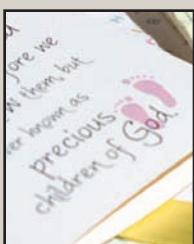


SPECIAL ISSUE



Churches cope with grief after fires

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Missing that little Cokesbury store

7A

When Christmas is blue Church services comfort the grieving

While helping “muck out” a home in Iowa damaged by flooding, the Rev. Paul Frederiksen carried out every single Christmas item that the family had cherished for years: decorations, lights, ornaments—all destroyed.

Christmas will never be the same for that family, Frederiksen says, and it’s for people like that—people who are grieving during the holiday season—that he always leads a “Service of Long Shadows” around Dec. 21 at the church he pastors, First United Methodist Church of Tipton, Iowa.

“It validates their feelings in the midst of a culture that’s hurtling through the holidays, singing joyous carols and smiling and laughing,” he said.

Frederiksen’s church is one of many that are now more carefully paying attention to the needs of people who may be feeling sad at Christmastime. These United Methodist churches are offering “Blue Christmas” or “Longest Night” services, usually around Dec. 21, the shortest day of the year. The services offer a subdued alternative for people coping with the death of a family member, the loss of a job, divorce or separation or some other life crisis.

“Not everyone is up and cheery for the Christmas holidays,” according to a General Board of Discipleship web page devoted to the topic. “Increasing numbers of churches are creating sacred space for people living through dark times.”

The services typically have a quiet feel and include Scripture, meditations or sermons focusing on the comfort God offers during dark times. Worship leaders select slow or meditative hymns, such as “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,” “Stay with Us” or “In the Bleak Midwinter.” Many services invite worshippers to light candles in remembrance of loved ones lost. Some conclude with a period of personal prayer—individually or with a pastor—or with a reception of light refreshments.

At the annual “Longest Night” services at First United Methodist Church in Birmingham, Mich., a few church members share personal stories of loss—a death, a job loss, a health problem—and how they were able to see God’s hand even during those difficult times.

“I know that many people who attended this service found it to be very healing and comforting,” said Jacquie Patt, the church’s director of congregational care.

“It provides a time of peaceful reflection,” said member Elise Norwood. For those feeling blue during the holiday season, she adds, “the best way to get through that is to honor those feelings that we do have. That helps us to move on.”

In 1996, the first year that the Rev. Meredith McMillan served as a minister, her father died on Dec. 2. When Christmas rolled around, her spirit was far from festive. She remembers that every year as she leads

[See BLUE CHRISTMAS, page 8A]

BY MARY JACOBS
The United Methodist Reporter

Grief center geared toward helping children heal

BY JANE DENNIS
Special Contributor

Dealing with grief and the death of a loved one is difficult enough for adults. Children have their own set of coping mechanisms: acting out, aggressiveness, trouble

sleeping, eating or concentrating in school. Grieving children often become withdrawn, angry and show signs of depression and anxiety.

Kaleidoscope Grief Center, a Little Rock-based counseling center, exists to help children, youth and families cope with feelings of grief

and bereavement. Kaleidoscope Grief Center is a program of Methodist Family Health, the nonprofit organization established more than 110 years ago by Methodists of Arkansas. The orphanage services of the early 1900s have been transformed into a

comprehensive network of psychiatric and behavioral healthcare programs serving children and families throughout Arkansas.

Many Kaleidoscope Grief Center services are free, including [See GRIEF CENTER, page 5A]

Aspects of grief, and the church's response

BY EDWARD PRUETT
Special Contributor

There is an old saying that "Time heals all wounds." Like many old sayings that are handed down from generation to generation, this one is partly true. However, it isn't simply passing time that heals the wounds of grief, but rather how one spends that time dealing with their grief.

Another saying is that everyone's grief is different. This saying becomes more correct all the time. We experience grief differently for many reasons.

I have been a health care chaplain for almost 30 years. In the course of my work, I have encountered people in the hospital who are dealing with a grief that started decades ago. For a variety of reasons, they have chosen to not completely deal with it, nor have they sought professional help.

Factors affecting grief

Many different elements in the death of someone we care about ultimately affect and inform our grief process. Some are minor, some major. The ones I mention below are in no particular order, but are those I have experienced as having the greatest effect.

The type of relationship we have to the person who has died has a great affect upon us. Was it a close relative—a spouse, parent or child—or was it that great-aunt that we only saw once every year or so at some family gathering? If it was a close relationship, was it a nurturing one or one full of tensions or fights? Often, such a relationship produces issues of resentment and guilt which tend to complicate our grief.

Years ago I encountered a woman whose husband had just died at my hospital. When I went to express condolences, she let me know right away that she had no remorse, as he had been a mean and cruel man and she was relieved to be out from under his thumb. Every person, every situation, is different.

What is the age of the person who has died? Many people experience a more intense grief at the death of a young person than at the death of a 99-year-old person.

And what is the age of the person experiencing the grief? The older we are, the more we have experienced issues of loss, disappointment and other events of life, and we have learned more about our deep feelings and how to process them in the context of life.



Edward Pruett

Broadly speaking, the ways we have learned to deal or cope with life in general often indicate the way we will deal with the death of a loved one. Someone who tends to openly and honestly face the things that come their way probably faces the death or dying of a loved one in a similar manner. Someone who tends to stick their head under a pillow and hope that the world's issues will pass them by will likely have a different experience of the grief process.

How the person died also affects our grief. Those who experience a sudden and unexpected death of a loved one deal with shock, and everything that goes with such loss all at once. Those dealing with a terminal disease have the opportunity to begin their anticipatory grief work in a more intentional way, perhaps even with the participation of the person who is dying.

Some deaths cause more struggle in grief because of the manner of death. A person whose loved one died from an act of violence or from a disease that carries a stigma with it may deal with added issues. They may have to deal with feelings of violation, or concerns about how people view their loved one's life and death.

How we understand life, its meaning and purpose affects how we respond to the death of a loved one. In other words, our theology

affects how we put the death in perspective.

Is God primarily a god of judgment, or is God primarily a god of grace for us? Does one's loved one go immediately to heaven, or does the soul wait until some time in the future? Does God's will determine all things that happen, or do things happen because that is simply the way life is, and God responds? There are a host of things that different people understand differently about God and God's role in life. All of these understandings affect the way we grieve.

As I said earlier, many factors affect grief and I have only mentioned a few of them. The last one that I will mention: **The church's ministry to grieving people** can help the healing process day-to-day, in concrete ways. People who have what I call a "safe place" to share their feelings and receive support face the issue of death and dying in healthier ways, and also process their grief in much healthier ways. A person or group within the faith community can provide that place.

Acts of ministry

A "safe place" is a person with whom the grieving person can talk about everything that they are feeling, with no fear of being judged or corrected, or told not to say certain words, or told to get over it already. It is that place where one can share their stories as many times as they need to as part of processing their feelings. In a safe place, they know that the person hearing them cares for them.

The safe place is where a grieving person can simply bare their soul and know that they are cared for completely, and that what is said will not be repeated. It is usually not a place where one goes for answers as much as it is for the person to be able to vent and to know that someone is listening.

Often, we make the mistake of thinking that we have to say something to help a grieving person. Actually, active listening provides

the support and expresses the level of care and nurture that most people need in uncomplicated grief. When we take the covered dish to the grieving family's house, it is not as much about feeding their bodies as it is about nurturing and feeding their souls by showing we care about what they are experiencing every day in their life's new dynamics.

Usually it is after the person has the ability to express their deepest feelings that we are able to use more words of faith. We can offer hope, assurance and grace found in our Christian faith in the most meaningful way at a point when they are able to really hear and process what we are saying.

It is important to remember that even within the Christian faith, even the same denomination, the same church or on the same pew, we do not all view our faith in the same way. When we do offer our words, we need to respect how the grieving person expresses their faith in God and God's actions.

Following a death, everybody arrives. Relatives and friends gather at the house. Some travel a long distance and stay many days following the funeral. Many others write or call to express their sympathy for the grieving family. However, after about two weeks, all the family and friends have gone back home and everyone resumes their regular routine of life. Letters and phone calls get fewer and fewer; the surviving family may feel as though others have forgotten or don't understand that their lives have changed forever.

After a death, some families have a hard time going back to church. They know that they will sit in the same pew and be reminded

that their loved one is not there... that he or she is dead and they are left alone. Also, a surviving spouse feels left out of the things that they used to do as a couple. Sometimes they are left out as people are not sure how to include them in traditional couples' activities.

Making an intentional effort to stay connected with the grieving person lets them know they are cared for as they continue to grieve. Showing understanding when they don't feel ready to return to worship makes a difference. Inviting them to share in activities or meals can help maintain a caring connection.

Personal connections are key, but a church can offer more general support, too, such as the option for counseling with the pastor—and, if it is complicated grief, the church can help connect the person with a professional counselor. The church can also make its building available to those in the community who offer either short-term or ongoing grief support groups.

These acts of ministry to persons dealing with grief can apply to church members as well as to any grieving person in the community. Especially with those who do not have a support system, the church has the opportunity to show that it cares for grieving people by offering the love of Christ.

The Rev. Pruett is a health care chaplain endorsed by the United Methodist Endorsing Agency of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, and a Board Certified Chaplain with the Association of Professional Chaplains. He serves as chaplain at the St. Bernard's Flo and Phil Jones Hospice House in Jonesboro.



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Issue Date	Submission Deadline
Dec. 7	Nov. 16
Jan. 4	Dec. 14
Feb. 1	Jan. 17

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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).

After the fire: a congregation grieves

BY DEBBYE HARRISON
Special Contributor

Shock!
“The church is on fire!”
Disbelief.
“It’s a total loss.”
Grief.

On May 30, 2012, lightning from a fast-moving thunderstorm struck the building that housed Hickory Plains UMC. By the time the fire was discovered, it was too late. Walls of flame consumed the 1932 structure and devoured the 1860s lumber that had been re-used in the present building. Church members and community friends watched as the fire rolled unabated.

There were tears, prayers and condolences that buoyed the congregation for the first few weeks. Later we developed a stoic sense of carrying on in spite of the loss. But in time, a shroud of grief planted itself over the church family. Many times we were reminded, “The church is not the building; it’s the people within.” But like an orphaned child numbed from fear, the group felt shrouded by the feeling of abandonment.

For weeks, it was paralyzing. No one seemed to have the energy to move forward. It felt like betrayal to start talking about a new building and

joking about the mistakes we could correct, like not having an outside electrical outlet or needing a kitchen large enough for at least four to work.

Even though material losses can be recouped, the mental and emotional toll is scarring. While the building may not be the church, it nonetheless provides a storehouse for memories, and a link from past generations to present day.

Rebuild? Of course. Soon we will have a shiny new building with spacious rooms and ample outlets. In time we will make friends with

the new church, and then one day someone will mention “the church” and our first thoughts won’t be of the old brown brick building, but instead of the “phoenix” that will be raised from the ashes.

The Rev. Harrison serves as pastor of Hickory Plains UMC, just outside of Carlisle. The church looks forward to a special Thanksgiving service that will include recognizing contributors to the new building fund. They hope to have new building plans approved in December.



Hickory Plains UMC member Jewel Ashmore has made beauty out of destruction: She gathered up fragments of the building’s stained glass windows and began fashioning jewelry out of the pieces. Proceeds will go toward the construction of the church’s new building. For additional information, visit Facebook.com/HickoryPlainsUMC.

COURTESY PHOTO

Church remembers saints, old building— and looks to future

The congregation of Living Waters at Centerton UMC gathered the evening of Monday, Nov. 5 at the burned-out shell of its old church building for a special All Saints’ Day celebration.

In addition to reading the names of those who have died in the last year and releasing lighted lanterns to symbolize their eternal life in Christ, church members said their farewells to the building. The Rev. Blake Lasater, the church’s pastor, invited attendees “to say goodbye to an old church building that has witnessed many a baptism, death, and wedding... it has borne witness to a river of tears, both of joy and grief... it has held together, in bonds of love, generations of faith communities.”

Built in 1922 to replace a building torn apart by high winds, the 90-year-old structure was lost to arson in September of last year, and demolition was completed in the days following the Nov. 5 service. Living Waters at Centerton expects its new building, which will be constructed on the same site, to be ready for occupancy by April 2013.



J.J. Kramer, left, and Gracie Lasater prepare to release a lantern at a special Nov. 5 worship service. Members of Living Waters at Centerton UMC sent floating lanterns skyward in an All Saints’ remembrance of loved ones, and as a way of saying goodbye to their old building. Their new facility will be built on the same site.

PHOTO BY DANA HOPE



EDITOR'S CORNER

BY AMY FORBUS

Light in the darkness

Death. Catastrophe. Illness. Divorce. Unemployment.

Most of us have dealt with these unwelcome changes in one form or another. Whether you’re directly involved or walking alongside a friend during hard times, by just living your life, you’re bound to witness and become intimately familiar with grief.

The five stages of grief—denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance, as popularized by psychiatrist and author Elizabeth Kübler-Ross—don’t happen in a particular order or last for a prescribed length of time. They’re part of a journey we don’t choose to

take, yet must travel. A wise friend has reminded me, “There’s no way beyond the grief except through it.”

As people of faith, we can know that we are not alone on that journey. We have Christ with us. And he sends us each other—“God with skin on”—as assurance of that promise.

As Christians, we believe the prophet Isaiah speaks of Christ when he refers to “a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity”; or, as the King James Version more poetically puts it, “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” Either way, our Savior knows our pain, and doesn’t shy away from it. In fact, he has the power to use each of us as a

balm for that pain, even when we may want to run in the other direction.

In this special issue of the *Arkansas United Methodist*, you’ll read stories of grief, as well as stories of comfort, healing and hope. Often, they are one and the same story. Life can be that way.

Some readers may want to skip this special issue entirely. Too sad a topic so close to the holidays; too depressing. But the Christmas story doesn’t deny the darkness in our world. Instead, it shows us that the Light of the World came to overcome the darkness. May that light break through within all of us.

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



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

Grieving parents ease the burden for others, one stitch at a time



Tara Dedmon Finney, center, shows photos of her son, Aidan, to members of Holy Sews. Finney works with Holy Sews as a way to honor Aidan's memory. PHOTOS BY KEVIN BINZ

BY AMY FORBUS
Editor

In April of 2007, a Maumelle woman gave birth to her second child, Ryan. But there were no expressions of joy that day. Ryan had died at 17 weeks gestation.

In October of that same year, on what would have been Ryan's due date, a group of women from Shiloh UMC Berryville gathered. As a way of helping Ryan's mother begin to make a difference through her grief, these women from her home church began helping her sew small burial gowns for children like Ryan, who had been too small for even premie-sized clothing.

"The hospital had nothing to fit him when they gave him to us to say goodbye," said Regina Binz, Ryan's mother. "I decided to do something to change that. A layette provides comfort to the families of these angels. It shows them that other people have been where they are, and that someone understands what they're going through."

The work done that day took root and eventually

blossomed into the Holy Sews ministry, an interfaith outreach based at Our Lady of the Holy Souls Catholic Church in Little Rock. Holy Sews provides tiny layettes for stillborn babies through connections with some 30 hospitals across Arkansas. It also supplies them to chapters in several other states and Canada.

"Holy Sews has allowed me to have an outlet in my grief," said Tara Dedmon Finney, one of the ministry's volunteers and a member of Cabot UMC. "I have found a security net in the people who understand our loss."

"Perinatal death is so taboo, [so] it has been a tremendous blessing to find safety in numbers," she said. "Perhaps the greatest service has been witnessing the love and passion that we put into these layettes, knowing that another family is going to need it. They will have lasting memories of their child."

Holy Sews holds an annual Interfaith Service of Remembrance, open to anyone who has experienced the death of an infant. For information on this year's service, see page 8A. To learn more about the ministry, including how to help, visit www.holysews.org.



Holy Sews supplies hundreds of layettes like this one, at no charge, to hospitals statewide. Each blanket, tunic and hat is handmade. Sets also include a tiny teddy bear and a memorial card.



Dozens of finished Holy Sews pieces await packaging into color-coordinated layette sets.



LEFT: People of all ages can participate in Holy Sews' work, and the ability to sew is not required. Helpers are needed to cut and pin fabric, as well as package complete layette sets. Here, Regina Binz helps her daughter Torrie sew a piece of lace trim onto a blanket. RIGHT: Members of the Holy Sews work team join in prayer as a priest blesses layettes bound for hospitals.



Grief center (continued from page 1A)

Kids Club social events for children 5-18, peer support bereavement groups that meet twice monthly, and the annual Camp Healing Hearts, an overnight grief camp for families. Reasonable fees are assessed for individual traditional counseling services.

Holistic approach

Acknowledging and expressing feelings is a major part of the grief process. Using play, arts and crafts and other creative forms of engagement, Kaleidoscope provides a framework for helping children verbalize feelings and emotions of grief and loss and embrace fond memories of their loved ones for the future.

Camp Healing Hearts is Arkansas' only grief support camp for children and their families. Held each summer, campers take part in therapeutic and recreational activities designed to help grieving families reflect on their experiences, reconnect with each other and rediscover hope for the future. In addition to swimming, fishing, arts and crafts and a host of traditional summer camp activities, a moving candlelight memorial service is a highlight.

Kaleidoscope requires that a family member accompany any child receiving services. The center offers age-appropriate grief support groups for children, youth and adults. The adults, who often believe they have already dealt with their grief and

bereavement issues, soon see the benefit of the family approach.

"We hear a lot of comments from the adults that they came to group for their children but ended up getting just as much help and support for themselves," says Kaleidoscope therapist Janet Breen. "It helps to have a safe and nonjudgmental place to voice their grief for themselves, and for their children to develop new friendships with children who understand their grief journey."

One parent wrote a note of thanks to Breen and said it had been a blessing for her son "to be with other children that have experienced loss." And the grief sessions made a tremendous difference in her life, as well. "Once again, it helps to know that others understand your pain," she wrote.

Providing support

Volunteers are needed to support Kaleidoscope Grief Center in the capacity of peer support bereavement group facilitators and assistants, hospitality workers for "group night" and quarterly Kids Club events, and even as office assistants. A training session for those interested in volunteering will be held Jan. 3 from 5 to 8 p.m. at Methodist Family Health, 1600 Aldersgate Road. Completion of a volunteer application is required, and training is mandatory.

Joining in the fun of the benefit Kaleidoscope Kids Auction is

another way to support Kaleidoscope Grief Center. The 14th annual auction was held in October and drew a crowd of more than 200 for a western-themed gala under the stars, complete with country supper, live music and silent and live auctions. To help with this festive fund-raiser next year, contact Jamie Griffith in the Methodist Family Health Foundation office, 501-661-0720 ext. 7304 or jgriffith@methodistfamily.org.

Kaleidoscope Grief Center is also a beneficiary of the special Christmas offering taken in many Arkansas United Methodist churches in December. The Arkansas Conference allows Methodist Family Health, which does not receive apportioned funding, to request support from local churches, and this year's special offerings are suggested for Dec. 9 and 16.

To learn more about Kaleidoscope Grief Center, call 501-661-0720 ext. 7170 or visit www.methodistfamily.org.

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

BELOW: Campers attending Camp Healing Hearts have fun with team-building games that teach trust and strengthen a sense of community.

COURTESY PHOTOS



Camp Healing Hearts, a program of Kaleidoscope Grief Center, includes canine visitors who help out by offering pet therapy.



A special candlelight memorial service is a highlight of Camp Healing Hearts.

Connecting with Kaleidoscope

To receive services: Kaleidoscope Grief Center is part of Methodist Family Health's Little Rock Counseling Clinic, located at 1600 Aldersgate Road. Children and families become involved by calling the Kaleidoscope office at 501-661-0720 ext. 7170 and scheduling a one-hour intake to assess grief history and to learn more about the Center's services. Services are provided for children ages 5-18 and their families.

To help others: Those who wish to volunteer with the program also should call the number above. Volunteers must be trained before participating; the next training session is scheduled for Thursday, Jan. 3 from 5 to 8 p.m.

To learn more, visit www.methodistfamily.org.



Growing through job loss and grief

BY DAVID DEERE
Special Contributor

Jim had worked at his job for 20 years when he was called into the manager's office and told that the company was downsizing and this would be his last day on the job. Jim had no idea this might happen, and was unprepared. At first, he was shocked. Then he became angry and later withdrew from church and the community. He wondered how his family would survive.

Pastors spend a lot of time supporting and counseling persons who have experienced loss and grief from death and divorce. However, there are many other losses we experience throughout life that can lead to grief. One of the most common is becoming unemployed.

We often try to be supportive in job searches, but may not see the importance of addressing the grief that a person may experience as a result of losing a job. While assisting persons in finding jobs is very important, pastors and churches are uniquely positioned to provide social, emotional and spiritual support, too.

Pervasive loss

When we suffer a major loss, we not only experience the central loss, but also have multiple related losses. Loss of a job often results in that person losing relationships with co-workers. People tend to lose their routine of getting up and going to

work every day.

Sometimes, financial losses result in workers losing their homes and possibly having to relocate. Some people lose their self-identity and ability to make a contribution to society. All of these losses together can even result in losing one's confidence of one's place in the world and one's relationship with God.

The grief that results from unemployment and related losses can bring with it a range of emotions. We often associate sadness and depression with grief, but many other feelings can be a part of the mix. Fear, anger, loneliness and self-pity are often present. People who are unemployed may feel embarrassment about the situation and may think they are a failure, even though their unemployment may be unrelated to performance.

In some situations, these thoughts and feelings lead the person who is unemployed to withdraw from others, including family members. Such withdrawal can cause additional stress on an already stressed family.

Ways to help

How can churches help Jim and

the millions of other people unemployed today? One of the best ways is to listen. When things are not going well, we usually don't want to hear about what we should do. We want someone who can hear our story and validate our feelings.

Questions can be a good way to invite a person to talk. Asking, "Have you felt (sad, angry, relieved, lonely, etc.) since you lost your job?" can send a message that you care about how the person really feels.

Another way churches can help is by connecting persons who are unemployed with others who have shared that experience. This can be done through organizing or hosting a support group or by connecting persons individually.

For example, a pastor might ask a parishioner who recently dealt with unemployment to make a contact with someone newly unemployed and talk about their experience. This not only gives the newly unemployed person someone with whom to talk, but it also can speak a word of hope of surviving the loss.

Some churches have organized job search groups, providing tips on practical skills such as writing resumes and preparing for interviews. These groups may be

more comfortable for people who are reluctant to sit in a room and talk about what it is like to be out of work, yet still provide a setting in which the participants can support one another.

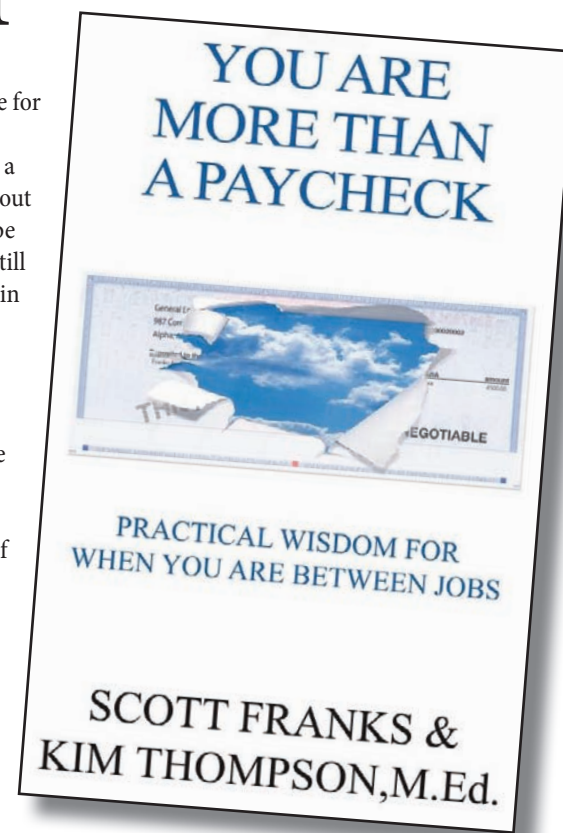
Many people report that they started to move beyond their grief when they were able to do something for others. Churches can be on the lookout for ways that persons who are unemployed

can serve. Giving that person a leadership role can also help to restore some of the confidence and dignity that she or he may have lost.

When people go through trying times, they often rethink their values, their world view, and their faith and are open to growth. Having a fellow traveler on that journey can help us reach the desired destination.



David Deere



The book *You Are More Than a Paycheck* was one resource used by the unemployment support group begun by Trinity UMC Little Rock.

The Rev. Deere is a retired elder in the Arkansas Conference. He helped recently to facilitate an unemployment support group offered by Trinity UMC Little Rock.

All Cokesbury store locations to close

The United Methodist Publishing House on Nov. 5 announced that all 57 of its Cokesbury bookstores will soon close their doors.

"There is a sense of loss," the Rev. Donna Hankins-Hull told United Methodist News Service. The associate pastor of children and family ministries at First UMC Little Rock said she will miss the helpfulness of the store's staff in making appropriate selections for her ministry needs.

"I'm going to have to set aside a lot more time for planning," she added, "because I'm not always going to get it right."

However, she also observed that the Arkansas store's downtown location, distant from any shopping center, and its limited weekday hours made it difficult to reach for many potential customers.

Cokesbury, the retail arm of the United Methodist Publishing House, will continue doing business at www.cokesbury.com and through its call center (1-800-672-1989). Call center hours will expand to 24 hours a day, six days a week by early 2013. But by April 30, the brick-and-mortar stores will be a thing of the past.

"I have the highest admiration for the staff teams at the stores whose dedication and skills amaze and

delight so many customers," said Neil Alexander, United Methodist Publishing House president and publisher. "Having the stores close and the staff leave is wrenching and deeply disappointing. But as painful as it is, it is also financially and practically necessary."

In addition to more comprehensive online and call center services, Cokesbury plans to expand its presence at church events, such as annual conference sessions and vacation Bible school showcases. The retailer expects to deploy more than 40 sales representatives to work directly with customers.

The United Methodist Publishing House board's decision to close Cokesbury stores will affect about 285 full-time and part-time employees. According to a news release, Cokesbury will provide severance packages and job search services to assist store personnel in the transition following store closures.

For details on the transition, visit www.cokesburynext.com. More information about the closing of the Little Rock store is expected to be announced in December.

Information for this report was adapted from a UMNS story by Heather Hahn.

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GODDARD UMC is in search of a FT/PT Director of Discipleship responsible for providing a complete and integrated discipleship program for adults. The Director will inspire and organize our lay people to accomplish the ministry of the church through teams and will lead the teams for the following ministries: assimilation, small groups, courses & seminars, evangelism and mission outreach.

Knowledge and skills:

- Strong desire to honor God and inspire His people through excellence.
- Bachelor's Degree preferred
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- Extensive knowledge of church environment preferred
- Excellent leadership skills (at least 5-7 years of experience working with others in similar work settings)

Contact Rev. Jim Hurst, Administrative Pastor, at 479-785-1415 for more information.

Missing that little Cokesbury store

BY SAM ALBRIGHT
Special Contributor

I know each of you were as shocked as I to learn that all of our Cokesbury stores were being closed. I had a conflicting reaction to this news from both my heart and my head. I was a Cokesbury manager for thirty-five years, and I truly loved being one. For me, serving churches, ministers and laity was a ministry, not a job. My background is not in business; my background is in serving the United Methodist Church. Serving churches is what a Cokesbury Bookstore is all about. That is its sole reason for being.



Sam Albright

I was honored to open the Arkansas Cokesbury store in 1979. For all of those years, that store has remained in the same location and has pretty much remained the same size. Given its low local overhead and the tremendous loyal support

from churches around the state, the Arkansas Cokesbury store has always been an overachiever. Our Arkansas store has, many times, been used as an example of how great success can come from a small footprint. My heart breaks with the thought of that little store closing.

My head, on the other hand, understands the reasoning behind this decision of the United Methodist Publishing House to get out of the retail store business. Unlike most businesses, a Cokesbury store is not in competition with other stores in its area. Lifeway, for example, is not a major competitor of a Cokesbury store. We each serve a different customer base and have a vastly different product mix.

The major competition for a Cokesbury store is the internal sales channels within the United Methodist Publishing House. As customers expressed their desire to shop more online, the pressures on all of the Cokesbury stores increased. There simply came a tipping point at which the stores could no longer sustain their own local and corporate overhead. This is

not the fault of the Publishing House, and certainly not the fault of our customers; it is simply the reality of retailing in 21st-century America. Closing all Cokesbury stores is a shock to our collective system as United Methodists. It is, however, the correct move if the United Methodist Publishing House is to serve the church in the future.

I would ask each of you to reach out to Yvonne Armstrong and her staff at your Arkansas Cokesbury store. That little store at Seventh and Center Streets in Little Rock has served Arkansas United Methodism with distinction for over thirty years. The current and past staffs of that store have been there when you needed them. They have served you well. Now is the time for each of us to say thank you to them for a job well done.

The Rev. Albright is a retired Elder in the Arkansas Conference.

Ministry combats pain, isolation of divorce

A number of life changes can prompt feelings of grief, with divorce one of the most stressful and potentially isolating types of change.

In recent years, churches have begun more intentionally reaching out to those coping with the end of a marriage. One example of this type of outreach: DivorceCare, a support group program used by churches in a number of denominations.

Ministries like DivorceCare provide weekly video reflections by experts on the topic, followed by a time of reflection in a support group setting. They also offer help in getting through milestones that may weigh upon those dealing with a significant life change.

"In our DivorceCare as well as our GriefShare classes, we have had short 'Surviving the Holiday' classes to help cope with loss," says the Rev.

Teresa Holt, pastor of discipleship at First United Methodist Church Hot Springs.

First UMC Hot Springs currently offers a 13-week DivorceCare study, led by the church's Stephen Ministers. In addition to having received extensive lay caregiver training through Stephen Ministry, the individuals who lead the church's DivorceCare series also have experienced divorce themselves.

To find a church in your area offering DivorceCare or to learn about the possibility of offering it at your church, visit divorcecare.org. GriefShare is a related ministry, with information available from griefshare.org. To learn more about caregiving through Stephen Ministry, visit stephenministries.org.



Right now in the northeastern United States, many victims of Hurricane Sandy face a monumental effort to make their homes livable once more. They are mourning the loss of normal life, and in some cases, the loss of loved ones.

Hurricane Sandy, which severely affected portions of the Caribbean and the eastern United States in late October 2012, was the largest Atlantic hurricane on record. It affected at least 24 states with gale-force winds, flooding, heavy rain, and even snow.

In the Caribbean—Cuba, Haiti, Puerto Rico, the Bahamas, and Jamaica—Hurricane Sandy is known to have killed 65 people. In the U.S., at least 90 deaths have been reported. Hurricane Sandy destroyed homes, produced billions of dollars in damage, and left millions of people in the dark.

The United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) is there, helping on our behalf. The Arkansas Conference's annual Ingathering event, held this year on Nov. 17 at the Arkansas Rice Depot in Little Rock, provides for such needs. Soon, relief supplies given by United Methodists in Arkansas will arrive at UMCOR's Sager Brown Depot in Baldwin, La., to replenish what already has been sent to help victims of Hurricane Sandy. Another disaster is coming, and thanks in part to Arkansas' preparation, UMCOR will be ready.

Whether you contributed to Ingathering or have given in some other way, you still can help storm survivors with your gifts to UMCOR. When you give to relief efforts through UMCOR, 100 percent of your donation goes directly to the need you specify. Visit www.umcor.org to give, or text the word "response" to 80888 to give an immediate \$10 donation.

One child forever changed our lives. Will you change one child's life? ~~World.~~ world.

Every gift made to Imagine No Malaria through the Arkansas Conference office will be matched by the United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas, up to \$333,000. For every \$10 given, two lives will be saved. Now that's something to celebrate.

How to give:

- Donations can be made on-line at www.arumc.org/INM

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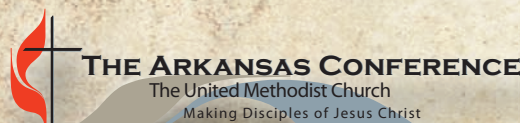
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Blue Christmas (continued from page 1A)

the “Blue Christmas” service at the church she now serves, Beymer Memorial United Methodist in Winter Haven, Fla.

“Christmas is so centered on family and joy. When you’re separated from family or experiencing loss, that pain seems amplified,” she said.

Many churches report that while Blue Christmas services don’t draw large numbers, they often bring in people from outside of the congregation. Some churches distribute announcements of the service to hospitals, funeral homes and hospices, offering the alternative to the wider community.

“Rarely is it a huge crowd,” said McMillan. “But for the people who come, it is really important.”

“About half of the people who come, I’ve never seen before,” said Frederiksen.

Michael Hawn, professor of sacred music at Perkins School of Theology, says more churches are offering Blue Christmas services due to an “increased sensitivity” for those who don’t find the holidays to be a season of joy for a number of reasons. There are few historic precedents for the worship services, he adds, because the festive theme of

the Christmas holiday is relatively new itself.

“Christmas and Advent services as we know them are really a fairly recent phenomenon [from the last 100 years or so],” he said. “It was not until later in the 19th century that Christmas was a celebrative observance.”

By ministering to the grieving and wounded, many pastors say they come to have a deeper appreciation of the Christmas story’s significance.

“We disenfranchise a lot of

people with our joy this and our joy that,” said Frederiksen. “One of the things that the church can do is to remind them that God isn’t in the business of coming when everything is nice and cleaned up. God comes to the stable, where the manure smells like we would expect it to.”

“The essence of the Christmas story that we celebrate,” says McMillan, “is that God’s light entered into the darkness in order to bring peace for our pain. Christmas isn’t just for happy people.”

This feature originally appeared in the United Methodist Reporter national edition. Reprinted with permission.

‘Rarely is it a huge crowd. But for the people who come, it is really important.’

Special worship opportunities for those who grieve

This list of worship services was compiled from responses to a request issued via the Arkansas Conference Email Network. There may be a similar service near you that is not listed. Check with churches in your area to find a worship opportunity that acknowledges the holiday season can intensify feelings of grief and loss.

Central UMC Rogers will hold a Service of Comfort and Hope on Sunday, **Nov. 18** at 5 p.m. in the church’s chapel.

St. James UMC Little Rock will have its annual Service of Light and Hope on Saturday, **Dec. 8** at 5:30 p.m. in the sanctuary.

The Holy Sews Ministry will hold its fifth annual Interfaith Remembrance Service on Sunday, **Dec. 9** at 2 p.m. Parents, family, and friends who have experienced the loss of an infant are invited to gather at Our Lady of the Holy Souls Catholic Church, 1003 N. Tyler Street in Little Rock. RSVP to regina@holysews.org by Dec. 7 to provide your child’s name to be read during the ceremony.

First UMC Star City will hold its third annual Tree of Remembrance Memorial Service on Sunday, **Dec. 9** at 3 p.m. in the sanctuary. The service, held in conjunction with Griffin Funeral Services, will honor and memorialize those who have passed away during 2011-2012. Each family receives an ornament to place on their own tree to help remember and pay tribute to their family member.

Bridges in Arkansas, a grief support group at **McCroy UMC**, will host “A Mustard Seed Christmas” service on Thursday, **Dec. 13** from 6 to 7 p.m. It is for anyone going through a difficult time during the holidays. Light refreshments will be served following the worship service.

First UMC Clarksville will have a Candlelight Service of Remembrance on Thursday, **Dec. 13** at 7 p.m. for anyone who experiences grief during the holidays. This service, led by the Stephen Ministers of the congregation, is open to all. A personal invitation is also sent to those in the congregation who have lost a loved one in the past year.

Heritage UMC Van Buren will hold a Celebration of Remembrance on Sunday, **Dec. 16** at 3 p.m. During the time of celebrating the birth of Jesus, the church offers this opportunity to celebrate the memory of loved ones with song and words of encouragement.

Central UMC Fayetteville on Sunday, **Dec. 16** at 6 p.m. will hold a service in its Wesley Chapel with traditional Advent candle lighting, hymns, Scriptures, Holy Communion and prayers for healing. This service is purposefully designed to remind participants that the light of Christ can shine in the darkness and bring hope.

Leslie UMC will have its second annual Blue Christmas Service on Wednesday, **Dec. 19** at 6 p.m. in the sanctuary.

Lakewood UMC North Little Rock will hold its Longest Night Service of Hope and Healing on Friday, **Dec. 21** at 6 p.m. in the sanctuary. Personal invitations go to church members who have lost loved ones in the past year, and the service is publicized to invite anyone experiencing grief and sorrow while everyone else seems to be “jolly.” Includes a time of anointing and prayer and celebrates the true meaning of Christmas: light in the darkness.

Christ of the Hills UMC Hot Springs Village will hold a Blue Christmas service on Sunday, **Dec. 23** at 3 p.m. It will include a time of silent prayer, Communion, a brief message and singing.

First UMC Hot Springs will have its fourth annual Longest Night Service on Sunday, **Dec. 23** at 5 p.m. The service includes Scripture reading, lighting of candles and music.

Bismarck UMC will hold a Blue Christmas worship service on Sunday, **Dec. 23** at 6:30 p.m. in the sanctuary.

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