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A BUZZWORTHY CAUSE



To raise awareness outside the United Methodist Church about Imagine No Malaria, Bishop Charles Crutchfield on April 4 spent an hour as a guest on "The Show With No Name" during morning drive time on 103.7 FM The Buzz, a radio station with listeners across central Arkansas.

AUM PHOTO BY MARTHA TAYLOR

'Imagine No Malaria' working to wipe out a killer

BY MARTHA TAYLOR
Arkansas Conference

Being "in the zone" most frequently refers to a form of defense in basketball and football. Recently, it has come to mean increased focus and attention on a task. Athletes, musicians, anyone who totally owns a challenge, can be in the zone. It means the individual or group matches skills and resources perfectly to achieve a goal.

Saving millions of lives would require a lot of people to be in the zone.

Six years ago, I and many other United Methodists learned about an effort to eradicate malaria in Africa by 2015. I was attending a new communicator's orientation in Nashville and I vividly recall hearing the phrase, "Send a Net, Save a Life."

I could save a life! By donating \$10 to the Nothing But Nets, the initiative that sought to deliver insecticide-treated bed nets into the hands of African families, I could protect a child from mosquitoes that transmit malaria through their bites.

The idea is so simple, so powerful that it has captivated thousands of United Methodists all over the world. Now, through Imagine No Malaria, we are in the

zone—the Spirit-led, kingdom-building zone.

It began in 2006 through Nothing But Nets. The goal: to stop the spread of and deaths from malaria, a preventable disease carried by mosquitoes and transmitted through their bites.

At the time, an estimated one million people, mostly children and pregnant women, were dying each year from malaria. But with the proper use of a bed net, many of these deaths could be prevented.

Started with partners such as the United Methodist Church, the United Nations Foundation and other charitable organizations, the effort grew to include United Methodist Communications, the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) and more of the church's general boards and agencies.

In 2008, the denomination adopted as one of its Four Areas of Focus "combating the diseases of poverty by improving health globally." Malaria is one of the poverty-related diseases highlighted in the priority list.

Word of Nothing But Nets was shared across the denomination through various channels. This communicator learned of it through a new communicator's orientation held in Nashville. The concept was simple: Donate \$10 to purchase a [See MALARIA, page 9A]

Churches connect for shared study, service

BY JEANNIE SMITH
Special Contributor

In the lead-up to Easter 2012, five northwest Arkansas congregations decided to let their connectional roots show.

Through a shared Lenten series, these churches showcased the ministry that can happen when churches take advantage of the United Methodist Church's historical emphasis on staying connected to one another.

First UMCs of Springdale, Bentonville and Prairie Grove, Farmington UMC and Trinity UMC Fayetteville partnered to present "Stranger," a pre-Easter series that combined devotionals, sermons and mission opportunities to engage all of the churches in a cohesive ministry.

The congregations spent weeks exploring how sometimes God is the Stranger revealing himself to us—and at other times, we are the strangers seeking God's presence in our own lives.

The Rev. Matthew Johnson of Prairie Grove UMC took charge of the personal study aspect of the collaboration. He gathered daily devotionals written by members from all of the participating congregations, making them available for Nook, iPad, laptop or desktop computers. Church members responded: within just a few days of it being posted online, individuals downloaded 600 copies of the devotional.

The Rev. Terry Gosnell of Trinity UMC Fayetteville planned the mission component to the series. Gosnell already had established partnerships with other churches and ministries, such as Potter's House, a local [See STRANGER, page 8A]

How vital are Vital Signs?

Reflections on statistical reporting

BY NATASHA MURRAY-NORMAN
Special Contributor

Our Conference now uses the Vital Signs dashboard, an online method of tracking local church statistics such as worship attendance, baptisms, professions of faith and involvement in mission.

I have to admit that at the start, I had mixed emotions about the dashboard—not because I was dreading anything “new,” but because I felt that this pile of recordkeeping would somehow hinder me from doing the work of Jesus Christ.

Maybe what was guiding my thought process was not “How will this help me lead my congregation?” but rather, “How will this look to my district superintendent?”

How would I explain dips in attendance in worship and giving? How would I explain the lack of missions and professions of faith? With talk swirling about effectiveness and removing people from ministry, I do not want to appear as a failure.

Pros and cons

After much prayer and conversation with colleagues who had healthy views of ministry, I began to see that my fears were just insecurities and that in the midst of the reporting and data entry, there is usefulness to this tool.

My view of Vital Signs is twofold: My positive side sees it as a great tool that will help churches like mine do a better job at tracking attendance, giving, small group ministries and professions of faith. So on that side, I like the use of Vital Signs. Most churches do not do a good job at recording their weekly

attendance. When changes occur, they are often unsure of what those numbers mean and the trends that they may suggest.

Then, my cynical side thinks that it may be too little, too late. If the United Methodist Church is declining in the United States, what's the point of adding extra work for exhausted pastors and laity who are resistant to change anyway?

Inputting the data for Vital Signs has been a wake-up call for me. I can't really say what I expected in my first full-time appointment. I think I just wanted to be in a place that was healthy and not in decline. But what I quickly realized is this: All churches are declining. (I guess that was supposed to be a secret. After all, I participated in the cover-up.)

When the Vital Signs dashboard was introduced, the complaints of some clergy were unbelievable.

Social media outlets saw a stream of pastors who were reluctant to use this dashboard. Though we have been using it since January, some still have not submitted their reports for their own personal reasons of protest.

The United Methodist Church has kept numbers for years in an effort to project trends. Whether it was to identify areas experiencing population shifts, increasing the odds that churches could thrive, or tracking worship attendance to get an idea of patterns within a given church, numbers have always been a part of who we are. I like inputting the data for the weekly dashboard, because it keeps my members and me accountable. I think that this data can be more reliable than averages compiled at

the end of the year for charge conference and the year-end data reports submitted to an annual conference.

Falling short

While numbers such as worship attendance and weekly giving are important, they aren't my biggest concern. My biggest concern lies with the discipleship, mission activities and professions of faith that my congregations are not reporting—because they're not happening. I feel that I have failed miserably in my first 10 months of ministry because I have zero professions of faith.

Maybe the grumbling among my more seasoned colleagues is not about the weekly reporting, but the mirror that is now being held in front of all of us. We have all fallen short of the mission of Jesus Christ,

which is to seek out the lost and to be in ministry by serving the least. Like others in the Church, I am frustrated. Not frustrated with the administrators in the Conference, but frustrated with myself for not going out and seeking the least and the lost.

I do not view Vital Signs as some form of heresy, but as a tool to help those of us who are sincere about seeking Christ's mission while addressing the challenges that our congregations face. Let's allow this new tool to help us focus on doing what needs to be done for the sake of the Kingdom.

The Rev. Murray-Norman serves as pastor of Parkview and New Hope UMCs in Benton.



EDITOR'S CORNER

BY AMY FORBUS

A cure for boredom?

“Sad to say, it is easier to push the preposterous notion that our church is going to eradicate the world's killer diseases than to focus on the boredom that is killing our churches.”

—Bishop William Willimon in his new book, *Bishop: The Art of Questioning Authority by an Authority in Question*

I read this quote several days ago and have kept thinking about it. I typically find Bishop Willimon's writing thought-provoking, but in this case, I'm not thought-provoked. I'm mostly just provoked—and I'm sure that's what he intended.

In light of our years of attention to, and significant progress toward, eradicating malaria, his statement makes a brazen assertion. But I wonder which part of it provokes me more—that he thinks eradicating malaria is part of a “preposterous notion,” or his declaration that we, the Church, are in the midst of boring ourselves to death?

If you've kept up with Nothing But Nets and Imagine No Malaria—or if you've simply read the cover story of this issue—you know that after just six years of effort, we have cut malaria deaths by half, which makes eradicating the disease sound like a realistic goal.

When it comes to eradicating boredom, though, we probably have a much longer way to go.

But I have a theory: Imagine No Malaria can help us fight boredom.

Think about it: This movement

has the potential to get rid of a preventable disease that kills someone—no, not just someone, but a precious child of God—every minute of every day.

What if by helping end malaria, you and I become part of the Church's cure for its own boredom? What if all of us share a focus on Jesus' call to us to heal a broken world? What if, in answering that call, we also find ourselves giving the church new life and focus?

Perhaps if the people of the United Methodist Church begin to invite their neighbors not just to church, but to worthwhile, world-transforming action, we can cure our boredom. Perhaps if we demonstrate the power of ten dollars to save a life, our neighbors will want to help.

They may ask why this cause is so important to us, and we can tell them about Christ, the one who taught us to pray that his Kingdom will come, and also told us to work on bringing it here.

Think forward a few years, when we hear that malaria has been eradicated. And with that news, we also hear millions of people celebrating, saying, “I helped make that happen.”

The same movement that can eliminate malaria can do something else in the process: It can connect people to each other and to God. And that's a world away from boring.

To reach me, send an email to aforbus@arumc.org.




Natasha Murray-Norman

‘While numbers such as worship attendance and weekly giving are important, they aren't my biggest concern.’

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




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AN OCCASIONAL WORD from the Bishop

BY CHARLES CRUTCHFIELD

Dear Friends:

On the Wednesday morning before Easter I had, what was for me, a very unique and delightful experience. You can see part of it on the cover of this issue. I was interviewed on radio station 103.7 FM, The Buzz. The subject was Imagine No Malaria.

I had been warned that the hosts of the show could be pretty wild and crazy. It was suggested that they might say anything that passed through their minds on any subject. They did. They were a hoot! It seemed that all three guys were doing stream of consciousness monologues at the same time. I loved it.

There were even the obligatory humorous comments and jokes about Easter and religion in general. After all, I was the first bishop of any church that had ever appeared on the program; I knew I could expect some gentle ribbing, and even some over the top questions. Nothing that was said was in poor taste.

What surprised and pleased me beyond imagining was the genuine concern they expressed for the cause of eradicating malaria in the next few years. Beyond all the jokes and laughter one could sense the seriousness with which they took the information and the cause. I was surprised they allowed me to stay with them for an hour. I was also surprised at myself. I had such a great time with my hosts! I am really grateful to them for the kind and gracious opportunity to tell a bit about our INM project.

Since the beginning of the Nothing But Nets project in 2006, the death rate from malaria in Africa has reduced from one death every thirty seconds to a death every minute. Progress has been made. It has been made by people like you and me who have bought a net and saved a child's life. It has been made by our digging water wells in the Congo. I just got a report that four more wells are due to be drilled before the end of this year.

Continued progress will be

made as we provide for education, for clean water projects and for the acquisition of a larger "Wings of the Morning" aircraft to transport bed nets, medicines, medical and educational personnel and equipment to villages, clinics and hospitals deep within the Congo.

We have made the eradication of malaria the business of the United Methodist Church. I am excited to be part of a church that will make a transforming difference in the lives of individuals and in the life of the world.

Faithfully,

Charles Crutchfield

P.S.—Should anyone ask, I'd be excited to go back on 103.7 for another visit.

APPOINTMENTS

The following pastoral changes and retirements have been officially announced as of press time on April 27.

To see appointments as they become official, visit arumc.org/appointments.

Confirmed appointment changes at Annual Conference (effective July 1)

- Brinkley/Brasfield UMCs—Jim Rowland
- Cavanaugh/Hackett UMCs—Michael Topham
- Central UMC Fayetteville (Associate)—Carl Palmer
- Christ of the Hills UMC Hot Springs Village (Associate)—Andrew Kjørlaug
- Concord UMC Lonoke—Larry Hughes
- Elm Springs UMC—Dixon Platt
- Farmington UMC—Troy Conrad
- First UMC Des Arc—Dee Harper
- First UMC Hot Springs (Associate)—Zack Roberts
- First UMC Searcy (Associate)—Tony Griffin
- Foreman UMC—Lynn McClure
- Grand Avenue UMC Stuttgart—Cleston Vaughan
- Griffin Memorial UMC

- Paragould—Jason Suffin
- Gurdon/Hollywood UMCs—Carl Ownbey
- Mineral Springs/Wakefield UMCs—Glenn Hicks
- Mount Carmel UMC Rison—Richard Rogers
- Mount Tabor UMC Cabot—Regina Gideon
- Mountainside UMC Hot Springs Village—J.J. Galloway
- Perryville UMC—Terri Lynn Bunnell
- Pleasant Grove UMC Jonesboro—Rex Darling
- Rondo/Pleasant Hills UMCs—Sara Gotschall
- Shiloh Paragould/Shiloh Jonesboro UMCs—David A. Moore
- Stamps UMC—Mark River
- Sugar Hill UMC Texarkana—Greg Burks
- Wesley UMC Conway—David Baker
- West Helena/Elaine UMCs—Everett Isom
- White Hall UMC—Justin Ledbetter
- Wiggins UMC Fayetteville—Nan Nelson
- Winfield UMC Little Rock—David Hoffman

Out-of-state appointments

- Good Shepherd UMC Kansas City, Mo. (Associate)—Jamey Bentley

Grade-schoolers ready, eager for mission work

BY KAYLEA HUTSON
Special Contributor

Five years and six trips ago, I had an idea.

It was simple. Take older elementary and middle school students out of their "comfort zone" and help them explore what it means to serve God.

What started as a single-church project has grown into a ministry that has involved students from 10 churches within the Arkansas Conference. We call it Destination: Mission.

Destination: Mission trips have a simple rhythm, which includes two days of "kid-friendly" mission projects, such as working in a thrift store, preparing and/or serving a meal, sorting items at a food pantry or even doing yard work.

At each project, students have a chance to learn about the sponsoring ministry through a brief educational offering and a question-and-answer session.

The ultimate goal: Students will experience projects they can do not only on the trip, but in their home community as well.

Other activities during the four-day, three-night trip involve group building (especially as we've expanded to include multiple churches), worship and, of course, a lot of fun.

For people who question whether younger students—especially those in third, fourth and fifth grades—can benefit from this type of experience, I unequivocally say yes.

In the last five years, I've watched as students have had all kinds of amazing experiences while doing ordinary tasks.

One year, the project involved sorting cans of food at the Arkansas Rice Depot—simple, right? But thanks to a volunteer

coordinator who went above and beyond to share the organization's story and mission, those students still talk in amazement about what the Rice Depot does for people in need.

Some even returned to their home church and encouraged the congregation to take a deeper interest in this hunger ministry.

During this year's spring break trip in Fort Smith, one third-grader listened intently to testimonies of how the Salvation Army ministry had been used to change lives.

The nine-year-old felt moved to do something. Without telling anyone, she quietly gave all of her allowance to the ministry.

Later, she had a chance to talk about her decision with her mom, who served as a chaperone on the trip. She said, "I will never look at things the same way again."

How many adults can say that?

Honestly, I'll never look at taking students on a mission trip the same way again.

To critics who say we should wait until students are older and at least in high school, I say "Why?"

Elementary students want to serve. They want to make a difference. They want help others. By providing them with opportunities to serve, we also help them grow as Christians.

I've watched as some of my first students "graduated" from the short trips to longer ones, and stepped into leadership roles with experiences like Ozark Mission Project, or returned to help on a Destination trip so younger students can have the same experiences they encountered.

I've also seen adults, unsure of what to expect, look on in amazement as their students dive into the mission projects

without complaint or hesitation.

This summer will mark the fifth year—and seventh trip—for Destination: Mission. Our plans include staying at First UMC Pine Bluff and working with two local ministries: Neighbor 2 Neighbor and the Salvation Army.

The planning team has already begun making plans for 2013's spring break and summer trips. We plan announce dates and locations for the two trips in late summer or early fall of 2012.

Want to keep up with our students during the summer trip to Pine Bluff? Follow our antics on Facebook: www.facebook.com/Destination.Mission.

Hutson serves as director of children's ministries for St. James UMC Little Rock. For information on Destination: Mission trips in 2013, contact her at kaylea.hutson@gmail.com.



PHOTO COURTESY KAYLEA HUTSON

PEOPLE OF FAITH

Kuonen named executive assistant to Bishop Crutchfield

Bishop Charles Crutchfield has named Rose Kuonen as executive assistant to the bishop, effective May 16, 2012. Kuonen will succeed Sheila Vancura, who retires May 15.



Rose Kuonen

Kuonen, who came to her current position with 13 years of experience working for a local church, was hired in 2004 by Bishop Janice Riggle Huie as a part-time administrative assistant, helping out in the episcopal office and with new church starts.

In 2006, she became secretary for the Conference Board of Ordained Ministry (BOM), which increased her position to full-time. She says she has enjoyed her time helping future pastors make their way through the ordination process, and loves watching their work come full-circle when they are ordained at Annual Conference.

“We appreciate all the outstanding work Rose has done for us,” says the Rev. Biff Averitt, chair of the BOM. He added that because the work of the secretary of

BOM is ongoing, the board hopes to hire a successor to Kuonen before Annual Conference convenes in June.

“As I move into my new position I look forward to working closely with Bishop Crutchfield as he transitions into retirement, and welcoming a new bishop in the fall,” Kuonen says. “I hope that I can be helpful in making the transition from one Bishop to another run smoothly.”

Church professionals receive continuing education at 2012 PAUMCS conference

The 30th Annual Conference of the Professional Association of United Methodist Church Secretaries (PAUMCS), held April 12-15, 2012, drew more than 160 administrative professionals from across the denomination. Seven Arkansans participated in the event, which provides opportunities for education and networking.

The organization, established in 1982 under the General Council on Finance and Administration of the United Methodist Church, fosters individual growth, professional development and spiritual enrichment for its members.

This year’s gathering featured a seminar led by Kathy Merry, the Rev. John Briggs and the Rev. Marc Brown, co-founders of “FaithFull Journey,” a ministry focused on transformational congregational leadership that is biblically based, organizationally effective, and spiritually nourishing. Their leadership guide and participant’s workbook, “Does Your Church Have a Prayer? In Mission Toward the Promised Land,” is grounded in these ministry concepts. Another seminar, led by the Rev. Dr. Daniel L. Garrett, explained how General Conference works, and introduced some of the issues garnering attention this year.

All seven PAUMCS attendees from Arkansas have now received their official certification as professional United Methodist Church secretaries. Karen Branton is the newest certified professional, having completed the Certification School held in Nashville in 2011.

Three of Arkansas’ PAUMCS participants now hold leadership positions in the organization. Libby Gray of the Arkansas Conference office was elected chairperson of the Professional Training Standards Committee, and Cindy Parker of the South Central District office was elected to serve as a member of that same committee. LaDonna Busby of the North District office was elected to serve on the Nominating Committee.

—submitted by Fonda Kirkman



Seven administrative professionals from Arkansas attended this year’s PAUMCS gathering in Richmond, Va. From left: Connie Thomas, Northeast District; LaDonna Busby, North District; Cindy Parker, South Central District; Karen Branton, Central District; Fonda Kirkman, North Central District; Libby Gray, Arkansas Conference office; and Julie Fowler-Berry, Grand Avenue UMC Hot Springs.

COURTESY PHOTO

Seminar lays bare the challenges of ‘Living Holiness’

BY JILLANN MEUNIER
Special Contributor

On March 31, I joined other United Methodists who gathered in Little Rock to explore the theology of social holiness. The Living Holiness Seminar, an event sponsored by the Arkansas Conference Board of Church and Society, quickly transformed into a workshop on the calling of the United Methodist Church.

In a denomination in which half of the members are over age 60, the 15 attendees ranged in age from 18 to 66. They were African-American and Caucasian, married and single, lifetime Methodists and new members—and all of them decided to sacrifice a Saturday to explore social holiness. Clergy and laity alike expressed their passion for social holiness, but realized that the desire to avoid controversy often kept them from doing the work of the Kingdom.

We listed the social issues that were most important to us. Some were divisive, including healthcare, gun violence, sexuality issues and economic inequality. We realized that typically, we only bring up uncontroversial topics in church.

The Rev. Mark Norman admitted that pastors are not encouraged to talk about social holiness because it will always alienate members on some part of the political spectrum.

The Methodist tradition, however, uniquely calls us to social holiness. The Revs. Lynn Kilbourne and Natasha Murray-Norman guided us through John Wesley’s theology of social holiness.



JillAnn Meunier

Wesley believed that good works were the innate response to the love of God; holiness is the external result of an internal faith life. Wesley also believed in communal, not just personal, salvation. As parts of larger systems, we are accountable for our actions in those systems. When we participate in or even allow a system that harms others, we commit “systemic sin.”

Biblical examples of systemic sin, as explained by the Revs. Mark Norman and Nathan Kilbourne, include the Israelite enslavement in Egypt and Isaiah’s rejection of

anti-immigrant taxes.

“Just because it’s in the Scripture doesn’t mean it’s not scary to people,” added the Rev. Brittany Richardson Watson, coordinator of the seminar.

As an example of modern systemic sin, several people pulled out their iPhones. According to these attendees, buying from a company that permits unfair labor practices encourages evil. (Following recent attention to this topic, Apple Inc. and its contractor, Foxconn, have agreed to address low wages and poor working conditions in Foxconn’s Chinese factories.)

“It’s a failing of the church that we haven’t proclaimed [systemic sin] from the pulpit more,” Watson said, adding that taking on systemic sin seems more difficult than carrying out acts of mercy, such as volunteering at a soup kitchen.

“The church is good at [acts of mercy] because it’s being nice,” said Lynn Kilbourne.

Though acts of mercy are important, changing the world’s systems requires reforming laws, governments and businesses. However, United Methodists fall across the political spectrum, and thus differ on the church’s role in

politics—or whether it should have any role in politics at all.

After the morning’s discussion time, the seminar attendees spent the afternoon in some churches with justice ministries. We visited the community garden of Theresa Hoover United Methodist Church, and also learned about the church’s work with a substance abuse rehab center, a low-income housing development and gang intervention.

According to the church’s senior pastor, the Rev. Malik Saafir, it is not only the neighborhood that benefits; Saafir sees social holiness as foundational for revitalizing the United Methodist Church:

“You can’t make disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world without justice,” he said. “You can make a church member.”

The last stop was in Little Rock’s historic district, at Quapaw Quarter UMC. Quapaw Quarter is the only United Methodist church in Arkansas to be a member of the Reconciling Ministries Network, a group of churches that advocates for full inclusion of people of all sexual orientations. Senior pastor the

Rev. Thompson Murray summed up the network’s position:

“We [United Methodists] say we welcome everybody, we take everybody’s money...but if you’re not straight, you’re not going to be ordained. That’s a social justice issue.”

Quapaw Quarter’s commitment to social holiness has not been easy, and not just because of issues surrounding sexuality. The story of the West Memphis Three inspired the church to take on the death penalty—a practice the denomination opposes in its Social Principles. Still, the church’s stand caused disagreement, and the congregation lost members. But Murray felt the loss was worth obeying the church’s call to seek justice.

After a tour of Quapaw Quarter UMC, we gathered in its sanctuary to serve each other Holy Communion. In the blessing, Watson summed up the day: “Social holiness,” she said, “is about understanding each other as brothers and sisters. If we could embody [that call], there would be no need for social holiness seminars.”

Meunier, a student at Hendrix College in Conway, is part of the UMYF Scholar program.

Ministry begun with donated home celebrates first year

BY KAROLE RISKER
Special Contributor

PARAGOULD, Ark.—When Emmy Witt, a beloved member of First United Methodist Church Paragould, died in March 2010, she left her home to the church. In the small white house nestled right by the church's property, associate pastor the Rev. Angie Gage saw a perfect way to reach out to neighbors.

"We are surrounded by a community that's suffering," Gage said.

She pitched her idea to then-pastor the Rev. Tom Letchworth and the Friends of Faith United Methodist Women's circle, who embraced it. The church council then unanimously approved Witt House as a new mission of the congregation, and the ministry opened in March 2011.

Now, in a perfect mix of compassion and hospitality, clients enter the Witt House and sit down on a couch in the living room. A host offers a cold soda, and clients may relax and watch a message of God's love on TV while they wait.

They then get to "grocery shop," gleaning what they would like from a list of available items. The food is placed in grocery bags so that no one can tell that the food came from a pantry. When they leave, their dignity is restored, as well as their kitchen cabinets.

Meeting needs

According to Gage, the need is greater than it ever has been. Some people only need assistance once or twice; others need it longer-term as they struggle to find permanent employment.



This property, left to First UMC Paragould by longtime member Emmy Witt upon her death, has become the Witt House, a ministry hub that helps meet needs of its surrounding community.

The number of Greene County residents living in poverty today is equivalent to the population of the nearby town of Walnut Ridge.

"For some of us, the economy is recovering. The blue collar workers are not recovering as quickly," Gage says. "There are more and more people getting laid off."

In addition to the "working poor," who do not qualify for any other food program in the community, the Witt House exists to help the elderly and those who cannot work because of a disability. Currently, about 145 households from these target groups receive groceries every month.

Through the community's generosity, the Witt House has fed more than 4,360 individuals (1,890 families). Each family receives the equivalent of three days' worth of food, so in just one year, Witt House has provided 13,080 meals. The food arrives from members of First UMC, the Scouts' food drives, area schools, local churches that wish to help but cannot manage a food pantry on their own, community businesses and the Arkansas Rice Depot.

Volunteers range in age from a two-year-old who carried cans to a regular helper who is in his early 90s. Most volunteers are from First UMC, but other United Methodist churches are represented, as are other denominations.

Bob Branch was unsure of the need of the Witt House before it opened. "When announced I wondered, 'Why?' We have adequate food pantries in Paragould," he said. "Then when the effort continued I never expected it to open. Then I visited and got caught up in the spirit. Now I am a regular volunteer. Praise the Lord." Branch now volunteers every week.

Growing disciples

Completely volunteer driven, the ministry includes helpers from the Agape House, a Christian transitional home for women recovering from addiction.

Judge Gerald Brown, who at age 92 is the oldest volunteer, proclaims himself the Witt House's biggest fan. He calls the house "Heaven's annex."

"It's a great opportunity to serve



Witt House volunteers begin to form an assembly line as they prepare for the rush of food pick-ups the week of Thanksgiving 2011.

COURTESY PHOTOS

my master," he said. "I know what it is to be poor, and I know how good it makes you feel when people care enough for you to help you.

"Sometimes I think I get more benefit than the people we serve," he continues. "I wish I could do more."

Clients are eligible to receive food once a month, and must meet some guidelines as far as income and the amount of assistance they receive. The Witt House follows the guidelines of the Hunger Coalition.

"All of the items in our pantry are considered nutritional," said Gage, although 'extras,' like a candy or snack item, may occasionally be available. Recipients will soon benefit from a community garden planted this spring.

Not only does the Witt House serve as a food pantry, but it also offers Journey to Hope, an ongoing substance abuse recovery ministry. In addition, there are plans to offer a cooking class, and the church has just launched a satellite ministry at

the Arkansas State University Wesley Foundation to serve students at ASU-Paragould, Black River Technical College and any other school of higher education.

The next step is to offer the home for use on Friday afternoons for the homeless community of Paragould, giving them a place to shower and wash a small load of laundry. In this way, the Witt House will provide a place where they can find cool comfort in the summer, warmth in the winter, have a cup of cold water or coffee and know that they are loved.

Besides helping the surrounding community, the Witt House helps grow disciples, too.

"We are providing a place for individuals to be the hands and feet of Christ," Gage said.

Riskier serves as director of communications for First UMC Paragould.

CLASSIFIEDS

PLACE YOUR CLASSIFIED in the *Arkansas United Methodist* for 60 cents per word, no limit. Call 501-324-8005 or mail to: *Arkansas United Methodist*, 800 Daisy Bates Drive, Little Rock, AR 72202; or email mtaylor@arumc.org.

DIRECTOR OF MUSIC MINISTRIES in dynamic, growing, diverse Northwest Arkansas. First United Methodist Church of Rogers, a church of 800 members, is seeking a full time music director with either a degree in sacred music or other degree in music with at least two years of leadership experience in both classic and contemporary church music. This position will be available beginning in July of 2012. Inquiries and resumes may be directed to Rogersrev@sbcglobal.net or Rev. David Bentley, 307 West Elm Street, Rogers AR 72756.

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



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Mission day at Annual Conference to launch June 11

Agenda includes afternoon of living out the church's call to service

As happens with more and more ministry ideas lately, this one began on Facebook.

In the spring of 2010, the Rev. Rodney Steele, then superintendent of the North Central District, posted on the social networking website the idea of setting aside time at Annual Conference for mission and witness.

"I knew that we could be doing things another way," he said.

As a member of the UMC's Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters, he has learned about the experience of Annual Conference as it is lived out in other parts of the world. Many of these gatherings outside the U.S. involve more time spent in service and faith-sharing than does the typical stateside gathering.

Here in Arkansas, the Imagine Ministry process had begun, bringing many conversations about doing ministry differently. So when he saw the "likes" and other positive feedback stacking up on his Facebook status update, he began drafting legislation that would incorporate mission and witness time into the agenda of Annual Conference.

After a revision to allow an additional year for implementation, the motion passed. Steele credits the grassroots momentum behind the concept for bringing it to fruition.

"I posted it on Facebook and wrote the resolution, but it's really an idea whose time has come," he said.

And while it had to wait until 2012 to get a spot on the agenda, the mission concept didn't have to sit out during 2011. The Rev. Carl Palmer created a "Flash Mission" event on—where else?—Facebook, which helped build momentum before Annual Conference.

Workers descended on Eleanor Klugh Jackson House, just down the street from Summit Arena in Hot Springs, during their lunch break on Tuesday, June 7, completing a variety of jobs for the local mission center.

Steele finds this year's plans encouraging, and he hopes future years will include the "witness" portion of his proposal. He envisions multiple opportunities for sharing faith and worship across the host city.

"That's my next hope, is that if we can get the mission part established then it'll segue into the witness part," he said. "But time will tell.

"The most important thing is that we're doing it, and I'm excited about the possibilities."

2012 Mission Opportunities

STOP HUNGER NOW

Description: Assembling meal kits that will be used around the world. Each meal costs \$0.25 to assemble. Donations are being accepted to help pay for the kits.

Skills: Good for those with mobility issues or who would prefer to work inside.

Times: 1:30, 3:00, 4:30 (40 volunteers per session)

Cost: \$0

ON-SITE

KNITTING FOR A CAUSE

Description: Learn to knit for ministries such as prayer shawls or baby hats for neonatal units.

Skills: If you already know how to knit, feel free to join the group for knitting fellowship.

Time: 1:30 pm

Cost: Please bring a round Knifty Knitter Loom and yarn

ON-SITE

MHUMC CLOTHES CLOSET

Description: Sort and arrange clothes closet that serves approx 50 families per week.

Time: 1:30 pm (7-10 volunteers)

Cost: \$0

OFF-SITE

TORNADO TUBS

Description: Each church in the Arkansas Conference is invited to bring one Tornado Tub to Annual Conference. Rice Depot will be on site to collect the tubs.

Cost: \$55

Materials list is available at: www.arumc.org/ac12

PREPARE

ACTS OF KINDNESS

Description: Teams will go into Fort Smith areas to do yard work and other small jobs for caregivers, those with disabilities, and elderly homeowners who could use some extra help.

Time: 1:30 pm (30 volunteers - 6 teams of 5)

Note: Not a good project for those with respiratory or mobility issues.

Cost: \$0 - You will need to bring your own work gloves.

OFF-SITE

FLASH MISSION PROJECT

Description: This will be a "flash mob" style project. It will be hands on mission work in the community. It could be doing local food pantry work to working with the homeless.

Time: 1:30 pm (30 volunteers)

Cost: \$0

OFF-SITE

GRAFFITI REMOVAL TEAMS

Description: Working in conjunction with the City of Fort Smith and local Graffiti Removal Team Leaders, teams will go out into neighborhoods to remove graffiti.

Time: 1:30 pm (25 volunteers - 5 teams of 5)

Note: Not a good project for those with respiratory or mobility issues.

Cost: \$0

OFF-SITE

COMPASSION PROJECT

Description: Visit local nursing homes to listen, visit, and laugh with residents.

Time: 1:30 pm (20 volunteers)

Cost: Ladies, bring your favorite nail polish to bless female residents with a fresh coat of nail polish

OFF-SITE

For more info about opportunities, please visit www.arumc.org/ac12

Life sentence issued for murder of Lillian Wilson at Ark. church

Jury: victim's faith influenced sentencing decision

Compiled from wire reports

After two hours of deliberation following a four-day capital murder trial, a Cross County jury on April 13 sentenced Rene Bourassa to life in prison without opportunity for parole for the murder of Lillian Wilson, a United Methodist laywoman.

Bourassa, 36, confessed to the June 6, 2010 killing of Wilson, and even walked investigators through his actions in the sanctuary of Central United Methodist Church, a small congregation just outside Wynne.

Wilson, 80, had dropped by the church building that day to prepare disaster relief supplies to be sent to the Arkansas Annual Conference, which convened that evening. No worship service was scheduled at the building that day, as Ellis Chapel UMC, the other church on the two-point charge, was hosting worship.

Bourassa had been camping out in the church building for several days and had avoided detection. His car had broken down in the area, halting his cross-country road trip. He hid when Wilson arrived. Then, when she discovered him, he bludgeoned her with the brass cross from the church's altar. When he left, he took her purse and her car.

Juror Jonathan Edwards, 28, of Wynne said the jury voted using "scratch" paper ballots.

"We could write life or death. Some just wrote 'L,'" he told a reporter for the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*. "It was the first vote back. Ten votes life. One vote death. One vote blank."

Edwards said several of the jurors decided to impose the life sentence for the same reason he did—because they didn't believe that Lillian Wilson would have wanted the death penalty applied.

In the *United Methodist Book of Discipline*, the denomination takes an official stance against the death penalty. Paragraph 164 of the 2008 edition reads, in part, "We believe the death penalty denies the power of Christ to redeem, restore and transform all human beings."

During the penalty phase, Lillian Wilson's son Mark Wilson told jurors, "We don't want your sympathy. We don't want your anger. We don't want your vengeance. She believed in the judicial system. She would want you to make a fair decision."

Following the sentencing, the Wilson family issued a brief statement: "While we know this conviction can never bring our mom back or change the horrible things that happened in our country church that sad day, it helps to know that justice has been served."



Lillian Wilson (center) poses with the Rev. Dixon Platt (left) and church member Norris Cruthirds at Central UMC Wynne, during preparations for Easter in this April 2010 file photograph. Wilson was found beaten to death inside the church on June 6 of that year.

UMNS FILE PHOTO BY MARY ANNE CRUTHIRDS

Invitation to join the Annual Conference Choir

Sign up by May 10 to sing in June 10 and 12 worship

All singers in the Arkansas Conference are encouraged to join the 2012 Conference Choir and sing in two worship services in Fort Smith:

- 1) Sunday night, June 10, Holy Communion and Memorial Service at the Arkansas Best Corporation Performing Arts Center Auditorium;
- 2) Tuesday night, June 12,

Ordination and Consecration Service, First UMC Fort Smith.

The Conference Choir is open to any singer who is willing to: 1) learn the music before arriving, and 2) attend two rehearsals: one on Sunday afternoon at the center and one rehearsal on Tuesday afternoon at the church. The choir may be able to condense to one rehearsal on

Sunday afternoon. Each singer will need a black music folder, a choir robe, a copy of each anthem and a joyful heart!

For information on scheduling, song selection, ordering music and finding recordings to help vocalists become familiar with the songs, contact Nancy Vernon, nvernon@fsfumc.org, by Thursday, May 10.

The Confessing Movement of Arkansas

Invites you to BREAKFAST during Annual Conference
Monday, June 11, 2012 at 6:45 A.M.
 Hall C, Fort Smith Convention Center

Reverend Robert Renfroe
Guest Speaker

"The Trouble with Truth"

Rob Renfroe is the president and publisher of *Good News* and serves as the Associate Pastor of Discipleship of The Woodlands United Methodist Church.



In addition to his other responsibilities in the local church, eight years ago Rob founded Quest, a ministry for men, in which he teaches 450 men weekly in the fall and spring. That ministry has built 30 homes for persons living in the slums of the troubled city of Juarez, Mexico, and has spawned Destination Manhood, a mentoring ministry for boys from underprivileged homes who don't have an active father in their lives.

Previously, he served as the preaching pastor of the west campus of First United Methodist Church, Houston, Texas. Rob has been committed to the reform and renewal of The United Methodist Church for the past 17 years, working in his own Texas Annual Conference, serving on the board and as the president of The Confessing Movement and now leading *Good News*.

He graduated from Rice University, magna cum laude, and received his Master of Divinity from Gordon-Conwell, summa cum laude. He and Peggy, married 33 years, have two sons, Stephen and Ian.

Tickets for the Confessing Movement Breakfast are \$15 each.
Call or email Karen Millar at (501) 268-4859 or
karenmillar@hotmail.com by Friday, June 8 to purchase tickets.

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

Stranger (continued from page 1A)

thrift store and ministry.

“Potter’s House Ministry actually funds other ministries,” Gosnell said. “They tutor other kids in this neighborhood, mostly low-income, high-risk children, and it’s been an amazing blessing to work with them.” Trinity also works with Mama Dean’s Soul Food Restaurant for a monthly feeding ministry, and with Try Cycle Farms to help teach farming to families in the community.

The mission and sermon components of the Stranger series were interwoven. Each week, church attendees collected specific items to donate to the designated mission for the series, 7 Hills Homeless Center. Each week, the item related to that week’s Scripture or sermon topic.

For example, the first sermon was entitled simply “The Stranger,” and was based on the biblical model of hospitality and compassion found in Genesis 18:1-15, the account of Abraham and Sarah welcoming three strangers into their tent. That week, members of the congregations collected and donated tents for literal

“strangers,” people they do not know personally who receive services from 7 Hills Homeless Center.

Shared ideas

This particular form of connectional ministry sprang from ideas the pastors shared in conversations about the direction of their churches. The pastors began to discuss ways they could help each other consistently by partnering to act as multi-site ministries, involving each of the congregations in worship and giving in significant ways.

The Rev. Stephen Coburn of First UMC Springdale believes that by working together, these churches have the potential to create a greater United Methodist presence in northwest Arkansas. Through involvement with this series, First UMC Springdale discovered ways to share resources that smaller churches like Trinity and Farmington needed. And this sharing worked both ways, as the Springdale church reaped the benefit

of individual member insight and personalization that is more easily gleaned from a smaller congregation.

“I think it just brought a new understanding of what it means to be United Methodist and work with your colleagues and work with neighboring churches,” Coburn said. “Had this been done by any one church, it probably would have been a traditional Easter sermon, but because it was more than one church, the dynamic became much more powerful.”

Gosnell said the central theme of the stranger got the attention of the congregations.

“It’s the perfect way to kick off the model, because of the message that as Christians we are called to greet strangers and have no expectations, but to know that the stranger could give us an amazing gift or message no one else could,” he said.

“After the Resurrection, the stranger was Christ who gave us the amazing gift of a Savior. In many ways, we are the stranger and desperately need a community to help us, so by combining efforts with five congregations who represent all the ways we struggle and need community, we have a powerful message and model for other churches.”

More collaboration

The five congregations are planning on working together again for an Advent series. They hope that churches in other parts of the state might look to their experience with the Stranger series to find inspiration for working together more closely and more frequently.

“We wanted to present a model beyond your typical district or conference relationship,” said Coburn. That’s also something I see



The five churches participating in the “Stranger” study, sermon and mission series for Lent 2012 used the same visual image, above, for the duration of the series.

as a responsibility of First Church [Springdale], because we are one of the larger churches in northwest Arkansas. I think we have a responsibility to be a teaching church... the feedback from each of the local churches was positive.”

Despite some slight differences in the approach, most churches followed through with each part of the series. Coburn says there is room to refine the model and each church will lend their own elements to futures collaborations.

“When we first planned this we wanted our folks to work together on the mission project but the logistics of it did not happen,” he said. “However, this was our first run, so maybe next time we can collect more and each church will be involved in each element.”

The series plan allowed for flexibility because no church is exactly like another. The important thing, Coburn added, is that the people of each collaborating church found meaning in sharing a common focus with neighboring congregations.

“We have gotten responses from churches in other parts of the state

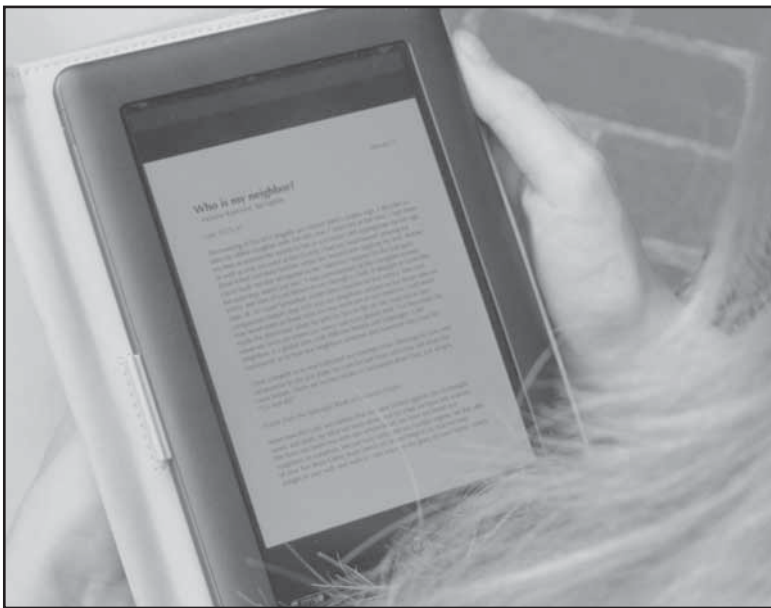
who want to know more,” he said, “and it will be exciting to see what happens.”

Gosnell points out that the United Methodist Church is connectional by nature. “I think that is something a few of our churches have lost,” he said. “[Connecting] is already the direction of the church, and partnering is the future of the United Methodist Church. I don’t think we have to reinvent the wheel, so to speak... it’s a Wesleyan tradition to find voids or needs in the community.”

He emphasized that opportunities to reach out exist all around our churches.

“In affluent communities there are people drowning in debt. There is hunger in the richest corner of Arkansas, and we have an amazing opportunity to truly be a connectional church driven to share the face of Christ, not just individual churches giving things to the poor and needy—it’s about us living in community together sharing our gifts in the ministry.”

Smith is a member of First UMC Springdale.



Participants in the “Stranger” series had the ability to read daily devotionals on a number of digital devices.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY JEANNIE SMITH

Holy Week drama presents behind-the-scenes view of Last Supper

On Maundy Thursday, April 5, the Piney Grove Players of Piney Grove UMC Hot Springs presented the “Beneath the Upper Room” by the Rev. Kevin Reese.

This dramatic representation of the Last Supper relies on the perspective of the women who may have prepared the meal for Jesus and his disciples. The audience sees the Last Supper from a different point of view than usually depicted in stories about Jesus’ last meal. With the well-known events of the Last Supper as a framework, these women reflect on the life of Jesus and his effect on all people.

Under the direction of Valerie Jackson, the cast included Linda Roseberry, Martha Nolan, Martha Fischer, Jan Murray, Sandy Landrum, Terry Askew, Maura Williams, Edith Gish, Sherry Vaught-Smith, Donna Flenniken, Jordan Gallimore, Darby Dunn, Eric Landrum, Kameron Fisher, the Rev. Scott Gallimore, John Landrum and Otis Preslar.

An open table service of Holy Communion was incorporated into the production, and a reception followed in the Fellowship Hall.



COURTESY PHOTO

Malaria (continued from page 1A)

net and save a life.

When that message made it to Arkansas, a state quite familiar with the pesky insect, it took off like the proverbial swarm of mosquitoes. United Methodists used all types of creative methods to collect donations: student-led basketball tournaments, t-shirt sales, net ornaments and Christmas gifts made in honor or memory of a loved one. In Arkansas alone, more than \$250,000 has been donated to date.

And it has made a difference. In just six years, the death toll from malaria in Africa has dropped by almost 50 percent. In this world there are so many challenges to transporting goods and materials, yet the nets—and the education to use them properly—made it into the hands of the people who needed

them most.

Imagine No Malaria builds on the success of Nothing But Nets to accomplish even more. Through its broader mission of prevention, education, communication, treatment and advocacy, thousands of lives have been saved. Individual and corporate donations of all sizes are making an impact.

United Methodists in the Arkansas Conference will have several opportunities to get involved. During the June 10-13 Annual Conference gathering, they can stop by the Imagine No Malaria exhibit to make a donation, purchase an Imagine No Malaria cinch pack and receive information on how to bring the message to their communities.

The goal is to eradicate malaria in Africa by 2015. Audacious, yes,

but if the gifts keep on coming and the work continues as it has for the past six years, this goal can be met.

Arkansas United Methodists and churches can help meet the goal by sponsoring Imagine No Malaria events in their communities, taking up special offerings, giving to the Advance: special #3021190, visiting imagineNomalaria.org or simply by texting MALARIA to 27722 to make a \$10 donation.

Let the blessings flow.

The Rev. Taylor serves as director of communications for the Arkansas Conference.

Want to know more?

To learn more about Imagine No Malaria, see the special supplement inserted in this issue, or visit imagineNomalaria.org.



Imagine No Malaria cinch packs like this one will be available at the Imagine No Malaria display table at Annual Conference. Individuals who make gifts at the display table will receive a pack as a thank-you gift. When carried to school, on errands or at work, the packs can serve as an opportunity to tell others about Imagine No Malaria.

TRANSFORMING THE WORLD

Nothing But Nets benefits from UMW Sunday at Ashdown and Richmond

The Ashdown/Richmond United Methodist Women on UMW Sunday, March 18, collected \$320 for in a special offering for Nothing but Nets, one of the organizations providing insecticide-treated bed nets for people living in areas where mosquitoes spread malaria.

The services at both churches were conducted by the United Methodist Women, and included reports of activities sponsored by the UMW for the previous year. The efforts of the three United Methodist Women's circles at Ashdown/Richmond provide support for a variety of mission projects, including Camp Aldersgate; UMCOR cleaning buckets; collecting food for the church food pantry; change for the Southwest District Mile of Pennies for missions, used shoes for Operation Shoe; greeting card fronts for St. Jude's; and local mission projects.

Primrose UMC awarded grant from Arkansas Foodbank

Primrose UMC Little Rock in April received a grant from the Arkansas Foodbank for its food pantry. The grant will pay for a computer and software to help with recordkeeping for the ministry.

The Primrose food pantry receives food from both the Arkansas Foodbank and the Arkansas Rice Depot, said the Rev. Clayton Bulice, Primrose's pastor. "We must make monthly reports to them about how many people we fed, along with other demographic information," he said. "The computer will help make that easier to accomplish.

"Also, our food pantry is so popular that we can only afford to give a family food every other week," he added. "The computer will help us to keep track of who visited when."

The Foodbank awarded \$160,000 for freezers, walk-in coolers, shelving, pallet jacks, computers and other equipment to church food pantries and other hunger relief agencies that use the Arkansas Foodbank as a source of supplies to help them improve their capacity for helping the hungry.

The equipment grants are a continuation of infrastructure improvements that were funded by the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation following the construction of the Foodbank's new Donald W. Reynolds Distribution Center, the 70,000-sq.-ft. Foodbank warehouse that opened a year ago at 4301 W. 65th St. in Little Rock.

The Arkansas Foodbank serves more than 250 food pantries, shelters, afterschool feeding programs and soup kitchens in a 33-county service area in central and south Arkansas. It also serves as a "mixing center" that supplies the five other Feeding America food banks throughout the state.

The largest nongovernment provider of donated food in Arkansas, the Foodbank is a member of the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance. Last year the Foodbank distributed 13.3 million pounds of food to agencies around the state. For information on how you can fight hunger, visit arkansasfoodbank.org

Good Samaritan ministry in Pine Bluff promotes outreach

Staff and residents at the Jenkins Residential Home for Women participated recently in a dance-a-thon sponsored by First United Methodist Church Pine Bluff and Healing Place Ministries' Good Samaritan program. Under the leadership of Good Samaritan Kenisha Peebles, a Pine Bluff High School student, and coordinator Carmelita Haynes, a University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff student, participants learned three line dances.

Good Samaritan is an outreach program in which students study a biblical principle one week under the leadership of First UMC Pine Bluff, and then visit various facilities the next week to promote the practice learned, in hopes that others will become Good Samaritans locally, statewide and nationally. To learn more, contact the Rev. Edna Morgan, associate pastor at First UMC, at 870-535-0935.

First UMC Sheridan completes renovation, retires debt

In a special "mortgage burning" service on April 15, First UMC Sheridan celebrated the completion of a major renovation of the church sanctuary and paying off the loan that financed the 2005 construction of the church's Youth and Family Life Center.

The building features a grand hall dining room, a youth center, a commercial kitchen, a nursery, and several classrooms. It was designed by Keith Miller of Little Rock, the same architect who designed the church's sanctuary building, which was completed in 1977.

The sanctuary renovation included changes to the chancel and choir area, altered pew spacing, lighting improvements, new floor coverings, handicapped accessible restrooms and improvements to the pastor's office.

Joining the Rev. John Fleming in the ceremony were two former First UMC Sheridan pastors: the Rev. Bruce Bennett (left), now the pastor of First UMC Texarkana, and the Rev. Don Nolley (second from left), now retired; and district superintendent Mike Morey.

"I'm happy to say that First United Methodist Church in Sheridan is now debt free," said Fleming. "We are grateful to God and a generous congregation for these accomplishments."

—submitted by Jim Lancaster



Wesley UMC serves Wesley UCA

Students at the University of Central Arkansas Wesley Foundation enjoy a lunch of pizza, salad and desserts at the ministry's final "Monday Lunch-In" of the semester. This particular meal was provided by members of Wesley UMC Conway, but all five UMCs in Conway, as well as churches from several surrounding cities, take turns



COURTESY PHOTO

preparing and serving this weekly meal for students.

The UCA Wesley Foundation and its sister campus ministries across the state welcome activities that provide interaction between students and the people of local churches. If a group within your church is looking for a new ministry, consider contacting a Wesley Foundation in your area and asking how you can help.

COMING UP

May

Denman Evangelism Award nominations due by May 10

It is time to nominate clergy, laity and youth for the 2012 Denman Evangelism Awards given at Annual Conference. Begun in 1981 to honor United Methodist clergy and laypersons who exhibit unusual and outstanding efforts for the work on Christian evangelism, the Harry Denman Evangelism Awards help draw attention to evangelism in the local church.

Persons who, in their daily lives, are effective in helping others experience the transforming love of God through Jesus Christ are eligible. If you have someone you would like to nominate, visit foundationforevangelism.org to download the forms. Send completed forms to thepastor@stuttgartfmc.org or mail to Dr. David W. Bush, 307 East Fourth Street, Stuttgart, AR 72160. Forms must be received by May 10. For information, contact David Bush at 870-673-1131.

Peace with Justice grant applications due May 31

The deadline for applying for an Arkansas Conference Peace with Justice grant is May 31. Applicants must be either a United Methodist or United Methodist-affiliated organization, or an ecumenical group working with least one United Methodist agency. Visit arumc.org/forms for an application.

Past recipients of these grants have included a program providing mentoring and child care so teen moms can finish school; a youth center that offers after-school activities; and a project that teaches English as a second language while building relationships between volunteer instructors and students.

Grants are funded by the annual Peace with Justice offering, which this year is June 3. The offering may be observed at any time, though, and helps ministries to promote equality; access to

resources like basic health care, food and childcare; and social justice. One-half of the Peace with Justice offering remains in the Annual Conference, and is administered by the Arkansas Conference Board of Church and Society. To learn more about the Peace with Justice special offering, visit umcgiving.org/peacewithjustice.

June

St. James Golf Classic for Congo Wells Project June 16

The fifth annual St. James Golf Classic will be held Saturday, June 16, at StoneLinks Golf Course in North Little Rock. Organized by the Stepping Stone Sunday School class of St. James UMC, the four-person scramble starts at 8 a.m. and is open to all. The \$75 per player fee includes golf cart, greens fees, prizes and lunch by Famous Dave's BBQ. All proceeds will go to provide water wells in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. To date, the St. James Golf Classic has raised \$48,000 for water wells.

There are many ways to participate: as a hole sponsor, an actual or virtual player or as a door prize donor. For more information, contact Nicki Hilliard at 501-666-2311, or nhilliard@mac.com, or Jane Dennis at 501-681-9472 or janedennis@comcast.net. To register online, visit StJamesGolfClassic.org.

Campmeeting revival at Salem UMC Benton June 17-24

The Rev. Carlton Cross and members of Salem UMC Benton invite all to the 2012 Salem Campmeeting revival, June 17-24 on the church grounds, 1647 Salem Road in Benton. The Campmeeting includes a different musical group performing each evening at 7:00 p.m., with a worship service following at

7:30. The Rev. David Bush, pastor of First UMC Stuttgart, will be the featured evangelist for the week, and the Rev. Mike Morey, currently superintendent of the South Central District, will preach on June 24, which also is Homecoming Sunday and includes a potluck dinner.

People of all ages are encouraged to attend. Special activities for youth and a fun-filled learning experience for children will be available each night, as will a nursery for children ages 3 and younger. Refreshments will be served in the fellowship hall after each service.

The revival, established in 1838, now meets in an open-air arbor equipped with ceiling fans. Last year, the sawdust floor of the arbor was upgraded to concrete. Attendees are welcome to sit in the cushioned pews of the arbor or bring lawn chairs for the services, which include the singing of old-time music, preaching and fellowship.

For more information, including a listing of the musicians performing each night and a history of the Salem Campmeeting event and grounds, visit <http://arnet.pair.com/salemcamp>, or contact Lydia Cheatham at the church office, 501-316-2282.

White Memorial UMC homecoming June 24

On Sunday, June 24, 2012, White Memorial UMC Little Rock will celebrate Homecoming. The congregation extends a special invitation to former members of Twenty-Eighth Street UMC and friends to attend at either the 11:00 a.m. worship hour or the afternoon service at 2:30. Former members also are encouraged to volunteer to participate in the service at either time. Those who are willing to participate may contact Bettye Johnson at 501-663-4851.

An appeal to help spread the gospel

Supporting Moscow Seminary a part of building the Kingdom

In the late 1980s, as Soviet bloc nations emerged from decades of Communist rule, a group of people seized the opportunity to openly share the Good News in their countries. Through their efforts, churches were started and many

people accepted Christ as Lord and Savior. The United Methodist Church was among those organizations that began immediately to re-establish a presence in Russia.

On March 31, 1999, the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation issued Moscow Seminary its Certificate of Registration, making the United Methodist seminary an officially recognized legal entity, in compliance with the new religion law.

Because the UMC in Russia continues to grow, seminary training has become crucial to providing a supply of called and equipped leaders.

So what does this situation have to do with Arkansas?

The Arkansas Conference has set a goal of \$10,000 to be given toward a scholarship fund for students of Moscow Seminary.

"As United Methodists, we support the education of our pastors," says the Rev. Pat Bodenhamer, chair of the Conference Board of Global Ministries (BOGM). The Conference BOGM has already put forward \$2,900 to support the effort, and asks that Arkansas United Methodists join them and Bishop Charles Crutchfield

to continue building the Kingdom by developing pastoral leaders in Russia. This is a critical time for United Methodism—and Christianity—in that country.

"We are asking all clergy to remember their seminary days and give towards the education of a fellow pastor in another country. We are asking all laity to support their church in the building up of a new generation of Christian leaders," she said. "If we all give, it adds up."

Bodenhamer says her personal approach to missions can be summed up in one phrase: Across the Street and Around the World.

"Each day I try to look around my surroundings and ask, 'What's going on, and how can I build up the

Kingdom?'" she says. "Then I turn on the news, open the newspaper, click on a website and again, I ask the question, 'What's going on, and how can I build up the Kingdom?'"

As she has received cancer treatment in recent months, Bodenhamer's "across the street" mission has been to share a smile and an encouraging word with everyone she encounters ("The cancer world can be very depressing," she says). At the same time, she embraces an "around the world" mission: supporting Moscow Seminary.

"Sometimes it is easy to get all caught up in our own little piece of the world, and miss the great opportunities and possibilities," she said. "And really, it's a small sacrifice for each of us to go 'around the world' and help build up the church in Russia."

The Conference Board of Global Ministries asks for support of this cause, either by personal gifts or as a church-wide effort. Please make checks payable to the Arkansas Conference UMC with "Moscow Seminarian Fund" in the memo. For more information, contact Bishop Charles Crutchfield's office at 501-324-8019 or visit www.gbmg-umc.org/umrussiaseminary.



Moscow Seminary president Sergei Nikolaev addresses a group of United Methodists in Little Rock on April 11, 2011.

AUM FILE PHOTO

Ways to support Moscow Seminary

Mission opportunities: Construction of the seminary's 15,000 square-foot building was funded by donations, but there is currently no financial support for maintaining the facility. The seminary often defers needed maintenance. Work teams may stay in the dorm, and may also help out at orphanages and local churches during their visit. To inquire about a potential work team visit, contact Dr. Sergei Nikolaev by sending an email to president.msumc@gmail.com.

Funding: Unlike U.S. seminaries, Moscow Theological Seminary receives no apportionment dollars. Two-thirds of the seminary's support currently comes from outside of Russia. See the paragraph at right for instructions on how to give.

OBITUARIES

LITTLE ROCK

Ruby Jackson

Ruby Lee Graves Jackson, 92, of Little Rock, died March 22, 2012, at Chenal Heights Nursing Center.

Born March 11, 1920, she was the daughter of Basley Carl "B. C." and Frances Elizabeth Neikirk Graves. She was reared and educated in Pine Bluff, graduating from Pine Bluff High School. She attended Henderson State University. She worked as secretary to the controller at the Pine Bluff Arsenal for 25 years, retiring in 1975.

She was a past president of the Wesleyan Service Guild and United Methodist Women, and the 1997 recipient of the Ethel K. Millar Award for Religious and Social Awareness, awarded by Hendrix College. She devoted more than 60 years to lay ministry in the United Methodist Church in Arkansas. A 52-year member of Lakeside United Methodist Church Pine Bluff, she served on the planning team and as dean for United Methodist Women's Regional Schools and Schools of Christian Mission.

She was instrumental in the funding and formation of a tutoring program for children in low-income households, and led workshops to help inform educators about racist and sexist biases in children's books. In 1976, she was elected to the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church. She worked in fundraising, appropriations and conducted workshops for officers of the United Methodist Women, and also trained officers of the Midwest and Pacific Regions of United Methodist Women.

She also volunteered with the P.T.A., Girl Scouts, Pine Bluff Women's Center and many charity and church organizations. She was a member and past Worthy Matron of Union Chapter No. 40 of the Order of the Eastern Star.

She was preceded in death by her parents, two brothers and one sister. Survivors include one daughter, Kathryn Jackson Rand of Little Rock; grandsons, Patrick Neil Heird of Tampa, Fla., Noel David Heird and Benjamin A. Rand IV of Little Rock; great-grandchildren, Sierra M. and Avery L. Heird of Florida and Elizabeth Catherine Alexandra Rand of Little Rock; cousins, nieces and nephews.

Services were held on Monday, March 26, at First United Methodist Church Little Rock with the Rev. Mary Jane Cole officiating, and at Lakeside United Methodist Church Pine Bluff with the Rev. Pam Estes officiating. Interment was in Bellwood Cemetery. Neil Heird, Noel Heird, Ben Rand, Carl J. Graves, Carl L. Martin, Robert R. Ellis and Christopher Lee Ellis served as pallbearers.

Memorials may be made to: L. I. F. T., c/o First United Methodist Church, 723 Center Street, Little Rock, AR 72201, or Camp Aldersgate, 2000 Aldersgate Road, Little Rock, AR 72205.

Kathryn Rice

Kathryn "Katy" Donham Rice, 92, died on Sunday, March 18, 2012, at Parkway Village Health Care in Little Rock.

She was born December 7, 1919, in Little Rock, to John Roy Donham and Veda Fitzhugh Donham. She graduated from Little Rock (Central) High School in 1937 and from Hendrix College in 1941. In 1942, she married James Horner Rice Jr.

A lifelong Methodist whose interest in Arkansas Methodist history led to her appointment as the archivist of the Little Rock Conference, she authored *A History of the First United Methodist Church in Little Rock, Arkansas 1831-1981*

**Katy Rice**

to commemorate the church's sesquicentennial. She served 28 years as church historian, creating with her husband the History Hall, home to many historic photographs and artifacts. She was a member of the Commission on Archives and History of the UMC and a charter member of the Arkansas United Methodist Historical Society.

She was a member of the Women's Emergency Committee, the political

organization which worked to re-open and support Little Rock public schools during the 1957 desegregation crisis. In the 1970s she worked at the Old State House Museum, first as a guide, then as registrar, a position for which she trained at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. In 1986 she was appointed to head the Religious Organizations Task Force of the Arkansas Sesquicentennial Commission, which sponsored workshops on church history writing and church archives management. For four years she was the Arkansas representative for UNICEF.

She had an abiding interest in Hendrix College, volunteering there as archivist in the Winfred Polk United Methodist Archives and the Bailey Library. In 1992, Hendrix awarded her the Mary and Ira A. Brumley Award for outstanding service in religious education. In 2003, the Hendrix Alumni Association honored her with its Humanitarian Award. In 1997, she and her husband established the Kathryn D. and James H. Rice Endowed Scholarship at Hendrix.

She was a member of the Hendrix Heritage Society, the Bowen-Cabe Sunday School class at First UMC Little Rock, the Arkansas Women's History Institute, the Pulaski County Historical Society and the Arkansas Historical Association.

Survivors include two sons, John D. "Mike" Rice and his wife, Janice, of Albuquerque, N.M., and James R. "Jim" Rice and his wife, Tracy, of Little Rock; two daughters, Kathryn Rice

Knowles and her husband, Robert, of Roseland, Va., and Louise Rice Fox and her husband, Joe, of Little Rock; nine grandchildren: Tamera Daniel, Kimberly Carswell, English Knowles, James Knowles, Robert Knowles, Jim Moore, Katie Moore Tennyson, Jessica Rice and John Rice; and twelve great-grandchildren. She was predeceased by her husband of 66 years, James Rice, and her sister, Lea Donham Cross.

A private burial on March 27 at Mount Holly Cemetery preceded a celebration of life at First UMC Little Rock, with the Rev. Michael Mattox officiating.

Memorials may be made to the James H. and Kathryn Donham Rice Endowed Scholarship fund at Hendrix College (Office of Advancement, 1600 Washington, Conway, AR 73032) or to the Perpetual Endowment Fund at First UMC Little Rock (723 Center Street, Little Rock, AR 72201).

The family would like to express gratitude for the care and support of friends and staff at Woodland Heights Retirement Center, Elder Independence Home Care and Parkway Village Health Care, and to the wonderful end-of-life ministry of Baptist Hospice.

ALAMOGORDO, N.M.

William Stroud

The Rev. Dr. William J. "Bill" Stroud, 75, passed away Wednesday, April 18, 2012, in Alamogordo, N.M.

He was born March 26, 1937, in Atkins, Ark., to Joe B. and Carrie Lee Griffin Stroud. An ordained Elder, he served churches in the North Arkansas Conference from 1980 to his retirement in 1999, including Perryville, Adona, Brinkley, Sylvan Hills and Osceola UMCs.

**Bill Stroud**

He is survived by his wife Judith Ann (Beck) Stroud, of Alamogordo; a son, Bruce Stroud, of Alamogordo; a daughter, Annette Marie Stroud and her husband, Paul Cizek, of Denver, Colo.; a grandson, Mohammed Bellifa, also of Denver; and brothers John Coleman Stroud, of Atkins, Ark., and David Lee Stroud Sr. and his wife, Sandy, of Pottsville, Ark.

Memorial services were held Friday, April 20, 2012, at First Christian Church of Alamogordo, and in Atkins, Ark., on Monday, April 23, at Atkins United Methodist Church with the Rev. Rebecca Wiseman officiating.

In lieu of flowers, memorial gifts may be made to the Otero Hunger Coalition. Please make checks to St. John's Episcopal Church, Attn: Otero Hunger Coalition, P.O. Box 449, Alamogordo, NM 88311.

'Church Finances' workshop in North Little Rock May 12

In a survey conducted earlier this year among Arkansas United Methodist clergy and laity, more than 60 percent of respondents expressed interest in attending a brief workshop on financial issues facing churches—such as budgeting, internal controls, church management software, financial reporting, debt retirement and giving strategies.

As a direct response to that interest, the Conference Stewardship Team is sponsoring "Church Finances: A Toolkit for Today and

Down the Road," scheduled from 9:30 a.m. to noon on Saturday, May 12. First UMC North Little Rock, 6701 JFK Blvd., will host the workshop. There is no cost to participate.

Presenters at the event include: **The Rev. Bob Crossman**, minister of new church starts and congregational advancement for the Arkansas Conference: "Create a Stewardship 'Ripple Effect' in Your Church"—*Committed to Christ: Six Steps to a Generous Life* is not simply an annual financial campaign for the

local church, but rather an invitation to every household in the congregation to raise their level of commitment in six areas of discipleship, including financial giving. Learn about each step from the creator of *Committed to Christ* and discover how your church can start on that life-long journey.

Janet Kernodle Marshall, vice-president of development for the United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas: "Creative Giving Options"—Find out how you can

receive guaranteed income for life, an immediate tax deduction and leave a gift to your favorite United Methodist charity through a charitable gift annuity. Learn why it is important for you to have a will or trust and other estate plans.

Brian Swain, church administrator for Central UMC Fayetteville: "Church Management Software"—Swain will lead a discussion of what church management software is, how it can improve the operational efficiencies

at the church and how to assess the needs of your church in selecting a package, including a review of several options and costs to consider.

The Rev. J. Clif Christopher, president, Horizons Stewardship: "The Debt Debacle"—Christopher, a stewardship expert and author of several books on the subject, will guide a session focused on how churches can avoid debilitating debt while growing mission and ministry.

Visit arumc.org/register to reserve your spot.

UMFA-funded documentary wins a Telly

“Gospel Without Borders,” a documentary with a Christian viewpoint on the issue of immigration, has earned a Silver Telly award. Produced by EthicsDaily.com, the documentary owes its existence to its Arkansas connections, including the United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas (UMFA), which provided primary funding.

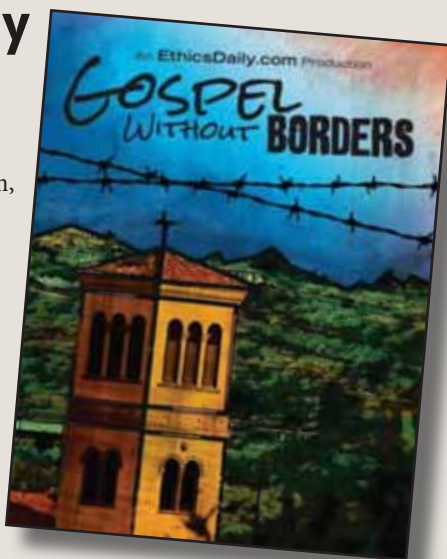
“We are pleased to see national recognition of this project and hope that it will lead to more people viewing the DVD,” said the Rev. Stephen Copley, director of Justice for Our Neighbors in Little Rock. “The theme of welcoming the stranger is strong throughout both the Old Testament and New Testament; those scriptures are the basis for a Christian understanding about immigration. We are happy to have a DVD that explains both this Christian viewpoint and immigration law.”

UMFA President Jim Argue Jr. said that when Copley first came to him for funding of an immigration DVD, he thought it was an excellent idea, but that it needed an expanded scope. Copley came back with an expanded project plan that ultimately resulted in “Gospel Without Borders.”

“Gospel Without Borders” focuses on faith and immigration, and highlights stories in five states: Arizona, Arkansas, North Carolina, Alabama and Iowa. It has been screened across the country and distributed in bulk by United Methodist and Catholic bishops. Long and short versions of the documentary are available on a single DVD through EthicsDaily.com.

The Telly Awards were founded in 1978 by David E. Carter to honor film and video products, web commercials and TV programs; there are about 11,000 entries each year. Only 10 percent of entries are awarded a Silver Telly, the organization’s highest honor. Judges are winners of previous Tellys.

UMFA is among the largest United Methodist Foundations in the country. Founded in 1963, it is responsible for more than 550 trust accounts that have combined assets in excess of \$104 million.



Faith Funds

Problem Solved

Pleasant Grove United Methodist Church in Jonesboro is home to generations of families who have nurtured its building and grounds with care, making significant renovations and keeping it alive with activities. With an average attendance of 73, the church is thriving and its youth group has started meeting again.

Rev. Nan Nelson, Senior Pastor at Pleasant Grove, was having problems with a local bank. The bank’s high fees were eating up a very large part of the annual income from a trust that was to be used to benefit the church. She contacted Jim Argue, President of the United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas, to ask for help.

“The Trustees and Finance Chair talked to Jim and told him we were having trouble moving our money from the bank,” she recalled. “Jim successfully moved the large bequest to the Foundation where the people of our church have full say in how it is used.”

Now the church has an official Endowment Committee and an additional permanent endowment fund at UMFA that already includes two smaller trusts. “We have a place to put money where it will grow and a path to follow on how to use it,” Rev. Nelson said. If you’d like to learn how UMFA can help your local church, contact Jim Argue at jargue@umfa.org or call him at the Foundation.



The United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas

5300 Evergreen Drive • Little Rock, Arkansas 72205

501-664-8632 • Toll free 877-712-1107 • Fax 501-664-6792 • www.umfa.org

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Different Settings

Three choose to stay outside Tampa hotels | 3B



'Game changer'

Social media turn GC into global experience | 4B



Class Meetings

Time to reclaim a Wesleyan tradition | 7B

May 4, 2012

Section B

THE UNITED METHODIST REPORTER

The independent source for news, features and commentary about the United Methodist Church



UNITED METHODIST NEWS SERVICE PHOTO BY KATHLEEN BARRY

Participants sing during the opening worship of the 2012 United Methodist General Conference held in Tampa, Fla.

GC 2012 gets underway with much at stake

BY SAM HODGES
Managing Editor

TAMPA, Fla.—United Methodists gathered here for General Conference 2012 found much to celebrate, including overall growth of the denomination, its increasingly global character and success in its fight against malaria in Africa.

But exultation alternated with anxiety as the nearly 1,000 delegates were confronted with stark data about the church's slide in the United States.

"At the current rate of decline . . . we have less than 50 years for the United Methodist Church in the United States," said the Rev. Adam Hamilton, a leader of the Call to Ac-

tion reform effort aimed at reversing declines.

The fate of specific proposals pushed by Mr. Hamilton and others—including consolidating general church agencies and ending guaranteed appointment—was far from certain at press time, as delegates met in 13 committees to begin working through more than 1,000 petitions.

There were deep divisions going in, particularly about agency restructuring. And early plenary sessions rubbed some delegates the wrong way, particularly the session in which the stage was largely given over to Mr. Hamilton and other backers of the Call to Action.

The Rev. Rebekah Miles, a Perkins School of Theology professor and

Arkansas Conference delegate, criticized planners of the General Conference for not allowing more time to debate and possibly amend the rules under which decision-making would proceed.

"The level of suspicion and distrust is higher," she said at the end of day two. "I agree with a lot of stuff they want to do, but it's going to be harder now."

'Hello church'

General Conference is the quadrennial gathering in which delegates—half of them laity, half clergy, and none bishops—decide key matters of church law, social policy and finances.

In Tampa, the 987 delegates, joined

by perhaps 2,000 others in a variety of roles, took over the Tampa Convention Center and a handful of downtown hotels.

This General Conference was not only notable for its long reform agenda, but also for nearly 40 percent of the delegates coming from Africa, Asia and Europe. Travel and translation costs for international delegates are the main reason this General Conference is projected to cost a record \$8.8 million—\$1.7 million more than the 2008 event in Fort Worth, Texas.

While decision-making dominates, General Conference never lacks for music and preaching.

"Hello church! We are here, and

■ See 'GC 2012' page 8B

Africa growth in evidence at GC 2012 site

BY SAM HODGES
Managing Editor

TAMPA, Fla.—As an African delegate at General Conference 2012, the Rev. "Guy" Mande Muyombo is a face in the crowd.

That's fine with him. He's pleased that delegates from his continent are more of a crowd than ever at the United Methodist Church's quadrennial gathering.

"For Africa to have more delegates to the General Conference is something we have to celebrate," said Mr. Muyombo, president of Kamina Methodist University in the Democratic Republic of Congo. "To me, it's a matter of celebration that we are indeed a global family and that the church has done well in terms of mission."

The United Methodist Church's growth in Africa, and shrinkage in the United States, has led to a power shift in delegates—one likely to affect how key legislation fares.

In the UMC, churches in Africa, Asia and Europe belong to "central conferences." At this General Conference, of the expected 987 delegates, 372 are from the central conferences.

■ See 'Africa' page 2B



"Guy" Mande Muyombo

FAITH WATCH

Prison Fellowship's Colson dies at 80

Charles W. Colson, the Watergate felon who became an evangelical icon, died April 21 after a brief illness. He was 80. Colson was best known for Prison Fellowship, a ministry to prison inmates and their families, which he founded in 1976 upon release from federal prison on Watergate-related charges. Today, Prison Fellowship has more than 14,000 volunteers working in more than 1,300 prisons across the country.

Catholic bishops seek end to Cuba embargo

Following Pope Benedict XVI's March 26-28 visit to Cuba, U.S. Catholic bishops are pushing the State Department to lift the 50-year Cuban embargo in order to improve religious liberty and human rights for the Cuban people. In an April 17 letter to Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, the chairman of the bishops' Committee on International Justice and Peace pressed the Obama administration to pursue "purposeful engagement" with Havana.

Young adults losing faith in record numbers

A growing tide of young Americans (ages 18-24) is drifting away from the religions of their childhood—and most of them are ending up in no religion at all. One in four young adults choose "unaffiliated" when asked about their religion, according to a new report from the Public Religion Research Institute and Georgetown University's Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs.

London mayor bans 'post-gay' bus ads

Boris Johnson, the mayor of London, axed an ad campaign spearheaded by two conservative Christian groups because their ads suggest homosexuality is a disease that can be cured through prayer. The groups, Core Issues Trust and Anglican Mainstream, planned to plaster double-decker buses with posters reading "Post-gay and proud. Get over it!"

—Compiled by Mary Jacobs

■ AFRICA Continued from page 1B

That's up 96 from four years ago.

And of those 372, Africa accounts for 282. That's 90 more delegates than Africa had in 2008.

The African Methodists were conspicuous at the Tampa Convention Center and nearby convention hotels, as they registered and attended legislation and orientation briefings.

Some dressed in colorful traditional garb. Others enlivened the event in different ways.

For example, during a break at one briefing, a group began to sing a cappella, drawing an admiring audience, as well as several smartphone photographers and videographers.

Many of the Africans are first-time delegates like Cissy Namukose of Uganda, who spent 17 hours on planes to get to Tampa. She had no trouble explaining why the United Methodist Church is growing in her country.

"We go out in the community, and help with different activities," the lay delegate said. "We identify a need, and then we go work in that community, and in that process people ask us [about Methodism]. They come to church."

'Return on investment'

Central to the story of growing African representation at General Conference is 20-year-old Africa University. That UMC school in Zimbabwe draws students from across the continent. And at least 20 Africa University alums are here as delegates, with others working as translators or in some other supporting capacity.

"It is exciting because Africa University was created to invest in Africa's future and create leaders," said Mr. Muyombo, himself an alumnus of Africa University. "This is a dream which has become a reality."

James Salley, associate vice chancellor for institutional advancement for Africa University, waved the school flag even more emphatically.

"Whether these graduates, the alumni of Africa University, sit on the floor of General Conference, or they are alternates, or whether they have

come as communicators or observer/monitors, they are all over the place," he said. "The church can see the return on its investment. I think it's great. I think it's wonderful!"

That the African delegates have more power than ever, due to their larger numbers, is a given. But will they maximize their strength through bloc voting?

"In Africa, we are united, and we will vote together," Ms. Namukose said.

Mr. Muyombo sized things up differently, saying that while Africans prefer dialogue that leads to consensus, he foresees delegates voting independently at this General Conference.

At a legislative briefing put on by the Connectional Table, a day before General Conference, Africans present (some delegates and some not) candidly shared concerns about proposals to restructure the general agencies of the UMC.

David Muwaya, a lay delegate from the East Africa Conference, said he has concerns about allocation of resources and representation of Africans if most of the general church governance is concentrated in a single board.

"There are many unanswered questions," he said. "We think that this General Conference is not the right conference to make the final decision."

African agenda

Many were watching to see if Africans would again vote overwhelmingly against liberalizing current positions on homosexuality.

Mr. Muyombo doesn't favor a change at present, and said that Africa's pressing problems have tended to keep gay rights off—or at least way down—the agenda.

"People are looking to the church to end poverty, to end malaria, to take on the issue of expanding education and to preach the gospel, so these are the priorities," he said.

Mr. Muyombo added that he understands homosexuality has divided the U.S. church, and he expects the issue will eventually become a large



UNITED METHODIST NEWS SERVICE PHOTO BY PAUL JEFFREY

"Guy" Mande Muyombo, a delegate from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, prays with other participants during the April 24 opening worship service at General Conference.

one in Africa as well.

Extra cost

The growing number of African and other international delegates has financial implications. This General Conference is projected to \$8.8 million, compared to \$7.1 million for the event for years ago in Fort Worth, Texas. Much of the differential owes to increased travel and translation costs that come with more international delegates, said the Rev. Alan Morrison, business manager of General Conference.

But the strong feeling among more U.S. delegates here is that the global feel of this General Conference is one of the more hopeful developments for the UMC.

"At our meeting for heads of delegations this morning, we had to wait for translators," said the Rev. Mike Slaughter, pastor of Ginghamburg Church in Ohio. "Twenty years from now, we're going to have to wait for English translators, if the church con-

tinues to grow the way it's growing. That's exciting to me."

Another who is grappling happily with the increased presence and influence of African delegates is Jay Brim, chair of the Connectional Table's legislative task force and a delegate from the Southwest Texas Conference.

He was on the panel for the Connectional Table briefing for international delegates. And he assured the Africans who raised questions that he was drafting amendments to address their concern about proportional representation for Africa on any single governing board for UM program agencies.

Mr. Brim said afterwards that the UMC must live up to its self-description as a worldwide church.

"It's just time for us to merge our interests and make it clear that we're either going to do this together—or we don't have the thing we think we have," he said.

shodges@umr.org

LETTERS

The real crisis is within

This is in response to Sarah Howell's essay "We Need 'Call to Holiness' More than Call to Action" (*Reporter*, April 13).

I completely concur with Ms. Howell's thoughts on the UMC's "dark night of the soul." I do believe, as Ms. Howell states, that when church members fear change, they fear "losing God," as if God could ever be lost when worship is sincere.

The crisis in the United Methodist Church is not from declining membership, as older members die out and younger folks aren't buying what we're selling. It's a true crisis from within, from power brokering by unkind

Christians who are absolutely certain that their way is the best way, while lost, unchurched and biblically-confused souls go elsewhere for entertainment and temporary relief.

Let's please not hoard our monies, but use them, trusting that if we are truly carrying out the Great Commission, we will thrive in God's world.

Daisy Harvill
Paris, Texas

The Reporter welcomes brief, civil letters, and reserves the right to edit for space and clarity. Send to news@umr.org or The United Methodist Reporter, 1221 Profit Drive, Dallas, TX, 75247.

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GC BRIEFS

Stats adding up in malaria fight

The UMC's anti-malaria efforts were showcased April 25 at General Conference, coinciding with World Malaria Day. The UMC's Imagine No Malaria campaign has distributed 846,000 mosquito nets, trained more than 5,000 community health workers and established 12 health boards to oversee malaria programs in Africa. More than \$20 million has been raised for the campaign. "Truly, we all have an important role in this fight against the killer disease, malaria," said Bishop John K. Yambasu, episcopal leader of the Sierra Leone Conference.

Bishop Swenson joins divestment backers

The United Methodist Kairos Response group held a press conference early during General Conference 2012, championing legislation that would have required divestment of UMC funds from three companies said to support the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. Bishop Mary Ann Swenson spoke, saying her latest trip to the Holy Land convinced her that conditions were worsening and divestment was called for. Other speakers included the Rev. Alex Awad, a Palestinian Christian, and Rabbi Brant Rosen, of Evanston, Ill. "You have friends in the Jewish community," Rabbi Rosen said.

T-shirt makes point about young clergy

Some young people at GC wore T-shirts that ask, "Where are all the young people?" One in such a shirt was Andy Millman, a student at Wesley Theological Seminary. He noted that a small percentage of UM clergy are under 30. "I think that's a tragedy," he said. The Rev. Mike Slaughter, pastor of Ginghamburg Church in Ohio, attended GC as a delegate and said his key issue is freeing up \$50 million to support training of young clergy. "We've got to go back to work at finding the young Adam Hamiltons," he said, referring to his fellow UM megachurch pastor.

—Compiled by Sam Hodges

Some at GC seek different digs in Tampa

BY SAM HODGES
Managing Editor

TAMPA, Fla.—They're sleeping in bunk beds, in a house without air-conditioning, in a hardscrabble part of the city.

Luke Wetzel and Brandon Lazarus wouldn't have it any other way.

Both are UM seminarians with a role at General Conference, and both chose not to stay at one of the posh downtown hotels near the Tampa Convention Center—as the vast majority of United Methodists here are doing.

Instead, they're at The Lake House, a nondenominational, evangelical "new monastic" community, keeping house and sharing meals with seven other young men.

"They're incredibly hospitable," said Mr. Wetzel. "They've said 'eat our food,' and they've fixed us food. There's a guy that's been driving Brandon and me to the Convention Center."

Mr. Wetzel is a third-year student at Duke Divinity School and a General Conference delegate from the Kansas East Conference.

He was a delegate four years ago in Fort Worth, and stayed in a hotel. Since then, he's become a student of intentional Christian communities, including those that are part of the Dorothy Day-founded Catholic Worker movement.

Mr. Wetzel and his wife plan to spend next year at a Christian community in Atlanta, and after that he'll seek appointment as an ordained elder.

For this General Conference, Mr. Wetzel decided he would bypass the hotel scene and stay downscale, with Christians living together. He called some Florida contacts and found The Lake House, where residents invited him to stay free.

Mr. Wetzel said he's not passing judgment on anyone else, but does feel that a General Conference where nearly everyone is staying in fancy hotels and eating at nice restaurants is not without consequences.

"I'm certain that setting affects us somehow as we deliberate about the things of God," he said. "I have some other misgivings. The convention and tourism industry drives the poor out of downtown areas."

Mr. Lazarus is a second year student at Perkins School of Theology. He lives at Bonhoeffer House in Dallas, part of a group of new monastic residences encouraged by Professor Elaine Heath at Perkins.

He used the Internet to find The Lake House.

"Like the Bonhoeffer House, their main outreach is to the homeless and impoverished in their community, so I wanted to see how they do it," Mr. Lazarus said.

Mr. Lazarus and Mr. Wetzel didn't know each other before—"We have about 25 Facebook friends in common," Mr. Wetzel said—but now are in bunks that are, as they laughingly acknowledge, inches away.

The first night, Mr. Lazarus was actually on the couch, as an attack of bedbugs had The Lake residents scrambling to bring in new mattresses.

But he's used to improvisation in living arrangements.

"They choose to live very ascetically, so they don't have air conditioning," Mr. Lazarus said of The Lake House residents. "But they open up the doors and there's been a nice breeze. So it's been very comfortable."

Mr. Lazarus, too, has concerns about the United Methodist occupation of the downtown hotels, and notes that \$1.7 million has been budgeted for delegates' food and housing.



UMR PHOTO BY SAM HODGES

Three General Conference attendees who opted not to stay in hotels near the Tampa Convention Center, left to right: Brandon Lazarus, the Rev. Lorenza Andrade Smith and Luke Wetzel.

"That money could be used in other ways," he said.

But while there's no mint on the pillow, and the covers aren't turned down just so, Mr. Lazarus feels he's having a richer, or at least less isolated, experience than many other United Methodists here.

"When I have prayers for Tampa now, it's prayers for the people we've been able to meet through the ministry of The Lake House," he said.

Both seminarians said they've appreciated eating and praying with their temporary housemates, and they've also been glad to answer their hosts' questions about John Wesley, founder of Methodism.

Mr. Lazarus is not reimbursed for his volunteer service at General Conference. Mr. Wetzel, as a delegate, gets a \$125-a-day allowance.

He said he plans to spend it in "an economy of grace," and already has taken The Lake House crew to dinner.

He is looking forward to doing the same for some visiting Duke Seminary students, and he will make a donation to The Lake House before he leaves.

Mr. Wetzel and Mr. Lazarus aren't the only ones seeking alternative accommodations at General Conference.

The Rev. Lorenza Andrade Smith is a UM clergywoman from San Antonio who lives on the streets in solidarity with and in mission to the homeless. She arrived by bus, and has been spending the nights outside.

On Sunday night, April 22, she'd found a congenial spot near the Convention Center, on which to sleep on her bedroll. But a security guard told her she would have to leave.

"Just asked to leave my bay-view sleeping spot outside the convention center," she posted on Facebook. "They said they're getting ready for some church conference."

shodges@umr.org

Bishop has 'sole authority,' UM top court says

BY LINDA BLOOM
United Methodist News Service

TAMPA, Fla.—United Methodist bishops have the "sole authority" to determine the time when an annual conference will meet, says the United Methodist Judicial Council.

That decision, on a case involving an interim bishop in the Philippines, came during the top court's April 22-23 spring meeting.

In 2011, Bishop Daniel Arichea, assigned as presiding bishop of the West Middle Philippines Annual Conference, established May 12-14 as the dates for the annual conference session. Before the conference, however, "a group of purported conference rep-

resentatives" adopted a resolution changing the dates to May 29-31 and requesting a different presiding bishop.

When the conference convened on May 12, 2011, Bishop Arichea ruled that the resolution violated the United Methodist *Book of Discipline*, the denomination's law book, and the Judicial Council agreed.

"Bishop Daniel Arichea was assigned to fulfill all episcopal duties in the Manila Episcopal Area and had the sole authority to convene and preside over the annual conference session," the ruling said.

"Any purported annual conference actions taken outside of said session are null, void and of no effect. The

bishop's decision of law is affirmed."

This was not the first time the court had been asked to rule about Bishop Arichea and annual conference dates.

Bishop Arichea, a retired bishop, was assigned to replace Bishop Lito C. Tangonan of the Manila Episcopal Area after Dr. Tangonan was relieved of his office by the United Methodist Council of Bishops last July.

Some members of the United Methodist Church in the Philippines have formed their own denomination, the Ang Iglesia Metodista sa Pilipinas. "The group finally declared its full autonomy and incorporated legally with Securities and Exchange Commission of the Philippines and was approved on December 7, 2011," according to

the church's blog.

On March 17, Dr. Tangonan was installed as the first bishop of the Ang Iglesia Metodista sa Pilipinas.

Dr. Tangonan filed a petition requesting a declaratory decision from the Judicial Council related to the "constitutionality, legality, meaning, application or effects" of the actions of the Council of Bishops and College of Bishops of the Philippines Central Committee. But an individual is "not authorized" to request such a decision, the council ruled.

Ruben T. Reyes, a Judicial Council member from the Philippines, has recused himself from all decisions related to the Philippines Central Conference.

Council of Bishops decides to limit meetings, shift roles

BY HEATHER HAHN
United Methodist News Service

TAMPA, Fla.—The United Methodist Council of Bishops voted overwhelmingly April 20 to reform its organization and reduce its meetings as a full council to once a year.

“I see this as a move toward building a community where we can support one another, encourage one another and talk to each other about what’s working and what’s not working,” Charlotte (N.C.) Area Bishop Larry M. Goodpaster, the council’s president, said in an interview.

Under the plan, the council’s spring meeting will be only for active bishops during the quadrennium of 2013-16. The full council, which includes retired bishops, will meet in the fall. Also, around two dozen committees and other groups that meet throughout the four-year period will be reduced to nine “leadership teams” of active and retired bishops.

The *Book of Discipline*, the denomination’s law book, mandates only that the Council of Bishops meet at least once a year. Under the *Book of Discipline*, retired bishops have a voice but no vote in council business.

The changes the council approved in a show of hands came just days before the start of the 2012 General Conference, the denomination’s top lawmaking body, and do not require any action by the legislative assembly.

The reorganization is in response to the Call to Action, which challenges the global denomination to redirect its attention and resources to increase the number of vital congregations and make more disciples for the transformation of the world.

“I think the opportunity for the active bishops to be together . . . will allow for some discussions in ‘real time,’” said Illinois Area Bishop Gregory V. Palmer, a leader throughout the Call to Action process and a former Council of Bishops president.

Role of retired bishops

At the spring meetings, he said, the active bishops will have a chance to focus on solving the similar problems that beset their areas. In the fall, he said, active bishops can gain from the body of knowledge of their retired predecessors.

Birmingham (Ala.) Area Bishop Will Willimon cheered the new model for council work. “The council is struggling to be more productive and to respond to the cry for more active and transformative leadership of the church,” he said. “This new structure



UMNS PHOTO BY MIKE DUBOSE

Bishop Rosemarie Wenner of Germany blesses the elements for Holy Communion during opening worship at the 2012 General Conference. During the conference, Bishop Wenner began a two-year term as president of the UMC’s Council of Bishops.

makes us more nimble, adaptive and puts the stress on bishops actually leading rather than simply having a congenial meeting.”

The council’s vote came after years of closed-session discussions by the bishops about the role of retired colleagues. In his April 18 address to the council, Bishop Goodpaster alluded to the anxieties these discussions have stirred. “Simply raising the question has caused divisions and created tensions,” he said in his sermon.

At the time of the bishops’ meeting, General Conference delegates were to face petitions seeking to limit the role of retired bishops and petitions that would seek to limit the tenure of active bishops.

“Those concerns are going to be raised and discussed regardless of what the bishops do,” Bishop Goodpaster said.

He said it would be a mistake to remove retired bishops entirely from the work of the council.

“The retired bishops bring a wealth of wisdom,” he said. “They bring history. They bring corporate memory. Those are pieces that can help us move into the future. So by limiting the role of retired bishops, in some ways you are taking away a resource we rely on.”

Lingering concern

The United Methodist Church now has 47 active bishops and 69 retired bishops in the United States. In the central conferences of Africa, Europe and the Philippines, the denomination

has 17 active and 23 retired bishops.

Richmond (Va.) Area Bishop Charlene Kammerer, who will retire this year, supported the council reforms but with some reservations.

“We’ve been struggling with this for so long—really several quadrennia—I hope we’ve made a wise decision, and I think it’s worth living into the new structure,” she said. “I remain concerned about unintentional separation of active and retired bishops, and I think it will be up to all of us to help this council stay together as one body.”

After the active bishops formally voted, retired Bishop Cliff Ives of Portland, Maine, asked the retired bishops to raise their hands if they affirmed the reforms. All retired bishops raised their hands.

Retired Bishop Donald A. Ott of Pewaukee, Wis., said he thinks the council is making “a helpful change that gets at the essentials of what we’re after without demeaning the contribution of retired bishops.”

“There are essential things that some retired bishops have that this council should not be without—prophetic voices, administrative skills, a willingness to fill in and take pressure off of active bishops,” he said.

Baguio (Philippines) Area Bishop Rodolfo Alfonso Juan, an active bishop, said he hopes the change will be acceptable to all.

“I believe this will be a new paradigm,” he said, “and hopefully we will accomplish more with this new setting.”

UM Twitter sub-culture leads to global feedback

BY MIKE BAUGHMAN
Special Contributor

TAMPA, Fla.—Even before opening worship at General Conference, a prophetic post went up on Twitter: “Twitter is about to be ridiculously overloaded with Methodists and their iPhones.”

So it was. And so General Conference 2012, whatever else happens, may be identified in UM history as the first where social media took hold in a big way, and proved influential.

“Technology is a game changer,” said the Rev. Larry Hollon, top executive of United Methodist Communications, which is livestreaming plenary sessions. “It allows us to bring the General Conference experience to many more people, as well as helping us to connect with each other and interpret what is happening on behalf of the church to the world.”

Bishop John Schol, of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, agreed.

“This is very much a different General Conference, from the standpoint of electronics and the resources we have,” he said. “If something is happening live, people are already engaging in conversation about it.”

Three days into General Conference, UMCOM said people in about 80 countries had livestreamed sessions, with viewing most common in the United States, followed by the Philippines, Germany and Denmark.

The first days also saw thousands of “tweets” and “retweets” offering instant reaction to sermons, music, addresses, committee decisions and more.

Samples include:

@gregmillinovich: “I move we disregard all the rules and go with a



UMR PHOTO BY SAM HODGES

William E. Brown, reserve delegate from the Texas Conference, took advantage of a break to jump online. Many at General Conference were connected via laptops, tablet computers, smartphones or some combination.

‘hunger games’ style conference.”

@umjeremy: “There’s not equity in this amendment when those that have more voices then get even more voices.”

@robrynders: “We are to increase membership, not out of fear, but because we want to make disciples. But don’t metrics induce fear in our pastors?”

@revmelissa: “If we do half of what Bishop Weaver called us to this morning, this will be a truly historic event.”

@RevAdamHamilton: “#gc2012 41% of delegates are from Central Conferences!”

That last message came from the Rev. Adam Hamilton, whose plenary plea for Call to Action reforms yielded lots of negative reaction from young clergy—on Twitter, of course.

The Rev. Sky McCracken, a district superintendent and alternate delegate from Kentucky, followed the critics and took to his blog to defend Mr. Hamilton and ask for more civility.

“I do not think God is pleased with our snide remarks,” he said.

But some of the social media humor was gentle, and even self-deprecating.

One pastor tweeted: “I can see @amylippoldt tweeting on her macbook during the Episcopal address. It’s our gen’s version of ‘call and response.’”

It wasn’t just younger people who were wired. Bishop Schol joined them, using a tablet computer.

“I was following opening worship and other activities online as well as being present,” he said. “I was monitoring and watching what people were saying all across the church and even around the world.”

Among the international participants was Dorte Randrup Bhutho, of Denmark.

“Following closely and also enjoying the stream from time to time,” she said in a Facebook message responding to a post by Bishop Christian Alsed, of Northern Europe and Eurasia. “Great to be (on) my own couch and still be there with you.”

Mr. Hollon, of UMCOM, said there are dangers in high-speed communications, as well as blessings.

“There is no filtering system for rumors and for inaccurate reports, and so a part of our role is to make sure that we provide quality information and accurate information to be able to represent the Church well,” he said.

The Rev. Baughman is an ordained UM elder and social media coach who is helping with Reporter coverage of General Conference.

Do we understand how the church works?

BY JOAN G. LA BARR
United Methodist News Service

Did you know the United Methodist Church opposes state lotteries and the death penalty?

If you did not, you're not alone.

A serious knowledge gap exists in what United Methodists know about the official positions their denomination takes and even how it's structured, say a number of church leaders. A recent survey by United Methodist Communications supports their concerns.

Nearly 1,000 delegates from around the world gathered for the General Conference in Tampa, Fla., to make decisions on behalf of the roughly 13-million-member denomination. These decisions will become part of the United Methodist *Book of Discipline* and *Book of Resolutions*.

The *Book of Discipline* is the denomination's law book, and the *Book of Resolutions* is the denomination's stance on moral, social, public policy and economic issues. The resolutions are considered instructive and persuasive, but not binding.

Those who vote at General Conference constitute less than 1 percent of the membership in the denomination, but decisions they make are significant and arguably critical to the future of the United Methodist Church. The question is how many of the other 99-plus percent will understand those decisions and their implications.

Books few read

It is a "big mistake for General Conference delegates to think that most people in the pews really care what the *Book of Discipline* and *Book of Resolutions* say," noted Richard Hearne, lay leader of the North Texas Conference and a member of the General Board of Church and Society.

Mr. Hearne said he believes the sheer volume of both books—in the neighborhood of 1,000 pages each—and the numerous changes that impede flow of the text and sometimes, good sense, are likely reasons why.

"I do know this—what we are doing is not working," he said. "Few people check the *Book of Discipline* and *Book of Resolutions* before taking action in their private lives. In fact, the books are more often used as weapons against the folks with whom we disagree."

Health care debate

The Rev. William B. Lawrence can attest to the disconnect.

He is a member of the United Methodist Judicial Council, which presides over the judicial administration of the denomination. He is also dean and professor of American church his-

tory at Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University.

Dr. Lawrence recently chose the United Methodist stand on health care for a Sunday school class at one of the Dallas area's largest UM churches. He distributed photocopies of the denomination's Social Principles statement on the subject, ¶162 (V) in the *Book of Discipline*, which describes health care as a basic human right and the belief that it is a governmental responsibility to provide all citizens with health care.

Many class members were shocked, he said, at the church's official position that health care is a human right and in a Q&A session asked why every congregation should not get to decide its stance for itself.

Similarly, when U.S. Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), then-Speaker of the House, thanked United Methodist leaders for their support of the 2010 Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, many United Methodists who disagreed with the law were outraged. They did not know that the General Board of Church and Society, for example, was carrying out the denomination's expressed position.

"While these statements are not laws or mandates, it is incumbent on the church to use official statements as teaching instruments," Dr. Lawrence said. "What is very clear is that a great many United Methodists, including those considered active, simply do not understand the nature of our church and how it is structured. Very few clergy find ways to teach the existence of the Social Principles, let alone what they say. . . . As I listen to sermons in various churches and hear laity and clergy talk about what happens in regard to the ministry of teaching, these issues are a pretty neglected area of church endeavor."

He noted that members in the pew, who might hear Rush Limbaugh as they drive home or turn on MSNBC and hear Rachel Maddow that evening, will know their opinions but not have a clue of what the United Methodist position might be.

"If pastors understood that it is not a question of whether you as an individual agree with a particular stance, but whether you are prepared to teach what the church teaches, even if your personal position is to critique the church's point of view, it would make a big difference," he said.

What a survey found

A recent United Methodist survey on U.S. immigration policy bears out the point that Dr. Lawrence and Mr. Hearne made. Survey participants were pastors and church leaders selected at random from a United

Methodist Communications database. When the 2,800 completed surveys were analyzed, findings included that most church leaders have little awareness of the church's positions on key social and economic issues.

A majority of pastors responding expected their opinions to align closely with those of the church. Leaders were more likely than pastors to indicate they did not know enough to say whether their opinions were in agreement with those of the denomination. Some 72 percent of pastors indicated United Methodist positions are at least somewhat important in guiding their decision-making, compared to 60 percent of the leaders.

When asked to select the most important issues facing the church, only about 4 percent of the pastors and leaders cited immigration as a primary issue, said survey developer Charles Niedringhaus, who heads the research team at United Methodist Communications. Seventy percent of respondents cited the economy, unemployment and the U.S. national debt as their top areas of concern.

The Rev. Robert J. Williams, the top executive of the United Methodist General Commission on Archives and



UMNS FILE PHOTO BY MAILE BRADFELD

While General Conference delegates may understand how the United Methodist Church works, many people in the pews do not. Shown: Delegates study a petition during the 2008 General Conference in Fort Worth, Texas.

History, said that issues surrounding immigration and language have a long history in the UMC, noting that in the early 20th century a number of conferences were formed based on languages, including German, Danish and Swedish, and that parts of the *Discipline* were translated into a number of different languages.

"I can pull old *Disciplines* off the shelf which have sections in six or eight different languages, so these issues aren't anything new in the life of the church," he said.

The Rev. La Barr is the former director of communications for the North Texas Conference.

Have you heard the news?



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Local congregations still hold key to the future

BY ANDREW C. THOMPSON
UMR Columnist

OK, let's think about next steps.

That's my best advice for what to do after all the hubbub around General Conference has passed. After the final vote has been taken. And after the last delegate has boarded his plane for home.

Next steps. Specifically, what those next steps are going to be, and where they're going to be taken.

The goings-on at the General Conference level have a great deal of relevance on one level in the church. But at another level—a local level—they don't matter nearly so much.

At the time I'm writing this column, I have no idea what the fate of the Call to Action plan is going to be. I don't know if the delegates in Tampa will accept it as is, alter it significantly, or reject it entirely. They could accept the idea of change while opting for one of the other options, like Plan B or the Methodist Federation



Andrew Thompson

for Social Action's alternative. Or, the delegates could simply go with the status quo.

And don't get me wrong. Yes, I do think what the church decides to do at the macro-level has real importance. We don't need our canon law hamstringing our ability to organize the church in the most efficient and effective way for ministry. Since the CTA plan is largely about administrative canon law, it would seem especially unfortunate if we allowed an outdated, overly bureaucratic structure to keep weighing us down.

So I do hope that by the time you read this the General Conference in Tampa will have made some changes toward helping the general church become a leaner and more mission-focused entity.

The 'visible church'

But with all that said, the next steps we need to be focused upon have little if anything to do with church bureaucracy at the highest levels.

We don't need to be looking up (at the General Conference) but rather around on a horizontal level (in our own communities).

The "visible church"—as we as-

sert in Article 13 of our Articles of Religion—is "a congregation of faithful men in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments duly administered according to Christ's ordinance" (§103).

It is a description of the church that is decidedly local in character.

It suggests that the church is not in its essence a global institution. Nor is it even a conference-level connection. It is a local expression of the body of Christ where the marks of

'... The next steps we need to be focused upon have little if anything to do with church bureaucracy at the highest levels.'

faithful ministry are seen.

Article 13 is an important doctrinal definition for the church to embrace. But it does not speak to the matter of discipleship formation, which has been a significant emphasis of the church's task in recent years. To see that emphasis, we need to look at our stated mission "to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transfor-

mation of the world" (§120). As a companion statement to that mission, the church affirms that "local churches provide the most significant arena through which disciple-making occurs."

Person-to-person

These two points taken together should show us exactly where our next steps need to be directed. The church exists in its most robust, most consequential form in local congrega-

any substantial way.

Evangelism and witness are Christian practices that faithful Christian men and women pursue in a local community. Worship happens in congregations. And redemptive love must always be given and received from one to another. That love comes first from Christ to the church, and it can then be shared person-to-person.

All this means that ministry is an inescapably intimate reality. As necessary as certain legislation might be from the "top down," it can only serve in a secondary capacity to the calling upon Christians in their local situations—where life happens, and where salvation is received.

So the future of the church is still largely what it has always been. We—the pastors and laity of the United Methodist Church—must repent, recommit ourselves, and so reinvigorate the life of the church in our day.

We should remember this fact whatever the outcome of the proceedings at the General Conference in Tampa.

The Rev. Thompson is an instructor in historical theology & Wesleyan studies at Memphis Theological Seminary. Reach him at www.andrewthompson.com.

With GC finished, can we focus on connection?

BY BEN GOSDEN
Special Contributor

Thoughts from a young pastor as General Conference 2012 comes to a close:

Grace and peace to everyone who has worked so hard to make General Conference 2012 happen. A special thanks to all of the leaders, delegates, bishops, agency representatives and lay people who gave up two weeks to serve our beloved United Methodist Church.

I'm a young pastor serving as an associate in a downtown church in the heart of Middle Georgia. I've only been in ministry for two years, and I graduated seminary in May 2011. So to say that I'm a little green is an understatement.

However, I am a student not only of ministry, but also the history and polity of the United Methodist Church. I'm not on my conference's delegation (who would ever elect someone with such little experience?); but I have followed the devel-



Ben Gosden

opments leading to General Conference and have prayed not only for my conference's delegation, but also for the delegations representing our global connection.

So for what it's worth—and with special humility, since I'm writing this before General Conference, not knowing the particulars of how things came out—I'd like to make a couple of requests of our connection in the aftermath of the Tampa gathering.

1. Can we let give political divides a rest?

I know General Conference is when caucus groups across the connection spend a lot of time, money and resources on whatever hot-button issues need to be championed. I can appreciate that. But change is on the horizon for the entire connection—all of us included—so can we please check the partisan and divisive language at the doors of the Tampa Convention Center? Scoring points and playing politics will do nothing but hurt the adaptive process we need to undertake as a 21st-century denomination.

2. Can we focus less on structure

and more on discipleship?

Once we settle (at least temporarily) the issue of structural change, can we please focus on our real problem—namely, discipleship? The thing is, we can't depend on General Conference to ultimately address the issue of discipleship. This will have to happen within every local church and station of ministry.

Disciples of Jesus Christ do not magically appear from legislative reform. They come through time and effort being spent together—held accountable in mutual love and formed by the practices of the Church and in the ways of Jesus Christ. This comes as the result of grassroots efforts being shifted toward the hard and often messy work of disciple formation. It's not top-down and we have to stop convincing ourselves that we can restructure ourselves to more naturally form disciples.

3. Can we learn to trust?

I've only been in full-time ministry for two years but I can tell you it doesn't take much time at all to learn that clergy do not trust one another.

Clergy can't trust bishops because bishops want power without accountability. Bishops and district superin-

tendents can't trust clergy because clergy want freedom and certain guaranteed rights without accountability. These are over-generalizations, but you get my point. Our whole system is built on the shaky sands of suspicion and lack of trust.

Change means that we're going to become something different whether we like it or not. So is it possible to find ways to break down walls of distrust in

'I've only been in full-time ministry for two years but I can tell you it doesn't take much time at all to learn that clergy do not trust one another.'

favor of working together—or, dare I say, learning to be *connectional*?

I have great hope in the United Methodist Church. I'm 29, and I've vowed to devote my life to serving the connection because God has called me to do so. And I still believe that a Wesleyan approach to the Christian life offers great hope in a modern America searching for a spiritual voice.

I work with young adults in my

local setting and I'm always astounded when they come and tell me, "I've been out of the church since I was a kid but there's something about this church and the Methodists that just brings me in."

At times, I'm tempted to shout back, "Are you crazy? Just wait until you get to know us better!"

I suppose my greatest hope is that we'll move to a place where we can

actually listen to more stories like this, and listen better to one another, without the noise of bickering drowning us out.

If God is the God of Cross and Resurrection, then I'm still convicted that our best days are always in front of us.

The Rev. Ben Gosden is associate pastor at Mulberry Street UMC in Macon, Ga.

In class meetings, we ask: 'How is it with your soul?'

BY KEVIN WATSON
Special Contributor

I am increasingly convinced that efforts to find renewal within the Wesleyan tradition are dependent on the denomination's ability to return to the place where transformation happened in the beginnings of the Wesleyan movement: the class meeting.

However, the class meeting has not only been largely abandoned, but the language for giving voice to the state of one's soul has also largely been lost in many Wesleyan communities. In my experience with United Methodism, for example, many people who are asked the question that was at the heart of the early Methodist class meeting, "How is it with your soul?" are simply unable to give an answer.

The class meeting was a group of around 7-12 people that met weekly in order to check in with one another about the state of their souls. Some people who participated in class meetings were Christians and others were seeking an encounter with God, but had not yet had one. The goal of joining the classes was essentially the same as that of early Methodism itself, to be transformed by the grace of God, to become an "altogether Christian."

The fact that the class meeting more closely resembles an archeological artifact of the early Wesleyan movement than a lived practice is a great loss. Particularly in America, the height of the influence of the class meeting largely corresponds to the explosive growth of the Methodist movement from the 1780s through 1850. While other factors also contributed to the growth of the Wesleyan movement, the importance of the class meeting is widely recognized.

When I have spoken on the importance and value of the class meeting, audiences typically grant the value of the class meeting. What they want to know is how one might actually go about reclaiming such a practice. Here is one approach that you could take to starting a class meeting from scratch



Kevin Watson

'The goal of joining the classes was . . . to become an "altogether Christian."'

in the context of a local church:

First, preach or teach on the early Methodist approach to communal Christian formation, particularly highlighting the role of the class meeting and the basic question, "How is it with your soul?"

Second, issue an invitation for people to experiment with being in a class meeting. Challenge folks who often join curriculum-driven studies to try this for eight weeks instead. Here I think it is wise to set a clear date when the meetings will end. That way, people don't feel like they are signing up for something that they will not be able to get out of if they find that it is just not something that they are comfortable with. Emphasize that the goal is to experience further transformation in our lives as people who are trying to become or grow as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Third, start meeting! The meeting should last no more than an hour and a half. The agenda for the meeting is straightforward. The organizer, or leader, should open the meeting with a prayer and then explain that the basic task of the meeting is for each

person to share how he or she is doing spiritually, at whatever level each individual is comfortable. The leader should then go first and answer the question, and then ask the next person.

It is OK, but not necessary, for members to respond to one another. And it is important for the leader to communicate that the goal is for people to grow in their relationship to God and one another, not to solve each other's problems.

My conviction is that when people risk joining together with others in a common desire to know and love God and neighbor more fully, the Holy Spirit will be present in recognizable ways. Wesleyan small groups have been one of the primary means of grace that God has used to change my life. I pray that members of the Wesleyan tradition will once again return to this tested practice.

Mr. Watson is assistant professor of historical theology and Wesley studies at Seattle Pacific University and is the author of *A Blueprint for Discipleship: Wesley's General Rules as a Guide for Christian Living* (Discipleship Resources). He blogs at <http://vitalpiety.com>.

REFLECTIONS

Recalling one of the 'firsts' who transformed our world

BY BISHOP WOODIE W. WHITE
UMR Columnist

April 15 is seared into the minds of American taxpayers. This deadline date for filing one's yearly tax return causes dread for millions of taxpayers, especially for those who wait until the deadline to fill out their returns. However, for all of us, simply seeing the date is a reminder of our national obligation.

The date, April 15, 1947, is also remembered by many of us, although the memory is fading fast. In fact, the media scarcely noted that date last month. Yet it forever changed and impacted the social fabric of American life.

Sixty-five years ago, on April 15, 1947, Jackie Robinson became the first black baseball player to walk onto a Major League playing field, as first baseman for the Brooklyn Dodgers. Today, of course, the team is the Los Angeles Dodgers.

The array of players, the nation and our "favorite pastime" have changed so much that Robinson's achievement is now largely forgotten. For most Americans, the only Major League baseball they have ever known is one with players of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, competing together in this still-popular national sport.

That's what time and change does.

I remember as a young associate pastor leading a discussion with the youth group in my first appointment after graduating from seminary. The topic that day was the response of students, other citizens and politicians to the effort of James Meredith to enroll and become the first black student at the University of Mississippi. A young person in our group said something to the effect of, "If white people do not want us in their schools, we should not force ourselves in places where we are not wanted." That, of course, was in 1963.

My immediate response was, "Well, what would baseball look like today if Jackie Robinson had taken that position?" To which the young lady responded, "Who is Jackie

Robinson?"

I learned more than one lesson that day. First, there's something called generational memory. I also learned that when change comes, the past can be too quickly forgotten.

Jackie Robinson and all he represented 65 years ago still loom large in my storehouse of memories. While at the time I did not entirely comprehend the historical significance, I was drawn into the street celebrations in my Harlem neighborhood. I saw tears roll down the cheeks of grown men, again not fully understanding. Such emotions were felt across the country.

Brooklyn Dodgers president and general manager Branch Rickey, a courageous white man (and a Methodist), had defied critics and warnings, signing an even more courageous black man, Robinson (also a Methodist), to play for the Dodgers. On that day, Robinson dared to take the ball field, amid some cheers but mostly boos and racial epithets. Even his teammates had signed a petition indicating they would not play with him.

There is often a high price to be paid for being the "first."

In fact, "Mr. Rickey," as he was affectionately called, had a three-hour conversation with Jackie Robinson as



Bishop Woodie White

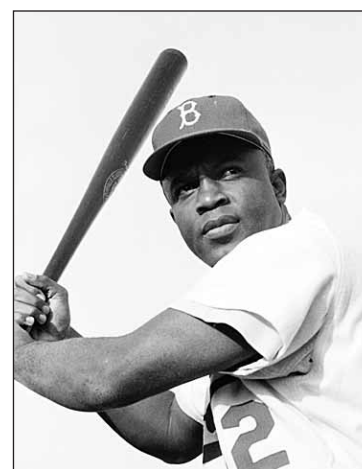


PHOTO COURTESY LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Jackie Robinson batting for the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1954.

he was considering putting him under contract. He knew that Robinson, as the first black player in an otherwise all-white national sport, would face the harsh racial abuse of fans and players alike. He would be entering a world marked "White Only." There were those who psychologically and emotionally simply

could not conceive that this "sacred space" could be so "violated." For Robinson, it would be a time of deep ugliness.

During their conversation Rickey reportedly asked Robinson if he thought he could withstand the racial epithets and taunts without fighting back. He reasoned that for Robinson to do so would be detrimental to him personally and to the larger goal of integrating Major League baseball. Robinson asked, "Are you looking for a Negro who is afraid to fight back?" Rickey responded that, no, he needed a Negro player "with guts enough not to fight back."

Indeed, being the first black Major League player proved to be a difficult road for Robinson. Being the "first" is not always easy. It has its unique challenges and opportunities. This is especially so when it comes to breaking down the barriers of race. Not only can the task be lonely, but one discovers the depth of the human capacity for cruelty.

Yet, what Robinson could never forget was the spirit, courage, vision and support of Branch Rickey—and he soon learned there were others as well, who did not share the racist reactions he encountered in ballparks and communities across America. It did not ease the pain, but it allowed Robinson to keep perspective. I'm sure he wished there were more kindly voices in the stands or more friendly faces in the community, and in time their numbers did increase.

Sixty-five years ago, our country began a journey that touched more than a national sport. It changed the very nature of American society. Every time there are those willing to be "first"—and those courageous and fair enough to provide the opportunity for a "first"—we move closer to our American ideal, one worth living and dying for. Regrettably, there may always be among us those who make it difficult for those "firsts."

Thanks, Mr. Rickey. Thanks, Mr. Robinson. And thanks to all those known and little-known "firsts" who have and continue to enrich our nation.

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

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God is good!" Marcia McFee, General Conference music and worship leader, told a packed crowd assembled for the first of nightly worship services.

On Wednesday morning, second day of the gathering, a rousing Episcopal Address by Bishop Peter Weaver, titled "The Resurrection Revolution," brought many delegates to their feet.

"It is not the decline in membership in some parts of our church that is most disturbing," Bishop Weaver, leader of the New England Conference, said. "Rather it is the decline in deep discipleship: discipleship that dares—no, delights in sharing Christ with others and living the radical Christ-like life that draws others to Jesus, so they too become followers, disciples, engaged with God in transforming the world."

But hours later, in the evening plenary, champions of the Call to Action reforms dwelled on the downward numbers in the U.S., including a 5.3 percent decline in membership over the last five years, and an 8.7 percent drop in worship attendance over that same interval.

Delegates heard as well that in the U.S. the average membership age is approaching 60, and only about 5 percent of clergy are under age 35.

While the church is growing rapidly in Africa—accounting for a much higher percentage of African delegates this time around—U.S. church members account for nearly all the appointments that operate general church agencies.

"Our financial base is shrinking," Moses Kumar, top executive of the General Council on Finance and Administration, told delegates.

He noted that his agency is recommending a \$603 million general church budget—a first-ever decrease over the previous quadrennium.

Mr. Hamilton, pastor of the

18,000-member United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kan., hammered on the downward trajectory of the denomination during his part of the presentation. He noted dramatic declines in baptisms and confirmations, and showed a video about a venerable UM church that closed last year after a long decline in a changing neighborhood.

"This could be our future as a denomination in the United States," he said. "But it doesn't have to be."

Mr. Hamilton pushed for a 10-year focus on boosting the number of vital congregations, allowing annual conferences more flexibility in organizing, consolidating most general church agencies under a single governing board led by an executive, and committing to recruiting and training 2,000 "next generation clergy."

There are other controversial reforms up for consideration: namely creating a "set aside" (non-residential) bishop to lead the Council of Bishops and help coordinate reform efforts; and ending guaranteed appointment for ordained elders.

But Mr. Hamilton acknowledged that consolidating the agencies—each of which currently has its own board and top executive—had caused the most pushback.

While taking care not to criticize agency workers, Mr. Hamilton said the current structure discourages cooperation and pits agencies against one another in a struggle for scarce dollars. And it doesn't, he went on, serve as well as it could to support local churches.

"Our current organizational structure is not sacred," he said. "John Wesley did not design it."

But opposition has been mounting for months to the main restructuring plans, with some complaining that a single, small governing board couldn't

reflect the diversity of the UMC, and others saying they feared a concentration of power. Two less sweeping plans have been put forward.

By Friday, April 27, one of those, dubbed "Plan B" by its proponents, had become the operative plan in the General Conference committee working through restructuring legislation. "Disappointed but open," Mr. Hamilton said in a twitter message just after the vote.

The plenary presentation by Mr. Hamilton was clearly aimed at shoring up support for strong reform, but some young clergy weighed in immediately and negatively through social media, arguing that it amounted to fear-mongering and seemed too much about preserving the UMC as an institution.

Meanwhile, the Rev. Sky McCracken, a district superintendent and alternate delegate from Kentucky, took to his blog to defend Mr. Hamilton and urge greater civility in social media commentary.

During a break in committee work, Mr. McCracken said the struggle to change entrenched structures and practices in the denomination was wearing on delegates already. "It's tense," he said.

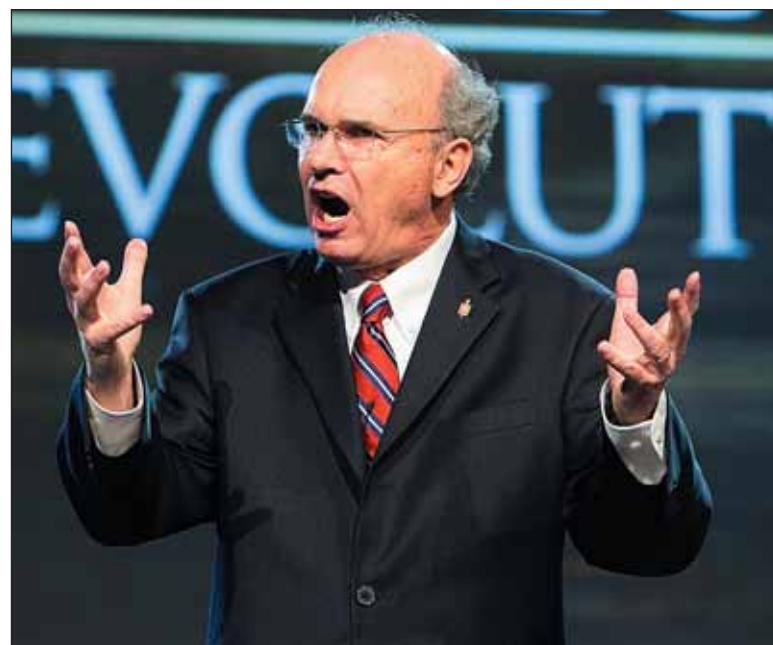
God's timing

Lots of other issues, some controversial, some not, surfaced early at General Conference.

Delegates heard Bishop Thomas Bickerton's report that United Methodists have raised more than \$20 million for the fight against malaria, and have been a major part of helping to thwart that disease.

"We've cut the death rate in half in the last four years," he said. "If we stay focused, we can get the job done."

The first week of General Conference saw gay rights advocates out in



UNITED METHODIST NEWS SERVICE PHOTO BY MIKE DUBOSE

Bishop Peter Weaver of the New England Conference brought General Conference delegates to their feet with the Episcopal Address titled "The Resurrection Revolution."

force, wearing rainbow colored attire, passing out materials, and holding events aimed at generating support among delegates for changing the church's official position that the practice of homosexuality goes against Christian teaching.

Growing support in the U.S. for gay rights, including same-sex marriage, would seem to bode well for that movement. But the church's position has held for 40 years, and some say increased African representation at General Conference makes change unlikely, given conservative social attitudes on that continent.

"I'm supportive of a totally inclusive church," said the Rev. Kent Mil-

lard, retired pastor of St. Luke's UMC in Indianapolis, at a gay rights' event early in General Conference. "And I surrender to God for the timing of when it happens."

One obvious development at this gathering was the prevalence of smartphones, tablet computers and laptops.

Even bishops were blogging, and they too reflected the highs and lows.

"General Conference is a roller-coaster ride," wrote Bishop Mike Lowry, of the Central Texas Conference. "Yet in it all is the presence of God."

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Many at General Conference used clothes to make a statement, from "Cross and Flame" dresses to yellow shirts bearing signs that support divestment of UMC funds in companies said to support the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. Andy Millman, a second-year student at Wesley Theological Seminary, wore a T-shirt that expressed his concern about the scarcity of young UMC clergy. "I think that's a tragedy," he said.

UMR PHOTO BY SAM HODGES