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Springdale church opens transitional house for homeless families

BY JEANNIE SMITH
Special Contributor

SPRINGDALE, Ark.—A crowd gathered in prayer Dec. 18 on the grounds of First United Methodist Church Springdale to celebrate the opening of Christopher's House, the area's first transitional house for homeless families.

The ministry's launch is a milestone in the church's vision to address the problem of homeless families in Northwest Arkansas. According to a 2011 study by the Community and Family Institute of the University of Arkansas Department of Sociology, each night in Benton and Washington Counties, an estimated 2,000 adults and children are without shelter. Many homeless families in the area sleep in cars and shelters, or move from relative to relative.

Christopher's House is a partnership between First UMC Springdale and Seven Hills Homeless Center (7hillscenter.org). Seven Hills will handle the administrative work, background checks and casework, while FUMC Springdale provides the furnished house and clothing.

Just as important, the ministry includes church members serving as a support system for participating families, who will live in the home for 12 to 18 months until they can get on their feet. Helping a family with physical,



Ryan Ritchie, a volunteer and steering committee member for Christopher's House, speaks to the crowd gathered for the house's Dec. 18 opening.

PHOTO BY DAVID GODWIN

emotional, financial and spiritual needs will provide church members the opportunity to live out their discipleship in tangible ways.

The house, which has the capacity to house two families at a time, sits on a corner of the church campus, and was purchased just four months before the ribbon cutting ceremony. The church had gone through several years of

[See TRANSITIONAL, page 8A]

Imagine Ministry transition yields three new appointments

BY AMY FORBUS
Editor

Bishop Charles Crutchfield on Dec. 7 announced appointments to three new positions created as a result of the Imagine Ministry process adopted by the Arkansas Conference.

The bishop named two clergy and one layperson to new roles: The Rev. Dr. Kurt Boggan as director of the new Center for Clergy and Laity Excellence in Leadership; the Rev. Andrew Thompson as the Wesley Scholar for the Conference; and Ms. Sandy Watson as the lead facilitator for Holiness of Heart and Life: The Network of Discipleship and Mission.

Leadership focus

Boggan, who currently serves



Kurt Boggan

as superintendent of the Northeast District, will move to the Conference office in Little Rock when he takes on his new role this summer. Having served in a variety of churches, and drawing from his experiences as a district superintendent and as project manager for the Imagine



Andrew Thompson

Ministry team, he hopes to foster an environment that leads clergy and laity to excel.

"This work will begin with the mission field of the local church and address the adaptive learning that must occur with clergy and laity working as a team," he said.



Sandy Watson

A major focus of the Center for Clergy and Laity Excellence in Leadership will be creating a sustained increase in the number of vital congregations in Arkansas. Regardless of their size, "vital congregations must learn how to be [See IMAGINE MINISTRY, page 5A]

Help UM youth to see where YSF money goes

BY MICHAEL RATLIFF
Special Contributor

As a seventh grader, I sat in the sanctuary with the rest of my 10-member youth group at Waresboro (Ga.) Methodist Church and filled out the commitment card to give \$1 to the Methodist Youth Fund. I'm not sure I knew the details, but I did know it was a way I could participate in mission giving to projects that would benefit youth through the Methodist Church.



Michael Ratliff

My commitment to give was very personal and very direct. I understand my counterparts in the EUB (Evangelical United Brethren) tradition were given the same opportunity with the Youth Fund.

The Youth Service Fund (YSF) was created a year later, in 1968, when the two funds merged with the formation of the United Methodist Church. The fund provided an avenue for youth of the new denomination to directly support mission initiatives created by youth, for youth. And since then, the fund has always been contributed to by youth, administered by youth, and supported youth-led, youth-serving projects.

A number of years later, as an adult member of the Conference Youth Department in the Florida Conference, I served alongside the youth co-chairs of a conference committee promoting the YSF and making decisions about support of projects with the 70 percent of contributions that remain in the annual conference. By that time, youth groups had moved from personal pledges to fundraisers supporting YSF. Some worked with national YSF vendors to sell Christmas wrap and candles, with a percentage going to Youth Service Fund. In the process, youth who gave to the fund were becoming disconnected from the youth whose lives were changed by the effort.

Today, I serve in Young People's Ministries at the United Methodist General Board of Discipleship, where responsibility for administration and promotion of YSF is an integral part of what we do. The majority of funds for YSF are raised at conference events and are often attached to a contest to see what grade can raise the most money, or the expectation of a youth or adult leader doing something crazy to entertain those present. Though these

methods are great fun—and raise significant money—they often also continue the disconnect between raising funds and the intended purpose of YSF.

This year in Cameroon, Uganda, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Russia and in various parts of the U.S., thousands of young people will get a second chance (or a first chance) to experience a new level of sustainable food security, build mentoring relationships with adults, learn about Christ, and find ways to take first steps out of poverty—all because of YSF. You can learn about current and past projects at globalyoungpeople.org/grants-scholarship/youth-service-fund.

Since 1977, youth of the United Methodist Church have contributed \$14.6 million to YSF! Youth of our denomination and beyond have been involved in changing our world through their gifts, involvement and commitment to share their faith in tangible ways. This amazing work has been made possible because hundreds of thousands of youth gave what they could, and the combined effort is more than any youth, youth group or conference group could do on their own.

But the challenge today is to reconnect youth with the ministry that happens as a result of their personal giving.

'...the challenge today is to reconnect youth with the ministry that happens as a result of their personal giving.'

If you grew up in a Methodist, EUB or United Methodist church, chances are you contributed to one of the funds mentioned above. And while not everyone gets to bounce their way to the top of a mountain in Zimbabwe to visit a poultry project, consecrate French-language Bibles in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, or visit young women in a juvenile detention center in the United States, Young People's Ministries is working on more

ways for today's youth to give and actually connect with the ministries that result from that giving.

Research says that young people want to make a difference in their world. The exciting news is that the United Methodist Church has provided that opportunity throughout our entire existence. Join me in celebrating what we've accomplished and in challenging our church's youth to do even more in the future.

The Rev. Ratliff is associate general secretary of young people's ministries at the General Board of Discipleship in Nashville, Tenn. This commentary originally appeared in the Dec. 16 issue of the United Methodist Reporter (umportal.org); reproduced with permission.



EDITOR'S CORNER

BY AMY FORBUS

Accountability and renewal

It began with a rude awakening in mid-November.

Shopping for clothes is one of my least favorite activities, so it works best if I take along a friend. In fact, I have a particular friend with a special gift for making the chore seem more like a pleasure.

So there we were, sharing potential wardrobe items over the wall dividing our fitting rooms, when we each discovered we needed pants a size larger than we had expected.

Ouch.

A few days later, I received a text message from her: "Drop and give me 20 crunches. I just did it and thought of you."

So began a new wave of accountability that continues today: Each morning, the first one to complete her calisthenics sends a text to the other, reporting the numbers and varieties of exercises. The second person matches the activity and texts a response reporting her numbers. Even on weekends and holidays.

Now and then, one of us increases the count by five or 10 repetitions, or adds hand weights to provide a better workout. And again, the other one matches it.

To outsiders, it may not look like much—we certainly won't be running a marathon any time soon—but we are holding each other accountable, and we can tell it's making a positive difference.

In our culture, January has a reputation for fresh starts. New

year's resolutions abound, and fitness centers see a spike in new memberships.

We can use January as a time for a fresh start in our spiritual fitness, too. "A Covenant Prayer in the Wesleyan Tradition," No. 607 in the *United Methodist Hymnal*, provides one such path for renewal. (Note: In older editions of the hymnal, there is a typo in the fifth line of the prayer. The corrected version appears below and in more recent editions.)

I am no longer my own, but thine.

Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.

Put me to doing, put me to suffering.

Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee, exalted for thee or brought low for thee.

Let me be full, let me be empty.

Let me have all things, let me have nothing.

I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal.

And now, O glorious and blessed God,

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.

And the covenant which I have made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.

As United Methodists in Arkansas, we face a time of change and renewal. May we remember that through it all, we belong to God.

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BY CHARLES CRUTCHFIELD

AN OCCASIONAL WORD from the Bishop

Dear Friends:

All the churches of the Arkansas Conference are beginning to post numbers on the Vital Signs dashboard. Pastors have received and will continue to receive information (as necessary) on the use of the dashboard. As with anything new, there is some discomfort.

Actually, this is not really new. It is just a 21st-century application of what every pastor had to do at the old Fourth Quarterly Conference, when all the preachers in a district gathered and gave a personal report on their ministry, including statistics, to all their colleagues.

John Wesley knew the importance of numbers. He required them from his preachers. He understood that we pay attention to what we count. If the numbers related to people displease us, we ask the question, "Why are the numbers as they are?" And if we are wise, we act to make the changes necessary to open more widely our arms to those outside the fellowship of the church.

Still, it is easier said than done. I once served as the senior pastor in a large, downtown, west Texas church. It was in the middle of oil country. On arrival, I asked how many members were on the roll. I then asked when a membership audit had been done. The answer

was that we were very careful to add and subtract the appropriate numbers from the figures in the Conference Journal.

When we did an audit—actually counted the names on the roll—we discovered that we were reporting 400 digits more in membership than we actually had in names. Ouch!

All this happened during a "bust" in the oil industry. My community led the nation in the outflow of U-Haul trucks and trailers. Population declined. We worked hard at evangelism, but all we could do was hold our own. There was no growth over our actual membership.

Attendance stayed flat. I

worried about how this would look at the end of the year. I did not need to worry. Both the bishop and the district superintendent understood the context of the numbers. And frankly, given the context, the numbers encouraged the church.

As we review worship attendance, professions of faith, baptisms and the other statistics, they will help us paint a picture of what is happening in our churches. The additional "box" for you to share your testimony about what is happening in the church will help to set the context for the numbers.

I believe knowledge is power. If we know there is a problem, we can address the problem. If we know

there is a roaring success, it will be an encouragement to us and those around us. Count me as one of those who thinks the Vital Signs dashboard will be a helpful tool for us to continue to build the Kingdom of God in Arkansas.

Faithfully,

Charles Crutchfield

Editor's Note: To read more about the Vital Signs dashboard and see a sample of the online form pastors are using to report ministry data, visit www.arumc.org/dashboard.

Peace Conference offers challenge

BY NATASHA MURRAY-NORMAN AND BRITTANY RICHARDSON WATSON
Special Contributors

What is the Church's role in addressing matters of economic justice, and how does it relate to our pursuit of peace?

We, along with the Revs. Maxine Allen, Jessica Durand, and Bishop Kenneth Hicks, had the privilege of attending the 2011 Lake Junaluska Peace Conference, an inspiring and challenging event held at Lake Junaluska, N.C., Nov. 12-15, to discuss that question. The United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas made it possible for our small group of Arkansas clergy to attend.

The focus of this year's conference, "Poverty, Abundance, and Peace: Seeking Economic Justice for All God's Children," led us to explore issues of systemic poverty, economic disparity and interfaith action through a variety of speakers and small group discussions.

Bishop Nukulu Ntanda Ntambo of the North Katanga Area, Democratic Republic of Congo, who spoke at Arkansas' 2010 Annual Conference; David Beckmann, president of Bread for the World; and several other speakers shared their visions for the continued role of the Church in issues of economic justice. Bishop Ntambo stated in his address that Americans have privilege and abundance.

"America is blessed to be a blessing," he said. "With the

abundance of everything that you have, you must be willing to share."

Bishop Ntambo described how different conferences in America have taken on projects to help build wells and help build bridges in places where bridges were torn



Natasha Murray-Norman

down because of the war. The role of the Church in the midst of poverty and brokenness is to build bridges in communities that are impacted by these conditions.

The Peace Conference maintains a focus on interfaith dialogue surrounding peacemaking. This year, an interfaith panel with scholars of Judaism, Islam and Christianity discussed what we can learn from each faith's sacred texts about peace, justice and economics. The beauty of this discussion was not in the brilliant words spoken, but instead in the true congeniality and love expressed among those on the panel, and the hope they shared in God's will for peace in the world.

The conference's leaders encouraged us to seek ways to live in peace and rethink our understanding of peace not just through our own faith lens, but through the lenses of all faiths. Our discussions gave us a sense of hope that we can all develop greater understanding of each other.

Most people attending the

conference were actively involved in ministries of justice. Many used it as a place for sharing information with other laborers from their respective fields, as well as for a time of spiritual renewal.

Small group discussions centered on topics presented throughout the day. Group members shared their context and experiences of addressing hunger and poverty within their communities.

Throughout the weekend, we received encouragement to answer God's call for us to work toward good and justice in the world. While the promise of God's presence brings us hope, the task ahead seems



Brittany Richardson Watson

daunting. On the last morning of the conference, Dr. Bob Edgar, a United Methodist clergyman, former U.S. Representative, and current president and CEO of Common Cause, left us with words of inspiration as we returned home to our ministry contexts.

"We are the leaders we have been waiting for," he reminded us.

His statement is both a challenge and a word of hope. We must stop waiting for someone else to come in and do the work for us. God has called us—yes, even us—to bring words of love and actions of

peace to the world around us.

At the close of the conference, we all were asked to write a letter stating what actions we would be willing to commit to once we arrived home. After writing the letters, we addressed the envelopes to ourselves in the hope of keeping us accountable to the commitment we made.

Now that we have returned home, our challenge is to continue to do the work that was planted in our hearts by sharing it with those in our ministries. We were all forced to ask ourselves, "What are we doing and how are we being the bridges to provide resources to those in need?"

In the coming year, we hope to continue the conversation that began at Lake Junaluska as we seek God's direction and vision for what lies ahead. Others will incorporate this into their day-to-day ministry by taking seriously their call and responsibility to journey toward economic justice. We must find ways to foster this sense of call in the congregations we serve.

This is not just a duty for our mission committees or our social action groups. It is a call for each and every Christian to be sure that our brothers are fed, that our sisters are clothed and our children have the hope of a peace-filled world.

The Rev. Murray-Norman serves at New Hope and Parkview UMCs, both in Benton. The Rev. Watson serves as associate pastor at Highland Valley UMC Little Rock.

Two DSEs to retire

Bishop Charles Crutchfield has announced that the Rev. C.E. McAdoo and the Rev. Charlie Settle will be requesting the retired relationship at the 2012 Annual Conference session. McAdoo currently serves as superintendent of the Southwest District, and Settle as superintendent of the North District.

"I have been deeply appreciative of the profound wisdom, abounding grace, strong loyalty and deep faith C.E. and Charlie have brought to the cabinet," said Bishop Crutchfield. "They will be missed."

To view a list of retirements and other appointment changes, visit www.arumc.org/appointments. Updates will be posted as available.



C.E. McAdoo



Charles Settle

Q&A: Technology task force gathering data, preparing recommendations

Since the approval of the Imagine Ministry proposal at the 2011 Arkansas Annual Conference, task forces and teams have begun working to determine the details of what the new Conference structure will look like.

Among these groups is the technology task force appointed by Bishop Charles Crutchfield, which will make recommendations to the transition team concerning the Conference's new Center for Technology. Their work has included a survey of the technology capabilities and needs of the Arkansas Conference churches.

Brian Swain, the administrator at Central United Methodist Church in Fayetteville, serves as a member of the technology task force and was the survey coordinator. He spoke recently with *Arkansas United Methodist* editor **Amy Forbus** about the survey results, as well as the team's ongoing process of imagining the future of technology's role within the Arkansas Conference.

How has the Technology Center task force approached this process?

There is a good combination of laity and clergy on the task force, and they bring a variety of expertise to the table. The task force is under the direction of Jim Argue, president and CEO of the United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas. It began meeting in August, and has met both in person and via videoconferencing, which has been extremely helpful since task force members are located all across the state.

Early in the process, the task force brought a technology consultant, Dr. Jim Pagan, onto the team. His guidance has been especially helpful and an integral part of the process. He's spent a lot of time talking with Conference staff, with district superintendents, and with churches of all sizes across the state, helping us get an accurate picture of our starting point in this process before guiding us forward.

What kind of participation did you get from the local church survey?

Close to 50 percent of our churches responded to the survey, which I considered a great response. A variety of church sizes participated, too. I think it's a strong enough sample that the data can be extrapolated to represent all of the churches in Arkansas.

Did any of the survey results surprise the task force?

One that jumps out at me is that 36 percent of churches don't have a computer on premises. That, along with an Internet connection, are the two things I consider essential to send and receive communication in this day and age, so that's a number I want to see shrink. There are still places in the state where Internet access simply isn't available, but there aren't many.

A pleasant surprise was that 96 percent of pastors reported having an email account. I really didn't expect the number to be that high.

What types of patterns did you see?

Only half of the churches that responded have websites. There are roadblocks to having a website for churches that I hope the Center for Technology can help remove.

Something I expected to see is that a lot of our churches seem to be very interested in exploring technology further, but don't know where to turn. Consequently, they end up doing nothing.

And some churches that responded are what I call "technologically averse," meaning they just don't seem to have an interest in exploring or investing in technology tools.

Among many churches, though, there was significant interest in establishing online giving and in streaming their worship services live on the web.

What about technology tools that don't depend on Internet access?

One need mentioned by multiple churches has to do with sound systems. Either they don't

have a sound system at all, or the one they have is not working well for them. And several responders indicated that they could really benefit from some hearing assistance devices for those who have trouble hearing everything that's said in a worship service.

Another item that stands out is the lack of church management software, which can track church finances, membership, attendance and group activity data. Only 39 percent of churches indicated that they have a church management software package in place. Some churches are still doing manual

recordkeeping of their financial and membership data. Others are using programs like QuickBooks, which isn't designed with a church in mind.

By providing access and training to churches in how to use software designed specifically for

churches, I believe great improvement can be made in recordkeeping and operational efficiencies.

So do you foresee some kind of grant program to help local churches get the equipment they need?

The task force has not come up with a specific plan on this yet, but I believe consideration should be given to allocating a certain amount of money for grants on a need-based basis.

Our task force will make recommendations, but the ultimate decisions on direction in this area will reside with the bishop's office and the new technology center director.

Is the goal still to have a director for the Center in place by some time this summer?

Yes, the task force is currently developing a job description for the director position, as well as an organizational chart for staffing.

Providing support for using new technology will be crucial. The task force is working on pathways for supporting local churches with

technology enhancements that are made available and put into place. The process for selection of the new director is also still under discussion.

Is there anything else you'd like our readers to know?

One of our goals for the Center

is that it helps establish connections between churches already using technology with those who are considering it. Churches can learn a lot from one another. There are some excellent advancements being made in the church community, and hopefully some best practices can be adapted from these.

Key findings of the survey conducted by the technology task force

The technology task force survey resulted in 478 total responses. Some churches tallied more than one response, but no church had more than four. The following information represents some of the key findings of the report:

- 36 percent of churches responding do not have at least one computer on the church premises.
- 40 percent of church offices do not have access to the Internet.
- Of the 60 percent of churches that do have an Internet connection, 92 percent indicated that they have a high-speed broadband connection.
- Of the churches with broadband, 60 percent use DSL, 17 percent use cable, and 16 percent use a wireless connection. Only 5 percent of those with high speed Internet had either a T1 connection or higher or fiber connectivity.
- 61 percent of senior pastors have a personal digital device or smartphone.
- 96 percent of senior pastors and church staff have an email account.
- 50 percent of churches have a church website.
- 51 percent of churches use social media, with Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube being the most popular of the media used.
- Of the churches that use social media, 7 percent noted that they have the capability to live-stream their church services.
- 66 percent of senior pastors use social media, with Facebook and YouTube being the two most popular.
- 8 percent of responding churches indicated that they offer online giving, with Paypal being the most popular service provider.
- 39 percent of churches have a church management software package in place to maintain church membership and accounting records. Of the 121 respondents who identified their church management software, the most common were: Church Windows (29 percent), PowerChurch (22 percent), Shelby (21 percent), and ACS (18 percent).
- 91 percent of churches have a copy machine; 41 churches (9 percent) do not.

'What obstacles prevent your church from greater utilization of technology?'

Of the 394 responses to this question, the top answer was lack of funding, listed by 73 percent of respondents.

The second-highest response (33 percent) centered on other limitations: limited technical knowledge, lack of staff/volunteers, lack of training and lack of equipment.

The third-highest response (25 percent) involved resistance to change in the congregation; typically, it was a small and aging congregation.

Other responses that totaled less than 5 percent included lack of time (4 percent); low-quality or nonexistent Internet service (4 percent); and facilities not compatible with use of technology in worship (2 percent).

Crossroad House provides home and hope for teen moms

BY AMY FORBUS
Editor

As a developmental therapist, Ophelia Mosley works with children ages three and under who have disabilities. She encounters clients in all types of living situations, including children in foster care.

During one visit to a client in a foster home, she overheard a conversation about a nine-year-old pregnant girl needing placement in the foster system.

"I said, 'You have got to have the age wrong,'" Mosley said. "But they were accurate."

She completed her work and left the home, still upset. "I was really fussing at Jesus, just ranting and raving," she said.

It was then she heard a clear voice say, "You do something about it." The Holy Spirit kept whispering to her, and she knew she had to act.

An active member of Christ United Methodist Church Cabot, Mosley discerned that her calling to help young mothers wouldn't involve founding just another facility or group home. She knew that it needed to be a real home—hers.

Mosley began putting together what would become Crossroad House. She rented a large, ranch-style home in Cabot and moved in, decorating rooms to make them comfortable and welcoming for

teens and their babies. Bedrooms can accommodate up to five mother-child pairs. The house includes rooms for studying and pursuing hobbies, and a playroom dedicated to one-on-one interaction between mothers and infants.

Teens living at Crossroad House learn life skills like how to cook using simple recipes and fresh ingredients, the importance of doing well in school and bonding with their children—skills they may not pick up in other environments such as a homeless shelter.

She also recruited an executive director: her daughter, Desiree Kelly, who is pursuing a Ph.D. in human services. As part of her work with Crossroad House, Kelly presents the state-approved curriculum "Making Proud Choices," teaching prevention of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

"My goal is to help young girls make good decisions about their life," Kelly says. "I am a resource ready to be utilized by the community."

Crossroad House has a highly involved, all-female board of directors, which includes a pharmacist, a police officer, a business owner and a United Methodist deaconess. Each board member uses her gifts to provide assistance for Crossroad House, often working directly with residents.

Colleen Caldwell, the deaconess

on the board, was commissioned in April 2011 by the Women's Division of the United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries. As director of community care ministries for Christ UMC Cabot, she has seen the congregation wrap its arms around the current residents of Crossroad House: 15-year-old Kasha and her 13-month-old daughter, Marie (names have been changed to protect privacy).

"That baby has so many aunts and uncles now," says Caldwell, who added that the church's eagerness to include the mother and baby is teaching the value of having a stable support system and faith life.

"We have a group of people ready to welcome girls who are new to the home and let them know they are welcome not only in Christ Church, but also in Cabot," says the Rev. Jeff Warrick, the church's pastor. "Kasha is becoming involved in our youth group on a weekly basis, and she's brought a wonderful perspective to the group."

Though Crossroad House currently has only one teen resident, they expect to receive more in 2012. In anticipation of that growth, Christ UMC has donated its church van to Crossroad House, ensuring that all of the home's residents will be able to get to church and other group activities. The church also gave Crossroad House more than \$500 raised



Ophelia Mosley, founder of Crossroad House, displays a dollhouse made by an anonymous donor. The dollhouse raised close to \$1,200 for Crossroad House's residential program for teen mothers.

AUM PHOTO BY AMY FORBUS

through its community fall festival.

Individuals from the church have helped with a variety of tasks, from providing diapers to installing wireless Internet access. One church member who prefers to remain anonymous builds dollhouses, and has donated two for fundraisers. This year's dollhouse, which was given away Dec. 18, raised almost \$1,200 for the cause.

"My church is wonderful," said Mosley. Christ UMC Cabot surrounds Kasha with love and encouragement, and Mosley says it would be impossible to sustain Crossroad House without the church's support.

Kasha says she and Marie enjoy living at Crossroad House.

"It's better than anywhere I've been," she says. "I tell Ms. Ophelia that all the time."

Soon after she gave birth, Kasha spent a few weeks in a homeless

shelter, with no clue where her child was in the foster system. Crossroad House has given her a fresh start in caring for both herself and her daughter. She plans to be caught up in school by summer break.

"The shelter I was in before here told me, 'You can't do teenager stuff. You've got to be a mother.' But you can be a mother too, and still have fun at the same time, as long as you're doing your job right."

And she does do her job right. Kasha handles all of her child-rearing duties, and she gets the kind of support that allows her to focus on her studies and participate in youth activities at Christ Church.

"She's got a good frame of mind to raise her baby, and that's the way it should be," Mosley says.

For more information on Crossroad House, or to volunteer, visit crossroadhouseforgirls.org.

Imagine Ministry (continued from page 1A)

steady in purpose but flexible in strategy," said Boggan.

He will take charge of recruiting and training up to 70 Circuit Elders and up to 30 Congregational Coaches who will be deployed by the district superintendents in 2012 and 2013. He also will develop strategies for equipping laity and clergy, and creating accountability for leadership goals.

"The purpose of all this is to develop and strengthen passion and excellence in local congregations so they can make disciples and transform their mission field," he said. "I look forward to serving the clergy and laity of the Arkansas Conference."

"The Center for Excellence in Clergy and Laity Leadership is really designed to create opportunities for accountability," said Bishop Crutchfield. "It's designed to create an opportunity for us to build excellence into everything we do,

both as clergy and laity.

"For a long time, we have said clergy need to be accountable.... But laity are accountable, too. Clergy are accountable to their vows of ordination; laity are accountable to their vows of baptism and church membership. We talk so glibly about laity-clergy partnerships, but we don't do much about it. This is a step in that direction."

Bridging a gap

Thompson, who lives in Marion and serves as instructor of historical theology and Wesleyan studies at Memphis Theological Seminary, is a Th.D. candidate at Duke University, where his dissertation focuses on the means of grace in John Wesley's doctrine of sanctification. His appointment as Wesley scholar for the Conference began on Jan. 1.

No other annual conference has a clergyperson appointed specifically

to provide insight into the Wesleyan roots of United Methodism, so Thompson expects his role to evolve over time. He will work with the Holiness of Heart and Life Network, the Center for Clergy and Laity Excellence in Leadership and with local congregations.

"I think direct engagement with local churches will be a significant part of this ministry," he said.

Bishop Crutchfield believes that having a Wesley scholar will help churches learn to more intentionally use John Wesley's teachings as a foundation for ministry in the name of Christ.

"When we talk about the business of the Conference, where are we as Wesleyans?" he asks. "And how do we strengthen that connection?"

"We think having a scholar like Andrew, who is also deeply committed to the life of the local church and the Annual Conference, is a great way to keep this unifying

factor before us—that is, our theology of grace."

Before completing his doctoral studies and becoming a professor, Thompson served two appointments as a local church pastor. Through these experiences, he has seen the gap between the church and the academy—"a gap I think is much too wide," he says.

"With [my] duties as Wesleyan scholar for the Annual Conference, I will be able to focus that much more directly on how the work of a Wesleyan theologian should serve the life of the church at the ground level."

Creating a network

Watson, a former administrator for two UMCs in Arkansas, is an active member of canvascommunity UMC Little Rock, and also sings in the choir at Highland Valley UMC.

Her experience at the local church level, including leadership training in Bible study and discipleship, contributed to her willingness to take on the volunteer

role of lead facilitator for Holiness of Heart and Life: The Network of Discipleship and Mission. Bishop Crutchfield will name four additional co-facilitators from across the state.

"Over the past couple of years we have had an opportunity to dream and imagine where we can go and what can be accomplished through the body of Christ," Watson said. "As we now put these thoughts and prayers into action, with the help of the Holy Spirit, I know great things are in our future."

Though Watson officially begins work in July, she looks forward to meeting with other leaders before then to begin bringing more pieces of the Network into place.

"This is really different, and it's not going to be easy to make this work," Bishop Crutchfield said. "I appreciate Sandy's willingness to walk along with us in kind of an undefined way to build the future."

"I am extraordinarily excited to have all three of these people involved in the Annual Conference's life going forward," he added.

Youth in the Arkansas Conference can connect with each other at local church gatherings or at larger events. District youth rallies in the fall of 2011 provided some of those connection points. Read on for a sampling of experiences from these events, shared by youth and adult leaders from several different parts of the state.

North District

On Oct. 22-23, the youth of North District had our District Fall Rally. We all drove to First UMC Batesville Saturday, stayed the night, then attended church service there the next morning. Mike Meeks from First UMC Arkadelphia served as our speaker and did an amazing job! Our band, Transcend, came from Beebe to play outstanding music. Genesis 2:7, our rally's Scripture, was the theme for the weekend. It was a time full of fun games, wonderful music, and good fellowship.

Saturday night, we made a worship painting to which everyone contributed; we then donated it to the church as a thank-you for hosting our event. We also spent part of the night making banners for the church to hang up in their sanctuary for Children's Sabbath.

All in all, it was an awesome weekend and we can't wait for the next district event!

—Audrey Kirk, First UMC Beebe, North DCYM reporter

Participants in the North District Fall Youth Rally experiment with a more Christ-centered approach to the standard group photo.

COURTESY PHOTOS

District youth rallies offer time



North Central District

Youth rallies, in general, try to address the problems that teenagers face in this day and age. But in doing so, they usually pick a singular problem and just slightly touch on others. The North Central District Council on Youth Ministry (DCYM) decided to touch on many of them at once in what was one of our most successful rallies to date.

"Along the Road: Finding God in your Journey" took place on Oct. 3, 2011. The purpose of the rally was to help youth better understand the concept of our personal faith journey and to help them gain confidence in overcoming the challenges of life. The day was filled with in-depth discussion and personal reflection. NCDCYM council members got a lot out of putting that rally together, and I believe that the youth who participated got even more out of it than we did.

—Austin DuVall, North Central DCYM president

Our small groups and worship helped the youth open their hearts to each other and to God. The main game of the day, an obstacle course, served as a fun way to convey the theme of our event, which dealt with finding God in different situations. It gave us all a chance to get to know each other outside the small groups.

Our verse was Jeremiah 6:16, "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it..." *Look... Ask... Walk.* We used this verse to sum up a bunch of things that a teenager goes through, and how to find God in each of those situations.

—Courtney Marsden, North Central DCYM vice-president

Worship Fair 2012 Ancient Ways, Future Paths

presented by the
Arkansas Chapter
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.arkansasfumwa.org

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Arkansas FUMWA

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

James O'Donnell, organist and master of the
Choristers of Westminster Abbey

Registration

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Address _____
City _____ St _____ Zip _____
Preferred email: _____
Phone: _____

I am a Fellowship member.

I am not a member.

Please send membership information

Please add me to the mailing list

Registration Fees:

\$55 includes Worship Fair & Sat. Luncheon
 \$10 Friday Plenary Session Dinner (seating will be available for those not eating)
 I am applying for .5 CEU (available only for those attending the entire event)

Total: _____

Make checks payable to: Arkansas Chapter, The Fellowship.

Send registration forms and payment to:
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for worship, fellowship, fun

South Central District

“Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly and you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs, from the spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.”

—Colossians 3:16

The South Central District Youth (also known as SCUMY) held a Fall Rally on Oct. 16, 2011, at First UMC Hot Springs. It was a complete success with more than 150 youth in attendance. The band Visitors Parking, a group of high school students, led worship. Their love for God showed on and off the stage, and kids were completely unashamed in worship. It was an amazing feeling! Our speaker, Tommy Jones from Sardis UMC, brought an inspiring message about filling the streets with the attitude and love that is portrayed in our rallies and events that the Conference provides.

We also raised money for Youth Service Fund at our rally. Kids willingly pulled out their wallets and purses and gave more than \$300. The churches competed against each other to give the most. First UMC Hot Springs raised the top amount of \$74 and won a Flip Video camera for their church. Overall, the event was incredible, everyone had a good time and left fired up with Christ burning bright through them!

—Becca Phillips, South Central District youth president

Southeast District

The Southeast District Council on Youth Ministries (SEDCYM) hosted its largest event to date on Oct. 1-2 at Sulphur Springs UMC. Nearly 250 youth in grades 6 through 12 attended the overnight Fall Rally, which the district youth council planned and led.

With the theme “Just Add Water,” most activities centered around water-based stories from the Bible, focusing on the Woman at the Well. The Living Waters Worship Experience, a multi-sensory worship time with various prayer stations, provided water facts from around the world and ended with reflection and remembrance of baptism.

Zach Schrick, youth pastor at First UMC Magnolia, gave inspired and moving talks throughout the weekend. Visitors Parking, a talented and enthusiastic band from Hot Springs, led the crowd in worship. Maggie Beeler of Methodist Family Health visited and showed a stirring video about the Methodist Children’s Home, following it with a brief message to the youth about how they can get involved with that cause.

Sunday morning Communion worship capped off the weekend. Youth and adults worked together to create a worship painting on several canvases. The painting used a variety of artistic techniques and depicted fish within a cross. We collected an offering of more than \$380 to go toward building a well for a village in Africa.

The SEDCYM, a hard-working group of more than 35 youth and 10 adults, are planning Spring Rally for March 9-11 at Bear Creek Camp in Marianna. It will be led by speaker Mark Norman and special guests Beware of Christians.

To learn more about SEDCYM and its activities, contact Emily Johnson, district youth coordinator, at 501-940-6577.

LEFT: The North Central District Council on Youth Ministries shows off this year’s T-shirt.



ABOVE: Participants created a multi-canvas painting as part of a worship experience at the Southeast District Youth Rally.



Youth found opportunities to have good, clean, messy fun at the West District Rally.

West District

The West District Fall Retreat drew more than 50 students from six area congregations. We are very blessed in the River Valley area and in western Arkansas to have a diverse group of young people who are always eager to descend on our beloved Shoal Creek camp for a weekend of fun.

The students, youth pastors and resource adults enjoyed the rustic beauty of Shoal Creek under cool blue skies during our daytime activities, as well as in the mild fall evenings. The weekend included corporate worship, games, mixers, small groups and a bonfire.

With change coming to our districts, our youth and our District Council members are all excited to join with our sister congregations in Northwest Arkansas in 2012, and to make new friends.

—Vini Scott, West District DCYM coordinator

What’s next? Veritas registration is open! Statewide youth event in Rogers Feb. 24-26

All Arkansas youth in grades 7 through 12 are invited to attend Veritas at the Rogers Convention Center, Feb. 24-26. Veritas has grown to more than 1,000 attendees and is the annual “big event” for young people in the Arkansas Conference, bringing youth together to celebrate, worship, learn, experience and be energized to serve God. For details on Veritas 2012 as they become available, visit accym.org, the Arkansas Conference Council on Youth Ministries website. Registration is now open at www.arumc.org/register.



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Transitional house for families (continued from page 1A)



ABOVE: Stacy Waller and her children, Stafford, Reese and Miller, stand on the front porch at the ribbon cutting ceremony for Christopher's House, the ministry named in memory of their husband and father.

BELOW: Members of First UMC Springdale tour Christopher's House. PHOTOS BY DAVID GODWIN



unsuccessful attempts to buy the house, and it was not until the church was contacted by Seven Hills with the need for a place to house homeless families that the home's owner decided to sell to First UMC Springdale.

"We've been trying to buy that house for years with no luck," said the Rev. Stephen Coburn, the church's senior pastor. "But once we had a purpose for it that would glorify God, all the roadblocks were gone."

The transitional home is named after Chris Waller, a church member who lost his life in a tragic accident on Dec. 3, 2010. Just 33 years old at the time of his death, Waller left behind his wife, Stacy, and three small children. The church chose to name the house after Chris because he was a devoted father and husband who put his family before everything. Clergy who worked with Waller's family and friends after his death heard countless stories of how he went above and beyond his duties as a father.

Stacy Waller headed the steering committee and says the work comforted her and others who were dealing with loss, because there

is no greater gift to a family than the safety and security of a home.

"I felt like this was something that I needed myself," she said, "and I wanted my kids to be a part of it so they could see their daddy's legacy continue on."

Church members donated building materials, furniture, clothes and toys. Carpenters, electricians and plumbers from the congregation stepped forward to help, as well as countless volunteers who painted, cleaned the house and landscaped the yard, all in time for the first family to move in a week before Christmas.

"When asked to help with Christopher's House, my wife and I were so excited to be a part of it," said Patrick Kelley, a friend of Chris Waller's who considered him a role model.

"Being part of continuing the legacy of Chris Waller and sharing with families about how he lived his life is something really special, and we look forward to opening additional houses in Springdale."

Volunteer Sarah Lanning feels the project is special because it allows families to stay together.

"So often, when people are dealing with an eviction or foreclosure, their children are sent to stay with relatives or friends, while the parents end up homeless or in shelters," she said. "This transitional housing concept provides a space for families to stay together while they get back on their feet, and provides services through Seven Hills to teach them how to be a working family unit."

The project has been a healing experience for Stacy Waller.

"Looking back at how our life was turned upside down a year ago, and seeing how many positive things have come from his life, I could definitely see that Chris is still here," she said.

Smith is a member of First UMC Springdale.

Small church stays faithful, finds new life



Bud Horne of First UMC Clarksville helps with a painting project at Spadra UMC. A group of workers from First UMC helped its neighbor church by making repairs to the building.

COURTESY PHOTO

Four years ago, Spadra UMC had an average attendance of four people. Then, with the illness of one member, it sank to three. But the trio of women believed the congregation still had a future. The three started a Wednesday night Bible study, inviting people from the area. Average attendance at Sunday worship soon grew from four to 12.

Help continued to come from outside the congregation. Since 2009, they have had a volunteer pianist from First UMC Clarksville providing accompaniment for the hymns they sing during worship. And a group of men from the same church recently provided free labor to make repairs to the Spadra UMC building.

"They spent two Saturdays of their time, during Razorback football games, to serve the Lord," said the Rev. Regina Turner, pastor of Spadra UMC. "Wow! What saints of the Lord!"

Now with an average attendance of 15, new Sunday school for children and youth, and a helper from another church providing a children's message each week during worship, Spadra UMC is seeing new life. The willingness of the congregation, combined with the giving spirit of individuals from other churches, has awakened new possibilities for ministry.

"We as United Methodists can change God's churches, one church at a time," said Turner.

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COMING UP

January

Jeannie Stone art show at St. James UMC Little Rock through 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.

Rethink Evangelism Conference in Memphis Jan. 14

Lindenwood Christian Church in Memphis will be the site of the Rethink Evangelism Conference, scheduled for 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. on Saturday, Jan. 14. Topics include "Best Practices" with Dr. John Ed Mathison; "Evangelism in the Mid-Sized Church" with the Rev. Carlton Cross; and "Evangelism in the Small Membership Church" with the Rev. Beth Purdue and Dr. David Bush. Registration cost is \$20 per person and includes lunch. For details, visit memphisseminary.edu.

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.

February

Worship Fair in Little Rock Feb. 17-18

"Ancient Ways, Future Paths," the 2012 Worship Fair presented by the Arkansas Chapter of the Fellowship of United Methodists in Music and Worship Arts, will take place Friday and Saturday, Feb. 17-18, at Pulaski Heights UMC Little Rock.

Clinicians include the Rev. Britt Skarda of Pulaski Heights; Dr. Dean B. McIntyre of the United Methodist General Board of Discipleship in Nashville; and the Rev. Les Oliver of Central UMC Rogers. The event features a special Friday night recital by James O'Donnell, organist and master of the Choristers of Westminster Abbey. For more information, visit arkansasfumwa.org. To register, submit payment along with the form on page 6A.

VBS regional training events in three locations Feb. 18, March 3

Come join the fun at one of three 2012 Vacation Bible School (VBS) training events sponsored by the Arkansas Conference

Council on Children's Ministries (CCCM). Previously held only in Little Rock, CCCM has expanded VBS training to three locations in 2012 to be more accessible to churches across the state.

Scheduled for Feb. 18 at First UMC Hope and First UMC Springdale, and March 3 at First UMC Conway, all events will begin at 9 a.m. and conclude at noon.

All three events will include door prizes from Cokesbury bookstore (including a gift card), and a "swap table" for churches wishing to trade gently used VBS materials.

VBS is one of the most important outreach events of the year for children in local churches. This year's training will focus on practical how-to skills for all sizes of churches rather than teaching participants about a specific curriculum.

Registration fees (\$10 early registration, \$25 at the door) will go toward mini-grants for small-membership congregations to assist with funding for VBS. Grants of \$250 will be awarded on the basis of need and available funds. For more information and to complete a grant application form, visit <http://kidz.arumc.org>.

'Veritas' statewide youth event in Rogers Feb. 24-26

All Arkansas youth in grades 7 through 12 are invited to attend Veritas at the Rogers Convention Center, Feb. 24-26. Veritas has grown to more than 1,000 attendees and is the annual "big event" for young people in the Arkansas Conference, bringing youth together to celebrate, worship, learn, experience and be energized to serve God.

For details on Veritas 2012 as they become available, visit the Arkansas Conference Council on Youth Ministries website, accym.org. Registration is now open at www.arumc.org/register.

Buchanan, Krau to speak at March 10 adult and older adult ministry conference



Missy Buchanan



Carol Krau

A popular author and an expert in spiritual formation are among the presenters at a March conference addressing ministry with a wide age range of adults.

Mark your calendars now for the Adult and Older Adult Ministry Conference, scheduled for Saturday, March 10, at St. James UMC Little Rock. Featured speakers are Missy Buchanan, author of *Don't Write My Obituary Just Yet* and several other books published by Upper Room; and Carol Krau, director of adult formation and discipleship at the United Methodist General Board of Discipleship.

Workshop leaders include the Rev. Jennifer Pasco, Oklahoma Annual Conference, and Sheila McCallum, Christ of the Hills UMC Hot Springs Village. Online registration opens Jan. 16 at www.arumc.org/register.

Believing, caring, learning, giving: United Methodist Women gather for annual meeting

BY LADONNA BUSBY
Special Contributor

On Saturday, Nov. 12, 2011, the Arkansas Conference United Methodist Women gathered for their 8th Annual Meeting at the historic Lakeside United Methodist Church in Pine Bluff.

With "Because We Believe... We Care" as the theme for the day, more than 300 women gathered for a time of worship, business and fellowship. Conference president Judy Jacobs and the other members of the 2011 Conference United Methodist Women Mission Team led the meeting.

Cheryl Trent, the coordinator for mission education for the Women's Division of the General Board of Global Ministries, the national policy-making body of United Methodist Women, served

as keynote speaker for the event. She shared some history of the women's missionary groups in the UMC, and highlighted some current mission work happening around the world through the United Methodist Women's organization.

Sarah Wacaster, director of Camp Aldersgate in Little Rock, brought the women up to date on the work of the camp. Camp Aldersgate is owned by the Women's Division.

Wacaster announced that a carousel from a park in Little Rock has been given to the camp. The carousel is in the process of being refinished and equipped for the use of children at who attend Aldersgate's Med Camps and Kota Camps, and have varying medical and accessibility needs. This will be the first opportunity for many of

these children to ride on a carousel.

President Jacobs presented Wacaster with a check from the Arkansas Conference United Methodist Women to secure the purchase and naming rights of three horses for the carousel. "Faith," "Hope" and "Love" will soon be available for rides by the children who attend the Camp Aldersgate. Many United Methodist Women units from around the Conference made this purchase possible.

The host unit, Lakeside United Methodist Women, together with their pastor, the Rev. Pam Estes, provided a meal and hospitality for the meeting.

Busby serves as the administrative assistant for the North District and is an active member of United Methodist Women.

Arkansas Conference selected for pilot program on improving health, well-being

The Center for Health (CFH), a dedicated team at the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits of The United Methodist Church, has begun collaborating with the Arkansas Conference on a pilot program to improve the health and well-being of clergy and lay workers and their families.

The CFH seeks to improve multiple dimensions of health and well-being—physical, emotional, spiritual, social and financial. The Arkansas Conference, along with the Mississippi Conference and the Pacific Northwest Conference, will serve as pioneers for this new program.

“We have met with Center for Health representatives for an orientation to the process,” said

Mona Williams, benefits officer for the Arkansas Conference. “We hope that as our own clergy and lay workers continue to learn what works best for maintaining a healthy lifestyle, our results will benefit other conferences that enter the program behind us.”

A Population Health Consultation in collaboration with the participating conference is the first step in developing a custom, multi-year strategic plan for prioritizing health and wellness in the annual conference. Arkansas Conference leaders have begun working with CFH staff, which includes health and wellness experts.

The next steps will include finding a way to incorporate clergy and lay health and well-being as part

of the conference structure, including designating a leader for wellness in the conference—an Arkansas Wellness Navigator—and district Wellness Ambassadors.

Navigators and Ambassadors will help promote wellness resources and programs that support individual clergy and laity in taking advantage of wellness offerings. They also will report to the conference and CFH on engagement and progress toward wellness goals of local clergy and laity. The CFH plans to connect the Navigators across the denomination so conferences can work together and learn from each others’ wellness successes.

A program already introduced by the Holy Healthy UMC team of the Arkansas Conference will stay in

place as part of the CFH initiative: Clergy and lay workers on the Conference health plan will remain eligible for the HealthMiles physical activity program. HealthMiles participants wear pedometers and upload their activity to a website, earning rewards for being physically active.

“We invited Arkansas to join the pilot following Bishop Crutchfield’s participation in an interview with the CFH discussing what health improvement efforts would help the conference and what the CFH plans to offer conferences in the future,” said Kelly Wittich, the CFH’s health and wellness program manager.

“Additionally, because Arkansas was moving toward implementing a new ministry strategy initiative—

Imagine Ministry—the timing for CFH involvement was perfect, since prioritizing and promoting the health of clergy and church leaders has been shown to be an important component of ministry.”

Future plans for the CFH initiative include connecting Parish Nurses and Health Advocates across the UMC to take advantage of these leaders’ gifts and graces to improve clergy and congregational health; offering more wellness programs like HealthMiles; continuing the strategic partnership with Arkansas and other conferences for years to come; raising consciousness of clergy health issues among seminary students; and enhancing the CFH’s website content, including the addition of webinars to support healthful practices.

TRANSFORMING THE WORLD



Dierks kids surpass goal of Advent service project, topping \$800

The Dierks UMC children’s Sunday school class took on a service project for the Advent season: raising \$500 to purchase toys for patients at Arkansas Children’s Hospital.

“This was a decision made only by the children, not the adults,” said the Rev. Robert Lyons, the church’s pastor, who noted that the kids surpassed their goal by far, raising \$816.

Pictured, from left: teacher Malinda Noel, Delaney Eckert, Chloe Billings, Macy Eckert and Aubree Abernathy. Front: John Patrick Cothren.

Cornerstone’s Glorious Giving Market raises more than \$8,500 for missions

Members and friends of Cornerstone UMC Jonesboro got a head start on Christmas shopping—with a twist—at the church’s sixth annual Glorious Giving Market on Saturday, Nov. 19. The special event, which provided opportunities to give out-of-the-ordinary gifts while supporting a number of missions, raised more than \$8,500 to benefit eight different causes.

Each mission had a booth in the multi-purpose building that serves as the Cornerstone sanctuary. Shoppers who supported the various missions received cards to send to friends or relatives indicating that in lieu of other Christmas presents, gifts have been given in their honor to particular missions.

“It is a wonderful way to celebrate Christ’s birth in a spirit of love for those we hold dear, while at the same time giving hope to God’s children who are in need,” says Patricia Harlan, who leads the church’s Glorious Giving Market ministry.

Christmas 2011 missions included Heifer International; Crescendo in Santiago, Chile, which is directed by Arkansas

missionary the Rev. Shana Harrison; Imagine No Malaria in Africa; One Book Foundation in Bunda, Tanzania, where Arkansans the Rev. Charles and Karen Wiggins are in ministry; the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR); Methodist Family Health; Arkansas Rice Depot; and Angel House Orphanage in Tarime, Tanzania.

In addition to the mission booths, a number of other activities were available, including snacks from a café and goods from a bakery booth. Entertainment included songs presented by Cornerstone children, as well as live guitar music.

As shoppers purchased mission gifts throughout the day, ornaments were added to a Christmas tree to provide a visual representation of each gift’s impact.



Children of Cornerstone UMC Jonesboro provided music at the church’s sixth annual Glorious Giving Market.

COURTESY PHOTO

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Sail with Criss Travel! Alaska Cruise-Tour - 7 night cruise on Royal Caribbean/3 night tour to Talkeetna and Denali National Park. June 22, 2012. Ocean view with air from Memphis. \$3329.73 per person, \$500 deposit. 870-483-0209 or crisstravel@yahoo.com.

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.

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

OBITUARY

CONWAY

Lora Woods

Lora Lafaye Teeter Woods, 98, passed away on Friday, Dec. 2, 2011, at Conway Regional Medical Center.

She was born Sept. 28, 1913, in Plainview to Melvin Odus and Bertha Dee Bowden Teeter. She was predeceased by her parents; a brother, Clayton; a sister, Oleta; and her husband of 62 years, the Rev. Woodrow Woods.

Survivors include three children, Katala Sisco of Clinton and her husband, Bob; Don Woods of Bryant and his wife, Belinda; and Sandra Woods of Conway; a sister, Nina Taylor and her

husband, Roy, of Wolfforth, Texas; six grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren.



Lora Woods

She grew up on Crow Mountain, north of Pottsville in Pope County. She was a member of Wesley UMC in Conway. For more than 40 years, Lora was a faithful pastor's wife, serving churches throughout the former North Arkansas Conference of the United Methodist Church. She often served as the pianist at

churches where her husband was appointed as pastor.

In addition to her work in churches, the joy and focus of her life were her family and helping others. During their ministry together, she and Woodrow often spent Thanksgiving and Christmas afternoons taking food baskets to the poor. She enjoyed gardening, sewing, cooking, and reading.

A funeral service was held at Wesley UMC on Tuesday, Dec. 6. Burial followed at Crestlawn Memorial Park in Conway. Memorial gifts may be made to Wesley UMC, 2310 E. Oak Street, Conway, AR 72032, or to the church of your choice.

Grand opening for UM Museum of Arkansas' new location Jan. 14

All United Methodists of Arkansas invited

Opening reception:

11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Dedication ceremony led by Bishop Charles Crutchfield:

11:30 a.m.

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@abcglobal.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.



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Grants from Ingathering go to ministries statewide

The nine districts of the Arkansas Conference have announced grant funding for 57 feeding ministries across the state.

Funding for all grants came from gifts given to Ingathering, the annual collection of supplies and funds to help those who face sickness, hunger or disaster around Arkansas, the U.S. and the globe.

Grants awarded at Ingathering on Nov. 19 focused on providing start-up funds to emerging hunger relief ministries, while the districts directed their grants toward established ministries. The emerging ministry grants were listed in the Dec. 2 issue of the *Arkansas United Methodist*.

District grant amounts ranged from \$200 to \$1,000, depending upon factors determined by the district. Each district reviewed applications from within its own boundaries, which allowed for greater attention to the unique nature of each ministry. Some districts chose to give equal amounts to all churches selected, while others gave more to ministries that serve larger numbers of people.

Recipients of district hunger ministry grants include:

Central District: Community Food Pantry at Amboy UMC; Gardner Memorial UMC food pantry; Geyer Springs UMC food pantry; the community garden feeding program at Theresa Hoover UMC; the weekly food pantry at Oak Forest UMC; the twice-monthly food pantry at Quapaw Quarter UMC; supplemental and emergency food distribution at Sweet Home UMC; and supplemental food distribution at Wesley Chapel UMC.

North District: North Sharp County Ministerial Alliance, Ash Flat UMC; Feed the Hungry program at Holiday Hills UMC; The Food Closet and Power Express after-school ministry at Leslie UMC; Melbourne UMC Backpack Program; Cedar Ridge Helping Hands Food Pantry, Oil Trough UMC; and Valley Springs UMC Food for Children. The North District used its own funds to give additional grants to the Agape Cafe Ministry of Hardy UMC and the food pantry at Bald Knob UMC.

North Central District: Amazing Grace Cafe at First UMC Conway; First UMC Des Arc's Brown Bag Ministry, which feeds children during the summer when they do not have access to free or reduced-price school lunches; Grace UMC Conway's Coupons for Christ Program to benefit Bethlehem House; Conway County Care Center, an extension ministry of First UMC Morrilton; Mount Tabor UMC Cabot's Brown Bag Ministry for children in summer; the food pantry at Vilonia UMC; and the food pantry at Wesley UMC Conway. First UMC Des Arc received a second grant for a weekend backpack program that will serve the same children as the summer Brown Bag Ministry.

Northeast District: Food pantries at Cherry Valley UMC; First UMC Blytheville; Fisher Street UMC Jonesboro; Harrisburg UMC; Hickory Ridge UMC; Hughes UMC; Piggott UMC; St. Paul UMC Jonesboro; Trumann UMC.

Northwest District: Food pantries at Central UMC Lincoln; Decatur UMC; First UMC Bentonville; Grace UMC Rogers; Harmon UMC; and Wiggins UMC Fayetteville.

South Central District: Open Door Ministries in Jones Mill, directed by Cathy Larson, a United Methodist Lay Missioner. Open Door serves hot meals and provides a number of other services for children and families.

Southeast District: Gillett UMC; Helping Hands ministry connected with First UMC Hamburg; Pioneer Club, an after-school ministry of First UMC Hamburg; Marianna Larger Parish, a ministry coordinated by Church and Community Worker Evelyn Banks-Shackelford; White Hall UMC; Wilson Chapel UMC Warren.

Southwest District: The Stewpot, a ministry of First UMC Magnolia that serves an afternoon meal three days a week.

West District: Alma UMC, for its work with the local Community Outreach Center food pantry; Bluffton UMC Waldron and Gravelly UMC, a two-point charge with an outreach network that delivers food within 24 hours of learning about a need; Greenwood UMC food pantry; Hartman UMC food pantry; First UMC Ozark food pantry; Faith UMC Fort Smith food pantry; the "Least of These" ministry at Midland Heights UMC, providing warm meals and after-school snacks; Mulberry UMC food pantry; St. Paul UMC Fort Smith's ministry of providing hot meals the first Saturday of each month.

Helping for the holidays



Members of Trinity UMC Little Rock serve lunch to clients of Methodist Family Health's Arkansas CARES program.

COURTESY PHOTOS

Many United Methodist congregations provided something special for clients of Methodist Family Health facilities this Christmas. Here are just two examples of the gifts a congregation can give.

Christmas luncheon

At Trinity UMC Little Rock's "Miracle Team" on Dec. 10 hosted its annual Christmas luncheon for women and children in the Arkansas CARES (Center for Addictions Research, Education and Services) program of Methodist Family Health. Children at Brady Elementary, the church's partner in education created decorations and special placemats for the event.

After enjoying a bevy of holiday dishes and desserts, the children played with toys until Santa Claus arrived. Each child had a photo made with Santa. And before leaving, the children got to select a gift of a hat and gloves or mittens.

There's a special connection between this church and the program it helps: Trinity UMC's Miracle Team is led by Cynthia Crone, founder of Arkansas CARES.

Bicycles for girls

The Ophelia Polk-Moore home near Helena is another ministry of Methodist Family Health. Holly Grove UMC, a nearby congregation

with an average attendance of 14 people, provided an early Christmas gift: On Dec. 8, they delivered nine brand-new bicycles to the home—enough for each of the residents and one for a supervising adult—and placed gift cards for each of the girls under the Christmas tree.

Some Holly Grove members have volunteered at an orphanage in Guatemala and worked building homes in Mexico.

"This time we decided we wanted to do something that would help others locally," said Don Dearing, a Holly Grove member. "So we visited with [teaching parents] Jessica and Shane and asked what the needs of the group home were. They said the girls could really use and enjoy some bicycles. So that fit the bill for us."

The Holly Grove church is one of several local groups that show generosity to the youth at the Ophelia-Polk Moore home, including First UMC Helena, West Helena UMC, Marvell UMC and several non-United Methodist organizations.

Methodist Family Health operates group homes around the state, Methodist Behavioral Hospital in Maumelle, residential treatment centers, a therapeutic foster care program, emergency shelters, therapeutic day treatment programs, community- and school-based counseling clinics, Arkansas CARES and Kaleidoscope Grief Center.



Holly Grove UMC members present gifts of bicycles to residents of the Methodist Family Health Ophelia Polk-Moore girls home.



Faith Funds

Spirit-filled Service

Rev. Heather Spencer Clawitter felt the spirit of God as a young adult during a church service at Bryant United Methodist Church. "In that pew I realized I wanted to spend the rest of my life working full time for God, and nothing else would do."

Now senior pastor at Bismarck United Methodist Church, Heather left her corporate job to attend Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. While exploring ways to meet the financial demands, her mentor and then pastor Bud Reeves suggested she apply for the United Methodist Foundation Seminary Scholarship.

"I had loans from undergraduate studies at Hendrix, and the United Methodist Foundation Seminary Scholarship enabled me to go to Perkins, take a full 12-hour course load, spend all my time on my studies and not have additional debt," Heather said.

Initially Heather pursued Deacon's orders to focus on teaching and pastoral care. "As an Elder in my first appointment, I've come to understand that preaching is a part of pastoral care, and I've felt the Spirit of God affirm and encourage my gifts for preaching," Heather said. "Today I feel I am steadily becoming the woman God created me to be."



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REPORTER

THE UNITED METHODIST
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Green power

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Calling on God

A pastor shares his ups, downs with prayer | 6B



Wesleyan Wisdom

Once upon a time UMC wasn't 'vanilla' | 7B

Section B

January 6, 2012

United Methodist of the Year



UNITED METHODIST NEWS SERVICE FILE PHOTO BY MIKE DUBOSE

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf won re-election this year as president of Liberia, and also shared in the Nobel Peace Prize. A faithful United Methodist, she's seen here speaking to the 2008 General Conference of the UMC, in Fort Worth, Texas.

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf leads Liberia, wins Nobel

BY MARY JACOBS
Staff Writer

For her work in peace-building and championing women's rights in Liberia—and in turn, inspiring women around the world—Liberian president and Nobel Peace Prize-winner Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is the *Reporter's* 2011 United Methodist of the Year.

"She is, in my view, an illustration of what God can do through the United Methodist Church, in terms of making a disciple of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world," said Boston Area Bishop Peter D. Weaver.

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf became Africa's first democratically elected female president in 2005, and is widely credited with helping Liberia to emerge from a brutal civil war. Ms. Sirleaf was one of three women who received the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo in December.

"We are celebrating her achievements and consider it an achievement of the entire church and the Liberian people," said the Rev. Jerry Kulah, superintendent of the Monrovia district in Liberia.

Raised in the United Methodist faith and educated at a United Methodist-affiliated high school, Ms.

Sirleaf is an active member of First United Methodist in Monrovia, Liberia. Many who have met her say her faith deeply informs her leadership.

"She has a sense that her life and her talent ought to be given to trying to make this world look a little like the kingdom of heaven," Bishop Weaver said.

Destined to lead

Ms. Sirleaf was born in Monrovia, the granddaughter of a Liberian chief. In her autobiography, *This Child Shall Be Great* (2009), Ms. Sirleaf relates a family story about an

old man who visited shortly after her birth, took one look at the infant and proclaimed, "This child shall be great. This child is going to lead."

For years, Ms. Sirleaf wrote, the comment seemed like a cruel joke. Married at age 17, later the mother of four sons, she felt trapped in an abusive marriage and struggled to pursue her education.

However, Ms. Sirleaf was able to eventually complete her education. She attended high school at the United Methodist-affiliated College of West Africa in Monrovia, and later studied at Madison Business College

■ See 'Liberia' page 8B

Christianity holds share, expands reach

BY SAM HODGES
Managing Editor

Back in 1910, Christians accounted for about one-third of the world's population, and that's the case today, a new study by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life shows.

But Pew researchers also found that the geography of Christianity has changed profoundly. Christianity has become truly global, showing rapid growth in Africa and Asia, remaining strong in North and South America, and losing ground in Europe.

"The Pew Forum study gives specific numbers to a phenomenon United Methodists know well—the Christian church looks very different today than it did 100 years ago," said Bishop Scott Jones of the Kansas Area, who chairs the Committee to Study the Worldwide Nature of the United Methodist Church.

As world population has grown, so has the number of Christians. They now total about 2.18 billion, the study found, making Christianity easily the world's largest religion, followed by Islam.

But in 1910, about two-thirds of the world's Christians lived in Europe, the center of the faith for centuries. Now only about one-quarter do.

■ See 'Expands' page 2B



Bishop Scott Jones

FAITH WATCH

Peggy Railey dies decades after attack

Peggy Railey, 63, former wife of a United Methodist minister accused of trying to strangle her, died on Dec. 26 in East Texas, nearly 25 years after she was attacked. She never recovered from an assault at her Dallas-area home in April 1987 and remained in what doctors called a vegetative state. Walker Railey, her husband at the time of the attack, was then pastor of Dallas' First United Methodist Church. He was acquitted in 1993 of attempted murder.

Watchdog group wins survival vote

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom was kept open by Congress in a last-minute reauthorization vote on Dec. 16. "We can get back into the business of doing what we do best, which is monitoring conditions for religious freedom around the world," said USCIRF chairman Leonard Le. The bipartisan commission issues an annual report on religious rights abuses.

Bin Laden death ranked top story

Members of the Religion Newswriters Association voted Osama bin Laden's killing and the reactions that it produced among people of faith as the top religion news story of 2011. The second ranked story was the series of congressional hearings on the alleged radicalization of Muslims in the United States. In third was the charging of Catholic Bishop Robert Finn of Kansas City, Mo., with failure to report the suspected abuse of a child.

Greek church plans to expand donations

The Greek Orthodox Church says it will pick up the pace in providing free meals to the needy, given the country's expanding financial crisis. Archbishop Ieronymos said the church already hands out 10,000 portions of food a day in greater Athens.

—Compiled by Sam Hodges

■ EXPANDS Continued from page 1B

Roughly the same percentage lives in sub-Saharan Africa, and about one-eighth of the Christian population lives in Asia and the Pacific.

Brazil vs. Italy

Demographic changes and the spread of Christianity account for some of the study's more intriguing findings. For example, Nigeria now has double the number of Protestants as Germany, where the Protestant Reformation was born. Brazil has more than twice as many Catholics as Italy.

Of the 10 countries with the largest Christian populations, three are in Africa (Nigeria, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Ethiopia) and two in Asia (the Philippines and China.)

Pew's researchers acknowledged the difficulty of getting a good estimate in China, where underground "house churches" abound, in addition to congregations that are registered with the communist government.

But the researchers felt confident enough to estimate that there are 67 million Christians in China, representing about 5 percent of the population. Given its massive overall population, China ranks third among countries in number of Protestants, with 58 million, according to the study.

"Thirty years ago, researchers weren't even sure if religion had survived the [Chinese] Cultural Revolution," said Brian Grim, senior researcher and director of cross-national data for Pew.

Russia ranks first in number of Orthodox Christians, followed by Ethiopia, Ukraine, Romania, Greece

and Serbia. The United States far outpaces other countries in number of Christians.

The Pew Study found that about 90 percent of Christians live in countries wherein Christians are in the majority.

But it also determined that the Middle East and North Africa, where Christianity began, now has the lowest concentration of Christians (4 percent of the region's population) and smallest number (13 million) of any major geographical region.

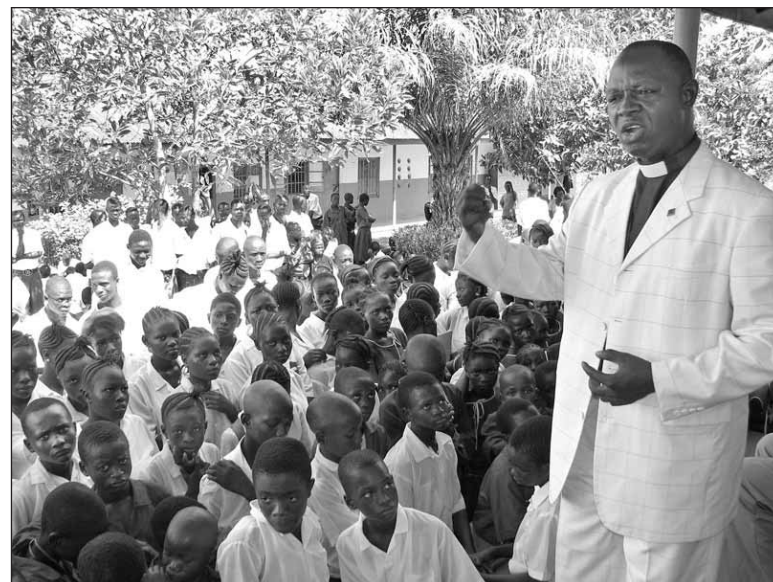
"It is disturbing to note the further decrease of Christians in the Middle East," said Thomas Kemper, top executive of the UMC's General Board of Global Ministries. "We must reach out in solidarity with Christians in these places and try to be a source of peace and hope."

Implications for UMC

The study found that the United States, Brazil and Mexico are the nations with the largest Christian populations, and in that order.

As with other mainline Protestant groups, the UMC has seen a long slide in membership in the United States. But the denomination's worldwide membership topped 12 million for the first time in 2009, thanks largely to growth in Africa.

"The global shift in Christianity reinforces the need to go beyond our traditional northern-centric mission models," Mr. Kemper said. "At Global Ministries today more than 40 percent of our missionaries come from countries in Asia, Africa or Latin America, reflecting the changes in



UNITED METHODIST NEWS SERVICE FILE PHOTO BY PHILEAS JUSU

Bishop John Yambasu of Sierra Leone is seen here in 2009 addressing a gathering of United Methodist students in that country. Christianity has grown rapidly in Africa, a new Pew Study confirms.

world Christianity but also in the United Methodist Church demographics."

Bishop Jones, whose committee has proposed legislation for the 2012 General Conference, agreed that the denomination must adjust.

"This new reality requires that we continue moving toward a more inclusive church that is deeply connected globally with more equitable sharing of power and greater mutual respect and understanding," he said.

The Pew Study estimated that about half of the world's Christians are Catholic, with Protestants accounting for 37 percent, Orthodox for 3.8 percent, with the rest—including

the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses and the Christian Science Church—falling into the category "other." The United States ranks first in Protestants, who account for about 51 percent of the population, or 160 million people.

The study also deals with Christian movements, and estimates the worldwide population of Pentecostal and charismatic Christians together at 584 million. For the study, Pew drew on 2,400 data sources, and counted all individuals or groups that self-identified as Christians.

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Clinton hosts summit on religious freedom

BY JOSEF KUHN
Religion News Service

WASHINGTON—Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently held a summit with international leaders to explore specific steps to combat intolerance, discrimination and violence on the basis of religion or belief.

The closed-door meeting on Dec. 14 was the first of an ongoing series called "The Istanbul Process." Representatives came from 30 countries and international organizations, including

Egypt, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.

"We are working together to protect two fundamental freedoms—the right to practice one's religion freely, and the right to express one's opinion without fear," Ms. Clinton said in her closing remarks.

The goal of the Istanbul Process is to produce a list of best practices for preventing religious discrimination and violence. Ambassador Michael Kozak, a deputy assistant secretary of state, acknowledged that the list would be helpful primarily for countries that already have the political will to protect religious freedom but need practical guidance to do so.

Nevertheless, Mr. Kozak said, it could also put pressure on repressive regimes to loosen up.

"By itself, this isn't going to change their minds. But . . . the more countries you get starting to do things in a good way, the more isolated the others become, and then movements develop

in their own countries," Mr. Kozak said.

The Istanbul Process grew out of a resolution adopted by the United Nations Human Rights Council in March and then by the U.N. General Assembly in November. Resolutions in the previous 10 years had supported legal measures restricting the "defamation of religions." The more recent Resolution 16/18, however, broke with that tradition by calling for concrete, positive measures to combat religious intolerance.

"It is important that we recognize what we accomplished when this resolution ended 10 years of divisive debate where people were not listening to each other anymore. Now we are. We're talking," said Ms. Clinton.

The new resolution has faced criticism from conservatives who think it amounts to a concession to Islamic countries, and will result in the curbing of any speech that is critical of Islam.

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Do something: 11 ways you can fight hunger

BY BARBARA DUNLAP-BERG
United Methodist News Service

Every minute, 11 children, age 5 or younger, die of hunger-related causes, according to the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society. About 800 million people suffer from chronic or acute hunger.

Think this is a problem too big for you to make a difference? Not so. To help you get started, here are 11 ways you can make a difference today.

- **Go the second mile through The Advance.** The Advance, an accountable, designated-giving arm of the United Methodist Church, ensures 100 percent of each gift reaches its intended mission or ministry. Working in 100 countries around the globe, Advance projects not only alleviate suffering and respond to disasters but also address the root causes of poverty and injustice, and improve the quality of life through development and education.

- **Buy a water buffalo ... or a goat ... or a flock of chicks through Heifer International.** A charitable gift through Heifer International, a United Methodist partner, provides animals and training to help families around the world build a better future

for themselves and their communities. Traditionally, recipient families give the first offspring of the animal they receive to another family, and the gift, quite literally, keeps on giving.

- **Make a group, housing or agriculture loan to an entrepreneur** across the globe for as little as \$25. Kiva is a nonprofit organization with a mission to connect people through lending to alleviate poverty. Leveraging the Internet and a worldwide network of microfinance institutions, Kiva lets individuals lend big or small amounts to help create opportunity around the world.

- **Participate in Stop Hunger Now,** a United Methodist partner and international hunger-relief organization that coordinates food distribution and other lifesaving aid. More than 100,000 volunteers have packaged meals through Stop Hunger Now's meal-packaging program. These meal packages are shipped around the world to support school feeding programs and crisis relief.

- **Urge Congress to end hunger through the Bread for the World letters campaign.** The interfaith organization, another United Methodist partner, is a collective Christian voice encouraging U.S. decision-makers to

end hunger globally. Bread for the World members write personal letters and emails and meet with members of the U.S. Congress.

- **Walk to help others.** CROP Hunger Walks sponsored by the UM-supported Church World Service, are popular hunger-fighting venues for people of all ages. Walkers collect pledges for each mile they walk. More than 2,000 communities across the U.S. join in more than 1,600 CROP Hunger Walks each year.

- **Become a "backpack buddy."** Children who depend on free school breakfasts and lunches may go hungry at suppertime and on weekends. "Backpack buddies" programs provide children from food-insecure homes with weekend meals during the school year. Local churches and other groups collect and pack bags with child-friendly nonperishable food.

- **Contribute to—or start—a food pantry at your church.** Don't know much about it? Get involved in community or state food banks to learn. Feeding America is a good resource. Its mission is to feed America's hungry through a nationwide network of member food banks.

- **Deliver Meals on Wheels.** Meals on Wheels is the oldest and largest na-



UMNS PHOTO COURTESY OF THE SOCIETY OF ST. ANDREW

Preschoolers join volunteer efforts with the Society of St. Andrew to pack sweet potatoes during the Virginia Annual Conference sessions in Norfolk, Va.

tional organization made up of local, community-based programs in all 50 U.S. states and U.S. territories.

- **Glean through the Society of St. Andrew.** The ecumenical organization founded by United Methodists has three hunger-relief programs. The Gleaning Network and the Potato and Produce Project deliver donated leftover and unmarketable agricultural produce to people in need. The third—Harvest of Hope—informs

people about the hunger problem and invites them to be part of the solution.

- **Give through Souper Bowl of Caring.** Mobilizing young people to fight hunger and poverty in their local communities, Souper Bowl of Caring is a youth-led effort that encourages people to each contribute one dollar at worship services on Super Bowl Sunday. In 2011 across the United States, 15,238 groups generated \$9,583,338 in cash and food items for local charities.



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**'Our Saviour'
finds purpose,
survival in
growing food
for others**



Becky Smith is a longtime member of the Episcopal Church of Our Saviour in Dallas, Texas, and the coordinator of its community garden. Each Tuesday, she prepares breakfast for volunteers.

BY LORI STAHL
Faith & Leadership

DALLAS—Members of the tiny Episcopal Church of Our Saviour asked themselves this question eight years ago: If the church closed, would it be missed?

The answer, congregants sadly agreed, was no. They cast about for ideas to help the church connect with the surrounding neighborhood, eventually deciding to start a community garden as an outreach ministry. It was truly a leap of faith in 2003, well before the “eat local” craze and before Michelle Obama planted an organic garden on the White House lawn.

Church members chose the project for one simple reason: “We had no money,” said garden coordinator Becky Smith.

The only thing they had was land; the one-story brick church sits on four acres in Pleasant Grove, an older, lower-income neighborhood eight miles from the glittering skyline of

downtown Dallas. And they had Ms. Smith, a lifelong gardener whose mother descended from sharecroppers in rural Arkansas.

Our Saviour members recall how amazed they were when crops from six 10-by-24-foot plots yielded more than 1,000 pounds of vegetables the first year. They donated the crops to a nearby food pantry, reversing the sense of irrelevance they’d had just a year earlier.

“They were just very down in the dumps,” said Suffragan Bishop Paul E. Lambert of the Episcopal Diocese of Dallas. “The next thing I know, they’ve got this garden out here.”

By the time Our Saviour’s garden reached the five-year mark, it had produced 11 tons for charity alone. With a partner agency, church gardeners quickly leveraged grant funding that helped them get tools, seeds, trees and other key equipment for expanding and sustaining the project.

Donations snowballed. They got a rainwater cistern and a roofed pavil-

ion. Area Wal-Marts awarded a matching grant for a plant sale. JPMorgan Chase Bank donated picnic tables and money for fencing. Starbucks sponsored a plot.

Church members say that, as of late 2011, the total yield since the garden started is approaching 20 tons. Regardless of the precise number, the members say they’re amazed they have been able to grow so much just outside the church doors.

Sophia Brown, a longtime church member, said, “It’s awesome to see what God can do with a little bit of something.”

Pre-harvest breakfast

On a cool autumn day, gardeners were eager to see what had survived the summer’s triple-digit heat and scorching drought. Mustard greens, peppers, long beans, okra and eggplant proved among the hardiest.

Pinkie White, a retiree, has a small plot that she has been tending for about three years. That makes her

something of a veteran gardener.

“A lot of the people that were here at first, they got jobs and went on,” said Ms. White, who visits the garden about three times a week to water her greens, beets and Swiss chard.

It’s a fact of life—particularly in the current economy—that gardening takes a back seat to working, or looking for work. But new people continue to arrive to replace those who’ve left.

The garden has a Facebook Fan Page, but most people seem to find their way to Our Saviour’s garden by word-of-mouth. On a recent morning, one new volunteer said his mother suggested he visit after she read about it.

Another first-timer, Charles Shipp, said a friend referred him to Our Saviour because he knew Mr. Shipp had previously worked at a community garden in California.

On Tuesdays, the newcomers are invited to join regulars at a breakfast prepared by church members. The fellowship typically continues as they

head out to the field to harvest.

Susan Balsam, who has been volunteering for about six months, read about Our Saviour’s garden in a supermarket flier and now drives across town from North Dallas to pull weeds, plant seeds and dig in the dirt.

“At first, I was kind of scared to drive out there,” she said. “I wasn’t aware of that part of town.”

Even some longtime Pleasant Grove residents say they were surprised to see a garden spring up in their neighborhood.

“I was just like, ‘What is this out here in the Grove?’” said Patricia Guynn, who lives about a mile away. The first time she noticed the garden while driving by, she pulled over to check it out. She now comes back to visit.

Recently, she brought her son Benjamin, who said the garden is a visible sign that Pleasant Grove is home to many good families.

“We have a bad rap,” he said. “A lot of people are afraid to come out in



PHOTOS COURTESY FAITH & LEADERSHIP AND GARDENERS IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

ABOVE: Located in Dallas' diverse, economically-challenged Pleasant Grove section, the Episcopal Church of Our Saviour is still small, but has found new purpose through its garden. **LEFT:** The garden draws a range of volunteers, some of whom participate in the church, some not.

this area.”

But they said they're glad to see a community project develop, particularly when it benefits neighbors.

“This is awesome,” Patricia Guynn said. “It’s a testament to what can be done.”

Neighbors connecting

While new residents have accelerated the growth in North Dallas and its suburbs, older neighborhoods like Pleasant Grove have struggled. First settled in the 1840s, the Pleasant Grove area exploded with new homes between 1943 and 1952, according to the *Handbook of Texas Online*.

But development since then has been scant. Although the area is ethnically diverse, the population is more transient now, making it difficult to grow the size of church membership.

But at Our Saviour, church members decided they could “grow” their church by forging stronger connections with their neighbors, many of whom seemed to be barely scraping along. Back in 2003, they considered a range of ideas, including opening a day care.

Their decision to start a community garden is now part of a growing trend, because the work and the yield provide so many benefits, both tangible and spiritual. People are increasingly drawn to the idea of eating nutritious food, and most find a deeper connection to their communities when they work on a joint project.

“Jesus was in the food business, and I think it’s time for Christians to be in the food business, too,” said Norman Wirzba, a theology professor at UMC-affiliated Duke Divinity School. He is an interdisciplinary specialist who has focused his teaching and research on the overlap between theology, philosophy, ecology and agrarian and environmental studies.

But in Dallas in 2003, the trend hadn't really caught on. Our Saviour's garden idea was sparked by a presentation by Don Lambert, who had vis-

ited the church a year or so before the garden outreach began. Mr. Lambert, who was once called “the acknowledged dean of the community garden movement in Dallas,” is a former Peace Corps volunteer and Berkeley-trained anthropologist.

He had helped develop gardens for Asian refugee families who settled in Dallas in the late 1980s and had been trying for years to interest churches and other organizations in starting their own community gardens. But he had met with resistance from homeowner associations, elected officials and city staff, some of whom worried that community gardens would be unsightly and hard to regulate.

“Implementing it here is very tough,” Mr. Lambert said. “The local culture. The inertia. Local community associations haven't seen gardens as anything they want in their neighborhoods.”

Against this backdrop, Our Saviour launched its roadside garden with help from Mr. Lambert and his non-profit, Gardeners in Community Development, which provided crucial technical assistance on starting and maintaining the garden.

Because Our Saviour was built on church property, gardeners were able to sidestep many of the regulations from City Hall.

But some church members did have concerns. They wondered whether the gardeners would track a trail of mud and debris into the church. They were a little concerned about having so many strangers visiting at one time. And they wondered whether irrigation costs would burden the water bill.

The garden started with 20 small plots, six of which were set aside for growing donated food. Others were tended by individuals or families who wanted to grow their own food. Mr. Lambert gave advice about how to keep things going with an ever-shifting workforce of Boy Scout troops and other volunteers.

“He usually knows [what we need] before we know to ask,” said Ms. Smith, the indefatigable garden coordinator.

For the most part, the congregation's worries have been laid to rest. Not only has the original garden grown in size, but gardeners have tried their hand with a worm farm, a

beehive for honey and an orchard with fruit trees.

The church still operates some plots specifically to grow food for charity, as well as designating some for individuals who want to grow their own food.

Measuring success

The garden has increased traffic at Our Saviour, although it has not added to the thin ranks on Sundays. Some weeks, just 10 families attend.

But the gardeners say they measure their success by the many people who've been touched in one form or another. There are the people who tend their own small plots, plus a cast of volunteers that includes countless Boy Scout troops, students, interns, civic clubs and neighbors. And now there are other parishes that want to replicate Our Saviour's model.

“It's just amazing what this small group of people has done,” said Bishop Lambert. “Now you have churches 15 to 20 times the size of them coming to them for information.”

And then there are the needy in Pleasant Grove, who recently lined up outside a food pantry even as the gar-

deners were pulling produce from the ground and shaking the dirt off the plants less than a mile away.

One food pantry client, Alice King, 55, lost her job 14 months ago. She brightened at the sight of the fresh produce after spotting it amid the cereal, rice and other food pantry staples.

“I love veggies,” she said. “These will be a meal for me all week.”

Before she left the parking lot, Ms. King had menus in mind.

For the greens, “I already know. I'm going to boil them. The peas, I know I'll shell them and freeze them until I need them. The eggplant, I'm not really sure. She said you can cook it like you do squash. I had never tried it before.”

That's why the garden ministry is considered a resounding success, regardless of whether it boosts church membership. If Our Saviour disappeared today, it's plain that the garden ministry would indeed be missed.

Ms. Stahl is a Dallas-area writer. This article first appeared at the Faith & Leadership website, www.faithandleadership.com, and is used here by permission.



LEFT: The garden regularly sees visitors, and much larger churches have sent teams to inspect it and ask advice from the Our Saviour team. **RIGHT:** Don Lambert (l) leads Gardeners in Community Development, a Dallas group, and has helped the Our Saviour garden become a major contributor to food pantries.

Occupy movement doesn't merit Methodists' support

BY MARK P. SMITH
Special Contributor

Whether it's Occupiers, Tea Partiers or pro-lifers, I admire people willing to take a stand. Indeed, apathy may be an even bigger problem in the contemporary church than misguided activism. (At least the activists are paying attention.) So, to a certain extent, I sympathize with Occupy Wall Street (OWS).

However, while they may have tapped into the widespread frustration so many feel about economic inequities, OWS protesters are a stark departure from the average American.

While claiming to represent struggling working folks (the "99 percent"), recent surveys indicate that a large number of Occupiers are actually young adults from very affluent neighborhoods.

Occupy protesters' values are also not representative of the general population, according to statistics compiled by Douglas Schoen, who was a pollster for President Bill Clinton. Mr. Schoen wrote in the *Wall Street Journal*:

"The protesters have a distinct ideology and are bound by a deep commitment to radical left-wing policies. . . . Our research shows clearly that the movement doesn't represent unemployed America and is not ideologically diverse. Rather, it comprises an unrepresentative segment of the electorate that believes in radical redistribution of wealth, civil disobedience and, in some instances, violence. Half (52 percent) have participated in a political movement before, virtually all (98 percent) say they would support civil disobedience to achieve their goals, and nearly one-third (31 percent) would support violence to advance their agenda."

Not offering solutions

Thus far Occupiers have done a much better job of cursing the darkness than illuminating it. What does "economic justice" look like and how do we achieve it? We don't know. They've yet to provide a reasonable answer. What we have heard is vague rhetoric aimed more at tearing down the rich than building up the poor. Demanding higher taxes for the "top 1 percent" and more regulatory authority for government, Occupiers hope that adding more regulations to ones

already not being enforced is going to help solve the problem.

The effect of OWS proposals would not be more equitable wealth sharing as much as it would be a transfer of money and power from private interests to governmental interests. Just as one might affirm that their faith in government is naively misplaced (since governmental mismanagement is a major cause of their grievances), one might argue even more strongly that the Occupiers' remedy is based on a misdiagnosis.

Wall Street profiteering complicit in the financial crisis was actually a secondary effect of at least three basic failures NOT of free enterprise but of government: 1) loose federal monetary policy; 2) poor enforcement of regulations already in place; 3) dubious public-private partnerships resulting in unwise federal underwriting of mortgages.

Perhaps because some United Methodist leaders are vocal supporters, most UM coverage of Occupy has been positive. This is surprising because, in addition to the previous statistics, the Occupy movement has resulted in thousands of arrests for criminal activity, including vandal-

'When church leaders . . . act as de facto cheerleaders for one side of the political spectrum, then their actions become cancerous.'

ism, rape, lewd and uncivil behavior, anti-Semitism, even homicide.

The agency that ostensibly represents United Methodism politically is the General Board of Church and Society, led by Jim Winkler. According to a report in his agency's newsletter, *Faith In Action*, Mr. Winkler ". . . has been deeply disturbed by the lack of basic decency and common courtesy among people who have disagreements about public policy."

However, his comments were NOT about the Occupiers but about Tea Party protesters rallying against President Obama's health care plan. Mr. Winkler volunteered his sentiments despite the fact that law-breaking and violence have been virtually nonexistent among Tea Party protesters. Next to the Occupiers, most Tea Partiers look like Mahatma Gandhi.

Considering his criticism of the Tea Party, Mr. Winkler's take on Occupy is intriguing. While one might expect him to condemn the criminal-

ity even if he agreed with the cause, such an expectation would be in vain. Apparently unbothered by any notion of a double standard, Mr. Winkler compared the activities of the Occupiers to the righteous indignation of Christ: "Like Jesus, they are occupying the temple of the moneychangers."

Mission is demeaned

I think Mr. Winkler's analogy indicates a troubling bias or misunderstanding, perhaps motivated by an ideological devotion so natural that Mr. Winkler himself may not even be aware of it. In its 12/12/11 issue the Church and Society newsletter yet again contained an article extolling the virtues of Occupy.

When church leaders reduce faith to a digest of secular platitudes and political initiatives—especially when they do it in an ideologically-biased fashion—unnecessary divisiveness occurs and the church's mission is not just impeded but demeaned. When church officials volunteer opinions on matters in which they have little expertise—health care, economics, etc.—it's concerning. When they act as de facto cheerleaders for one side of the political spectrum, then their ac-

tions become cancerous.

Though the reasons are not fully understood, it's clear that the United Methodist Church has been losing U.S. members for decades. The lowest UM membership is largely in areas where churches have developed an affinity for liberal political activism. Many of the clergy participating in the Occupy movement come from these regions.

Perhaps it's time for United Methodism to connect the dots and seriously rethink its involvement in the political arena. In recent years, UM activists have misinterpreted and overplayed John Wesley's call for social action. If John Wesley was about anything, he was about converting individuals to Christ. Anything else was a very distant second. Has the denomination that traces its roots to Wesley forgotten this?

Dr. Smith is an optometrist and longtime United Methodist. He lives in Pine Mountain, Ga.

UM pastor's prayers turn urgent, personal

BY JAMES C. HOWELL
Special Contributor

Prayer for healing has never been my strong suit. Of course I pray all the time—in hospitals, over the phone and privately in response to the endless requests for intercession—but I'm never entirely at ease.

I'm bugged that over 90 percent of the prayer requests we receive are health-related when we live in the healthiest place and time humanity has ever known. Why don't my people want to pray more for holiness, or for the betterment of God's mission on earth?

I also have felt a call to moderate between people's prayers for healing and medical realities. Some clergy seem cocksure God will heal, but the number of allegedly miraculous healings I've witnessed could be counted on one hand with a leftover finger or two. My vocation, I've believed, has been to stand in the breach and help people understand God still exists, or God isn't punishing, when prayers aren't answered, when the cancer still advances, when the heart surgery fails.

Truth be told, beyond my professional praying (and I really do honor every request for prayer, even if only once, or quickly), I find I do not ask God for much, or at least not for specific favors.

So how dizzyingly uncomfortable was it to find myself in the ICU waiting room when my daughter's boyfriend, whom I adore, was lingering near death? I reminded God I don't ask for much—and then, like all the people to whom I've offered pastoral care, I pleaded with God for the miracle I of all people knew was exceedingly unlikely. The family seemed to feel they had an edge in our praying, with me on their side, but as I laid my hands on the young man's head, I apologized to the family, explaining I felt desperate and really had no clue how to heal.

And then he beat the odds and began to recover. Onlookers called it a



IMAGE COURTESY WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

miracle, but I was the one who resisted—I spend my days with people who pray earnestly for someone with a year to live, but the beloved dies in just four months. Faced with what might be proclaimed a miracle, I was the one to demur.

I mention all this here to raise the question about clergy and prayer.

What are we really doing, we professional prayers? And what are the linkages, or disconnects, between our pastoral office of intercession and what we do in the thick of our own personal stuff?

I wonder why seminaries teach so little about prayer and theologians speak so rarely about it, when people obsess over it above all other things ecclesiastical or spiritual.

During our personal crisis, I announced I was going to lead a little workshop on prayer. More than 500 people showed up, and more than 500 others have watched on YouTube. The kindred email series has elicited enthusiastic response.

I'm more unsettled, and yet, as a result of all this, more settled about prayer than I've ever been. But I wonder what others think and feel. Do we grasp how crucial the way we pray, and what we say about prayer, is for all our work?

'I wonder why seminaries teach so little about prayer . . . when people obsess over it above all other things ecclesiastical or spiritual.'



James Howell

Dr. Howell is senior pastor of Myers Park UMC in Charlotte, N.C., and author of the new book *The Beauty of the Word: The Challenge and Wonder of Preaching* (Westminster John Knox Press). This essay earlier appeared on Duke Divinity School's Faith & Leadership website: faithandleadership.com.

WESLEYAN WISDOM

Take a look behind UMC's favorability ratings

BY DONALD W. HAYNES
UMR Columnist

A recent survey by LifeWay, a Southern Baptist agency, had interesting data on how the United Methodist Church is viewed by Americans. We need to ask ourselves what is behind the opinions uncovered by the poll takers. We need to avoid denial and ask ourselves how we can use these numbers to become more creative, to enhance our profile, and to reach more people to become disciples of Jesus Christ.



Donald Haynes

The survey found that 62 percent of Americans have a favorable view of United Methodists. That might work as an upbeat headline, but digging deeper, one learns that only 15 percent have a "very favorable" view of our denomination. Forty-seven percent have a "somewhat favorable" view, and this does indeed give United Methodists a higher positive total than either Catholics, Southern Baptists, Mormons or Muslims.

No other religious groups were factored into the survey. The good news is that when we approach a friend, a relative, an acquaintance, a neighbor, or a stranger about attending our United Methodist church, nearly two-thirds will not tell us that ours would be low on their list of churches they might seek as a gateway to a first-time or renewed personal, meaningful relationship with God.

Another telling stat was that United Methodists had the lowest percentage of respondents who have a "very unfavorable" evaluation of our denomination: only 6 percent. By contrast, Mormons and Muslims generated very high negative feelings.

Now the disturbing "kicker." Who is growing and who is declining in membership, attendance and vitality?

We all know the answer. We are declining and the Mormons and Muslims are growing.

Vanilla denomination

One must wonder what our image really is. Perhaps it is the church of one's family heritage, the "little country church of my childhood," the church with "dignity and high respectability" or some other rather benign or innocuous impression.

After all, 47 percent rated us "somewhat favorable." That lacks a

cutting edge, a high curiosity, or any in-depth knowledge. Most likely, those who rate us "somewhat favorable" had no idea of our grace theology, the United Methodist Committee on Relief, or persons who we in the denomination know have found "the living water of Jesus" through a life-changing experience that happened in a United Methodist church!

The bottom line question is: What are we doing to capitalize on this "soft" favorable response?

The LifeWay study has another disturbing stat. Sixteen percent of Americans have no opinion at all about United Methodism. We have 37,000 churches in the United States and 16 percent of the people do not know we are here! We are not even on their radar screen!

This anonymity is higher than Catholics, Baptists, Mormons or Muslims. We are vanilla. We lack "brand" or "flavor."

So here we are. People have nothing against us but little interest in us. Have we become part of nostalgic Americana like the white clapboard churches on every New England village green? Many of those have paint peeling from the steeples, empty pews on Sunday mornings and little influence in the village where they were once the dominant cultural influence.

Is that our destiny?

Re-branding

Once upon a time, Methodism had a "brand" and it was not vanilla!

John Wigger, historian, writes of the early Republic era, "Methodism provided a great many Americans . . . not only with a source of spiritual meaning, but also with fellowship and community, with comfort and aid in times of distress, in short, with a sense of belonging that all people crave. The extent to which Methodists were able to accomplish this is what most clearly distinguishes their movement from the other denominations of this period."

He continues, "Early American Methodism's leaders understood the nature of the post-revolutionary cultural marketplace, in effect designing an innovative marketing strategy to master what historians call 'Jacksonian America.' No company could match Francis Asbury's nationwide network of class leaders, circuit stewards, book stewards, local preachers, circuit riders and presiding elders. They led the movement's system of class meetings, circuit preaching, quarterly meetings, annual confer-

ences, and quadrennial conferences—all churning out detailed statistical reports to be consolidated and published on a regular basis."

One conclusion is almost irrefutable: In the 19th century, 16 percent of the American people would not be oblivious to the presence of Methodism to the extent that they had "no opinion." We were the most talked about denomination in every American setting, from the country store to the political "smoked filled room." Dr. Wigger calls Methodism "first and foremost a religion of the people."

One concluding appraisal of the "muscle days" of Methodism's decades of growth was the comprehensive effects of spiritual formation, social support, missional outreach and numerical increase. Research by Roger Finke and Rodney Stark indicates that this gargantuan growth had such a head of steam that it continued well into the 20th century.

Then comes the sad news. We gradually evolved from what John Wesley clearly saw as a "counter-cultural" religious movement to be a substantial part of dominant American culture. Now we are part of the woodwork.

Spiritual footage

Diana Butler Bass' *Christianity for the Rest of Us* needs to be, at least for a season, our denominational "playbook." She understands what happened. She notes the evolution of mainline Protestantism from "congregations" to "denominations," with a loss of spontaneity, fluidity, receptiveness to change, and adaptation to local needs.

She continues as a prophet who needs to be heard: "If American religious institutions are to regain their spiritual grounding, they will need to listen to and learn from the spiritual practices of local congregations." Then she gives us this word of wisdom: ". . . we are, again, in a time when faith would live through rebirthing its tradition, not through maintaining or improving its inherited structures."

These lessons are profoundly important. Methodism began with disenfranchised, dislocated people seeking "spiritual footage." That is the major spiritual and psychological need of people in our own time.

Gradually though, we ceased to be the "voice crying in the wilderness" and blended into the cultural woodwork. As Dr. Butler Bass put it of her home United Methodist church, it was like "my father's Rotary Club at prayer." Both in Sunday school and the pulpit, the message ceased to be transformational. Most messages centered on personal morality and superficial ethics. With the 1960s, "social holiness" morphed into an insistence that a non-transformed people of "half-way covenanters" embrace a somewhat radical posture of social justice ethics.

Can United Methodism be reborn with some of the theological integrity, missional outreach and life-changing evangelism of the Evangelical United Brethren and the older Methodist churches? Dr. Butler Bass, a former Methodist herself and now an Episcopalian after a sojourn into fundamentalism, says that we can. She warns though that "the old way of organizing religion in America has vanished."

Her hope is that a new kind of Protestantism is being born, building upon tradition, faithfulness and wisdom. The new venture is that of a pilgrim who seeks a spiritual "growing place." Pilgrims are looking for a place they cannot yet see: a future undergirded with faith, enhanced by hope and enriched by love.

The key phrase in our Council of Bishops-backed Call to Action reform agenda is "vital congregations." To see more of those will require a loosening of authority, a lessening of connective "costs of doing business."

It will require freedom for congregations to have a voice in who their pastor will be and what their local mission is. It will require encouraging them to find out whether they have the "nerve to submit" to the lessons of our early heritage, before we copied corporate structures in the early 20th century.

Diana Butler Bass has an intriguing invitation: "There are many pilgrims on this road. Welcome to the way! We are glad for your company." Let this be the hope and prayer for the outcome of the 2012 General Conference. T.S. Eliot once wrote, "We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time."

We must do just that: arrive at where we started and, in our generation, know the place for the first time.

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

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■ LIBERIA Continued from page 1B

in Wisconsin, the University of Colorado and Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. Her entry in politics came in 1972, when she delivered a now-famous commencement address at her high school alma mater, sharply criticizing the government.

Ms. Sirleaf worked for the World Bank in Washington, D.C., then served as head of the African Regional Office of Citibank in Nairobi. In the mid-1980s, she returned to Liberia and was imprisoned for her criticism of the regime under Samuel Doe. With the outbreak of the First Liberian Civil War in 1989, Ms. Sirleaf initially supported Charles Taylor's rebellion against Doe, but later opposed him and had to leave Liberia. In the early 1990s, she led the United Nations Development Programme's Regional Bureau for Africa. In 2005, she won the election, and this past October, she was re-elected.

Her status as Liberia's president sets "an important precedent. . . . Not only has it inspired women, they like what her election says about the inclusiveness of politics in Africa," said Ambassador Charles Stith, former ambassador to Tanzania and former pastor of Union United Methodist in Boston. He has met Ms. Sirleaf and remembers her as a "woman of great bearing and presence."

Nobel Peace Prize

Ms. Sirleaf shared the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize with Leymah Gbowee, her Liberian compatriot, and Tawakkol Karman of Yemen. The peace prize committee recognized the three women for championing women's rights in regions where oppression is common and for empowering women to promote peace.

On accepting her Nobel in December, Ms. Sirleaf dedicated it to the women of Africa, particularly the Liberians.

"They have carried the burden of those conflicts, subjected to rape, to sex slavery, being the ones who have to continue to have to provide for their children even as their men are out in war," she said in a speech in Oslo the day before the prize ceremony.

No woman or sub-Saharan African had won the prize since 2004, when the committee honored Wangari Maathai of Kenya.

Thomas Kemper, top executive of the General Board of Global Ministries, visited Liberia during the war, and has followed Liberia's comeback after the civil war dragged the on-thriving nation into chaos and violence.

"When you meet women in Liberia and Africa, you can see the pride as they talk about Liberia's first female president," Mr. Kemper said. "To have a president who was a kind of mother of the nation, to be elected and re-establish trust and relationships and standing up for women . . . was just unique and created this atmosphere that the international donor community wanted to give to Liberia, because they trusted the president and her way forward."

Dr. Kulah, whose 2010 dissertation at Asbury Theological Seminary described the church's leadership in transforming Liberia, noted that Ms. Sirleaf's years as president have created a marked decline in corruption. When she took office in 2005, Liberia ranked 185th among 206 countries for success in controlling corruption, he said, citing World Bank Institute data. Two years later, Liberia ranked 113th, the largest improvement over two years by any country.

Dr. Kulah sees Ms. Sirleaf's Wesleyan roots in her governing style.

"At the moment, over 25,000 youths are doing vacation jobs, cleaning up their communities, and will be paid on Dec. 23rd to have



PHOTO BY JAMES GARRESEN, EXECUTIVE MANSION, LIBERIA

From left: Leymah Gbowee of Liberia, Tawakkol Karman of Yemen and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf shared in the Nobel Peace Prize, and posed together while in Norway for the ceremony.

some money for their Christmas," he said in a Dec. 18 email. "These similar things Wesley did as he went into the coal mines, barns, prisons and ghettos to liberate people."

"She has doubled the number of healthcare facilities in Liberia during her tenure," Ambassador Stith added. "She has built over 220 schools since 2006. More than 700,000 residents in Monrovia now have pipe-borne water. These things reflect her commitment to uplifting the poor."

Ambassador Stith hopes Ms. Sirleaf's example will also inspire action.

"Her success is a challenge to the church universal to look at ways to support the hope in a place like Liberia," he said. "It's not enough to stand on the sidelines and cheer her achievements."

He adds that, while Ms. Sirleaf has accomplished much, Liberia has a long way to go. The nation's roads and infrastructure are still shaky; there's still government corruption that needs addressing.

Deep faith

Ms. Sirleaf's United Methodist faith remains an important part of her life. Dr. Kulah called Ms. Sirleaf a "very devoted worshipper" who attends services every Sunday.

"She listens to her leaders of the church and is open to counsel," he said.

Bishop Weaver was part of the delegation that attended Ms. Sirleaf's inauguration in 2006, and recalls her deep faith as evident. She carefully planned a prayer service at First UMC in Monrovia for the day before

her inauguration.

She chose three hymns for the prayer service: "A Charge to Keep" (by Charles Wesley), "Jesus is All the World to Me" and "We've a Story to Tell the Nations."

After a contentious election and long years of civil war in Liberia, the latter hymn was particularly moving, Bishop Weaver recalls, as it closed with the refrain: "the darkness shall turn to dawn and the dawning to noon day bright."

"She sang those hymns by heart," he said. "I don't mean just by memory, she sang them by heart. You could tell she was deeply moved by what she was singing."

Mr. Kemper adds that Ms. Sirleaf's visible commitment to her United Methodist faith has "helped the church in Liberia to find its place after the war and to restart again."

Ms. Sirleaf was called on to address the United Methodist General Conference in 2008 in Fort Worth, Texas. She was the first African leader and the first female president to address the General Conference.

"We need the church now as never before," she told the delegates, calling them "fellow Christians and fellow Methodists" many times during her address.

"I am proud to say we have moved Liberia from a failed state, from an awful flicker on your television screen to a success story," she added. She recalled how, shortly after her election, children were frightened by her presidential convoy. "Today, they light up and they smile," she said. "Liberia is on the way back."

Ms. Sirleaf, who calls herself

"Mama Ellen," has made equality for women a top priority for her administration.

She has also emphasized education for women, said the Rev. Deborah Thompson, mission coordinator for the Wisconsin Conference. The conference sends teams to Liberia for mission work.

"She's encouraging young women to go to school," she said. "She believes that if you educate a woman, you can educate a nation, because women will teach their children."

Ms. Thompson lived in Liberia in the late 1970s and has family ties there; she recalls how people then referred to their country with pride as "Sweet, sweet Liberia." That pride evaporated during the long civil war, but as the nation rallies, now she sees pride returning.

"The Methodist church tries to bring hope in situations where people are challenged," she said. "Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is someone who has brought hope to Liberia."

mjacobs@umr.org

Quick Facts

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
President of Liberia
Born: Oct. 29, 1938
Education: College of West Africa, Madison Business College, University of Colorado at Boulder, Harvard University
Birthplace: Monrovia, Liberia
Family: Four sons and 11 grandchildren



STATE DEPARTMENT PHOTO VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf met with U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at the U.S. State Department in Washington in April 2009.