shares a rented house with four other men in Williston.

The Fords came to Williston in July for Brian's job as a truck driver for an oil company. (There was work available in Wisconsin, but at pay that was "pennies on the dollar" by comparison, he says.) Jessica found a receptionist job at a car dealership. Back home, the couple had struggled with debt; the move meant a chance to earn enough to pay back what they owe, rather than file for bankruptcy. They hope to eventually save enough to return to Wisconsin and buy a home there.

Ms. Ford says she's observed some tension between longtime residents and newcomers—some locals use the term "oil trash" for oil industry workers—but she's found a warm welcome at Faith UMC.

"Every Sunday, I know that I'm going to a place where I know everybody and everybody knows me," she said.

Mr. Nordenstrom echoes that sentiment. He's also a lifelong United Methodist, and says that faith is helping him brave this time away from family. The church in Williston helps keep his faith renewed, and he's made a few friends, too, including a 92-year-old woman in the congregation whom he teasingly greets as "Sweetheart" every Sunday morning.

"The church is my sanctuary away from home," he said.

Crafting a response

Faith UMC and other congregations in Williston are just beginning to figure out ways to respond to the needs created by the influx of people, Dr. Tkach said.

Recently, the Rev. Keith Nelson, Sakakawea district superintendent,



PHOTO BY JIM STARICKA

Faith United Methodist Church is struggling to find the best way to minister to the influx of people who've come to Williston, N.D., looking for jobs.

called an "oil patch ministry summit" for pastors and lay leaders of churches in areas affected by the oil boom.

"Given the population explosion, and all the needs that are arising, and that got me thinking: 'How are we responding? What do we need to do to have outreach?'" he said.

Pastors traveled to Williston from Dickinson, N.D., Bowbells, N.D., and Sidney, Mont., for the summit. Williston's mayor, Ward Koeser, addressed the gathering, saying that many who come to Williston are separated from their families, especially those who work on the oil rigs, and are in need of simple conversation and companionship. He added that many come to Williston after facing financial troubles, hoping for a new beginning.

"If people are looking for a new beginning, we want them to know that God and the church offer wonderful new beginnings," said Mr. Nelson.

Sue King, director of the Nu Places for Nu Faces program in the Yellowstone Conference, also traveled to Williston to share advice on equipping lay people to minister to the newcomers.

Of those who've flocked to Williston for work, "Right now, the only places that seem to want to welcome them are the bars, the casinos and the strip clubs," Dr. King said. "The church has an opportunity of real hospitality."

A historic precedent

Williston's "Wild West" atmosphere may seem unprecedented to modern United Methodists—but also echoes the situation that spurred Methodism's explosive growth in the 19th century. Many older United Methodist churches in California trace their beginnings to the influx of people during the Gold Rush. And the Methodist Church Extension Society, formed in 1864, raised millions of dollars to plant and assist churches on the West-

ern frontier, initially in Iowa and Nebraska.

A colorful former Union soldier, Chaplain C.C. McCabe, was the society's most visible leader. In 1881, in response to a freethinker who claimed that "churches are dying out all over the land," McCabe replied in a telegraph with words that became the Society's rallying cry: "We are building more than one Methodist church for every day of the year, and propose to make it two a day!"

Meeting the needs of people in Williston today, Dr. King and Dr. Tkach both acknowledge, is more than a small congregation like Faith UMC can tackle alone. Connecting with those who work on the oil rigs is especially difficult. The "man camps" have tight security and are closed to those who don't work for the oil companies. Many oil workers put in long days while they're in Williston, then head home to families when they get a few days off.

Attendees at the summit brainstormed for innovative ways to reach out, tossing out ideas like offering an "Internet café" in the church where folks could connect with family at home via Skype; serving up a hot meal in the parking lot of a motel; inviting oil workers for home-cooked meals; or opening up the church's fellowship hall for families with kids living in tight quarters.

Faith UMC is also teaming up with churches of other denominations, as part of Williston's ministerial alliance, to find ways to help. The group recently invited Tom Beddow of the Oil Patch Chaplaincy, a mission of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, to speak.

"We're partnering with them, because we need the help, and they have the expertise," said Dr. Tkach.

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Volunteers help Tennesseans rebound from disaster

BY BARBARA BUNLAP-BERG
United Methodist News Service

OLD HICKORY, Tenn.—As the skies opened and the rain let loose on Friday, April 30, 2010, the Williams family settled in for the night.

The next morning, they awakened to find their furniture and other belongings submerged in raw sewage in their basement. Often, three of the six children, now ages 8 to 18, slept downstairs. Some of the water began climbing upstairs as well.

Although the house is not in a low-lying area, the sewers had backed up. “The fence around the house created a fishbowl,” Erica Williams explained. “There was water everywhere—nasty sewage. The water clogged the duct-work.”

However, that wasn’t all.

“A week or so later,” she said, “the rats came.” They went into the ventilation system. We killed 18 big rats. Then the mold came. Then the bugs came.”

But the family had nowhere to go.

“We had no choice but to stay here,” Ms. Williams said. “We kept getting sick. Rats were in our ventilation system, and we heard noises in the walls.” The rats were quick to grab any morsel of food they could find.

The family said the Federal Emergency Management Agency gave them \$3,200 and told them they “could just wipe everything down.”

But the mold and other flood residue proved relentless. “We kept taking the kids to the hospital,” Ms. Williams recalled.

The family tried to repair the damage themselves, ripping up soaked carpets and removing kitchen cabinets. They paid a “contractor” more than \$4,000, and he disappeared with the money.

The situation took a huge emotional toll on the entire family, especially the children.

“Our lives just spiraled out of control,” Ms. Williams said.

UMCOR steps in

The Williams family was not alone in its despair. Over that wet weekend in 2010, more than 13 inches of rain fell in Middle Tennessee. The Cumberland River reached nearly 12 feet above flood stage and topped out at 51.9 feet before the waters began to recede. Rescuers, using boats and canoes, plucked hundreds of people from their homes. UMCOR issued an appeal for flood survivors.

Immediately, the United Methodist Committee on Relief gave an emergency grant of \$10,000 at the request of the Tennessee Conference. Since then, UMCOR has awarded two \$100,000 grants for meeting survivor needs.



Volunteers Tim Scholl (right) and Paul Kessler remove a mattress from the flooded home of Theresa Lyles in Nashville, Tenn.

Brandon Hulette directs mercy mission and disaster recovery for the conference. He reported that a large recovery operation continues.

Immediately after the flood, the Tennessee Conference played a key role in organizing and providing technical and financial assistance for 20 long-term recovery committees. It is still involved in home repair in 12 counties.

The conference serves as a central volunteer-coordination center for people of all faiths. Since June 2010, volunteers from 43 denominations have repaired and rebuilt homes in 22 Tennessee counties.

In late October, some of those volunteers went to the Williams home to lay tile downstairs and install cabinets upstairs. Two of them were Lloyd Kaufman and Steve Barnum.

The retired building-trades teachers are members of Lakewood United Methodist Church in Lake Odessa, Mich. They are no strangers to volunteer work—Mr. Kaufman in Mississippi after Hurricane Katrina and Mr. Barnum at Red Bird Mission in Kentucky.

“Our church tries to do one or two mission trips a year,” Mr. Kaufman said. One of his favorite quotes is, “Grace received is grace to give.”

“God gave me the talents,” he

noted. “This is a chance to give back.”

Project manager Mr. Barnum switched from teaching to being a school superintendent until his retirement in 2002. “Then,” he said, “I went back to driving nails.”

Counseling services

Mr. Hulette anticipates the effort will continue “at a pretty aggressive pace” until March 2012.

The Flood Recovery Network, a conference-led, case-management association, began operation in April 2011. Cases come from seven coun-

ties. FRN workers are conference employees, paid by the conference in partnership with the Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee. The FRN, which trained more than 300 volunteer caseworkers in Middle Tennessee, is still accepting new cases.

Case manager Elizabeth Neal has helped the Williams family find resources. “I don’t know what I’d do without [her],” Ms. Williams admitted. “She helped me with finances. My income was less than my bills.”

“They [the Williamses] have been very active in their own recovery,” said

Ms. Neal, who manages 16 cases.

“Ninety percent of it is knowing whom to call.”

Counseling is an important component of the program. “We may pay for services, including pastoral counseling, marriage and family therapy,” Mr. Hulette said. “We plan to keep that program going as long as we have requests for it.”

The Williams family continues to benefit from therapy for post-traumatic stress disorder. Clients can see mental-health professionals up to five years after a disaster, Mr. Hulette said.

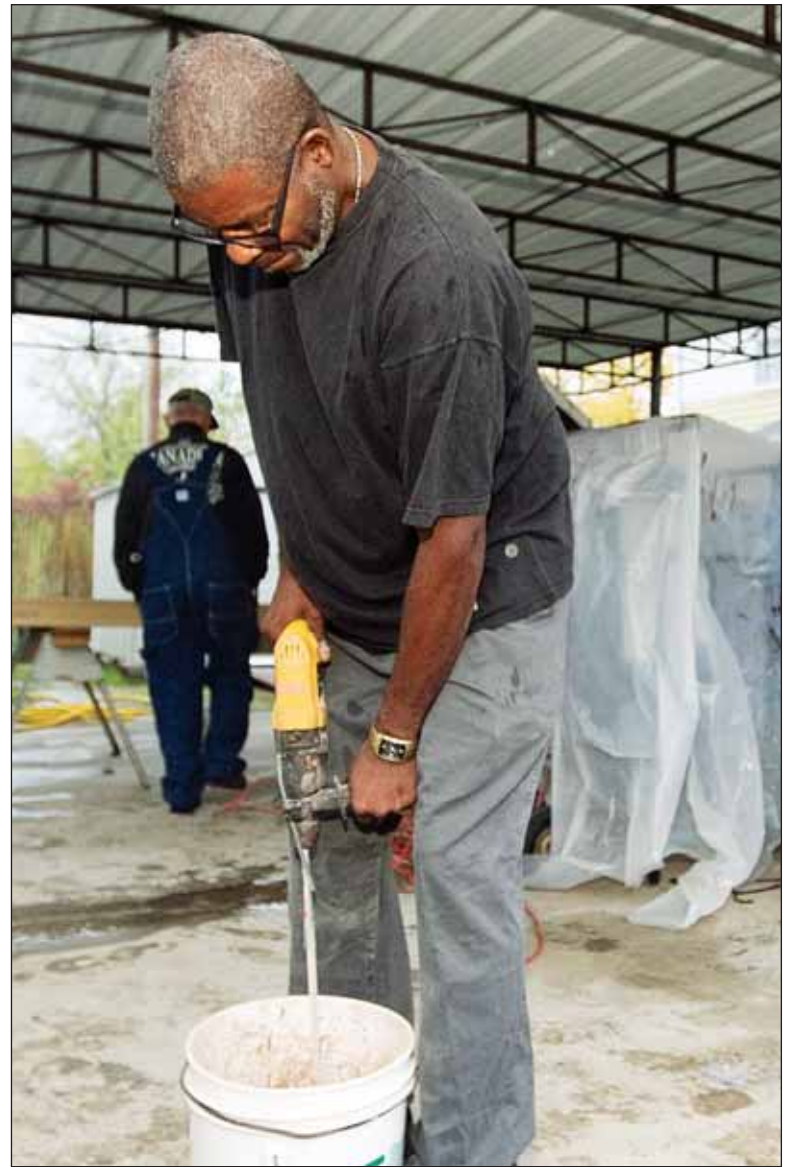


ABOVE: A construction trailer displays some of the places UM volunteers have been working. LEFT: Lloyd Kaufman (right) and Steve Barnum are part of a Volunteers in Mission team from Lakewood UMC in Lake Odessa, Mich.



LEFT: Erica Williams (right) recalls some of the difficulties her family faced after a 2010 flood at their home in Old Hickory, Tenn. At left is her case manager, Elizabeth Neal. BELOW: Kenny Williams (right) helps volunteer Lloyd Kaufman trim a new kitchen countertop.

UNITED METHODIST NEWS SERVICE
PHOTOS BY MIKE DUBOSE



Kenny Williams (front) mixes tile grout while working with a United Methodist volunteer team at his home.

Of the 230 people now receiving counseling, he added, only 12 percent have completed treatment.

"I have a real good therapist," Ms. Williams said. "She's like the best."

Recently, canvassers from the Flood Recovery Network started knocking on doors in targeted flood-affected areas to identify individuals who, like the Williamses, still have unmet needs. If someone requires assistance, canvassers collect information electronically. Then a case manager contacts the flood survivor to begin developing an individual recovery plan. "We meet people where they are—literally and spiritually," Mr. Hulet said.

With I.D. badges that state "Tennessee Annual Conference," the canvassers have received a "very positive response," he added. "People are glad to see someone is checking to make sure no one is falling through the cracks."

'This means so much'

While Tennessee flood recovery has been under way, five significant tornadoes have come through the area, and the FRN is still working with four of them. "Several folks were hit twice, first by the flood, then by tornadoes," Mr. Hulet said.

"Despite the sustained level of disasters here, we've been able to be the body of Christ in the lives of those individuals through the extravagant,

generous support of volunteers and donors across the connection."

The United Methodist program is unique, Mr. Hulet said, because it is "comprehensive and holistic," considers "overall needs" and "tries to see what is not being done, always working with our partners."

After Ms. Williams purchased materials to repair the family home, she worried about accepting help from outsiders. She prayed, "Please don't let it be those other [dishonest] people."

However, she had nothing but praise for the United Methodists and other volunteers who have worked with her and her husband, Kenny.

"They're so good!" she said.

"If it weren't for them, it would have cost \$6,000 to pay someone to do the work. We saved a lot of money we didn't even have."

As of Sept. 30, 2011, the conference had recorded more than 154,880 hours of volunteer labor. "If you were to convert that to paid labor, according to FEMA rates," Mr. Hulet said, "the cost would exceed \$3 million. More than 300 teams have done almost everything imaginable."

"Without [their help], this area would not have been able to recover as well as it has."

"This is my first house," Ms. Williams said of the cute little home she bought six years ago. "I'm so excited. It's so beautiful."

"This means so much to me."

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Is the UMC in need of more skills, or passion?

BY ERIC VAN METER
Special Contributor

When the Lewis Center released their report on clergy age trends for 2011, no one seemed particularly surprised. The news that our ordained leaders are aging fast is akin to a report that French fries are bad for you.

Still, the United Methodist Church affirms its commitment to developing a new generation of principled leaders. Questions as to how to do this abound. Should we start more programs aimed at youth? Invest more in campus ministry, even as many annual conferences are giving up on having a college presence?

Change the way both clergy and laity are trained for leadership?

At the heart of such questions is the assumption that the future of the UMC begins and ends with authorized leadership. If that's the case, the question of where our leaders will come from and how we will help them develop are of vital importance. In many ways, I'd agree.

But when it comes to reigniting a Methodist movement, the question of key leadership may not be the most important one. That distinction may go to a much simpler inquiry: Who cares?

Literally. Who cares?

Who is passionate enough to devote their time, money, energy and talents to the best of our denomination's dreams? Who wears the T-shirts, carries the banners, or has the cross-and-flame tattoos? Who gives themselves with reckless abandon to following Jesus in the UMC?

These are questions we don't seem to ask, or at least don't trust the answers we get when we do ask them. We are far more interested in finding those who are most qualified, who sport the badges of experience or wear the mantle of potential.

Movements, not ads

And what do we get for our insistence on appropriately locating power? More institution, couched in the language of movement.

But what if we worried less about qualification and more about passion? Could it really be that, when it comes to movements, those who care most are more important than those

who have credentials?

No doubt, if you think about scissors.

Scissors are not an exciting product. Even Fiskars, a leading manufacturer of scissors, recognized that. When they enlisted the Brains on Fire group to help them sell their product, they had little reason to hope for much success.

But Brains on Fire doesn't believe in advertising campaigns, which amount to nothing more than efforts to convince someone else how good you are. The company sparks movements, which focus on the passion of the people who use the product you make. They ask what is already happening in the world and get their clients to engage in the conversation surrounding it.

To lead a movement for Fiskars scissors, Brains on Fire didn't rely on renowned pitchmen or expert testimony, but on ordinary yet passionate scrapbookers who needed good scissors to follow that passion. They even formed a group of "Fiskateers" to create energy around scrapbooking. As the energy grew, Fiskars was right there in the center of the conversation, and their satisfaction with their customer relationships—not to mention their sales—increased tremendously.

Sounds like Jesus

The Fiskateers were not trained

'Could it really be that, when it comes to movements, those who care most are more important than those who have credentials?'

artists. They were soccer moms and accountants, ordinary people who fell in love with a company that loved them back and encouraged their creativity. They were not the best and brightest.

But they were the most passionate.

Is that really what should concern the church, though? We constantly fight against religious consumerism. Isn't looking to a firm whose job is to increase sales for a company a bit crass, if not outright sacrilegious?

Not at all, when you consider the principles Brains on Fire works with. They insist that the best conversation is not around product, but around passion. They want to empower everyday people to represent their clients. They encourage shared own-

ership, and even suggest that a movement around a product should also fight some injustice if it's ever going to matter.

That doesn't sound like corporate America, or even the United Methodist Church. Rather, it sounds an awful lot like Jesus.

We know that Jesus did not call only the best and brightest to help lead his movement. For every scholar Paul, there was a working man Peter. Throughout the long history of the Christian movement, those who made the biggest difference have not been the ones hand-selected for their skill set. They have been the ones who have cared most deeply about following Jesus, regardless of the cost.

Building a base

Not long ago, I ran into an old college friend. We'd been part of Wesley Foundation together, and we started catching up on some of our other friends. Two are very involved in Pentecostal churches. One is in seminary studying Reformed theology. My friend and I have spent considerable time in the emergent church conversation.

It was a telling conversation. We were highly involved with three very different perspectives on Christianity. But each of those—Pentecostalism, Reformed theology, and emergent aesthetic—enjoy a broad base of pas-

sionate people who draw life from what they share with others in their movements.

Why has the UMC failed to spark similar passion? Probably for a lot of reasons, none of which matter as much as the question of how we can change to get a movement going—not for our own sake, but for the sake of passionately following the Lord of the Universe in our time.

Who cares the most for God's work among United Methodists? It's a question we need not only to ask, but to answer.

Our life depends on it.

The Rev. Van Meter is director of the Wesley Foundation at Arkansas State University. Reach him at: ericvanmeter@ymail.com.

Why dialogue is useless without critical thought

BY STEPHEN RANKIN
Special Contributor

I recently had an encounter with a student who expressed irritation with "judgmental Christians" who tell people they are going to hell. It is a very common attitude found especially on college campuses. Therefore, this conversation nicely illustrates how—for whatever reasons, and they are many—we are failing to grow thoughtful, self-aware young adults.

To use academic speak: We are not teaching students how to think critically, even though we talk about critical thinking all the time. Dirty little secret: "Thinking critically" often turns out to mean demonstrating agreement with the professor on tests and in papers. Students figure this one out quickly.

I know that colleges and universities all have professors who don't fit what I just said. They are careful, compassionate pedagogues. But let's not miss the forest for the trees.

Walk with me, for a moment, through the conversation. After the student told me how bothered she was by these judgmental Christians, I said to her, "So, you have an opinion about other people having an opinion. What makes your opinion superior?"

I don't want to get sidetracked on the theology of this question. I know that thoughtful people disagree about people's eternal destinies. And I am not one who thinks going around telling people they're going to hell represents a good Christian witness. That said, I want to look at the logical problem this student has.

It became clear to me that she could not recognize that her opinion was *not* self-evidently true. Merely by the assertion, she believed she was doing enough. Again, I don't have a problem with her view. I have a problem that she could not articulate her reasons for thinking her view is superior to the other.

Why? Not because she is intellectually slow, but because most of us have lost the ability to have a truly open dialogue.

She assumed some moral high ground without having to think about whether her assumptions are defensible. She has learned that telling peo-

ple they're going to hell is wrong and offensive. She learned this, most likely, not through careful thinking but through rhetorical power plays from people she admires and respects. They are her teachers, whether they hold the title or not. (And we should remember what the book of James says about teachers. See 3:1.)

In higher education, we are supposed to be in the business of helping students learn to think well. This is not all we're supposed to be doing, but certainly it is one of our main jobs. We are to help students become self-aware and reflective about how they develop their opinions, where they get their ideas. We are to give them the intellectual tools to evaluate well their own thinking.

Then they'll be able to fairly evaluate the thinking of others.

But we do not teach them. Maybe we don't have time. Maybe we don't care. Good dialogue requires real tol-

'We are to help students become self-aware and reflective about how they develop their opinions, where they get their ideas.'

erance and respect, not the mere mouthing of these words. For all our talk about tolerance (which I support wholeheartedly), I see precious little of it on college campuses. It's more like we've declared a truce. We don't, in fact, tolerate each other; we just co-exist in the same general space. We may call this arrangement "tolerance," but it is a sham tolerance. We tacitly make a deal not to talk to each other about controversial things. Instead, we divide into self-selected groups and talk only to those who already agree with us.

So, nobody has to think critically, not even the professors.

To the extent that what I have said is true, to that extent we are failing to educate young people. God forgive us.

Dr. Rankin is an ordained elder in the United Methodist Church and chaplain of Southern Methodist University.



Eric Van Meter



Stephen Rankin

'Set aside' all UM bishops for conference leadership

BY JOE M. WHITTEMORE
Special Contributor

The recently announced Connectional Table/Interim Operations Team legislation for the 2012 General Conference amounts to turning the general church over to the bishops. Just the opposite is critical! Our episcopal leaders should be devoted almost exclusively to their annual conferences. Let's restructure our agencies to focus on assisting the annual conferences in building vital congregations, and devote our bishops to leading their annual conferences.



Joe Whittemore

The job of the Council of Bishops (COB) is to support the *Book of Discipline* and carry out the polity and mandates established by the General Conference, not to write the *Book of Discipline*. (The bishops do not vote or have voice at General Conference). The United Methodist Church has never been willing to give the COB authority to run the church.

Several years ago, the COB proposed that one bishop, not assigned to an episcopal area, be set aside to handle the affairs of the COB including the evaluation and accountability of individual bishops. The idea did not gain traction before or during the 2008 General Conference.

Affirmation #2 of the Aug. 2, 2011, Interim Operations Team (IOT) report called for the adoption of performance standards for bishops. Jurisdictional committees on episcopacy would implement annual assessments. To support this request the report then called for a bishop without residential assignment to guide the UMC, support and assist residential bishops, and chair the body that could hire and fire a new 15-member board of directors for the church that would control the vast majority of all net assets other than pension funds.

Accountability

Our denomination has never been willing to "turn things over to the bishops." Our culture is well acknowledged in the operational assessment project done by Apex, which states "the church has the opportunity to strengthen its existing leadership structures *without altering power or authority* (emphasis added). . . . This strengthening could be achieved

through renewal of purpose, goals and role clarity, better accountability, courageous leadership and better capabilities to support leadership. . . ."

The 2010 Call to Action report listed five key recommendations, one of which was to "reform the COB, with the active bishops assuming responsibility for improving results in attendance, professions of faith, baptisms, participation in servant/mission ministries, benevolent giving . . . and establishing a new culture of accountability throughout the church."

The Call to Action report departed from our polity and wishfully said "a unified COB will institute and maintain an effective executive management operating function that strategically and practically aligns the resources of the general church in order to focus on increased local church vitality." Its duties would include annually naming current realities, setting performance objectives, and developing a stronger sense of connection by aligning the work of the COB with general agencies and denominational initiatives/programs.

The Apex research called for strengthening "without altering power or authority," but the final IOT recommendations ended by putting power in the hands of a small, 15-

which he/she is assigned.

Lay executive

A lay executive of the Council of Bishops to facilitate the accountability of individual bishops may be to the benefit of the denomination. An experienced, strong executive who is not clergy may bring a fresh and reasonable approach. Envision the changes we could quickly experience if that lay executive had the authority to recommend to the College of Bishops and the Jurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy the removal (or placing on leave) of the ineffective or non-responsive episcopal leader as currently provided in paragraphs 16.5, 408.3 and 410.1 of the *Book of Discipline*.

To adopt the recommendations of the IOT, we would be interpreting the Apex research to indicate that the COB should have huge political, budgeting and organizational power and authority, and that action would alter our polity.

Many believe the COB does not function well. Why put more authority there? With few exceptions our U.S. annual conferences are dying. If our bishops are focused on their annual conferences with reasonable performance standards, the likelihood of

'The United Methodist Church has never been willing to give the [Council of Bishops] authority to run the church.'

member group (the board of the Center for Connectional Missions and Ministry) subject to considerable influence by the set-side bishop and the COB generally. And the IOT called for the COB to institute and maintain an effective executive management operating function that strategically and practically aligns the resources of the general church. In other words, let the COB take over and operate the church, agencies, budgets, everything!

Is the best plan to hand the bishops this responsibility and take one of their number to be the executive decision-maker? For decades, one major concern of conference committees on episcopacy has been the huge amount of time bishops are required to devote to general church assignments. All bishops should be "set-aside" to lead, motivate and challenge our clergy. They can provide spiritual guidance for laity and clergy. Indeed, each must be held accountable for the measured progress of the annual conference to

success would be significantly increased. But diluting them with the operation of the entire church is folly.

Yes, we desperately require restructure and reorganization of our general church to focus on the development of vital congregations and leadership. The starting place is in devoting all our bishops to the ministry and mission of their annual conferences and evaluating in transparent ways the fruits of their ministries. The bishops have already identified how this should be done. Let's set aside all our bishops for their most important ministry: leading the annual conferences and developing vital congregations.

Mr. Whittemore is a member of the Connectional Table from the North Georgia Conference where he has served as Conference Lay Leader. He also is a past chair of the Southeastern Jurisdiction Committee on Episcopacy. He will be a delegate to his sixth General Conference next year.

REFLECTIONS

For our weary hearts, Advent is here again

BY BISHOP WOODIE W. WHITE
UMR Columnist

Here we go again! Advent is here, and I am excited. I am glad that our Church observes the liturgical year and that many United Methodist congregations organize their worship and devotional life according to the liturgical seasons.

Our United Methodist *Book of Worship* states, "Advent is a season of four weeks including four Sundays. Advent derives from the Latin *adventus*, which means 'coming.' The season pro-

claims the comings of the Christ—whose birth we prepare to celebrate once again, who comes continually in Word and Spirit, and whose return in final victory we anticipate. Each year Advent calls the community of faith to prepare for these comings. . . ."

I am perhaps more personally and emotionally engaged in Advent and Lent than in any of the other liturgical seasons. Both are times of spiritual devotion and introspection.

During Advent, I make special time to be alone for looking inward before looking outward. Usually—even in retirement—life is filled with activity, travel and "doing." Advent is a time, which forces me to slow down for some measure of each day. Since I love silence and especially solitude, it is not a major challenge.

But what special preparation is required for His coming!

Frankly, my spirit gets pretty cluttered from time to time. I worry too much. I fill the empty spaces in my spirit with a lot that is not of Christ: politics, social concerns and issues, conflicts and the like. Often Christ is absent from my context, I must confess.

I "argue" with TV commentators and politicians. Even in times of quiet, I am often agitated or "debating" with someone, something, even the Church. Noise. Clanging cymbals!

I need to make room for Him, the Christ-child. Clear out the clutter so I can give mind, spirit, heart and attention. The Church, through its worship, helps me in this quest. The music of Advent calls me to remember the

hope that His coming signals. Even a sanctuary adorned with purple or blue is a reminder that this is no longer "ordinary time." And then, week by week, the sanctuary is filled with other reminders: a tree decorated, wreaths placed here and there, the aroma of pine. All the senses are engaged, as reminders of His coming.

It is a time of clearing out selfishness, unhealed wounds, unresolved anger, all the things that crowd out the spirit of love, forgiveness, reconciliation and hope. I am surprised how much has been stored up over the days, weeks and months of the year. So much avoided, or so much stuff held which should have been let go. Advent is a time of reminder for me. I want Him to come into a clean house!

This time of looking inward makes possible a more intentional reaching outward to others. Those close and those in distant places are remembered. A sense of love and generosity must now find expression. It is a time that looks for ways of gifting. Ways to say, "I care." "I remember." Even, "I love."

'Advent is a time of reminder for me. I want Him to come into a clean house!'

Advent is a time to claim again the hope promised of a better world, a better life and a better Church! And especially, a better self. Advent is full of promise. Perhaps that is why I long for it so, year after year, never tiring of its coming.

For those four Sundays I will sit in a sanctuary somewhere, singing the songs of hope and promise, and hearing The Word proclaimed of a caring God who loved the world so much that a Son was sent into it, that all might know that love and caring—first in a child, who even in infancy would be called, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace!

Here we go again! Advent is here, and my soul is dancing!

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

Q&A: Jimmy Creech still pushing on gay issue

One morning in 1984, United Methodist pastor **Jimmy Creech** was visited by a parishioner named Adam, who revealed that he was gay. Adam had chosen to leave the United Methodist Church, in light of the denomination's then-recent decision that self-avowed, practicing homosexuals could not be ordained.

That led Mr. Creech to rethink his belief that homosexuality was a sin, and ultimately convinced him to perform same-gender commitment ceremonies. He underwent two church trials, and, after the second, his ordination credentials were revoked.

Mr. Creech tells the story in his new book *Adam's Gift: A Memoir of a Pastor's Calling to Defy the Church's Persecution of Lesbians and Gays* (Duke University Press, 2011). On a recent visit to Dallas' Northaven UMC, he spoke to staff writer **Mary Jacobs**.

What have you been up to in recent years?

Since 1998, I've been speaking around the country at churches of various denominations, on college campuses and to various community organizations that support full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered [LGBT] people.

[After the trial] my wife and I went through a period of discernment. It was really her idea that she would work, and I would not get a job, so that I could be free to travel the country and speak and also to write.

Did you imagine that the denomination would still be wrestling with this question in 2011?

I think the dynamics within the United Methodist Church are different from dynamics in other denominations. The Presbyterians and the Lutherans have changed their policies toward same-gender couples to include them, not only in membership but also as ordained clergy. These bodies are really based in the U.S., but the United Methodist Church is an international body that includes delegates from Africa. It's going to take longer and it's going to take more work and patience.

What we hear in letters from readers is: "How can we do anything but condemn homosexuality? It's wrong, and it's right there in the Bible." Your response?

It's not right there in the Bible. We

read it into the Bible. It is the prejudice that is current that we read back into the Bible. The stories that allude to same-gender sexual activity are very few in the Bible and they happen to be in contexts that are objectionable—violent rape which has to do with the Sodom & Gomorrah story; idolatry which is related to the Leviticus passages and the first chapter of Romans; and then issues of promiscuity or exploitation in the New Testament.

The other significant point that needs to be stressed is, sexual orientation is an innate aspect of the human personality that was really not discovered until the late 1800s. There was no comprehension, no understanding of it in biblical times. It's inappropriate to claim the Bible says anything about sexual orientation. You can't claim the Bible says something it doesn't.

The other argument against ordaining or marrying gays and lesbians that we often hear is, "If we allow that, where do we draw the line?" What's your response?

We've been taught that homosexuality is some kind of perversion, and it's hard for people to give up those kinds of teachings. That's what people mean when they say, "If we allow



UMR PHOTO BY MARY JACOBS

Jimmy Creech at Northaven United Methodist Church in Dallas, where he recently spoke.

this—what is the limit? You allow everything possible to be OK." Those are the same kinds of arguments I heard in the 1950s and 1960s: "If we allow the races to mix, what's going to happen to the white race, the black race?" You hear the same kinds of fears being expressed now, although it's about gay people instead of African-American people.

We understand now that homosexual orientation is a normal, natural aspect of human personality. As a pastor it's important to nurture the whole person. You cannot say, "I nurture you spiritually and emotionally and intellectually except for one part of you, which I reject."

Another argument: The churches that are conservative on this issue are growing.

I can also say that the church is losing people because of this. Young people are frustrated to no end. They are growing up knowing friends who are LGBT. They don't want their friends excluded. They don't understand how a church can talk about God's love and then exclude their friends, talk about them as if they're disordered. So we are losing youth. I can understand how conservative churches are attracting folks who are resisting the change and not wanting to be open to gay people, but I don't think those churches are going to survive in the long run. Once the generation that is resisting so strongly now has gone, these large churches are not going to be appealing any longer to the younger folks, who are wanting to see the change happen.

Your book title uses the word "persecution." That's a pretty strong term.

I was very intentional in using that term because the church, because of

its policies and its teachings, has targeted same-gender loving people for exclusion and condemnation. That has caused them to sometimes be outcast from their own families as well as their church families. It has even caused them to feel disordered, as if there was something wrong with them, to hate themselves. Self-loathing is one of the deadly consequences of the teachings of the church for LGBT people. That I consider to be persecution. It is an act of spiritual violence against gay people.

Gay people keep being told, "This is just a choice. You can choose to be not gay." Gay people know that is not true. It torments them. They're told they'll only be accepted, and worse, only be loved by God, if they pretend to be someone they're not.

What are your thoughts on the United Methodist clergy who are publicly pledging to perform same-sex unions?

The church is going to have to decide whether it's going to use its resources to prosecute all of these clergy. I think that's going to be a big question. It's a waste of resources. I think it's actually a scandal to use the church's resources to prosecute clergy for being pastoral.

Do you miss being a pastor?

Yes, I do, very much. I love the United Methodist Church. It's my tradition. I feel a responsibility to help the church change. I think it's a matter of justice for LGBT people but also for the integrity of the church. I don't think we can speak authentically about God's love when we're doing harm to LGBT people. I feel like that's my ministry now, even though it's not a pastoral ministry.

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



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