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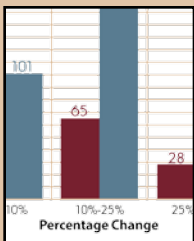
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Annual Conference to address matters of ministry, administration



BY AMY FORBUS
Editor

When the 2015 Arkansas Annual Conference convenes June 14 in Hot Springs, it will face a packed agenda.

Decisions concerning the business of the church, such as apportionment formulas and health insurance, may command much of the session's time, but so will hours of worship, prayer and, as the conference theme suggests, a call to spiritual revival.

And, as happens every four years, some of the decisions of Annual Conference involve electing delegates to other denominational conferences.

Apportionments

The Conference Council on Finance and Administration (CFA) is presenting a resolution that, if approved, will begin move the Conference from calculating local churches' apportionments based on their reported expenses to calculating them based upon reported revenue.

Apportionments are a denomination-wide method of giving that proportionally allocates the United Methodist Church's budget among

[See AC2015, page 7]

Arkansas reaches \$1 million in pledged support to fight malaria

BY AMY FORBUS
Editor

In early April, just weeks before World Malaria Day, the Arkansas Conference of the United Methodist Church reached the \$1 million mark in gifts and pledges supporting the denomination's multi-pronged initiative to combat malaria in sub-Saharan Africa. The denomination is very near its goal of raising \$75 million for the cause.

It was an April gift from First UMC Piggot that put the Arkansas Conference over the top. The congregation took advantage of the free Imagine No Malaria offering boxes (available at imagineinomalaria.org/resources) and organized a Lenten coin collection drive to benefit the cause.

"We hope our 'change' will help to meet the goal of stamping out malaria in our lifetime," wrote DeNese Newbill in a note that accompanied the church's check for \$205. "Thank you Arkansas Conference for being a good global neighbor."

Spurred on by a generous \$333,333 matching grant from the United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas (UMFA), United

[See MALARIA, page 12]



Going home: confessions of a returning seminarian

BY TODD LOVELL
Special Contributor

I seem to be getting a lot more questions these days.

Sure, there have always been questions. It is seminary, after all.

The first year, it was “What is your denomination?” Second year, it



Todd Lovell

was “Are you seeking ordination?” Now, as I move to complete my degree in May, the question has become, “What are your plans after graduation?”

It’s a question that I’ve grown accustomed to answering. “I’m returning to serve the local church in Arkansas,” I’ll say. Sometimes I’ll simply say, “I’m going home.”

Going home.

It’s a lofty dream. During my time in seminary, Arkansas has become more of an ideal than a location. My home state exists in my imagination as a place of wonderful potential, a place to live out the calling I’ve become so well acquainted with over these three years.

But into this Edenic ideal of what I remember as Arkansas comes what I suspect to be the real truth. I can never truly go home. At least not to the “home” that I once knew. No, I’m sure that the Arkansas that is is quite different than the Arkansas that was.

Each trip home I’m both encouraged and distraught by how much things have changed. Anxiety begins to creep in: “Can I ever truly go home?” After all, “home” has changed so much. I have changed so much.

This feeling will undoubtedly be the case for many seminarians as they return home this summer. Though I do not wish to speak for them, I would like to speak as one of them. Allow me

to share three ways in which you can help your seminarians to come home.

First, **remember that the authority we have is given by you.** Yes, there are certain pastoral privileges granted to clergy, but these are not wrested from the people by an authority from on high. Rather, all manner of clergy, even bishops themselves, have been called out from the humble pews of the local church. Before they were sent by the bishop, they were approved by you.

That means that when new clergy, or any clergy for that matter, make a difficult or unpopular decision, they are not trying to “pull rank.” They are simply attempting to live out their specific call within the life of their community, a call that you have affirmed. Listen to us, allow us to lead; trust that the potential you once saw in us was not an illusion.

Second, **remember the calling we have was nurtured by you.** Our respective callings were shaped and encouraged by you, and any authority we may have is granted to us through your gracious support. Many of us grew up next to you in the pews of our local churches. You got on to us when we were too rowdy in the halls, offered us snacks during Vacation Bible School and taught our Sunday school and Confirmation classes. We followed your lead as we took Communion together, and we learned to pray by listening to you.

Our calling, then, is not our own. It is not something we dreamed up in isolation. It was nurtured and articulated by you even before we could nurture and articulate it ourselves.

Third, **remember that the passion we have is sustained by you.** It’s no secret that the pastorate is no longer considered a safe and fulfilling profession. Current research suggests that physical and mental illness occur at higher rates in clergy than they do in the general population, and it’s often attributed

to the increasing demands put upon the modern-day pastor. You have the ability—and the responsibility—to help returning seminarians establish patterns of self-care and Sabbath.

For many of us, seminary didn’t just teach us about theology and history; it also taught us how to pull all-nighters and work through physical and mental exhaustion. That may be doable one semester at a time, but the local church schedule never ends. There are no “finals weeks” to look forward to. Therefore, it is up to you to encourage your new pastors to establish sustainable practices of self-care so that they may provide the local church with a lifetime of healthy and fruitful ministry.

Of course, we seminarians know what we’ve signed up for. The life of a United Methodist minister can be demanding and isolating. We agree to go where we are sent and put our hands to the work of God’s Kingdom. Families will be tested, friendships will become distant and ministries will come and go. And yet, we welcome this struggle. We do so because we understand that our lives are no longer our own.

Through our baptism, we are granted a new life in Christ, a life that is lived out and sustained in Christ’s holy church. Our baptism tells us that, in many ways, this church has become our new home. In other words, my true home is no longer in a place; now it is in a people. God has called me to consider these people my family—my brothers and sisters—who will equip, empower and encourage me in this calling we’ve discerned together.

So what are my plans after graduation? I’m going home; home to Christ’s church to encourage the faithful in the work of the Kingdom.

Lovell, a student at Duke Divinity School, will return to Arkansas this summer to serve as associate pastor of First UMC Springdale.



EDITOR’S CORNER

BY AMY FORBUS

Grace along the road

I’ve spent a fair amount of my adult life behind the wheel of a car. Like many Arkansans, I live too far away from my office to walk to work, and my work provides me with the means to own a vehicle, so driving remains a regular part of my life.

When I lived in the DFW area, I spent a lot of time sitting behind the wheel, not going much of anywhere. I’m thankful that traffic jams don’t occur too frequently on my regular routes these days.

One weekday morning as I followed one of those nice, clear regular routes, a car passed me bearing this bumper sticker:

“To hell with our enemies, GOD BLESS AMERICA”

I found the message of condemnation so jarring that I didn’t even bother to mentally correct the punctuation until days later. That comma would work better as a semicolon, or possibly a dash. (I can’t help it. Editing is second nature for me.)

Instead, I thought immediately of Jesus’ instruction in Matthew 5, which must also have jarred his audience: “You have heard that it was said, You must love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who harass you so that you will be acting as children of your Father who is in heaven” (Common English Bible).

Jesus lays it out there: Will you follow the Law as he and countless

others learned it? Will you wish your enemies toward hell, or follow the law of love? That unexpected point of contrast fits right in with the new commandment he would share in another of the Gospels: “I give you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other” (John 13:34).

Human nature includes the urge to judge. We do it constantly, though not always on a large-scale or intentionally harmful level. Nevertheless, making choices, and therefore judgments, comes as a package deal with life.

But exalting ourselves while condemning the “other”—whether a non-American, non-Christian, non-recycler or non-chocolate lover—doesn’t help anything. Instead, we would do well to remember we are people of grace, and then act like it.

I know I don’t always recognize my own tendency to condemn. But when I do catch myself thinking ill of those who don’t live like me, or behave like me, or understand the world like me, that bumper sticker sometimes comes to mind. The very vision of it helps me change my behavior.

As people of faith, we have an extra measure of grace. Why not share it?

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



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Submission Deadlines

Issue Date	Submission Deadline
June 5	May 18
July 3	June 18
Aug. 7	July 20

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GROWING TOGETHER IN CHRIST: A word from the Bishop

BY GARY E. MUELLER

Annual Conference

I attended my first Annual Conference as a lay member at the end of my junior year in high school, my first Annual Conference as a deacon in probationary membership after my middle year of seminary and my first Annual Conference as an elder in full connection two years after graduating from seminary.

That's a lot of Annual Conferences over a lot of years.

It's interesting to reflect on how different parts of Annual Conference have been important to me at different times in my life. Early on, it was debating the great issues facing

our world. Later, it was the clergy session dealing with my ordination. Some times, it's been resolutions or proposed General Conference legislation. At other times, it's been the election of General and Jurisdictional Conference delegates. And, at still other times, it's been worship.

I bring a different perspective to Annual Conference these days. I don't focus nearly as much on any single part of Annual Conference, but rather how we are inspired, motivated and equipped to go back home and create vital congregations

that make disciples of Jesus Christ, who make disciples engaged in transforming lives, communities and the world.

We'll accomplish this the way Methodists have always structured Annual Conference. We'll address important legislation, celebrate the ministry of those who are retiring, conference about important issues in our world, grieve for those who have died and commission and ordain persons for ministry. But we'll also highlight "glory sightings," join together in passionate worship, encounter our connection at work in

powerful ways, be challenged to respond to God's call on our lives and experience what it means to truly be part of the Body of Christ.

There will be some things we'll do that you wish we wouldn't. We may fail to spend enough time on some things you believe are very important and spend too much time on others.

But when all is said and done, we will witness, celebrate, listen to God, grow as disciples who make disciples and experience a powerful call to spiritual revival.

As we continue our journey to Annual Conference, I want to share a prayer members of our Worship Planning Team have written to guide

us through our time together next month in Hot Springs:

God, wake us to the beauty and pain alive in our world and our church as we gather for this time of holy conferencing.

Revive us by the power of your spirit, that we encounter your compelling presence in every session, every service, every conversation.

Transform us, that after the lights are dimmed and the arena is quiet, our lives carry forth the hope of your world-changing love.

*We pray this in Jesus' name.
Amen.*

Gary E. Mueller 

Multicultural mission team shares work, witness



Participants in a March tornado recovery project build a deck to provide entry into a Black Oak-area home.

COURTESY PHOTO

BY JENNI DUNCAN
Special Contributor

On March 21, 2015, what brought together four United Methodists from St. Andrew UMC Little Rock, six from Sylvan Hills UMC and nine Hispanics from El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico and Guatemala in Black Oak, Arkansas? If you knew Black Oak is near Mayflower, then maybe you guessed we met to do tornado recovery. How did such a partnership bridge not only the river between cities, but also several cultures?

After the 2014 tornado that hit

Mayflower and Vilonia, St. Andrew UMC Little Rock set up a reception station, taking in cases of water, cleaning supplies and other disaster kits, and we were surprised by some unexpected donations. Many Hispanic students in my adult English classes at St. Andrew left class early and came back with cases and cases of donations. They wanted to help the people they had



Jenni Duncan

heard about on the news.

Students asked about other ways to bring restoration to the damaged areas, and the idea for a spring break rebuilding trip was born. I polled my morning and evening classes and received a lot of interest.

In mission training, my husband, Glen, and I had learned that the best model is to work alongside people in need, rather than making handouts from a position of power. What an opportunity this would be, to work with immigrants who often found themselves on the needing end! They would be building something, and many of my students build things all day. Their expertise would put them on a whole different footing in this mission experience.

Forming a plan

Glen and I set aside four days to be involved in disaster relief, including one day to scope out the site and make certain we could put everyone to work. We wanted the three workdays to include the weekend, because most of my students work Monday through Saturday. Twelve or 13 students signed up, but I knew that if paying work was available, some volunteers

[See MULTICULTURAL, page 11]

APPOINTMENTS & RETIREMENTS

The following appointment changes have been announced since the deadline for the previous issue of the *Arkansas United Methodist*. Changes are effective July 1.

- Bill Sardin (provisional elder)—First UMC Searcy (associate pastor)
- Davida (DeeDee) Autry (elder)—Mountainside UMC
- Michael Topham (elder)—Mansfield/Hackett UMCs (charge realignment)
- Mark Donald (associate member)—Diamond City/St. Paul UMC Harrison (charge realignment)
- Tom Frase (elder)—First UMC Mountain Home (senior pastor)
- Charles Murry (elder)—First UMC Fort Collins (interim senior pastor), Rocky Mountain Conference; retaining membership in Arkansas Conference
- Paul Coy (elder)—First UMC Mountain View/St. James Mountain View
- Brad Elrod (elder)—First UMC Star City
- Thompson Murray (elder)—First UMC Newport
- Bill Fish (elder)—Lakeside UMC Lake Village
- Rich Mitchell (elder)—St. Paul UMC Little Rock
- Daniel Thueson (provisional elder)—Alma/Kibler UMCs
- Ramiro Lizcano (elder)—Rogers Cooperative Hispanic Ministry
- J.J. Galloway (elder)—Mount Ida/Joplin UMCs
- Zeke Allen (provisional elder)—First UMC Benton (associate)
- Samantha "Sam" Meadors (deacon)—Director, ASU Wesley Foundation; secondary appointment to Cornerstone UMC
- Carissa Rogers (provisional elder)—Quapaw Quarter UMC
- Mark Cloninger (provisional elder)—DeQueen/Gillham UMC
- Russ Breshears (elder)—Oaklawn UMC Hot Springs
- Judy Platt (local pastor)—First UMC Bella Vista (associate)
- Blake Lasater (elder)—First UMC Eureka Springs
- Mike Wilkie (elder)—Helena UMC
- Bryan Diffie (elder)—Sardis UMC
- Tony Griffin (elder)—Highland Valley UMC Little Rock (senior pastor)
- LaNita Daniels (part-time local pastor)—North Pulaski UMC

Retirements effective July 1:

- David Morgan (full-time local pastor)
- Kennis Key (part-time local pastor)
- Clarence "Dooley" Fowler (full-time local pastor)
- David M. Moore (part-time local pastor)
- James McElhanon (full member, other denomination)—mandatory retirement; will continue at Pleasant Hill/Pine Log UMCs
- John Stoll (part-time local pastor)—mandatory retirement; will continue at Eli Lindsey/Friendship
- James D. Wheeler (part-time local pastor)—mandatory retirement; will continue at Cushman UMC/Cornerstone UMC Pleasant Plains

For the most recent changes, see www.arumc.org/appointments.

UM chaplain works to make Healing Gardens a reality

BY MARTHA TAYLOR
Special Contributor

When Jesus says, "Come and see," or "Do you not have eyes to see?" readers of Scripture recognize that Jesus is speaking of sight beyond normal vision. Jesus turns the eyes and heart to something that has not yet come to pass, something wonderful and healing.

And so it was one afternoon two years ago when the Rev. Pamela Cicioni and Dr. J. Thaddeus Beck stood looking out a window at an empty field. Beck, an oncologist with the Highlands Oncology Group in Rogers and Cicioni, a United Methodist deacon appointed as the chaplain at the clinic, looked at the land before them and spoke of their dreams for that land.

After Beck shared his vision for the future, Cicioni turned to him, stretched her arms to the west, and said, "Someday, Dr. Beck, I would like to see a Healing Garden built right here." Beck replied, "Do it."

In two short years, the vision of the Healing Garden, designed to provide an oasis for restoration and healing, is becoming a reality.

Healing Gardens of Northwest Arkansas, Inc., is a non-profit organization focused on turning the two-acre parcel of land, donated by the physicians of the cancer treatment center, into a healing haven with a reflecting pool, walking paths, labyrinth, secret garden and sanctuary.

Community connections

The idea of creating the Healing Garden as a complementary space to the medical facility captured the imagination of some of Northwest Arkansas' best.

"It was amazing how people connected so quickly to the idea of a place where people would be able to heal physically, emotionally and spiritually," Cicioni said. "Through casual conversations and hand-drawn sketches on notebook paper, the garden took on a life of its own."

Arlin Vancuren, vice president and cofounder of the landscape architectural firm Howell and Vancuren, is leading the project. Vancuren designed the grounds and trails for Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Rogers.



The Rev. Pamela Cicioni, foreground, along with other founders of the Healing Gardens of Northwest Arkansas, participates in a blessing of the Healing Gardens by spreading seeds to symbolize the beginning of the garden's growth.

Architect Maurice Jennings designed what is being called the Sanctuary, an intimate chapel that will seat approximately 20 people. Jennings is known for his work on Thorncrown Chapel in Eureka Springs and, more recently, Hunt Memorial Chapel in Rogers.

The Healing Garden buttresses up to the fast-growing Trail System of Northwest Arkansas and will

welcome all to come in and explore its varied spaces. Main elements of the project are intended to soothe and heal: water, pathways, stonework, an open grassy area, woodlands and sanctuary. There will be numerous places for visitors to sit alone or in small groups.

While the total cost of the project is still being determined, gifts from individual and corporate sponsors have already begun to appear. A public event, planned for early summer, will enable others interested in the project to talk with board members and get a closer look at the plans.

A first in many ways

Cicioni says that the physicians at Highlands have not shied away from the spiritual aspects of healing and have been leaders in the area of complementary services to support their patients, such as social services, massage and physical therapies. According to Cicioni, while other U.S. clinics have a chaplain on staff, theirs is the only

private clinic in the country to have a chaplain and chapel available for anyone who may have cause to spend time at the clinic.

In addition to Cicioni, there are nine spiritual care volunteers for patients, their families, staff and visitors to the center. The volunteers include retired clergy, Stephen Ministers and certified chaplains. Cicioni requires the group to go through an additional training program she developed.

As a nationally certified Spiritual Director, Cicioni is grateful that the underlying message for the gardens is one of drawing people closer to God.

"I am very thankful that the doctors see the necessity of someone calling forth, 'God is here,'" Cicioni said. "This isn't a park, botanical garden or trail. It's a sacred space set aside for a specific purpose."

"Those who come to the Healing Gardens will be invited to walk a purposeful path to the center, rest, and when ready, move back into the world with healing, courage, and dignity," she added. "The elements of the gardens will help visitors move toward wholeness... toward God."

While the gardens and sanctuary will be open to all people, Cicioni is delighted that she can represent the United Methodist Church in the effort.

"I am identified only as the spiritual director or chaplain [of Highlands Oncology Group]," Cicioni said. "But if someone asks, I let them know I'm a United Methodist minister. I am excited that our church will be taking part in transforming lives through the Healing Gardens of Northwest Arkansas."

To learn more about the Healing Gardens of Northwest Arkansas, Inc., visit www.healinggardensofnwa.org, or contact Cicioni at 479-270-3553 or pcicioni@hoganonc.com.

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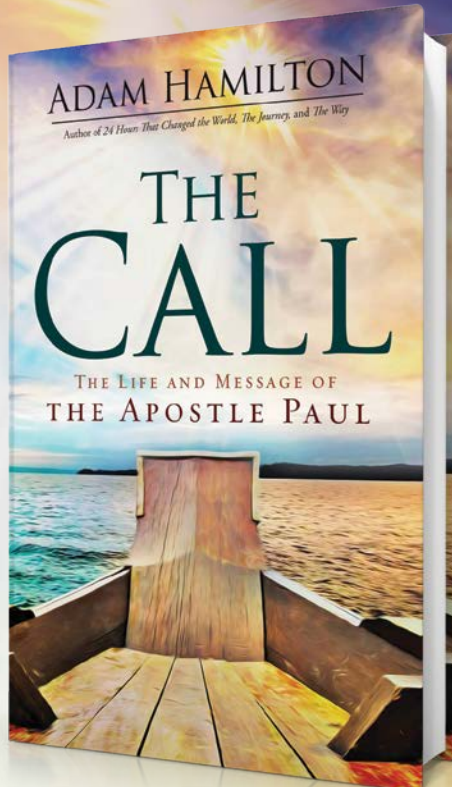
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Adam Hamilton is senior pastor of the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas, named by The Church Report as the most influential mainline church in America. Hamilton is the best-selling author of *Revival*, *The Way*, *24 Hours That Changed the World*, *The Journey*, *When Christians Get It Wrong* and *Seeing Gray in a World of Black and White*.



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The Rev. Pamela Cicioni shows two Founders of the Healing Gardens the architectural renderings of the garden, which will include a sanctuary, reflecting pool and waterfall to symbolize baptism, cleansing, renewal and new life.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF TERRELL ROHRBACH PHOTOGRAPHY

Stronger together: Three African-American churches form teaching parish

“A pastoral charge may be designated by the bishop and cabinet as a “teaching parish” when either a local church with a pastor or cooperative parish with a director is available to serve as a counseling elder for a provisional, local, or student pastor appointed or assigned to the teaching parish. A teaching parish shall have a demonstrable commitment to a cooperative or team ministry style and the training of pastors.” —Paragraph 205.3, 2012 *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*

Members and leaders of a campus ministry and two churches gathered March 29 at Wesley Chapel UMC Little Rock, on the campus of Philander Smith College, to mark the official beginning of the the South Little Rock Teaching Parish (SLRTP).

Two years of discussions and discernment among church members and clergy have culminated in a plan to open the way for identifying more young African-American United Methodists as potential candidates for ministry. The SLRTP will mentor college students through a process of discernment, encouraging them to discover and use their gifts to the glory of God. The intent is to continue that

mentoring relationship all the way through completion of the candidacy process for United Methodist clergy.

The SLRTP directly aligns with Next Step 9 of the Bishop’s Mission Plan: Create Vital African-American Congregations.

The Rev. Ronnie Miller-Yow, chaplain of Philander Smith College and senior pastor of Wesley Chapel and Duncan UMCs, serves as the parish director. Other key partners in the teaching parish are the people of Duncan and White Memorial UMCs.

Yow had already begun using this ministry model in cooperation with Duncan UMC, and since Danita Waller-Paige’s appointment in August 2014 to White Memorial UMC as a lay supply pastor, the churches have participated in joint services during Advent and Lent. Students regularly lead worship in all three congregations.

At Duncan UMC, Philander Smith College students lead praise and worship as singers and liturgists, as well as through preaching. At White Memorial UMC, a student musician serves each Sunday, and other students participate in the choir and as liturgists. In addition, a student preaches once every six weeks.



Members of Wesley Chapel, White Memorial and Duncan UMCs, as well as students active in religious life at Philander Smith College, gathered at Wesley Chapel to mark the formation of the South Little Rock Teaching Parish.

PHOTO BY BRENNEN BOOSE

The Philander Smith College Chaplain’s Office/Office of Religious Life provides group mentoring for ministry and leads weekly chapel worship services.

“This is an innovative idea specific to this mission field,” said the Rev. Maxine Allen, Arkansas Conference associate director for mission and ministry for mission

field engagement. “With Duncan and White Memorial about a mile apart, they are well positioned to work with students, be in relationship with each other and help raise up a new generation of leaders.”

Plans for the SLRTP’s future include a full-time parish administrative assistant; a part-time bookkeeper; five student interns

working in the areas of preaching/administration, worship/music, outreach/mission; and either a seminary intern or local pastor.

In addition to eventually sharing staffing, the parish sites already share a common mission: to provide a teaching and learning community that extends the love of God through worship, witness and outreach.

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PEOPLE OF FAITH

Purifoy receives inaugural Nancy Wood Scholarship

Nancy Wood, left, on May 19 announced Harper Purifoy of Malvern, right, as the first Nancy McDonald Wood scholar. Wood presented the \$3,000 scholarship during a worship service at Purifoy's home church, First UMC Malvern. The scholarship funds, given to honor Wood last fall by family and friends, are invested with the United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas. Wood hopes to use the scholarship to build strong United Methodist lay leaders in the years to come.



COURTESY PHOTO

The selection committee reviewed 28 applications from United Methodist young women who will begin college in the fall. Criteria emphasized lay involvement in the applicant's local United Methodist Church in Arkansas. The process was extremely competitive, as most applicants had strong academic records and volunteer commitments to their home churches.

Purifoy's unselfish efforts on behalf of her church and community were obvious from letters of recommendation for her selection and a long list of activities at First UMC Malvern. She is the lead singer in the youth band and has done volunteer work with Meals on Wheels and Under the Bridge programs, as well as the Kids Club in her hometown. She plays soccer, cheers and serves on Student Council. She leads her class with a 4.23 grade point average.

A senior at Malvern High School, Purifoy is enrolling at Hendrix College, following her parents, Shawn and Brenda Purifoy, both Hendrix graduates.

Applications for the 2016-17 scholarship year will be available in January 2016 through accym.org and United Methodist church youth ministers.

VOLUNTEERS IN MISSION & DISASTER RESPONSE - UPDATES AND NEEDS

For information on any Volunteers In Mission (VIM) project, contact the individual listed or Byron Mann, Conference VIM coordinator: vim@arumc.org or 870-826-0268. For Disaster Response (DR) projects, contact Byron or Janice Mann, DR co-coordinators: disaster@arumc.org or 870-703-8359 (Janice). On Facebook, join the group "Volunteers in Mission & Disaster Response - Serving Arkansas & Beyond" for updates.

Early Response Team training available in May

Arkansas Conference Disaster Response will hold two Early Response Team (ERT) training events this month: May 2 in Paragould and May 9 in Rogers.

Trained and certified ERTs are deployed by United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM) immediately following a natural disaster or other time of need. Only those who have received training are permitted to participate in early response. ERTs enable United Methodists in the U.S. to bring hope to those who are suffering. For details, email Janice Mann: disaster@arumc.org.

Driver needed to transport relief supplies to Louisiana depot

The Arkansas Conference has a load of disaster relief kits in the Conway warehouse that need a ride to UMCOR Sager Brown Depot in Baldwin, La. with a team sometime in the near future. Disaster Response and VIM will rent and load the truck if someone will drive it down. Contact Byron Mann to make arrangements.

Projects in Arkansas ready for VIM teams

Several recovery and other projects around the state are ready for Volunteers in Mission teams. Contact Byron Mann for details. Byron also offers organizational and planning assistance for teams wishing to travel on Mission Journeys outside Arkansas or the United States.

Ongoing tornado recovery needs, one year later

- If you have or know of resources for new or gently used furniture and household goods for these new homes, contact Janice Mann. Donations or significant discounts are appreciated.
- VIM and Disaster Response still need workers for skilled repairs and rebuilds, clean-up duty (ranging from picking up and sorting debris to operating chainsaws and heavy equipment), clerical help, phone staffing and case management. Contact Janice Mann to schedule a work shift.

RENEWAL IN THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

The Confessing Movement of Arkansas Annual Breakfast

Monday, June 15, at 6:30 a.m.

Union Missionary Baptist Church
(behind the Convention Center)

"Come Holy Spirit: The Power of God Today for United Methodist Renewal"

David F. Watson, Guest Speaker

David Watson is the Academic Dean and Associate Professor of New Testament at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. During his time in administration he has helped to oversee one of the fastest growing and most dynamic seminaries in the U.S. As an ordained elder in the West Ohio Conference, David serves on his Conference Board of Ordained Ministries, the board of Evangelical Fellowship of West Ohio, as well as the University Senate of the United Methodist Church. He has written *Honor Among Christians: The Cultural Key to the Messianic Secret* and *Key United Methodist Beliefs* (with William J. Abraham) and numerous articles and essays. David has preached and lectured in a diverse array of settings, from Dayton to Dallas, Cuba to Vietnam. His blog is www.davidfwatson.me



David F. Watson

Tickets are \$15.00. Purchase tickets as part of your registration for the Arkansas Annual Conference, or by contacting Karen Millar, 501-268-4859 or karenmillar@hotmail.com by June 10.

The Arkansas Conference Board of Church and Society

Breakfast - Tuesday, June 16, 6:30 a.m.

Emma Escobar, Grassroot Organizer for Immigration, General Board of Church and Society, is the speaker.

A former Ethnic Young Adult Summer Intern at the General Board of Church & Society, has joined the agency's Civil & Human Rights program area to help build a movement to defend and support the rights of immigrants. Emma is originally from El Salvador and recently graduated from Boston University School of Theology, where she did research focused on issues such as immigration, health and contextual theologies.



Grand Avenue UMC, 841 Quapaw Avenue, Hot Springs

RSVP to Melissa Thomas,
mthomas668@gmail.com

AC2015 (continued from page 1)

conferences and local churches. Each Annual Conference determines its own formula for how its local churches share in that giving. A revenue-based formula for calculating apportionments will keep apportioned giving close to a tithe (10 percent) of a local church's income.

"We will be moving to an apportionment system that is biblically-based and exceptionally transparent, as well as immediately responsive to economic changes in each local church," said the Rev. Jim Polk, chair of CFA.

"For years we have been looking for a way to fund our connectional ministries that was both sustainable and fair for all," he said. "I truly believe that the Arkansas Tithe Initiative will be both.... The work has been done, the pieces are in place and this is the time to change the way we support our connectional ministries."

Registration packets for AC2015 members include detailed information on the Arkansas Tithe Initiative. The documents also may be viewed online at <http://ac2015.arumc.org>. In addition, a number of pre-conference informational meetings open to all United Methodists will take place around the state between May 17 and 30; see page 9 for a complete schedule and agenda.

Insurance

This year's report from the Conference Board of Pension and Health Benefits (BPHB) contains a significant change: the end of Conference-provided health benefits on Dec. 31, 2015. If approved by the members of the Annual Conference, the report will mean every clergyperson and Conference staff member receiving health benefits will have six months to choose new coverage, either through a spouse's existing coverage or on the healthcare marketplace made available through the Affordable Care Act.

As part of this change, the BPHB recommends that local churches re-route the funds currently used for insurance premiums into clergy compensation, with a minimum increase of \$12,000 per year.

"For many years the insurance companies utilized a 'pre-existing condition' exclusion clause which made it extremely difficult for families to change plans," said the Rev. Dennis

Spence, chair of the BPHB. "We have a window of opportunity now with that clause removed to let clergy find the best plan for their families. It will also lessen the load of the churches, which have been burdened with 100 percent of the cost of ever-escalating premiums."

Spence will address questions concerning the change at each of the pre-conference informational meetings to be held around the state. See page 9 for the schedule of meetings.

Repentance

Tuesday afternoon of Annual Conference brings a special worship service: An Act of Repentance Toward Indigenous People. Led by the Rev. Dr. David M. Wilson, superintendent of the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference of the United Methodist Church, the service will feature the Cherokee Adult Choir and a special offering to benefit Native American ministries. It also will include the celebration of Holy Communion.

General Conference, the UMC's highest legislative body, in 2012 held an Act of Repentance Service for the Healing of Relationships with Indigenous Persons. A General Conference resolution mandated an ongoing process to improve relations with indigenous persons through dialogue, study, and local or regional acts of repentance. The Tuesday afternoon service is part of that process in Arkansas.

Remembering, ordaining, commissioning

The memorial service honoring the lives of clergy and clergy spouses who have died within the past year will be held the Monday afternoon of Annual Conference. The Rev. Walter E. "Bubba" Smith, senior pastor of Christ of the Hills UMC, will preach.

The final night of Annual Conference features the Service of Ordination and Commissioning, with Bishop Gary E. Mueller preaching. Nine provisional members of the Arkansas Annual Conference—two deacons and seven elders—will be ordained in full connection, and seven candidates for ordination, all on elder track, will be commissioned as provisional members of the Conference. For information on those being ordained and commissioned, see page 8 of this issue.

Guest preachers at other services during AC2015 are the

Rev. Paul Rasmussen, Bishop Young Jin Cho and the Rev. Lisa Yebuah. For information on their preaching schedules, visit ac2015.arumc.org.

Voting

Members of the Annual Conference with voting rights will elect delegates to serve at the 2016 General and Jurisdictional Conferences. Laity will elect lay delegates, and clergy will elect clergy delegates.

The work of General Conference centers on making changes to the *Book of Discipline*, the denomination's law book; and the *Book of Resolutions*, which states denominational policies on social issues. Jurisdictional Conference's primary task is to elect new bishops. Both conferences take place every four years.

The 2016 General Conference delegation from Arkansas will consist of four lay and four clergy, as will the 2016 Jurisdictional Conference delegation. General Conference delegates also serve on the Jurisdictional delegation. Jurisdictional delegates will serve as alternates to General Conference; two lay and two clergy will be selected as alternates for Jurisdictional Conference.

Those open to being elected as delegates were encouraged to submit a self-nomination form by April 15; those completed forms are now available at <http://ac2015.arumc.org>.

Conference officials anticipate a smoother experience for the sometimes drawn-out process of electing delegates to the 2016 General and Jurisdictional Conferences. An electronic keypad voting system will yield results faster than the ballot scanning system used four years ago and in many election years past. After exploring available options, the Arkansas Conference has contracted with Padgett Communications to provide this service.

"Padgett Communications is one of the industry leaders in audience response systems, and have worked with many other conferences," said Todd Burris, director of administrative services and treasurer for the Conference. "They will have technicians on site to ensure all votes are counted accurately."

The keypads will be used not only for delegate elections, but also for any matter before the Conference that requires a vote, eliminating the need for tellers to count a standing vote or secret ballot in the event of a narrow margin between the yeas and nays.

Eight Arkansas students graduate from Hispanic church planting training

The Northwest District of the Arkansas Conference, in partnership with Discipleship Ministries of the United Methodist Church (formerly known as the United Methodist General Board of Discipleship) graduated eight students for church planting in Arkansas who are native speakers of Spanish. The students come from two congregations: four students each from The Journey UMC Fort Smith and Nueva Vida UMC Dardanelle.

The commissioning service was held on Saturday, March 28 at First UMC Dardanelle. Present to celebrate the commissioning were the Rev. Maxine Allen, Arkansas Conference assistant director of mission and ministry for mission field engagement; the Rev. Bud Reeves, superintendent of the Northwest District; and the Revs. Alma Perez and Douglas Ruffle, both of New Church Starts Discipleship

Ministries in Nashville, Tenn.

The Revs. Julio Ibarra, Vitalino Méndez and Jim Benfer led the training. Group sessions were hosted by the Rev. Larry Martineau of Alma UMC. Grants from the Northwest District and the Arkansas Conference Committee on Ethnic and Language Ministries provided funding.

The curriculum, Path 1 Lay Missionary Planting Network (LMPN), is distributed by Discipleship Ministries. Path 1 is a team of mission-driven, passionate and diverse leaders drawn from national, regional and local levels of the United Methodist Church, providing collaborative leadership to evangelize the United States through new congregations. The Path 1 Team leads a denominational movement to reach more people—more young people, more diverse people—as disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, by

creating new places for new people. Ultimately, Path 1 seeks to create the leaders, cultures and processes needed to regain our healthy denominational habit of starting at least one new church each day.

LMPN curriculum is available in English and Spanish; this particular training was held in Spanish. The training consists of 10 events of a full day each, immersing students in Bible study, worship, preaching and learning. Sessions include:

- Church Planting 101
- United Methodism 101
- Basic Wesleyan Theology
- Community
- Teaching and Preaching
- Caring
- Leadership
- Multiplication
- Christian Stewardship
- Celebration

Students are expected to participate in all the sessions, make



Arkansas students of the Path 1 Lay Missionary Planting Network included Jose Girón, Suni Méndez, Kelsey Castillo, Oscar Nava, Rómulo Guerra, Vilma Recinos, Ana Gallardo and Eduardo Gallardo.

COURTESY PHOTO

commitments to greater involvement in local churches and assess their call from God to help start new congregations. Students in the classes have already helped with the on-going launch of new Hispanic church starts in Morrilton (Solo Cristo Salva UMC), and in Russellville (Jesucristo es el

Única Hacia Dios UMC).

The first Path 1 LMPN in Arkansas for Hispanic church planting, brought together by the Rev. Bob Crossman, was held two years ago and trained the teachers of this session.

—submitted by Jim Benfer

Nine to be ordained at June 16 worship service

Pending approval during the June 14 clergy session of the Arkansas Annual Conference, the following provisional clergy will be ordained in full connection to the Arkansas Conference. The service of Ordination and Commissioning is set for Tuesday, June 16, at 7:30 p.m., in the Bank of the Ozarks Arena, Hot Springs. All are invited to attend.



Paul Atkins

Paul Atkins, deacon
Hometown: Benton
Education: Bachelor of Music in bassoon performance and B.S. in music education, University of Missouri; M.A., bassoon performance, University of Arkansas; M.A. in religion, Memphis Theological Seminary
Appointment: CanvasCommunity UMC Little Rock (associate)



Mark Lawrence Cloninger

Mark Lawrence Cloninger, elder
Hometown: Fort Smith
Education: B.A. in Spanish, UA-Fort Smith; M.Div., Phillips Theological Seminary
Current appointment: Cornerstone UMC Jonesboro (associate)
Future appointment: First UMC De Queen/Gillham UMC



Chase Green

Charles Henley "Chase" Green Jr., elder
Hometown: Searcy
Education: B.A. in religious studies, Hendrix College; M.Div., Wesley Theological Seminary
Appointment: Asbury UMC Little Rock (associate)



Andrew C. Kjorlaug

Andrew C. Kjorlaug, elder
Hometown: Paragould
Education: Bachelor of Music in vocal performance, Arkansas State University; M.Div., theological studies, Boston University
Appointment: Lakewood UMC North Little Rock (associate)



Jacob Lynn

Jacob Lynn, elder
Hometown: Paragould
Education: B.A. in speech communication, Arkansas State University; M.A. in speech communication, ASU; M.Div., Saint Paul School of Theology
Appointment: Pulaski Heights UMC Little Rock



Sam Meadors

Sam Meadors, deacon
Hometown: Benton
Education: B.S. in mathematics, University of Arkansas; M.Div., Iliff School of Theology
Appointment: Campus minister, Arkansas State University Wesley Foundation; Cornerstone UMC Jonesboro (secondary appointment)



Michelle J. Morris

Michelle J. Morris, elder
Hometown: Benton
Education: B.A. in English/French, M.A. in comparative literature, University of Arkansas; M.Div., Perkins School of Theology, SMU; Ph.D. in religious studies, SMU
Appointment: First UMC West Memphis (associate)



Dixon Platt

Dixon Platt, elder
Hometown: Memphis, Tenn.
Education: B.B.A., Texas Tech University; M.Div., Memphis Theological Seminary
Appointment: Elm Springs UMC



Daniel V. Thueson

Daniel V. Thueson, elder
Hometown: Broken Arrow, Okla.
Education: B.A. in theology, Life Christian University; M. Div., Perkins School of Theology, SMU
Current appointment: First UMC Benton
Future appointment: Alma/Kibler UMCs

Seven ministry candidates to become provisional members June 16

Pending the approval of the June 14 clergy session of the Annual Conference, seven persons will be commissioned as provisional members of the Arkansas Conference, one of the final steps in the journey to ordination. The service is set for Tuesday, June 16, at 7:30 p.m., in the Bank of the Ozarks Arena, Hot Springs. All are invited to attend.



Colin T. Bagby

Colin T. Bagby, elder track
Hometown: Russellville
Education: B.A. in English/Literary Studies, Hendrix College; M.Div., Candler School of Theology, Emory University
Appointment (July): First UMC Maumelle (associate)



Sara Darlene Bayles

Sara Darlene Bayles, elder track
Hometown: Springdale
Education: B.A. in political science, religious studies, women's studies, University of Central Arkansas; M.Div., Duke Divinity School, with a Certificate in Gender, Theology and Ministry
Current appointment: Student associate pastor, Asbury UMC Durham, N.C.
Future appointment: First UMC Fort Smith (associate)



Jonathan Griesse

Jonathan Griesse, elder track
Hometown: St. Louis, Mo. (home church is First UMC Springdale)
Education: B.A. in broadcasting, minor in journalism, John Brown University; M.Div., Asbury Theological Seminary
Current appointment: Wesley Chapel UMC in the Lexington District, Kentucky Conference
Future appointment: First UMC Heber Springs (associate)



Todd Lovell

Todd Lovell, elder track
Hometown: Perryville
Education: B.A. in Christian theology, Ouachita Baptist University; M.Div., Duke Divinity School
Appointment (July): First UMC Springdale (associate)



Eric Lee Meyer

Eric Lee Meyer, elder track
Hometown: Bentonville
Education: B.S. in marketing, Northern Illinois University; M.Div., Phillips Theological Seminary
Current appointment: Gravette/Sulphur Springs UMCs
Future appointment: First UMC Bentonville (associate)



John F. Michael

John F. Michael, elder track
Hometown: Paragould
Education: B.S.E. in speech communication and theatre arts, Arkansas State University; B.A. in philosophy, ASU; M.A. in speech communication and theatre arts, ASU; M.Div., Memphis Theological Seminary
Current appointment: First UMC Mammoth Spring/Camp UMC
Future appointment: Corning UMC



Carissa Rodgers

Carissa Rodgers, elder track
Hometown: Little Rock
Education: B.A. in English, minor in political science, Philander Smith College; M.Div., SMU Perkins School of Theology
Appointment (July): Quapaw Quarter UMC Little Rock

Annual Conference 2015: Be informed before you go



The Arkansas Tithe Initiative: A New Way to Share Ministry

Find more details on the Arkansas Tithe Initiative online at <http://ac2015.arumc.org>, or by attending one of the pre-conference informational meetings listed below.

Pre-Annual Conference meetings scheduled throughout the state

A series of pre-Annual Conference informational meetings open to all United Methodists will take place around Arkansas between May 17 and 30. Clergy and lay members of the 2015 Annual Conference are especially encouraged to attend the meeting most convenient for them.

Sunday, May 17

4 p.m., First UMC Jonesboro

Tuesday, May 19

10 a.m., First UMC Hot Springs
3 p.m., First UMC Hope

Thursday, May 21

6 p.m., First UMC Newport

Tuesday, May 26

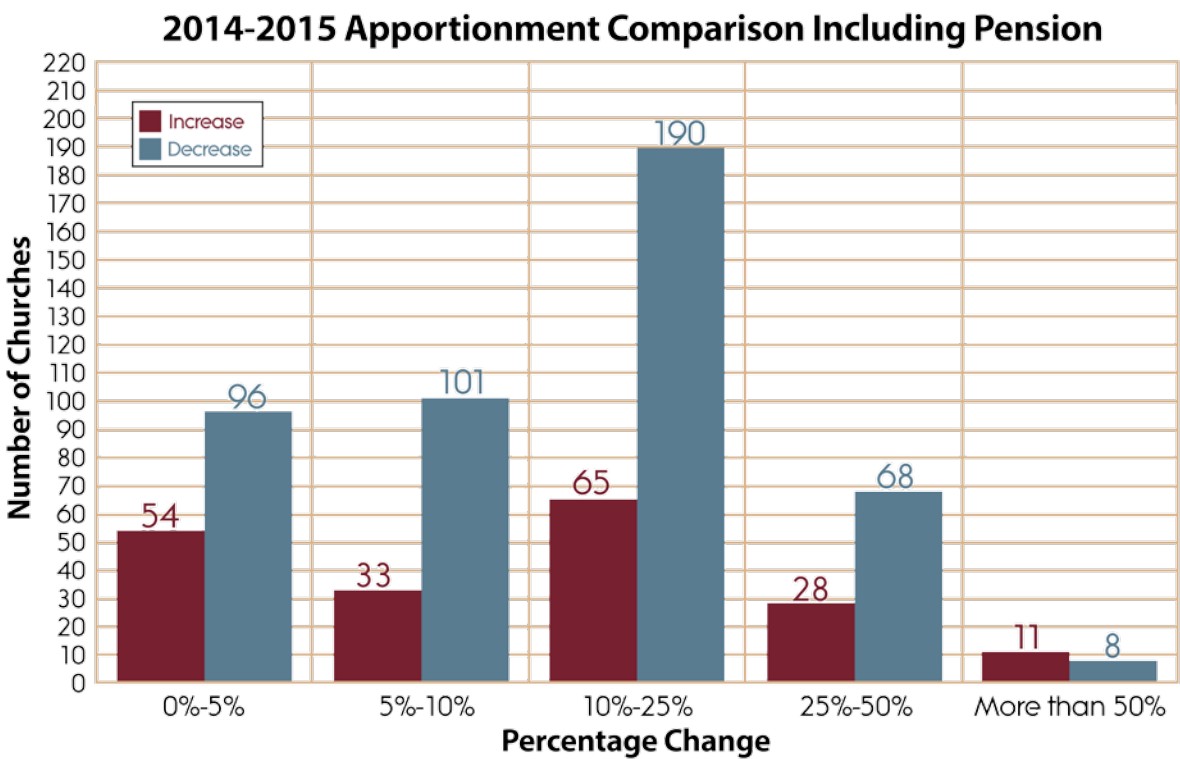
9 a.m., First UMC Brinkley
2 p.m., Lakeside UMC Pine Bluff

Saturday, May 30

10 a.m., First UMC Russellville
2 p.m., St. James UMC Little Rock

Need more information?

Visit <http://ac2015.arumc.org> to download the Pre-Conference Journal, multiple documents related to the Arkansas Tithe Initiative, nominees for the delegation to General Conference and more.



The graph above shows the combined apportionment and pension billing amount for all churches in the Arkansas Conference. Churches fall into one of five ranges of change in percentage. The red bars represent churches that will experience an increase in the apportionment and pension amount the church will pay. The blue bars represent churches that will experience a decrease in apportionment and pension payments. For a detailed report that includes how specific churches are affected, visit <http://ac2015.arumc.org>.

Agenda for Pre-Annual Conference meetings

Conference Pension and Insurance

The Rev. Dennis Spence, chair of the Conference Board of Pension and Health Benefits, and Todd Burris, Conference director of administrative services, will be on hand to share information and answer questions concerning the potential change in how churches provide these benefits for their clergy.

Arkansas Tithe Initiative

Jim Polk, chair of the Conference Council on Finance and Administration, and Todd Burris, Conference director of administrative services

Process for Petitions and Resolutions

Video presentation from the Rev. Will Choate, chair of the Petitions and Resolutions Task Force

General and Jurisdictional Conference delegate election process

A video message from Bishop Mueller

General Question and Answer Session

The Rev. Mackey Yokem, executive director of mission and ministry for the Arkansas Conference

Other Business

Closing Reflection

An invitation to clergy ordained at First UMC Hot Springs

Dear Friends in Arkansas United Methodism:

2015 will be a joyous year for us in Hot Springs National Park, Arkansas, and even more so with the “people called Methodists” returning to our city for your Annual Conference! Welcome back!

2015 will also be this historic congregation’s centennial year of ministry at the same location on Central Avenue in Downtown Hot Springs. Though the congregation was established in 1852, fire destroyed three previous locations. Since the summer of 1915, the Methodists of Hot Springs have gathered at 1100 Central Avenue, may God be praised!

Annual Conference sessions of the former Little

Rock Conference and even a session of Methodism’s General Conference have been held in our city, and we are most pleased to welcome back our sisters and brothers to this very special place.

To commemorate the occasion, First UMC of Hot Springs invites any and all clergy who were ordained at the altar of First UMC or Central Methodist Church (as it was known at one time) to come to our Sunday morning worship services on June 14, 2015, and be recognized. We would love to know who you are and celebrate your ministry and the small role this congregation may have had in your spiritual journey. Please contact Maggie Foster, Centennial Celebration Committee Chairperson at mlpf326@yahoo.com or 501-276-2945.

Michael L. Mattox, senior pastor



'Living Last Supper' part of Holy Week at St. Paul UMC LR

St. Paul UMC Little Rock included in its Maundy Thursday service a living re-creation of Leonardo DaVinci's famous mural in Milan, The Last Supper. Thirteen adult cast members portrayed Jesus and the disciples, and several elementary aged children dressed from the church's closet of "biblical attire" helped set the table with fresh food similar to what may have been served on that night. The participants by chance included four generations of St. Paul UMC members from the Short family, grandfather to great-grandson. Scripture readings centered around "The Seven Last Words of Christ" as the cast acted out or interpreted the content. At the conclusion, the cast slowly moved into the poses depicted by DaVinci in his mural. Hymns and sacred music were interspersed, with Holy Communion following, served by four of the disciples.

—submitted by Tyna Moore

Easter morning crosses bloom

COMING UP

Lay Servant Academy at Mount Sequoyah set for May 13-16

Mount Sequoyah Conference and Retreat Center in Fayetteville will host the next Lay Servant Academy, May 13-16, 2015. Sponsored by Arkansas UMC Lay Servant Ministries, the academy provides opportunities to equip laity in areas of Scripture, doctrine, organization and ministries of the church.

Certified Lay Servants are leadership among the laity who work to be better equipped for service. They serve the local church or charge in any way in which their witness or leadership inspires the laity to deeper commitment to Christ and more effective discipleship. Students must order materials through cokesbury.com and complete two hours of required homework before arrival to successfully complete the class.

This Academy will offer the basic course, as well as advanced courses on leading worship, evangelism, preaching and United Methodist heritage. Instructors for this academy include the Rev. Pat Bodenhamer, Jodi Cataldo, Liz Curtis, Susan Jett, the Rev. Shane Pair and George Rhoades. To learn more or to register, visit www.mountsequoyah.org.

Retired Ministers Day worship and luncheon May 18

The 17th annual Arkansas Retired Ministers Day will be held at Bayou Meto United Methodist Church in the Southeast District on Monday, May 18, with worship at 11:15 a.m. and lunch at noon. The keynote speaker will be Bishop Richard Looney. All retired pastors, spouses and surviving spouses are invited to attend. For more details, contact the Rev. Dr. David Bush at 870-673-1131.

Nominations for 2015 Barnabas Award accepted until May 22

The Arkansas Conference Board of Ordained Ministry will present the 2015 Barnabas Award at the Sunday afternoon Clergy Session of Annual Conference. The Barnabas Award is presented annually to a person, lay or clergy, known to have "a heart for pastors." Established in honor of the Rev. Jim Beal, the award goes to persons who, as Beal did, show special interest in aiding pastors in the entry process, as well as in the work of ministry. Nominations for this year's recipient are now being sought from among Arkansas United Methodists. To submit a nomination, email the Rev. Lynn Strang at 127victor@cox.net no later than Friday, May 22. Please include the name of the person you wish to nominate and an explanation of why you feel this person should receive the award.

Youth Lay Servant Academy at Mount Sequoyah June 21-24

The Lay Servant Academy for Youth, set for June 21-24, 2015, at Mount Sequoyah Retreat and Conference Center in Fayetteville, is designed for individual young people (6th through 12th grades) who have leadership potential in the local church. This event is not for entire youth groups, and not designed for college-age or young adult individuals.

Youth who attend will go through the Basic Lay Servant Course, as well as select an advanced course in Spiritual Gifts, Leading Worship or Leading Prayer. The experience also will include mission projects both at Mount Sequoyah and in the surrounding community.

For registration details, visit www.mountsequoyah.org. If you have questions, or are an adult interested in chaperoning the event, contact Christian education and spiritual formation coordinator Denni Palmer at denni.palmer@mountsequoyah.org or 479-443-4531.



Many congregations observe the long-known Christian tradition "the flowering of the cross" on Easter morning.

In the rural Grant County community of Tull, Ark., Ebenezer UMC made an indoor floral cross (left), as well as a 10-foot outdoor cross (center) draped in purple for Lent and white for Easter.

For about 10 years, Wynne's Central and Ellis Chapel UMCs have brought flowers every Easter to decorate



their "Old Rugged Cross." The idea came from church member Lill Wilson, who was murdered in the Central UMC building in 2010. Her husband, Art, built the cross.

After the service, the congregations leave the cross outside on Easter Day for others to enjoy (right). The congregations in the two-point charge alternate hosting worship on Sundays.

—Information and photos submitted by Albert Marlar and Mary Anne Cruthirds



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Soul Care to help churches minister to returning veterans and families

New healing ministry from JustPeace, the United Methodist Center for Mediation and Conflict Transformation

JustPeace, the United Methodist Center for Mediation and Conflict Transformation, announced in an April 7 news release the launch of Soul Care, an initiative to develop spiritual understanding and ways to speak to a hurting soul within the context of trauma and moral injury that returning veterans and their families often confront.

The mission of Soul Care is to enable faith-based organizations to receive returning veterans and re-integrate them and their families into the community. Soul Care provides resources and collaboration on the cultivation of spiritual care and resiliency.

Faith communities are uniquely positioned to help in this endeavor by offering hospitality, hope, new life, love and compassion. With enhanced awareness, education, coaching and support, churches can be empowered to render an invaluable ministry to returning veterans and their families.

“The care of souls is at the heart of the United Methodist witness,” said Bishop Hope Morgan Ward, president of JustPeace. “This initiative is a gift to faith communities as we engage in the healing ministry of Christ.”

www.soulcareinitiative.org

Soul Care has launched a website that highlights research, resources and organizations to assist faith communities to address the needs of returning service members in a sensitive, healing manner.

The Rev. Dave Smith, a retired U.S. Army chaplain, is coordinator for the Soul Care Initiative. He deployed

numerous times in support of contingency and combat operations during his 30 years of active duty. He is available to conduct workshops and consult on empowering faith communities with ways to be in ministry to returning veterans and their families.

“For many of our returning veterans, even after they return home, they are still at war,” Smith pointed out. “Healing the wounded soul is an underserved component of veteran well-being.”

A spiritual dimension

Smith emphasized that maintaining health and wholeness includes a spiritual dimension.

“The battlefield became a test of the soul as the warrior confronted the horrors of war,” he said. “Often traumatic experiences, like those in combat, affect the mind, body and soul.”

Smith explained that Soul Care addresses the aspect of well-being that captures a person’s overall spiritual health. “The Church has an opportunity, a responsibility, a calling to be part of the veteran’s journey home,” he said.

For more information, contact Smith via email (dsmith@soulcareinitiative.org) or phone (202-488-5621), or visit www.soulcareinitiative.org.

The mission of the JustPeace Center for Mediation and Conflict Transformation (<http://justpeaceumc.org/>) is to prepare and assist United Methodists in engaging conflict constructively in ways that strive for justice, reconciliation, resource preservation and restoration of community in the Church and in the world.

Petitions being accepted for General Conference 2016

Petitions for consideration by the 2016 General Conference may be submitted to the petitions secretary through Oct. 13, 2015.

According to church law, “Any organization, clergy member, or lay member of The United Methodist Church may petition the General Conference.”

Detailed instructions for submitting a petition are available on the General Conference website, <http://gc2016.umc.org>. Petitions must be typed and may be submitted through the General Conference website, by postal mail or via email to petitions@umpublishing.org. This email address should be used for petition submission only; direct all other correspondence to petitionsquestions@umpublishing.org. Petitions submitted without digital media need to be submitted by July 1, 2015, to allow time for transcription and translation.

If submitting a hard copy petition (accompanied if possible by digital version on CD or USB drive), mail to:

Rev. Gary Graves, Petitions Secretary
United Methodist General Conference 2016
230 2nd Street
Paris, KY 40361

Eligible petitions are given numbers and assigned to one of 12 legislative committees or the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters. The committees will debate the proposals and determine whether to approve, amend, combine or reject them for recommendation to the full body of General Conference.

Submitted petitions must indicate whether the petition has “general church budget implications,” meaning that it causes the need for funding (i.e., creation of a new program, staff position, support requirements, etc.) through the general church apportionments. Such petitions require review by the General Council on Finance and Administration to verify if the funding is already included under the recommended quadrennial budget.

Submitters must also indicate whether a petition has “global implications,” meaning it is a constitutional amendment, has a direct effect on the global work of general agencies, places requirements or expectations on all annual conferences, districts or churches, or speaks to societal concerns regardless of the particular form of secular government.

Questions about the petition submission process may be submitted by email to Rev. Gary W. Graves, petitions secretary, at petitionsquestions@umpublishing.org.

Multicultural (continued from page 3)

would have to bow out. The snow and ice of 2015 caused many hourly workers to have lots of no-pay days, which increased the possible shortfall. But God always provides.

I teach night English classes in North Little Rock with Jane Ann Bilon, who also is a United Methodist—a member of Sylvan Hills. Both of us know how our class turnout varies with weather and work opportunities. Bilon volunteered to talk to her pastor, the Rev. Brittany Richardson Watson, about joining the effort. Before long, Sylvan Hills United Methodists had fleshed out the team.

Heavy rain was forecast for the second of the three days of work, and most workers could only come on Saturday. A few signed on to come back Sunday in the rain or Monday to finish whatever was needed. Thank God Saturday was

cloudy but rain-free; the mud was already inches deep all around the trailer where the team worked.

No need for a return trip, however! With six Hispanics familiar with construction, and most of the Methodists being veteran missionaries, in less than seven hours the team built a back deck platform and step, and a front porch with staircase and rails.

Making connections

It was especially rewarding to connect with the family we were

helping. Knowing that our team was multi-ethnic and bilingual, Volunteers in Mission coordinator Byron Mann had sent us to a Hispanic family in the Black Oak area. When the students took a break, they visited with the family. Some ended up sharing information about immigrant resources the family really needed. The students had received the resources in presentations and displays at our ESL site. They also brainstormed ideas for future classes to help each other adapt to Arkansas—gardening, for instance, and learning to cook U.S. cuisine so that they can secure better jobs. Here

was grassroots organization at work!

In the team meeting the night before the workday, I had read 1 John 4:11-12: “Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love each other, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us” (NIV). I wanted the group to remember that our task was to build the two porches, but our purpose was to work together so that God’s love could flow through us toward others.

The very way we work is a witness, and I wondered how it might play out, having workers from such far-flung places. ¡No problema! Most students spoke some English and some of the missionaries spoke a little Spanish, but language didn’t matter. The team hadn’t worked together before, either, but everyone mastered the art of becoming a team. It was a great day.

My work often centers on helping others use their gifts to share God’s love. Some of those “others” can even be the strangers in our midst that Matthew 25 talks about, to whom we offer welcome and yes, partnership.

Outreach is best when standing shoulder to shoulder with one another. Two or three days’ work finished in just a few hours? Well, sure—because when two or three, or 19, gather in Jesus’ name, God’s power is at work in marvelous ways.

The Rev. Duncan teaches ESL at St. Andrew UMC and Seis Puentes Hispanic Center, and is pastor of adult and Hispanic outreach at St. Andrew UMC Little Rock.

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Malaria (continued from page 1)

Methodists across the state found creative ways to raise funds—running 5Ks and marathons, baking cookies and selling crafts, hosting sporting events, special programs and much more. Age and specific talent didn't matter; everyone found some way to contribute.

"We set out to make this as much of a grassroots project as possible," said the Rev. David Freeman, chair of the Arkansas Conference's Imagine No Malaria task force. "We wanted this work to be done by churches, Sunday school classes, small groups and youth groups. The people of Arkansas got on board. Beyond the matching gift from UMFA, almost every dollar was raised by people in the churches—not a committee or campaign team."

"It's not hard to wrap your mind around a mosquito bite," said task force member Mary Lewis Dassinger. "But a bite that can send a

family into deeper poverty because the loss of wages, and into deeper suffering over the loss of a parent or child, is harder to imagine. That malaria infects, sickens and kills millions is even harder to comprehend."

Knowing that God would work through the Arkansas Conference's and the United Methodist Church's faithful actions spurred Dassinger's family to give to Imagine No Malaria, she said. It provided a way to put their faith into action and to help change the world.

"As I traveled the state speaking to various groups about Imagine No Malaria, I often said that I was 100 percent convinced that God was working in and through our church to further God's work in the world," said the Rev. Martha Taylor, who for six months served as the full-time Arkansas field coordinator for Imagine No Malaria. "The saving of

millions of lives, the education and communication strides and the empowering of the people of Africa so that they can continue the work far into the future—it all brings to life Jesus' words in Matthew 21: 'I tell you the truth, if you have faith and don't doubt, you can do things like this and much more.'"

Freeman highlighted the large impact of so many small gifts.

"We've reached this milestone because people got behind the belief that they had the power to make a real difference," he said.

Taylor finds hope in how sharing personal stories made a difference. She believes the same type of momentum is poised to happen with the latest Conference-wide focus, the 200,000 Reasons initiative to end childhood hunger in our state.

"All you have to do is look at the faces of the people whose lives have been transformed to know God is using the UMC in a powerful way," she said.



Households connected with Piggott UMC brought their Imagine No Malaria coin boxes to church March 29 as part of a special Lenten offering. The congregation collected more than \$200, which pushed the Arkansas Conference over the top of its \$1 million minimum goal for helping to end deaths from this treatable, preventable disease.

At the same time, the church took a separate collection to benefit those close to home: The baskets seen on either side of the altar hold collected "Busy Items"—coloring books, crayons, puzzles, books and toys—for children who receive care at Piggott Community Hospital.

PHOTO COURTESY ANDY NEWBILL



Circuit of UMCs has party to stock local food pantries

The Harrison Circuit of the Northwest District (known as the "God's Country" Circuit among its member churches) on March 28 partnered with northwest Arkansas nonprofit The Pack Shack (www.thepackshack.org) for a "Feed the Funnel" party.

Sharing the work load, the churches exceeded all of their goals for the party. With 84 laity and clergy signed in and working to package meals for area food pantries, they were able to prepare more than 10,000 shelf-stable meals in just two hours. The meals were then distributed to organizations in Bull Shoals, Jasper, Leslie, Marshall, Harrison and Diamond City, all communities within the Harrison Circuit area.

After a successful effort, circuit members decided that their goal for next year will be to double their output, from 10,000 meals to 20,000 (or more). The Harrison Circuit already has booked a party with the The Pack Shack for Palm Sunday weekend 2016.

The churches of the Harrison Circuit include Diamond City, Omaha, First Harrison, St. Paul Harrison, Valley View, Bellefonte, Cedar Grove, Pleasant Ridge, Valley Springs, Jasper, Everton, Bergman, Bull Shoals and Yellville. The Rev. Pat Bodenhamer, pastor of Diamond City and Omaha UMCs, serves as Circuit Elder.

The churches of the Harrison Circuit include Diamond City, Omaha, First Harrison, St. Paul Harrison, Valley View, Bellefonte, Cedar Grove, Pleasant Ridge, Valley Springs, Jasper, Everton, Bergman, Bull Shoals and Yellville. The Rev. Pat Bodenhamer, pastor of Diamond City and Omaha UMCs, serves as Circuit Elder.

COURTESY PHOTO

Stone Soup marks 30 years of ministry feeding neighbors

The Stone Soup ministry at Quapaw Quarter UMC Little Rock just celebrated 30 uninterrupted years of providing a hot meal for the hungry at 3 p.m. on Sundays.

If you do the math, that comes out to 1,560 Sundays—every single Sunday for 30 years, in fair weather and during ice storms, gas leaks and power outages—even if they had to make do with a sack lunch, which was only a handful of times. An average of 120 persons share the meal on a given Sunday, which translates into approximately 187,200 meals served.

It began on an Easter Sunday, April 7, 1985. The Rev. John Miles Sr., then pastor at St. James UMC Little Rock, had people who wanted to help feed the hungry and money to help do it, but people in need of food didn't live in or frequent St. James' west Little Rock neighborhood.

Bobbi Pitts, an active member of the church at 16th and Louisiana Streets downtown (still Winfield UMC in those days), was concerned for the hungry people who knocked on the church's doors every day. While the church's tiny food pantry could give out a few canned goods if someone asked, it lacked the financial resources to meet the needs of its immediate mission field. In an example of the United Methodist connection at its best, Miles and Pitts pooled their respective churches' resources of money, volunteers, needs and space to form Stone Soup, and the rest is history.

Many United Methodist churches, youth groups and individuals have spent time in the Stone Soup kitchen at 16th and Louisiana, now Quapaw Quarter UMC. Among the ones who are still active in the program are Asbury UMC, Henderson, St. Luke, St. James Little Rock, Keo, England, First Benton, Sardis and Salem Benton. Volunteers from these churches were honored at a spaghetti dinner Tuesday, April 7, at QQUMC, along with current and former volunteer schedule coordinators Brenda Weeks and Debbie Hiller of St. James and Bobbi Pitts of Quapaw Quarter, and the ministry's grocery shopper, Lori Llewellyn of St. James.

—submitted by Anne Holcomb



Bobbi Pitts in the Stone Soup kitchen at Quapaw Quarter UMC.

COURTESY PHOTO

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United Methodist church disinvented to Easter parade

Members of First United Methodist Church Eureka Springs talk with Sandy Martin, right, a resident of Eureka Springs, Ark., who came to the Jesus Parade. Church members are, from left, Suzie Bell, Peggy Way and Kim Stryker.

PHOTOS
COURTESY OF
SUZIE BELL



BY KATHY L. GILBERT
United Methodist News Service

In a city that sits under the watchful eyes of a 67-foot Jesus, a United Methodist church marching in a Jesus Parade, waving a banner “Jesus Loves All! All are Welcome!!” would seem to be right in step with the celebration.

It didn’t turn out that way for First United Methodist Church of Eureka Springs when the congregation was disinvented to join the parade on April 4.

Eureka Springs is home to “America’s #1 attended outdoor drama,” The Great Passion Play about Jesus’ last days on earth, and Christ of the Ozarks, a 2-million-pound sculpture of Jesus. The city in northwest Arkansas is also the only city in the state with a

nondiscrimination ordinance providing protection for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) residents and visitors.

Diversity seems to be embraced.

But Suzie Bell, a member of First United Methodist Church, believes the church was turned away because it is a “reconciling” congregation. That means the church is committed to equality and full inclusion for all people regardless of race, gender, age, physical or mental ability, sexual orientation, gender identity, nationality or economic status.

The Reconciling Ministries Network, an unofficial United Methodist group, recognizes a congregation as reconciling if it adopts a statement to welcome people regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. The

group also asks congregations to look for ways to be more welcoming of other people who may be missing from their pews, including people of color and people with disabilities.

The Judicial Council, the denomination’s top court, ruled in 1999 that a local church or any of its organizational units may not label itself as an unofficial body. Many congregations disregard that ruling.

‘A pretty great message’

“Jesus loves all. All are welcome.” Can’t argue with that. It’s a pretty great message,” Bell said. The church applied and was accepted to participate in the parade. Parade organizers talked to Bell about what the church’s message would be and also approved.

That permission was rescinded by parade organizers the Monday before the event. Organizers said the church “was the wrong kind of group” for their parade.

Steve Roberson, another church member who represents the reconciling congregation group, said people in the church were shocked and angry but God turned the incident into a blessing.

“We are Christians just like everyone else and just wanted to celebrate Jesus on Easter weekend. It has allowed our little congregation a chance to shine and show what we are about,” he said.

United Methodist News Service tried to contact organizers of the Jesus Parade but got no response.

Laura Nichols, parade director, did release a statement to the press after some local news stations picked up the story.

“This day isn’t a day of pointing

fingers or playing the blame game. This parade is to honor our Lord and Savior and for praising God for sending His only Son who willingly went to the cross, died and rose on the third day that when we repent of our sins and accept Him. We have the promise of eternal life with the Lord. But more than that, He carries us each day that we are on this earth. We are all sinners redeemed by the grace of God. We believe that the Bible is the uncompromised Word of God inspired by the Holy Spirit.”

The statement from Nichols goes on to say, “We do not have anything against the Methodist Church. After all, my uncle was a Methodist minister. Nor do we have anything against the homosexual community. When I worked downtown I had homosexual people that I considered my friends and still do.”

Following a plan

Bell said the church was following a 10-point plan for Arkansas designed by Bishop Gary E. Mueller.

“One of the goals is to look like your neighborhood,” she said. “This is our neighborhood; we cannot ignore this large group of people who feel left out and ostracized by the church.”

Mueller sent a letter to the congregation of First United Methodist Church saying he was saddened by the treatment they received at the Jesus Parade and was grateful for the church’s response to stand on the sidelines and cheer for the parade marchers, as well as offering food and water to all.

“You responded in love,” he said.

The Rev. Bud Reeves, district superintendent, attended the parade and witnessed how the church responded to exclusion.

“When the parade started, a

bunch of UMs gathered along the route with their banner (that would have been used in the parade) saying ‘Jesus Loves All’ and a few homemade signs with similar messages, and each group that came down the parade route, the UMs applauded for them!” said Reeves, noting the church members knew many of the marchers. “I was frankly astounded at the response of the leaders who curtailed the anger and bitter reactions to the hypocrisy and exclusion to turn it into an expression of love.” He was so impressed he sent that message to Mueller and other members of the United Methodist Arkansas Conference.

Bell said she has had many conversations with Reeves, who did not approve of the church

in United Methodist churches; and “self-avowed practicing” gay people cannot be ordained.

Since 1972, the denomination has been debating this stance at its top legislative body, General Conference. Each time, General Conference has consistently voted to keep the language, and over the years has expanded restrictions against gay clergy and same-gender unions.

Disagreements do not have to mean exclusions, Mueller said on Easter Monday.

“Yesterday Christians throughout the world celebrated the resurrection of Jesus Christ. On the day after Easter, it’s back to business as usual as we criticize each other in ways that break Jesus’ heart and give the world all the evidence it needs to



The banner the church had planned to wave in the Jesus Parade.

identifying as “reconciling.”

Reeves said that was true.

“I still don’t agree with the decision of the Eureka Springs United Methodist Church to become a reconciling congregation because the Judicial Council has ruled it inappropriate. But I was glad to be there and be in conversation with a group of positive and gracious people,” Reeves said.

The United Methodist Church’s official stance is that homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. United Methodist pastors are not allowed to officiate at same sex weddings; same sex weddings cannot be held

not take us seriously.

“Why does this happen? There are many reasons, some profound and others petty. But there’s one that’s far more powerful than all the others put together — each of us believes Jesus prefers our worship style, beliefs and stance on social issues more than others. It doesn’t have to be this way if each of us is willing to set aside our own agenda and give ourselves wholly to Christ,” he writes.

Bell said church members had many “fabulous conversations” with members of the LGBT community on Saturday, and many of them came to First United Methodist on Easter morning “to see what we were about.”

“It cracked open the door for many in the LGBT community and I think that will be ongoing,” Bell said.

Gilbert is a multimedia news reporter for United Methodist News Service. Contact her at (615) 742-5470 or newsdesk@umcom.org.

In a “behind the story” story, Suzie Bell and her husband, Dan, started a free ecumenical medical clinic in Eureka Springs in 2005. The clinic was featured on ABC World News Tonight, in an issue of People magazine and on the Oprah Winfrey Show, which included a visit to the clinic from Dr. Oz. Parade director Laura Nichols and her husband, as well as four other people on the parade committee, were all part of a prayer team that meets in support of the clinic. Bell said all of them resigned from the prayer team after the parade incident.

Destination: Mission provides servant experience for younger students

What did you do on Spring Break? Go to the beach? Go skiing? For a large group of children and their adult leaders from United Methodist churches across the state, Spring Break meant a time for serving others in the name of Christ.

Destination: Mission, a hands-on mission experience for elementary school students, headed to the Jonesboro area for Spring Break 2015. The theme was "JUMP!" based on Psalm 9: 1-2 (J = Just give thanks, U = Use your Bible/journal, M = Make a joyful noise, P = Praise God!) The 72 people on the mission served at 10 area agencies, ranging from food banks and an animal shelter to a community garden and a

youth center.

The group made a big impact on their host city and the surrounding community. For a slide show of the participants in action, visit <http://goo.gl/ysdOzm>.

Leaders of Destination: Mission pray each trip to be made aware of things that break the heart of God. For one team, this became reality when they visited the Methodist Family Health Children's Home in Bono. The young men there have had some difficult experiences in life, yet they were gracious. The team spent time playing games with the young men and promised to pray for them. Other Destination: Mission teams joined in prayer for youth at Methodist Family Health group

homes, as well. God used the experience to plant seeds of service.

Destination: Mission will have a trip for 3rd-6th graders July 8-11 in Beebe. It is coordinated by Tiffany Jones, Children's Minister at First UMC Beebe. The theme is "Blast Off!" based on Psalm 8. Destination: Mission will also have two joint mission efforts with Mount Sequoyah for 3rd-8th graders. Session 1 is July 19-22 and Session 2 is July 22-25. The theme for these sessions is "SHOUT!" based on Psalm 66:1.

To keep up to date on Destination: Mission, visit www.facebook.com/Destination.Mission.

—information submitted by
Karen Swales and Denni Palmer



Campers at Destination: Mission's Spring Break camp in the Jonesboro area spent their time at 10 different mission sites, including the Food Bank of Northeast Arkansas.

COURTESY PHOTO

Tanako announces camp scholarships available to African-American churches

Camp Tanako has received a grant from the Arkansas Annual Conference Committee on Camping and Retreat Ministries for summer camp scholarships for children and youth from African-American congregations. This support for African-American local churches in building strong, vital congregations supports Next Step 9 of the Bishop's Mission Plan (details available at arumc.org/missionplan).

These scholarships to Camp Tanako may be used by local churches to pay in full for one child's or youth's camping experience, or may be split to reduce the price for two children or youth attending camp. Time spent at camp changes lives through spiritual revival and renewal! Scholarships will be awarded on a first-come, first-serve basis. For more information, contact Kim Carter at 501-262-2600 or tanako@tanako.org.



Everton youth give to Heifer International

Children and youth from Everton UMC recently raised \$820 to benefit the programs of Heifer International, a nonprofit organization that works with communities to end world hunger and poverty and to care for the Earth.

The Rev. Dave Smith, the church's pastor, said the memory of a past experience of giving to Heifer programs prompted the young people to start a new fundraising campaign. "They identified the need, formulated a plan and conducted the program to raise money for Heifer," he said.

As a way to challenge church members to give, the kids developed a list of "assessments" for each week's collection. One week they asked for 10 cents for every pair of shoes in members' closets; another week was 25 cents for each TV in members' homes. (When they assessed for the number of fishing poles, it hit Pastor Dave pretty hard.)

Five adults and three children from Everton UMC made the trip to the Heifer Ranch in Perryville over Spring Break, where they toured the ranch and presented their gift.

At left, Jaylee Freeman, Tel Potter and Ty Potter of Everton UMC present the church's check to a Heifer Ranch representative.

COURTESY PHOTO

Church's new playground 'ark' inspires pantry gifts

A new piece of playground equipment is bringing joy to children, and it also has helped provide for the church's neighbors.

Several years ago, a severe storm uprooted a tree that fell on part of the playground at Salem United Methodist Church Benton, damaging the equipment. In February, the church unveiled a new addition to their playground: a playset built to resemble Noah's Ark. "Not only did our congregation and kids raise the money for it, it was built by hand by our church members," said Russell Powell, co-director of children's and youth ministries. "Several members of the church volunteered their free time



A young member of Salem UMC Benton holds a can of food that helped "fill the Ark" as a missional way to celebrate the church's new playset.

COURTESY PHOTO

and talents to give to the children of our church and community."

On ribbon cutting day, the children of the church wanted to see how many canned foods it would take to fill up the Ark, so they helped

sponsor a church-wide canned food drive to celebrate the opening of their new playset. The result: more than 800 cans of food for a local food pantry.

—submitted by Rachel Powell

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OBITUARIES

FORREST CITY**Lawrence O. Taylor**

The Rev. Lawrence Odell Taylor, 85, of Forrest City, passed away Tuesday, March 24, 2015, at VA Regional Medical Center in Memphis, Tenn.



Lawrence O. Taylor

Born Wednesday, April 3, 1929, in Marshall, Texas, he was the son of the late Mr. Issacc Taylor and the late Mrs. Terah Hunt Taylor. He was the husband of Mrs. Mae Glover Taylor. He was retired from Universal Life Insurance Co., and was a member of Beth Salem Baptist Church. He was a retired associate member of the Arkansas Conference, having served appointments at Ebenezer UMC Conway and Kynette UMC.

Survivors include his wife, Mae Glover Taylor of Forrest City; daughters, Rosalyn Shumpert-Boone of Chicago, Cheryl Brooks of Dallas, Terah Bias of Houston, Shauna Taylor of Phoenix and Tiffany Sykes-Brown of Fayetteville; a sister, Janis Prat of Los Angeles; 12 grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren. He was predeceased by a daughter, Mrs. Anthony R. Harris, and a sister, Mana Taylor. A funeral service was held on Sunday, March 29, at Beth Salem Baptist Church in Forrest City. Interment followed in West Tennessee State Veterans Cemetery, Memphis.

LITTLE ROCK**Joel A. Cooper**

The Rev. Dr. Joel Aubrey Cooper, 96, passed away on April 17, 2015, at Parkway Village Health Center in Little Rock. He was born Dec. 26, 1918, in Paragould.

Joel was licensed to preach in 1932 at age 14. He graduated from Hendrix College in 1940, and Duke Divinity School in 1943. As an ordained United Methodist minister, he served churches throughout the Arkansas Conference. His career included church appointments in Vannsdale-Cherry Valley, Tuckerman, Mountain Home, Conway, Little Rock, Fayetteville and Fort Smith from 1944 until his retirement in 1984. He continued to be active in the United Methodist Church even after retirement, and worked for Hendrix College in several capacities. He served as the founding pastor for two churches, Maumelle UMC in 1986 and Grace UMC Conway in 1993.

Recognitions during his 70 years of service were numerous. He was named The Progressive Farmer Rural Minister of the Year in 1948. He received an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from Hendrix College in 1962. The North Arkansas Conference of the United Methodist Church nominated him as their candidate for election to the United Methodist episcopacy in 1976 and 1980. He was a delegate for many years to the General and World Methodist conferences. He also held numerous Annual Conference, Jurisdictional and General Conference positions.



Joel Cooper

Joel was a beloved father, grandfather and great-grandfather to his family, with his loving wife, Bill, always by his side at home and in his ministry. He was known as a strong and loving minister to the many congregations he served for over 50 years and continued to preach until his very last years.

Throughout his life, Joel was a faithful and loyal member of the United Methodist Church and was always a devoted fisher of men. However, when he got the opportunity for a free afternoon, he also enjoyed being on the lake catching fish. In retirement, he was an avid woodworker, writer and poet.

After he retired, he always smiled when he handed someone his calling card. On the bottom he had added in bright red ink, "WILL PREACH FOR FOOD," and many congregations throughout Arkansas did indeed take him up on it.

His beloved wife, Billie Charlene (Thacker) Cooper, a native of Danville, preceded him in death in June 2014. He also was preceded in death by his parents, Willis Cooper and Willie Mae Hensley McAden; his oldest son, Paul G. Cooper; grandsons, John Denton Cooper and Wesley Christopher Cooper; as well as his sister, Nestel Wilkinson.

He is survived by three sons: the Rev. Wm. Christopher Cooper and his wife, Kathy, of Little Rock, AR; Dr. C. Marcus Cooper and his wife, Donna, of Johnson City, Tenn.; and J. Clayborne Cooper and his wife, Cindi, of Murfreesboro, Tenn.; a daughter-in-law, Anita Ladensack and Joe of Phoenix, Ariz.; a brother, John Cooper and his wife, Patty, of Conway; and six grandchildren: Emily Horton (Jimmy), Matt Cooper (Priscilla), Josh Cooper (Jessica), Charlie Cooper (Allison), Casy Brian (Matt), Andee Parks (John); and six great-grandchildren.

A memorial service was held Thursday, April 23 at First United Methodist Church, 723 Center Street, Little Rock, with a reception following in the Winston Faulkner Gymnasium.

The family requests that memorials be made to the Bill and Joel Cooper Duke Divinity School Scholarship Endowment through the United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas, 5300 Evergreen Dr., Little Rock, AR 72205-1814. This scholarship will help provide Arkansas students who want to serve the local church in the Arkansas Conference a seminary education at Duke Divinity School.

SHERWOOD**Patrick Owen Henry**

The Rev. Patrick Owen "Pat" Henry passed away quietly in his home on April 9, 2015. He was born Nov. 24, 1949, to Owen David Henry and Juanita Henry of Childress, Texas.

Pat was married to June Henry for 44 years, and was an ordained deacon in the Arkansas Conference of the United Methodist Church, serving as a music minister. He was appointed to First UMC Maumelle at the time of his death, and had previously served at Christ of the Hills UMC Hot



Pat Henry

Springs Village. He was a professional musician for over 50 years, playing 15 musical instruments. He shared his love of music by teaching others.

Pat was preceded in death by his father, Owen David Henry.

He is survived by his wife, June Shackelford Henry of Sherwood; his mother, Juanita Henry; one brother, David Henry of Childress, Texas; three sons: Jim Henry and his wife, Becky, of Romance; Richard Henry of Sherwood; and Craig Henry of Childress, Texas; eight grandchildren: Chris, Madison and Joseph Henry; Morgan and Nicole Henry; and Kateland, Kimberly and Carson Henry; and one great-grandchild, Rylie Custer.

Funeral services were held Sunday, April 12, 2015, at First United Methodist Church Maumelle.

SALINA, Kan.**Ronald L. Robbins**

The Rev. Ronald Lee Robbins, 81, of Salina, Kan., passed away April 1, 2015, surrounded by his family.

He was born on Aug. 13, 1933, in Scott City, Kan., son of Orville and Garnett Ballentine Robbins.

Ron served in the United States Army during the Korean War, attaining the rank of Corporal. Following his military service, he earned a bachelor's degree at McPherson College in McPherson, Kan., and a Master's degree at Dubuque Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa.

He was an active and caring minister for the United Methodist Church, as well as combined Methodist and Presbyterian churches, serving in Hazleton, Stanley, and Des Moines, Iowa; Bennington, Kan.; and Diamond City, Omaha and Yellville, Ark. (the Cedar Grove/Pleasant Ridge charge from 2003 to 2008).

He married Carol Ann Robbins in 1987, and they spent many wonderful years in Yellville before moving to Salina. Ron enjoyed bird watching, carving, singing and sharing stories.

Ron is survived by his wife, Carol; his children, Alisa Smith and her husband, Mike; Randy Robbins and his wife, Doe; and Terry Robbins and his wife, Celeste; his brothers, Gary Robbins and his wife, Mary Ann; and Ed Robbins and his wife, Ruth; his sister, Judy Taddiken and her husband, Dale; two stepchildren, Stacey Gingell and her husband, Jim; and Creigh Bell and his wife, Keri; seven grandchildren, three great-grandchildren and countless other loved ones.

He was preceded in death by his parents and a grandson, Michael Smith.

A memorial service was held April 11 at Ellsworth Memorial Cemetery, Ellsworth, Kan.

In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, c/o Ryan Mortuary, 137 N. 8th Street, Salina, KS 67401.



Ron Robbins

Philander Smith College named a top 40 HBCU for third year running

In its 2015 Best Colleges listings, U.S. News & World Report included United Methodist-related Philander Smith College among the nation's top 40 Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), the college announced in a March 19 news release.

Philander Smith is ranked

35th, tying for the spot with the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff. This is the third consecutive year that the Little Rock institution has made the top 40.

For the top HBCU list, the publication ranked a total of 69 historically black colleges and universities. Rankings are derived

from data such as institutional reputation, retention rates, college entrance scores, faculty strength and graduation rates.

"Each year national college ranking reports create a lot of interest and dialogue surrounding our nation's best public and private universities," said Dr. Roderick L.

Smothers, president of Philander Smith College. "We are proud that Philander Smith College has a national prominence as a quality choice for a solid college education."

To be part of the Best Black Colleges and Universities, a school must be currently designated by the

Department of Education as an HBCU, a status created as part of the Higher Education Act of 1965. Additionally, the college must be a baccalaureate-granting institution that enrolls primarily first-year, first-time students and must also have been part of this year's "Best Colleges" process.

Through duo of dramas, West Memphis church brings Christ's story into current culture



In *The Trial*, a Good Friday drama produced by First UMC West Memphis, Jesus is executed by lethal injection.

PHOTO BY ELIZABETH WILLIAMS

This year during Holy Week, First United Methodist Church West Memphis presented two dramas. Both stories relied on information found in the Gospels (especially John), but through costuming, language and the use of popular music, they set the scene as if the Last Supper and the trial and execution of Jesus happened today.

Last Call was set in a fictional bar and grill on Beale Street and featured Jesus's last meal with his disciples, all the way up to his arrest in the patio (Garden of Gethsemane). It was written by members of the church community: Jayna Leitze, associate pastor the Rev. Michelle Morris, Anna Kate Spotts and Kate Stall.

The Trial, written by Laura Partlow Foster in consultation with Morris, depicted Jesus' trial and execution in a courtroom and execution chamber of today, and included the seven last words as Jesus made his way from the courtroom to the execution table. Randy Sullivan played the role of Jesus, and more than 50 members of First UMC West Memphis worked to put on the two dramas.

Some unexpected and powerful moments unfolded during the presentation of *Last Call*.

As the final song played, an audience member broke the "fourth wall" and crossed over into the area where the play was staged. The man sat down with Sullivan (Jesus) and shared that he was facing some struggles—and that the story told through the play was helping him find healing and know Christ more deeply. Sullivan ministered to the man and then sent him peacefully back to his seat before the song drew to a close.

Another surprise came during the celebration of Holy Communion.

"While we distributed communion to the crowd, we came across a man in the audience who had never had Communion before," said the Rev. Dr. Michelle Morris, the church's associate pastor. "Our server, Laura Partlow Foster, helped him understand how and when to take it."

Morris believes that both plays served to bring Christ to the community in new and valuable ways.

"I had prayed and prayed that we would be the Body of Christ in the world for the people who came, and that is exactly what happened," she said.

To learn more about either or both of these plays, contact Morris at michelle.morris@arumc.org or 870-735-1805. For her reflections on the productions, visit the Bridge blog and blog archive at www.fumcwm.com, under the "Encounter" section of the site. Video of the dramas will soon be posted on the church's YouTube channel, <http://goo.gl/VCNY1K>.



Faith Funds

A Local Church Legacy

John and Becki Lusk love their church — First United Methodist Church of El Dorado. He was a hands-on Board of Trustees Chairman and has participated in mission trips to the Mississippi coast and Haiti. Becki has made three mission trips to Mexico, is a leader in UMW and helped with interior design for the refurbished Fellowship Hall.

John, a stockbroker for 31 years, decided after retirement to create a \$1 million endowment to support his local church. The couple chose the United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas to manage their Faith Fund because John had researched the Foundation's past financial performance and had heard President and CEO Jim Argue, Jr. speak. "We know the people at the Foundation are the best people to manage our gift," John said.

Most of the couple's blended family of six children, 12 grandchildren and 3 great-grandchildren no longer live in El Dorado or in Arkansas, but the Lusks chose to leave a legacy for their home church that will touch many families through mission work, music ministry and youth ministry forever.

"My feelings are that to whom much is given, much is asked," said Becki, a retired Bank Trust Officer who joined the UMFA Board of Directors in 2014. "It is a special pleasure for us to be able to make a lasting gift to our church."



The United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas

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