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Churches use 'Blessing Box' concept to meet local needs

BY AMY FORBUS
Editor

An idea shared on social media has arrived in Arkansas and is being used by United Methodists to help their communities: the Blessing Box.

The concept is simple: Stock a container with nonperishable food items, toiletries or other basic household needs that can withstand storage outdoors. Invite people to take what they need and give what they can. The Blessing Box phenomenon has been compared to the Little Free Library movement, which provides small cabinets of books for communities to borrow and trade. Often, the boxes and the libraries bear some resemblance to each other.

When Patrick Brown, a member of Dover UMC in the Northwest District, saw a post on Facebook that shared the idea of the Blessing Box, he sent it to his pastor, the Rev. Roy Beth Kelley. It turned out that a fellow church member, Cindy Hurley, had sent Kelley the very same photo that day, too.

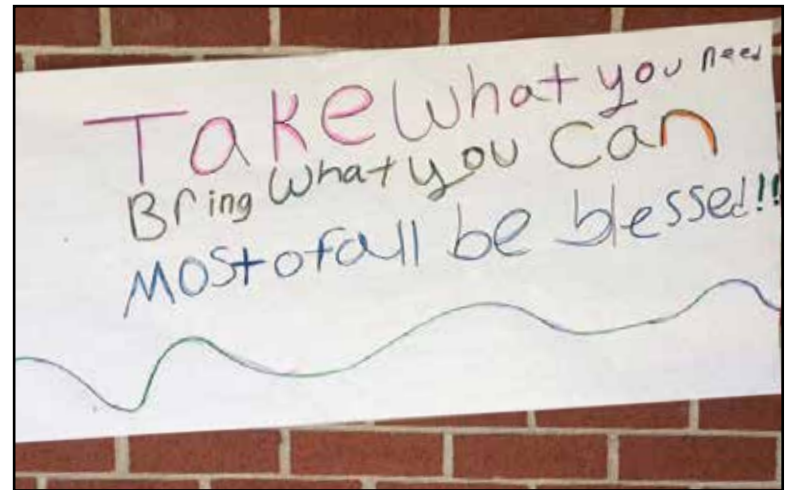
Quick action, good response

Kelley encouraged the Dover UMC members to run with the idea. Before long, Brown and his wife, Laura, found a small armoire in a thrift store that they thought would work as a Blessing Box. They brought it home and their three teen daughters, Nicole, Kristen and Jennifer, began to sand and paint it, adding lettering on the door as a finishing touch. They delivered it to the church, where Hurley, Kelley and others began stocking it with items.

"It really was a church family effort, because we just got the box ready," Brown said. "Cindy Hurley and Roy Beth and the other folks at the church took it from there."

Since then, it has broadened to include nonperishable items donated by the wider community, such as canned goods and snacks left over from a local haunted house fundraiser in October. And the Dover church has found that the

[See BLESSING BOX, page 7]



ABOVE: A handmade sign on the exterior wall of Dover UMC explains the basics of how the Blessing Box works.

BELOW: The Blessing Box and a sampling of its contents.

COURTESY PHOTOS



Speaker sheds light on human trafficking at United Methodist Women's annual meeting



Louise Allison of Partners Against Trafficking Humans addresses the statewide annual meeting of United Methodist Women, held Nov. 12 at Mabelvale UMC. PHOTO BY K.D. REEP

BY K.D. REEP
Special Contributor

Members of United Methodist Women units from across the Arkansas Conference packed the sanctuary of Mabelvale United Methodist Church on Saturday, Nov. 12, for their 13th annual meeting. The sunny and mild day outside contrasted with what the members learned of the stark realities of human trafficking happening right now in their communities.

Keynote speaker Louise Allison, [See WOMEN, page 4]

Where did the time go?

BY WILLIAM O. "BUD" REEVES
Special Contributor

I did the math. Numbers don't lie. I turned 60 on Thanksgiving Day. (And was very thankful to do so!) But I've been thinking: How did that happen? It seems like yesterday I was in high school, college, seminary, starting out as a pastor. Someone hit the fast-forward button, and here I am, at an age I used to think was SO old.

I'll admit to some joint pain and getting tired quicker than I used to, but from the neck up, I'm still young, I swear. At least I try to be...

The landscape for the church has changed dramatically in the 36 years I have been in ministry, as it has for our whole culture. It's been a learning curve of exponential proportions. I should have learned more along the way, but a few things stuck. Claiming no wisdom other than the fact that I have survived, here are a baker's dozen insights I picked up along the highway.

1. There is no greater peace and pleasure than knowing why you were put on the planet, then living into that calling. I figured out as a young adult that God wanted me to be a pastor, the divine

sense of humor being what it is, and I have never wanted to be anything else.

2. No life is more wonderful and frustrating than being a pastor.

Sometimes it's like herding cats—mean cats!—but there is no place you can give and receive love and compassion like you can in a church.

3. The local church is the hope of the world. Bill Hybels said it years ago, and I still believe it. Local congregations are the agency of God to complete the work Christ did on the cross to save the planet.

4. We are teaching our children and grandchildren to be poor disciples. One of the conditions of our active and affluent culture is that church is one of a list of choices we can afford. It is seldom the priority. The old expectation that we should be there every week has become the idea that we should be there unless we have something else—an athletic tournament, dance competition, football weekend, lake party, etc. Disciples can only be made in the context of communities of faith.

5. Love is the most powerful force in the universe. It created, redeemed and sustains the world. Love cannot be extinguished by hate.

6. Relationships are all that matter—with God, family, and friends. People are more important than the to-do list: a hard truth for me to learn. Short of heaven, there is nothing better than a loving family.

7. Grace abounds. When we fall and fail, there is forgiveness. If you are still alive, you can recover from almost anything.

8. Reconciliation, unity, and community are better than division, hostility, and bitterness. You would think this goes without saying, but lately it's been hard to tell.

9. The basic Christian attitude



Bud Reeves

is hospitality. Our hallmark should be welcome and service, like a good place to eat (which the church often is). We are a diner for the downtrodden, a hospital for the lost, lonely and broken. Our doors and hearts need to stay open to all.

10. Wesleyan Christianity is the Gospel for the 21st century. Biblical grace, piety and social witness, holiness and Holy Spirit—the world so needs this good news!

11. We have a beautiful planet. Shame on us for our bad stewardship, and kudos for the ways we are learning to sustain it.

12. Political systems are temporary; God is eternal. The pendulum swings to and fro. Some of my friends were elated at the recent election; others were devastated. My rookie year as a pastor, I stayed in bed for a day, upset and depressed at the results of an election. This year I got up on Wednesday and went to work. Politics matter, but whoever sits in the Oval Office, Christ is still King.

13. Because of #12, there is no reason to lose hope. Our hope is in the God who created us, the Savior who died for us, and the Holy Spirit that leads us. Advent is in particular a season of hope, as we prepare for the coming of the Best Gift of All. Revival is possible. We can make a positive difference in our families, churches, workplaces, schools, communities, nation and world. There is so much good to work for, and no good reason to give up.

I have been a little nostalgic, reflecting on turning 60, wondering where the time has gone. But I am really more interested in where the time is going. I feel a sense of energy and enthusiasm for what God will do if we allow. I can't wait to see what I will learn in this seventh decade of life. I'll let you know!

The Rev. Dr. Reeves serves as senior pastor of First UMC Fort Smith. Email: breeves@arumc.org.



EDITOR'S CORNER

BY AMY FORBUS

Wrong side of the fence

The ground behind our house cannot be considered a lawn, as grass is sparse, but I suppose it still qualifies as a backyard, as it's in back of our house and bordered by a wooden fence. Just beyond it, though, is an undeveloped wooded area that serves as a thoroughfare for urban wildlife. And not all urban wildlife respects a fence line.

It seems one rather large opossum (henceforth referred to as 'possum, as this is, after all, Arkansas) endured quite a startle from our back door opening last Friday night, because when we followed our city canids outside, it already had taken to playing that game 'possums play so well. The foster dog began barking at it, which had no discernible bearing upon its demeanor. From its contorted position on the ground, with rump tipped up against the fence and neck turned at an unlikely angle, the 'possum appeared to have been frightened to its demise while patrolling our perimeter from six feet aloft.

After corralling the dogs back inside the house, we undertook an investigation, and intrepid husband discerned a feeble twitch after the fourth or fifth prod with an umbrella. We deemed that the dogs would conduct the necessary transactions on the front lawn to allow some recovery time for dear Mr. or Ms. 'Possum. After supper, we discovered to our relief that though we have indeed had to bury a real-live dead 'possum once before, we would not have that chore this time. No, thank the Lord, the fence line was empty! The 'possum lives!

Why yes, I have spent a great deal of time thinking about this 'possum. (And no, I haven't named it... though if I did, it would be Lazarus... or Awesome.) I've been thinking about this 'possum because some folks have no use for it. But behold, the continent's only marsupial! Possessing more teeth than any other mammal! Devourer of ticks! Beloved creature of God!

According to the Opossum Society of the United States (www.opossumsocietyus.org), the 'possum "helps keep our neighborhoods clean and free of unwanted, harmful garden pests and rodents, which may carry diseases. The opossum has earned the title of 'Nature's Little Sanitation Engineer."

I admit, I do wonder why God created the mosquito, and I suspect I'm not alone (especially when malaria and the zika virus come into the picture). The 'possum, though, has its merits. As do those people in our lives who may not live up to our expectations, or who are planted firmly outside our political or theological fence line, whom we would exclude or who would exclude us, for reasons large and small. And I think at some point we've all found ourselves on a fence, frozen, resigned to a fall, just praying it'll all work out.

Amazing how much one little backyard encounter can give someone to consider.

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



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Submission Deadlines

Issue Date	Submission Deadline
Jan. 6	Dec. 12
Feb. 3	Jan. 17
March 3	Feb. 13



GROWING TOGETHER IN CHRIST: A word from the Bishop

BY GARY E. MUELLER

Christ the Savior is born

*In the beginning was the Word
and the Word was with God
and the Word was God.*

*The Word was with God in the beginning.
Everything came into being through the Word,
and without the Word
nothing came into being.*

*What came into being through the Word was life,
and the life was the light for all people.*

*The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light.*
—John 1:1-5 (CEB)

I love Christmas and everything that goes with it. But the very things that make this 'the

most wonderful time of the year' can also cover up what matters most about this time of year: the reality that Christ the Savior is born. It bothers me. And I believe it bothers you as well.

This is why I want to invite you to join me during these hectic days before Christmas to dwell once again on the heart and soul of Christmas—how God has come to us in a tiny baby in a manger long ago to unleash the fullness of God's unconditional, transformational and invitational love.

As we do this together, it is my hope and prayer that we will discover once again the miracle of how the love that came into the world in the most unlikely of ways still crosses the boundaries

of time and culture to literally bring abundant life to our lives. And Lord knows we need it right now in a world filled with so much suffering, division, hatred and polarization.

May you experience how the angels' proclamation about "good news of great joy" is true for you and for our world.

Merry Christmas!

Grace and peace,

Gary E. Mueller

Delighting God by sharing the table

BY NATASHA MURRAY-NORMAN
Special Contributor

The hymn "For Everyone Born: A Place at the Table" has been on my heart these past few weeks. I love this hymn for its lyrics and its hope that one day all will be welcomed with a place at the table. The songwriter, Shirley Erena Murray, published this song in 1998, inspired by the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In a time of growing anxiety over what may come, perhaps we can all benefit from remembering the need to offer a place at the table for all.



Natasha Murray-Norman

The imagery of this hymn is an invitation for all to come and be reconciled. Laying aside status, gender roles, age and ability, all are welcome to the table. All have a right to be heard. While these groups gather together it is the call of the Church to be, in Murray's words, creators of justice and joy, compassion and peace because it delights God.

How can being a creator of justice and joy, compassion and peace delight God? God delights when we are like the Samaritan who finds the man on the side of the road beaten, robbed and suffering. We don't know if the man's assailants are ever caught, but the Samaritan's act of compassion and justice brought healing that was needed for the man to recover.

We are creators of justice and joy, compassion and peace when we seek to love one another and drive out fear. The text of 1 John 4:18 reminds us that, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear." God delights when we remember that we are people who were born in love. Because of the love that God has for us, we in turn share that love with others. However, when we allow fear to settle into our lives,

God's love does not abide in us. God will delight when we are creators of justice and joy, compassion and peace—that is, when we show our love to others.

My family of origin has become quite small over the last few years. However, I still look forward to the fellowship of family gathering around the table. I am reminded of holidays where my uncle would carry a plate to a friend who was homebound, and when my grandmother would offer anyone passing through a plate to enjoy while sitting with us at the table. If you

came over for dinner, she would insist that you sit at the table. The formality of sitting at the table was a way for you to interact and have an assurance that you were welcomed, regardless of your affiliation to our family.

I would like to think that in some way I have absorbed this practice of welcome, as well. Table gatherings are intimate, sacred places that allow a degree of vulnerability. With the interaction between the host and the guest, needs are met and humanity is united in the breaking of bread, the telling and retelling of stories, a sense of oneness. There is a place for the young, old, married, divorced, widowed, male, female, broke and not so broke. Dignity is restored. All are welcome.

In these uncertain times, with mounting anxiety growing as to what will happen in the future of our nation and our church, it seems that some have forgotten what it means to offer a welcome to everyone. We have allowed fear to paralyze us and prevent us from offering the fundamental right to all of God's children: a place at the table.

The Rev. Murray-Norman serves as associate pastor of First UMC Pine Bluff, and chairs the Conference Commission on the Status and Role of Women. Shirley Erena Murray's hymn appears as No. 3149 in Worship & Song, a supplement to the United Methodist Hymnal.

'We are creators
of justice and joy,
compassion and
peace when we seek
to love one another
and drive out fear.'

Our Trajectory

Creating vital
congregations
that make
disciples of
Jesus Christ,
who make
disciples

equipped to
transform lives,
communities
and the world.



APPOINTMENT CHANGES

The following **appointment changes** have been announced since the adjournment of the 2016 Arkansas Annual Conference:

- Phil McLarty—Village UMC Hot Springs Village (interim); effective Jan. 1, 2017
- Michael Dodson—Imboden/Smithville Charge; effective Jan. 1, 2017
- Sue Howe—Hollywood/Prescott Charge (interim); effective Nov. 15, 2016
- Larry Martineau—medical leave; effective Nov. 1, 2016

The following **retirement** has been announced since the adjournment of the 2016 Arkansas Annual Conference:

- Wade Shownes—effective Jan. 1, 2017

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

PEOPLE OF FAITH



Four students finish Arkansas Course of Study School in Fall 2016 session

Four students completed coursework this fall through the Arkansas Course of Study School, an extension school of SMU's Perkins School of Theology.

Pictured, from left, are Bob Sanders and Johnnie Davis of the Arkansas Conference, and Dwight Gressel and Wally W. Jones of the Missouri Conference.

Approximately 60 students currently participate in the Course of Study School, which offers classes each semester at Hendrix College in Conway. To complete the school, students must pass 20 classes. If a student takes all of the classes at Hendrix and never misses a semester, it takes 10 years to complete the school. Students also may take classes online or at

other schools to count toward the coursework.

Wright named inaugural Spirit of Maya Award recipient

The Celebrate! Maya Project of Arkansas recently announced that Hazel Trice Wright of Hot Springs is the first recipient of the Spirit of Maya Award. The award was presented to Wright on Sunday, Nov. 17, during the 139th anniversary celebration of Haven United Methodist Church Hot Springs, where she is an active member.

"This award symbolizes Maya Angelou's legacy of artistic greatness, her human and civil rights advocacy and her lifetime of service to others," said Janis F. Kearney, founding president of the Project. "Mrs. Hazel Wright's life works, her passion for the arts and her advocacy for human and civil rights beautifully represents these attributes."

Wright is a poet and arts advocate born in Bauxite, Arkansas, and raised in Pine Bluff. She attended Merrill High School in Pine Bluff, where her 8th grade English teacher, Mrs. Bennett, introduced her to poetry. At her graduation in 1948, Wright was recognized as the Class Poet. She attended Triton Community College in Forest Park, Illinois, and joined a group called the Live Poets, as well as the Great Books Group, which encouraged her writing and performance in local plays. She later joined the Front Porch Writers in Oak Park, a



Hazel Trice Wright

Chicago suburb with a rich history of diversity and tolerance.

In 1992, Wright wrote and published her first book of poetry, *A Collection of Thoughts*, which she hopes to reprint soon with updates. She is currently working on a new book of poetry set for publication in Fall 2017.

The mission of the Celebrate! Maya Project is to honor and propagate the creativity, social consciousness and inclusion modeled by artist and activist Maya Angelou. The public is invited to nominate candidates for the annual Spirit of Maya Award; visit www.celebratemayaproject.org to learn more.

Copley honored as 'Abolitionist of the Year'

The Arkansas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty on Nov. 15 honored United Methodist elder the Rev. Stephen Copley with its Abolitionist of the Year award.

Copley, a Church and Community Worker with the United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries, currently chairs the board of the coalition, as well as the boards of several other justice-focused organizations within the state. Beyond Arkansas, he serves on the Justice and Advocacy and Interfaith Relations Convening Table of the National Council of Churches, as well as on their Local and Regional Ecumenism Committee.

A graduate of the University of Central Arkansas, he also earned degrees from SMU's Perkins School of Theology and the University of Arkansas' Bowen School of Law.



Stephen Copley

Women (continued from Page 1)

executive director of Partners Against Trafficking Humans (P.A.T.H.), discussed her experience as a trafficked person and how UMW members can help those in the web of modern-day slavery.

"Human trafficking is a fancy name for slavery," Allison said. "Today, there are 30 million people sold into the system—more than at any other time in history."

Allison was born and raised in Dallas, and as a 14-year-old, she became a trafficking victim. In 2011, she left her career in nursing administration to dedicate her life to finding a way to provide services for trafficked people, including safe housing for rescued victims. She met others who shared her vision, and together, they established P.A.T.H.

Now a spokesperson and modern-day abolitionist, Allison serves on the Arkansas Human Trafficking Task Force to raise awareness of trafficking throughout Arkansas. She works with legislators to make laws to protect victims, educate school-aged children and young adults on danger signs and how to stay safe, work with healthcare providers and law enforcement to recognize potential victims and provide immediate care, deliver outreach services to areas with high probability for trafficking, provide comprehensive services for victims of sex-trafficking and sexual assault, and end human trafficking in the state.

"No 14-year-old kid chooses to be a hooker," Allison said. "Anyone can be a victim at any time. Traffickers and perpetrators are looking for the vulnerable, but the vulnerable will come through your church doors. I was saved because I met an amazing God who loved me for the person I was right at that moment and loves me now. I couldn't believe someone could love me, but I know the power of it."

To learn more about P.A.T.H. or to contribute, visit www.pathsaves.org or follow on Facebook at www.facebook.com/partnersagainsttraffickinghumans.

The meeting's theme, "A Call to Community," was based on the teachings and people in communities in the Old and New Testaments. God's love serves

as a model for Christian women, crossing boundaries to be in community with humans. Christians are challenged to form communities and live faith-filled lives, and Arkansas' United Methodist Women are positioning themselves at the intersection of culture and faith.

Upcoming events

This Call to Community precedes the 150th anniversary of United Methodist Women, which will be celebrated at Assembly, a worldwide gathering set for May 18-20, 2018, in Columbus, Ohio. Held every four years, this next gathering will celebrate how visionary Methodist Women have organized for mission, focusing on the needs of women and children, for a century and a half. It offers a personal faith journey through community building, training for action and visioning a movement for the future. Registration details will be posted when available at www.unitedmethodistwomen.org.

Arkansas Conference United Methodist Women also were encouraged to save the date for a Legislative Briefing hosted by Faith Voices Arkansas, an organization chaired by United Methodist minister the Rev. Stephen Copley.

The Legislative Briefing is scheduled for 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at the State Capitol on Tuesday, Jan. 31, 2017. Those attending will meet at the Arkansas Education Building at 1500 W. 4th St. in Little Rock, and lunch and a tour of the capitol will be provided after the briefing. Attendees will hear about the issues of the 2017 General Assembly and

how they impact their hometowns. They also will learn the best ways to approach local legislators from a faith-based perspective and become a public witness. Reservations are required; to reserve a space, call 501-626-9220 or email aiapolicy@aol.com.

Faith Voices Arkansas: Protecting Faith and Freedom is committed to protecting the integrity of both religion and democracy in Arkansas. It champions religious freedom by respecting individual rights, promoting policies that protect both religion and democracy, and uniting diverse voices to challenge extremism to build common ground.

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Do you prefer keeping up with church news on social media? See the Facebook pages for UMNS, www.facebook.com/umnews, and the Arkansas Conference, www.facebook.com/arkansasumc.

Philander Smith students learn and serve during Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week



Philander Smith College students participated in the 2016 Ingathering at the Arkansas Foodbank.



Young adult clients of Better Community Development shared their experiences with homelessness during a Nov. 15 "Faces of the Homeless" panel discussion.

AUM PHOTOS BY AMY FORBUS

Philander Smith College from Nov. 13 through 19 hosted Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week, a time to learn about and address the needs of Central Arkansas's homeless and food-insecure populations.

The week's events included a charity basketball game; a winter clothing drive; a documentary screening with discussion; a panel discussion featuring young adults who have experienced homelessness; the gathering and blessing of more than 130 Thanksgiving food baskets for food-insecure households; a "One Night Without a Home" event, during which students spent an evening sleeping outdoors; and an advocacy letter writing

workshop. A group of students capped off the week by participating in Ingathering, an Arkansas Conference event held at the Arkansas Foodbank (see page 8 for details).

Sponsored locally by the college's Office of Religious Life and Campus Culture, and nationally by the National Coalition for the Homeless and the National Student Campaign Against Hunger and Homelessness, this annual program is a social movement designed to help educate students and the community on the plight of homelessness and hunger and to work collectively to identify ways to eradicate both.

"Hunger and homelessness are social injustices that plague

our country and are particularly prevalent in Central Arkansas," said the Rev. Ronnie Miller-Yow, chaplain and dean of religious life and campus culture at the United Methodist-related institution. "This week is designed to provide our students with the awareness and abilities to make a difference in the lives of those who may be affected."

In addition to the activities listed above, during the chapel service that included the blessing of the Thanksgiving baskets, Yow presented a \$500 check in support of the 200,000 Reasons to Fight Childhood Hunger initiative to the Rev. J.J. Whitney, who chairs that Arkansas Conference effort.

SHARE THE Light

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Need for change addressed at Horizon Conference



The Rev. Tom Fuerst challenged churches to reclaim a prophetic voice as part of the change needed to carry out ministry in a changing context.

AUM PHOTOS BY AMY FORBUS

BY AMY FORBUS
Editor

NORTH LITTLE ROCK—"We are not here to make your church grow," said the Rev. Carter Ferguson, pastor of CanvasCommunity UMC Little Rock, as he welcomed attendees to the Horizon Conference, a Nov. 11-12 gathering sponsored by the United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas, the Texas Methodist Foundation, Quapaw Quarter UMC Little Rock and CanvasCommunity.

Instead, he said, the gathering represented an acknowledgement that the church must change, and a willingness to do something about it.

Argenta Community Theater was the setting, a deliberate choice to meet in a non-church environment because so much of the event's discussion would center on changing or moving away from familiar patterns of church life for the sake of the Gospel. Presenters addressed ways the church needs to experience change in building community, ministry with the poor, racial reconciliation and the place of the prophetic voice.

Positioning for the prophetic

The Rev. Tom Fuerst, associate teaching pastor of Christ UMC Memphis, encouraged attendees to consider how they can position themselves in ways that allow them to speak prophetic truths.

"The task is not easy—that's why we don't want it," he said, noting that Martin Luther King Jr. had an approval rating near 20 percent at the time of his assassination.

Fuerst encouraged reclaiming ancient meaning and practice as a way to increase prophetic witness. "Weekly Eucharist is a prophetic act," he said, because it keeps front and center the need to confess that we hurt one another and we hurt God.

He also reminded clergy that their first job is to speak truth to power and to critique the regime, and they can cultivate an ability to do that by building relationships. "You want to know who you can actually be prophetic with? The people you're pastoral with," he said, noting that rootedness and longevity are keys to developing a prophetic witness.

A common fear is that when a pastor speaks discomfiting, prophetic words, financial support for the ministry may decline. In response to that possibility, Fuerst suggested that pastors develop a five-year plan to wean their

congregations off depending upon the top 10 percent of givers.

Learning from secular communities

A duo of Harvard Divinity School ministry innovation fellows, Angela Thurston and Casper ter Kuile, presented results from their qualitative research projects centering on community and belonging, especially among the spiritually unaffiliated (also called "the unchurched").

"There's this sense of being unhoused, but not necessarily without interest," said Thurston of the people they have interviewed for their work. People are seeking somewhere to belong, whether it's through secular community leadership, "maker spaces" for artists and craftspeople, Crossfit or a number of other non-religious connections, many of which can have some undercurrent of the spiritual.

Thurston and ter Kuile identified six themes among organizations drawing large numbers of religiously unaffiliated people: social transformation, personal transformation, accountability, creativity, purpose finding and community.

They shared one story of a Crossfit gym owner who also is a Presbyterian minister, and is convinced that more ministry is happening through his Crossfit work than through the church he pastors.

"What we heard more and more from these secular organizations... was that [participants] were looking for something like spiritual direction," ter Kuile said, adding that the institutional church, by and large, is no longer designed for its intended purpose.

"There's real room for greater spiritual community development," said Thurston, "[but] if the goal is to make more Methodists, it won't work."

Summaries of Thurston and ter Kuile's work are available at www.howwegather.org.

Showing another way

The Rev. Rudy Rasmus, co-pastor of St. John's UMC Houston, shared his personal story of beginning to move toward relationship with God while running what he called a "borderline bordello"—a hotel that rented rooms to sex traffickers.

But he met the Rev. Kirbyjon Caldwell, pastor of Windsor Village UMC Houston, who patiently invested time in getting to know him. "I tell him exactly what I do for a living, and he became my friend," Rasmus said. Friendships with others in the faith followed, until eventually, "my heart changed," he said. "And I told my wife, I think I'm a Christian now."

Mentored by Caldwell, Rasmus discerned a call to ministry, and the church he now pastors has over the past two decades developed "phenomenal street credibility," he says. "That's 20 years caring about people."

St. John's UMC distributes food to 600 families per week, serves 500 meals per day and embraces the housing-first model of helping people leave homelessness. They provide HIV testing in conjunction with their worship services, and offer permanent housing for persons leaving life on the streets. In the past 15 years, St. John's has spent \$20 million on housing homeless individuals.

"I think the work that we have done... is really connected to what someone did for me: showed me another way to live," Rasmus said.

Going forward, he expects that the work of the church must

change, and not just in his congregation. What does he see coming? "Opportunities to be present in some lives and some spaces we've never had before," he said, "but the key is, you can't be scared."

Rasmus asked attendees to discuss two questions: "Where is love creating a disruption in our churches?" and "What are some things that could be done for love to be louder?"

Conversations on justice

The work of reconciliation facilitated by the Rev. F. Willis Johnson, pastor of Wellspring UMC Ferguson, Missouri, became nationally known following the 2014 shooting of Michael Brown and the protests that followed it. It resulted in the founding of the Center for Social Empowerment in Ferguson (www.thecenterforsocialempowerment.com), which addresses social and racial justice issues; and also in a book by Johnson, *Holding Up Your Corner: Talking About Race in Your Community*, which Abingdon Press will release in January.

Johnson encouraged those willing to work on racial issues to begin having conversations, even at the risk of saying the wrong thing. With our language changing more quickly than ever, "you're going to say it. You're going to mess up. You're human," he said, but the conversation is important enough to work through those stumbles. Besides, the goal of the conversation is not to help you feel better, but rather to make some progress.

He admitted that even now, he catches himself "othering" some people—labeling them and distancing himself from them. It's something to guard against, because ultimately, we are responsible for nurturing one another.

"Each new encounter... should move us, strengthen us or move us toward that next encounter," he said.

Attendee Rachel Hunt of Grand Avenue UMC Hot Springs agrees that difficult conversations need to happen in all churches. "It's a body of Christ conversation," she said of the



The Rev. Willis Johnson encouraged having conversation with the expectation of it leading to action.

reconciliation and justice work. "I'm hopeful that this will transform me, and in turn transform those whose lives I'm in relationship with."

The Rev. Carissa Rodgers of Quapaw Quarter UMC encouraged attendees to think deeply and intentionally about what the presenters had to say. "Our hope is that the conversation leads to more conversation," she said. "My hope and my prayer is that we take these things to heart."

VIDEO:

To view portions of the Horizon Conference presentations, visit the Arkansas Conference Vimeo channel, www.vimeo.com/arkansasumc.

Blessing Box

(continued from page 1)

stock of their Blessing Box changes regularly, without their constant involvement.

“Our church is right by the Dover Middle School, and right by the football field, so those kids are walking by twice a day,” Brown said. “And there’s a lot of hungry kids in Arkansas.”

It’s not just food, either; there are hygiene products and other non-food items available too—even some children’s books, which tend to go fast, as do packages of diapers.

“It’s just like shopping—people pick the things they like the best!” Kelley says, noting that canned chicken and dumplings seem to be one of the more popular food items.

The Dover congregation also maintains a clothing closet, which was started for families who have connected with the church through their Wednesday after-school program. Some of those families now attend worship and are growing as disciples of Jesus Christ. “People are excited to give and receive,” she said.

Meeting a real need

In Fort Smith, two United Methodist churches have set up Blessing Boxes on their property: Wesley UMC and Kavanaugh UMC, both pastored by the Rev. Dr. Michelle Morris.

Morris says that within the first two weeks of having the Blessing Boxes, people from both churches lost track of how many times the contents were replaced with new items.

“I can generally say that

Wesley’s box gets filled and emptied about three times a day.... We have a tremendous amount of foot traffic at Wesley,” she said.

And not all of the food comes from the host churches. It’s an ecumenical, community-wide ministry, with different organizations and churches interested in helping to fill the boxes. Some call to get permission to contribute (which really isn’t needed), and others spot members in the parking lot and ask about it. Still others will post photos on Facebook when they stop by to stock the boxes, which helps spread the word about what’s being offered.

Morris has learned much from watching the activity surrounding the Blessing Boxes. She has seen people trading food, not just giving or taking it.

“My guess is they had either bought something they did not like or had been given something they did not like or couldn’t use, and rather than waste it, they have found a way to give it without looking ungrateful,” she said. “It also makes them partners with us instead of just recipients of charity.”

She also has noticed that much of the giving and taking happens in the evening hours, possibly because people either appreciate the cover of semi-darkness, or they are stopping on their way home from work. And nobody is coming along and taking all of the contents in either location: “People do not appear to be operating out of greed, but instead out of need,” she said.

Filling the gaps

In Dover, Brown thinks the

Blessing Box fills a unique and real gap for people who, for whatever reason, come up short at the grocery store but who don’t receive formal assistance.

“I think that there’s people out there that are in need that may not be comfortable walking into a food bank, but this is a way they can get what they need,” he said.

Morris agrees with Brown that the anonymous place to receive food preserves the dignity of individuals who might be hesitant to ask for help. She also believes the two churches she pastors in Fort Smith benefit from hosting the boxes. Having such a consistent, community-based way to help others has contributed to a certain amount of spiritual revival in the congregations. The heavy use of the Blessing Boxes has created excitement. “My folks love coming up and sharing stories with me, and the energy to serve is pretty high right now,” she said.

Brown is thinking about how and where the Dover church might put some smaller blessing boxes that wouldn’t have a need to be under an awning like the one at the church. “Like satellite locations in different places,” he suggests. “But right now, this is a good start.”



Wesley UMC Fort Smith’s treasurer George Jensen found funds available in the church budget to cover the cost of the Blessing Box construction, but that’s not all. Here, he prepares to add a sign to the top of the box.



Andrea Schluterman adds items to the Blessing Box at Wesley UMC Fort Smith. Schluterman proposed the idea when the church was getting traffic as a Pokestop for those playing Pokemon Go.

COURTESY PHOTOS

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- Youth Study • Children’s Study Guide

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Ingathering feeds the hungry, enables response to disasters



By mid-morning, the parking lot near the loading dock was filled with disaster response supplies bound for UMCOR's Sager Brown Depot in Baldwin, Louisiana.



Volunteers break down the sides of a tall container of sweet potatoes so they can continue working quickly to get the job done.



United Methodists work in the clean packing room at the Arkansas Foodbank to prepare pinto beans for distribution at area food pantries.

LITTLE ROCK—How long does it take to get 20 tons of sweet potatoes packaged into boxes small enough for area food pantries to manage?

With a few hundred United Methodists involved in the process, only about 90 minutes.

Members of local churches from across the state converged on the Arkansas Foodbank Nov. 19, 2016, for Ingathering, the annual day of service that benefits hungry Arkansans as well as those affected by disasters around the world. In addition to taking on a mountain of sweet potatoes from the Society of St. Andrew, they labeled canned goods for food pantry distribution; packaged eight tons of dried pinto beans by the pound; learned about nutrition and making the most of a dollar through Cooking Matters live demonstrations; and sorted disaster relief supplies onto forklift pallets to be taken to the United Methodist Committee on Relief's Sager Brown Depot in Baldwin, Louisiana—and from there, distributed worldwide whenever disaster strikes.

To begin the day, the Arkansas Conference presented the Foodbank with a check for \$3,000 to help them further their mission. The Foodbank is among the partners in 200,000 Reasons to Fight Childhood Hunger, the Arkansas Conference initiative to reduce food insecurity in Arkansas, particularly its effect on approximately 200,000 children within the state's borders. Volunteers kept the Foodbank's facility buzzing with activity all morning, singing choruses of "This Is the Day that the Lord Has Made" as they moved from the gathering area to their work stations.

Mary Williams of Mission UMC Fort Smith serves as the Northwest District secretary for the Conference Board of Global Ministries, and though she had heard about Ingathering for years, this was her first time to experience it on-site. She enjoyed helping with the process of boxing sweet potatoes, and before she left the Foodbank, she already had begun thinking about next year's Ingathering.

"I look forward to it, I really do," she said. "It's exciting! I'm impressed."

AUM PHOTOS BY AMY FORBUS

Refuge 2016 held twice to provide more space for more youth



A group of youth prepare to go zip-lining at Refuge 2016.

Over 600 sixth- through ninth-graders and their leaders from 37 different churches attended Refuge 2016, an event designed by the Arkansas Conference Council on Youth Ministries and held each November at Shepherd of the Ozarks in Harriet, Arkansas.

"We experienced phenomenal growth this year," said the Rev. Jay Clark of Pulaski Heights UMC Little Rock, one of the adult task force leaders. "In 2012 we had 270 students and adults, and last year we had 389. We made the decision to try two weekends and pray that people would come—and they did."

"It was really amazing and the task force did a great job at planning and leading the whole event," said Lily Jones, a Pulaski Heights UMC member and chair of the Refuge task force. "To make the switch to two weekends and for both weekends to be evenly split and almost at capacity... I can see Refuge being three weekends at some point in time."

This year's theme was "Breathe"; the Rev. Rob Holifield, associate pastor of First UMC Texarkana, served as the speaker, and the youth praise band from Greenbrier UMC, T4:12, led worship music.

Refuge always has a focus on getting away and reconnecting to God through worship and the outdoors. It is also a great way to introduce sixth-graders to Conference youth events. Mark your calendars now for Nov. 3-5 and 10-12, 2017, and choose a weekend to attend.



T4:12, the youth worship band of Greenbrier UMC, led music at this year's Refuge.

PHOTOS BY ACCYM MEDIA TASK FORCE

Council of Bishops to involve the whole church in prayer and conversation ahead of special General Conference

UNITED METHODIST PRESS
CENTER

From a Nov. 2 News Release

Through an affirmative vote at their fall meeting, the United Methodist Council of Bishops expressed their intent to call for a special session of the General Conference in either February or March of 2019 and asked the business manager of the General Conference to move forward with exploring venues and a bid search.

The Constitution of the United Methodist Church provides that the Council of Bishops may call a special session of the General Conference possessing the authority and exercising all the powers of the General Conference. Business to be considered during such a session would be limited to the purpose defined within the call, which also would include the time and place.

The Council's action stops short of making the actual call for a special session, which is expected to come

at some point after the Commission on a Way Forward begins its work.

The Council's Executive Committee brought the recommendation to the full Council for consideration and action after exploring the feasibility of meeting in either 2018 or 2019.

"A requirement that materials be in the hands of delegates at least 230 days before such a session makes it unlikely that the Commission could complete its work in time to meet that deadline for a 2018 meeting, so

2019 seemed to us to be the best option," said Bishop Bruce R. Ough, president of the Council. "The purpose of broadening the timeframe to either February or March is to afford more flexibility in finding a suitable and available location."

Such a special session would be composed of delegates to the preceding General Conference—or their lawful successors—unless a conference prefers to have a new election.

The Council received a report from the moderators of the Way Forward Commission about composition of commission membership, a plan for the first meetings and a strategy for communication.

The Council also voted to approve a recommendation from its Executive Committee to initiate a conversational process among clergy and laity within annual and central conferences that would parallel the work of the Commission on a Way Forward. Each bishop would be free to structure the process and timeline according to the specific needs and context of their area, using some suggested questions as a starting point.

Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett and Bishop Al Gwinn, co-chairs of the Praying Our Way Forward Initiative, announced the second phase of the appeal, which involves each conference making a commitment to come together in prayer during a designated week. The effort would

The Council of Bishops is working in partnership with The Upper Room, which has developed a website, www.UMCprays.org.

begin Jan. 1, 2017 and continue into 2018. The first phase involved a commitment from bishops for daily prayer focused on the selection and initial efforts of the Commission.

"We want the church and the Commission on a Way Forward to be led by God.

This prayer emphasis puts us in a posture where as a church we are asking and listening for God's leadership," said Wallace-Padgett. "Our prayer focus is twofold: We are praying that God will help us to more effectively fulfill the mission of the church. And we are praying to be one in Christ."

She said they are inviting persons to:

- pray daily for the church's effectiveness in fulfilling our mission of making disciples and for the outcome of the work of the Commission on a Way Forward;
- participate in their conference's week of prayer;
- fast weekly as they are able for the United Methodist Church and our future.

Bishop Gwinn said the Council is working in partnership with The Upper Room, which has developed a website, www.UMCprays.org.

"The website features many tools and resources to help you to plan your week of prayer," said Bishop Gwinn. "Each week will feature information about what is happening in the conference that is praying that week, including a prayer-focused blog written by the bishop in that area."

VIM AND DISASTER RESPONSE UPDATES

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.

New Southeast Arkansas locations ready for VIM teams

Flooding in southeast Arkansas earlier this year continues to affect communities in Chicot, Desha and Ashley Counties. In the Lake Village area, projects are identified, funded and waiting for Volunteers in Mission teams. In the McGehee area, case management is moving to the next phase of the list, and help is still needed. Work in Ashley County is just getting started. To schedule a team, contact Janice Mann at disaster@arumc.org.

The climate-controlled host facility in McGehee has real beds (not cots), a kitchen and large common room. Several churches in town take turns feeding the teams.

Donations are still needed for continuing recovery efforts. Give to flood relief by sending checks to Arkansas Conference Disaster Response, 800 Daisy Bates Drive, Little Rock, AR 72202. Gifts also may be made at www.umcor.org with the designation of Advance #901670, U.S. Disaster Response.

Help Mount Eagle complete the new Hermitage Cabin

Work teams have made great progress on the new Hermitage Cabin at Mount Eagle Retreat Center, owned by the United Methodists of Arkansas and located near Clinton. More tasks remain, though, to make it ready to accept reservations for one- or two-person retreats. To arrange a time to donate your skills, contact Sarge Leonard, sarge.leonard@arumc.org, director@mounteagle.org or 501-723-4580.

Hurricane Matthew recovery in Haiti: UMCOR is there

Hurricane Matthew was a Category 4 storm that caused significant loss of life and property along Haiti's

Tiburon Peninsula. We pray for the lives that were lost and the families that mourn them. Workers there request your continued prayerful support and donations to UMCOR's International Disaster Response fund, Advance #982450, at www.umcor.org.

Cuba mission opportunities in July, November 2017

Contact Nechi Fullerton at 501-766-8151 or nfullerton@yahoo.com to learn more about these opportunities with the Methodist Church in Cuba:

- **July mission:** Another VIM team is forming to travel to Holguin, Cuba, to lead Bible school, with the one-week journey tentatively scheduled for July 2017. Now is the time to consider joining the team. In addition to morning Bible School, the team will worship with the 2,000-member Catedral de Holguin, visit missions, house churches, small groups and see the sights. Those not interested in volunteering at Bible school can be valuable team members, as well.
- If you cannot travel but would like to **sponsor a child's Bible school experience** in Holguin, Cuba, supplies, craft projects and snacks are needed. Sponsorships of even a few dollars make a real difference in enriching the mission team's abilities to connect with and teach the students. Follow-up photos provided.
- **November 2017 mission:** Be a part of a one-week November 2017 Mission Team to experience the Cuban Methodist revival while supporting and worshipping with Catedral de Holguin, the second largest Methodist Church in Cuba. This immersion experience includes large church services, missions, house churches, small groups and the sights of Holguin, Cuba.

To keep up with these and future opportunities in Cuba, visit "Arkansas Methodist-Cuba Metodista Connection" and "Catedral Metodista de Holguin" on Facebook.

CLASSIFIEDS

PLACE A CLASSIFIED AD in the *Arkansas United Methodist* for 60 cents per word, no limit. Call 501-324-8037 or email aforus@arumc.org. Deadlines appear on page 2 of this issue.

Grace Community Church in Fort Smith, Ark., is seeking a full time Youth Pastor to oversee a ministry to students in grades 7-12. Competitive salary commensurate with experience and education. Resumes should be sent to Pastor Jeff Jones at jeff@gracefs.com.

Swamp Angel Ministries is "TRAVELING ARKANSAS!" For more info contact Dr. David Bush @ Stuttgart FUMC - (870) 673-1131 or thepastor@stuttgartfumc.org call or text @ (870) 830-7777.

COMING UP

Beyond Children's Ministry Conference at Mount Sequoyah Jan. 27-28

Registration has begun for the 2017 Beyond Conference, to be held Jan. 27-28 at Mount Sequoyah. It is open to anyone working in children's ministry (part-time, full-time, paid or volunteer).

Sponsored by the Arkansas Conference Council on Children's Ministry of the United Methodist Church, the event is open to participants from other conferences and denominations.

The keynote speaker is the Rev. Melissa Cooper, an ordained United Methodist deacon in the Florida Annual Conference; the coordinator for the Life Enrichment Center, a United Methodist retreat and conference center in Fruitland Park, Florida; and the director of LECFamily, a ministry that includes intergenerational retreats and camps, resources for families and churches, as well as training and workshops for local churches and leaders. Cooper has a passion for the present and future of the Church and loves helping equip churches to expand and strengthen their ministries, especially around building intergenerational culture. She regularly works with churches around the country to develop intergenerational culture, and has spoken at numerous local, regional and national events on the subject of intergenerational ministry and cross-generational faith formation.

Check-in begins at 10 a.m. Friday, Jan. 27. There will be a Wellness Workshop at 11 a.m. for early arrivals, with lunch to follow at noon. The first session of the conference begins at 1 p.m.

Visit www.mountsequoyah.org to learn more and to register. A commuter rate is available. Questions? Contact Denni Palmer, Christian education and spiritual formation coordinator, at denni.palmer@mountsequoyah.org.

Food safety for churches: Free courses for United Methodists in January, February, April 2017

The chicken for food pantry arrives, and it is one solid frozen 40-pound block. How can you thaw it safely to give it away? ... The Helping Hands group got the holiday spirit and cooked four casseroles and a pot of soup for the church's stash to give the bereaved. Refrigerators are designed to keep cold food cool, not to chill hot food! How can you cool the casseroles safely to store them until needed? ... You're serving up a great meal to a crowd. Does it matter if you use the same utensil for the chicken and dressing as for the gluten-free rice? Do you have to wear gloves? Do you need to wash your hands after bussing tables? ... The food at the fellowship dinner sat out through the hour meeting afterwards. Is it safe to keep and re-serve?

These are the kind of things that ServSafe Food Manager covers, as well as how to inspect received food for safety and how to make sure you don't have cross-connection, cross-contact or cross-contamination. We'll examine the leading causes of food-borne illness, and more. The course is usually six hours in length, but St. Andrew UMC Little Rock will split the course into two parts, hosting four sessions in 2017. Through scholarships, United Methodists can attend for free, and limited resource books and certification exams are also available. The Rev. Jenni Duncan, a certified trainer for ServSafe in English and Spanish, will lead the sessions and can give training hour credits or proctor official certification exams.

Module 1: attend either Saturday, January 21 or April 22, 9:30-12:30

Topics are a) Food-borne Illnesses, How They Occur & How to Respond, b) Keeping Food Safe; Contaminants to Food: biological, chemical, physical, deliberate, your role, c) Safety regarding Food Allergens, d) Personal Hygiene and Food Safety, e) Hazards in the Flow of Food; Time and Temperature, and f) Purchasing, Receiving and Storing Food.

Module 2: attend either Saturday February 25 or April 29

Topics are a) Preparation, Cooking, Cooling and Reheating Food, b) Holding and Serving Food, c) Systems, Facilities and Pest Management, d) Cleaning and Sanitizing.

Exams will be offered at 12:45 p.m. on the February and April dates. Up to two hours can be allowed for the 90 questions. For more information or to register, contact Jenni Duncan, jenni.duncan@arumc.org or 501-551-2141.

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Nancy McDonald Wood Scholarship: Apply by Jan. 31

Applications are now being accepted for the 2017 Nancy McDonald Wood Scholarship. The purpose of this scholarship is to educate and develop strong, committed female lay leadership for United Methodist churches and the communities they serve. The scholarship assists young Arkansas women planning to enroll in an accredited college for undergraduate studies.

Preference is given to a student who is an active member of an Arkansas United Methodist Church and has demonstrated commitment to historic Methodist values.

Preference will be given to those with sound academic ability, leadership traits and exceptional personal character.

To be eligible, the applicant must have been accepted by an accredited college to begin classes the following fall semester. The amount of the scholarship award will be determined annually, beginning at \$3,000.

Early in April, finalists will be chosen to attend a NMW scholarship luncheon.

For additional information, see the advertisement on this page.

Senior Retreat: Registration open for February event

A special retreat for high school seniors is set for Feb. 17-18, 2017 at Camp Tanako. Senior Retreat provides an opportunity for graduating seniors to spend time learning what to expect on their post-high school journey, and how to navigate new challenges and situations.

Topics Include College Life 101: New Freedoms, Finances, & Time Management; Relationships: Old Friends, New Friends and Family Changes; and Continuing the Journey: Faith after High School.

Visit www.arumc.org/camping-retreat-ministries/senior-retreat to learn more, or contact the Rev. Jay Clark, jclark@phumc.com or 501-944-8400. Registration closes Feb. 5.

Confirmation camps: Register now for February and March sessions

Camp Tanako will host two Confirmation Camp sessions in early 2017, and registration is now open for both.

Camp 1 will be held Feb. 10-12, 2017. Registration is open until Jan. 29.

Camp 2 will be held March 31-April 2, 2017. Registration for this camp closes March 19.

To learn more, visit www.arumc.org/camping-retreat-ministries/confirmation-camp, or contact Laura Stinett, laura@asbury-ir.org or 501-225-9231.

Veritas registration opens Dec. 1

Veritas 2017 is set for Feb. 24-26 in the Rogers Convention Center. This annual event provides an opportunity for youth and youth leaders to be renewed spiritually through passionate worship and community building. Early Bird Registration runs until Feb. 1; regular registration ends Feb. 19. For pricing and additional information, visit www.accym.org/veritas.

Hendrix Youth Institute applications due by Feb. 1

Applications for the 2017 Hendrix Youth Institute (HYI) are due Feb. 1. HYI will be held June 25-July 10, 2017. To learn more, visit www.hendrix.edu/religiouslife/youthinstitute or contact the Rev. J.J. Whitney, whitney@hendrix.edu or 501-450-1263.

Little Rock hosts FUMMWA national biennial gathering July 24-27

The Fellowship of United Methodists in Music & Worship Arts (FUMMWA) invites you to Little Rock on July 24-27, 2017, for its biennial convocation. Four days filled with seminars and workshops that will allow learning and growing in ministry, as well as providing moving worship experiences and fellowship.

To learn more, visit <https://awaken2017.wordpress.com>.

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Applications now open for the
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available to young Methodist women

Apply by January 31, 2017

Download application at <https://goo.gl/qDrZiy>
and mail the completed form to P.O. Box 7407, Little Rock, AR 72217.

OBITUARIES

FAYETTEVILLE

Linda Harrison

Linda Lee Minton Harrison, 77, passed away peacefully Tuesday Oct. 25, 2016, surrounded by family at the Willard Walker Hospice Home in Fayetteville, Arkansas. She was born Jan. 29, 1939, in Stuttgart.

Linda was a truly devoted wife, mother, and friend. She graduated from Stuttgart High School and attended Arkansas Tech University in Russellville. She was an educator for many years and retired from Rogers Public Schools. She was a member of Sequoyah United Methodist Church Fayetteville.

Linda was preceded in death by her parents, Charles R. Minton and Nettle G. Eddins, and brother, Russell Charles Minton, and infant daughter, Jill Harrison.

Survivors include her husband of 57 years, the Rev. James "Jim" Harrison, a retired elder in the Arkansas Conference; three daughters, Joy L. Jeffery (David) of Rogers, Jana B. Carroll (Jon) of Brinkley and Jamie L. Tenison (Bill) of Fayetteville; six grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren. Her grandchildren include Christian Campbell (Jacob), Taylor Speegle (Jill), Jillian Thompson (Caleb), Justin Carroll, Sara Tenison and Rachel Tenison. Her-great grandchildren include Harrison Campbell, Finlay Campbell and Ollie Speegle.

A memorial service was held Monday Oct. 31, 2016, at Sequoyah UMC Fayetteville. In lieu of flowers, the family requests that donations be made in Linda's name to the Sequoyah United Methodist Church Youth Pumpkin Patch, 1910 Old Wire Road, Fayetteville, AR 72703.



Linda Harrison

Oct. 18, 2016, doing what he loved—hunting. An avid outdoorsman as a hunter and fisherman, Elvin was also a premier brick mason who launched the careers of many bricklayers by taking them under his wing and teaching them the art of perfection masonry.

He was a lifelong member and cornerstone of St. Paul Maumelle UMC Little Rock, and served on the board of trustees for the Southwest Annual Conference in the Central Jurisdiction at the time that the segregated Central Jurisdiction was dissolved. The Southwest Conference was the last conference to be united with others, and its churches became members of the Oklahoma, Little Rock and North Arkansas Conferences of the United Methodist Church.

Elvin was an honorably discharged U.S. Army veteran and Worshipful Master of Oak Spring Lodge #487 Prince Hall Masons. He was a loving husband and provider to his wife and family for 65 years. Left with a cache of cherished memories are his wife, Samella Miller; sons, Carey, Clark (Lisa) and Denva (Amanda) Miller; daughters, Eleanor Miller-Settlers, Cathy Miller-Hunter, Audrey Miller-Liggins (Ron), Cheryl, Jennifer and Veronica Miller; 18 grandchildren; 21 great-grandchildren; and 1 great-great-grandchild; and sisters, June Walker and Joyce Watson, both of Detroit, and Janice Bowen.

Funeral services were held Saturday, Oct. 29, at St. Paul Maumelle UMC. Visitation with Masonic rites was held Oct. 28.

MARION

Bill Williams

The Rev. Powell Gladstone (Bill) Williams II, 73, of Marion, Arkansas, passed away on Oct. 28, 2016, in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Born on Sept. 25, 1943, Bill was the son of Powell



Elvin Miller



Bill Williams

Gladstone (Billie) and Margaret Becton Williams and brother of Thomas Coldren, who preceded him in death. He is survived by his wife, Donna Bland Williams, to whom he was married for 51 years; his two children, Kathy Williams Kostopulos and Nancy Williams White; and his grandchildren, Madison, Mahlon, Garrett, Sam and Kate. He also leaves a host of extended family members, an exchange family in Brazil and many cherished friends.

Bill graduated from Marion High School in 1961 and attended Hendrix College, where he graduated with a degree in theology in 1965. He continued his studies at Candler School of Theology at Emory University where he received a Master of Divinity degree and Master of Christian Education degree. At the Decatur-Dekalb, Georgia YMCA, he worked with inner-city youth, promoted social justice and walked with Martin Luther King Jr. for racial equality.

A retired United Methodist minister, Bill served congregations in Conway, Springdale, Mount Hebron, Trumann, Earle, Cabot, Jonesboro, Newport, Greenwood, Blytheville and Crossett. Throughout his ministry, he touched the lives of many.

In his retirement, Bill enjoyed hunting, Razorback sports and spending time with his grandchildren. He became an avid reader of Native American history and culture.

Bill's family wishes to express their heartfelt thanks to the staff at Memory Care of Little Rock at Good Shepherd for their compassionate care.

A service celebrating Bill's life was held at First United Methodist Church Paragould, Arkansas, on All Saints' Day, Tuesday, Nov. 1, 2016. A visitation luncheon followed the service. In lieu of flowers, memorials may be sent to a local United Methodist Church or Arkansas Children's Hospital, P.O. Box 2222, Little Rock, AR 72203-9984.

Shiloh Paragould women bring 'Buddy Benches' to local elementary school

The ladies' Share Group at Shiloh UMC Paragould has donated two "Buddy Benches" to the Greene County Tech Elementary School. Two spouses of Share Group members, Bob Marcotte and Don Fuller, built the benches, and the entire Share Group had a hand in painting and decorating them.

"Buddy Benches" promote friendship among children and seek to end loneliness at school. Children can sit on the "Buddy Bench" and another child will come and sit with them on the bench and invite them to play. (See www.buddybench.org for more information on the concept.)

The Share Group meets monthly for devotional and service opportunities. In addition to donating the Buddy Benches, they also help the local Food Bank; support the Shiloh Youth by helping with the cost of attending Veritas; purchase banners for the church to use during the Christian Year; and cook the meal when the congregation hosts Soup and Sermon during Lent.



—submitted by Rev. Ed Seay

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

The United Methodists of Arkansas have committed to reducing childhood hunger in Arkansas through feeding ministries, public witness and education for long-term stability. This Christmas, join others who are supporting new and on-going ministries across the Natural State by giving a gift in memory or honor of someone.

For each gift, you and your designated recipient will each receive an acknowledgement card.

Give by credit card or check at <https://goo.gl/1poQAc>

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Claiborne speaks, teaches in Little Rock



Author, speaker and activist Shane Claiborne visits with one of the attendees of his recent book signing at Pulaski Heights UMC Little Rock.

PHOTO BY JACOB NOLEN, PULASKI HEIGHTS UMC

Pulaski Heights UMC Little Rock and St. Luke UMC Little Rock hosted author, speaker and activist Shane Claiborne the weekend of Oct. 28-30, 2016. Events began with a forum and a question-and-answer session centered on Claiborne's latest book, *Executing Grace: How the Death Penalty Killed Jesus and Why It's Killing Us*. A reception followed featuring entertainment by the Prodigal Daughters, a musical group from McPherson Prison Women's Unit.

The Tennessee native initially became known for founding The Simple Way, a monastic community in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and for his first book, *The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical*. In that vein, he led a Saturday workshop, "Another Way of Doing Life," at St. Luke UMC Little Rock.

Claiborne preached during worship at Pulaski Heights on Oct. 30, drawing on John 14:12 and recounting some of his experiences working with Mother Teresa and other members of the Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta. To view the worship service, visit www.youtube.com/PulaskiHeightsUMC.



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"How to translate God to the world."

That's the lesson Rev. Dr. Michelle Morris values most from her years at Perkins School of Theology in Dallas as a United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas Seminary Scholar.

Michelle is the solo pastor of two churches in Fort Smith, Wesley UMC and Cavanaugh UMC. She loves the joy and challenge of serving two loving churches who have two different missions and histories. She also serves the larger church by teaching Course of Study for Perkins in the summer. Michelle was one of the writers for the CEB Women's Bible that came out in Fall 2016.

"I don't have enough words to convey my gratitude to the UMFA donors who made it possible for me to graduate from seminary debt free," said Michelle. "Seminary was a foundation I build on every day. Thanks for what you did for me, my family and every church I will serve."

UMFA continued to invest in Michelle's ministry by sponsoring a trip with members of her previous congregation at First UMC, West Memphis, to the Leadership Institute at the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas. "The first group came back transformed and excited," Michelle said. "That experience made a noticeable impact on the congregation in West Memphis, so I started budgeting for the trip every year."



The United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas

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