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Wreck on journey doesn't deter college students from mission

BY AMY FORBUS
Editor

For longer than the Rev. Jessica Durand has served as pastor of the Henderson State University/Ouachita Baptist University Wesley Foundation, the United Methodist campus ministry has invited students to use part of their winter break to engage in mission.

Unlike previous years, though, they had an unexpected decision to make two hours from their destination of flood-damaged Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

"We always travel with SAU [the Southern Arkansas University Wesley Foundation] to make sure that if there's a problem that there's a group of us," Durand said.

This time, that problem came along.

Just past Alexandria, Louisiana, on Interstate 49, with the Magnolia/Arkadelphia caravan going at full speed, a tire blew out on the van carrying four Henderson State students, one University of Central Arkansas student and two adult leaders. Durand tried to maintain control of the vehicle, thinking, "I have people with me! I don't want to hit anybody! There are people in other cars!" The van came to a stop on its side in the median, and the Rev. Mark Lasater, the SAU Wesley pastor following behind it, called 911 while SAU students ran to those in the wrecked van. An off-duty EMT also stopped to help everyone safely evacuate.

"I was in shock, but I was not hurt, so I decided pretty quickly that I wanted to go on," Durand said. Five [See WRECK, page 5]



Southern Arkansas University students Jessi Moore and Antonio Phillips make repairs to a Baton Rouge, Louisiana, home damaged by flood waters. Several Arkansas campus ministries partnered with United Methodist-related Ozark Mission Project and Revive225 of First UMC Baton Rouge to help with flood recovery, and the Arkansas Conference Board of Higher Education and Ministry provided a grant to make the trip affordable for all students.
PHOTO COURTESY SAM MEADORS / ASU WESLEY FOUNDATION



Tithe Initiative influences boost in payout

BY AMY FORBUS
Editor

Changes brought about by the Arkansas Tithe Initiative contributed to an overall increase in local churches' payment of Conference and general church apportionments in 2016.

The 656 active congregations in Arkansas collectively paid 90.99 percent of the funds requested for Conference ministries and support of global missions—an increase of 3.25 percent over the previous year.

Last year marked the end of a transition as churches migrated to the Arkansas Tithe Initiative formula adopted by the 2015 Annual Conference. The change coincided with the completed transition to direct billing of clergy pensions, as opposed to including pensions in the Conference apportioned budget. In 2015, 25 percent of clergy pensions were still factored into the Conference budget. In preparation for the full implementation of the 2017 Tithe, all pensions were billed separately beginning in 2016.

[See TITHE, page 9]

Why I gave up my smartphone

BY CARTER FERGUSON
Special Contributor

Editor's Note: This is the first commentary in a two-part series about giving up a piece of technology many now consider essential to daily life.

Never in my life have I been more afraid to click my mouse to confirm an action than I was Jan. 18, 2017, at about 11 a.m. I was confirming a temporary switch of cellular service from my new iPhone 7, the most convenient and incredible tool I've ever owned, to the LG Revere 3, a phone with technology so paltry in comparison that it felt as though with that click I was condemning myself to using papyrus (please feel the hyperbole in that statement, but not too much).

I'd had the idea of going back to a basic flip phone a few weeks earlier, as a means of preparing for a new sermon series called "Disconnected," in which I would explore what happens to my interpersonal connections and my connection to God if I disconnect from most of the things the smartphone enables me to do.

Several things prompted this change:

First, I found that, if I'm honest, social media irritates me. Rarely did I leave a session on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram without feeling as though I had been sucked dry emotionally, as though everything there was an attempt to grab my attention, to garner my affectionate approval through the hallowed "like" button or to sway my opinion in that person's favor. And yet, despite the fact that I nearly always left social media drained, I felt compelled to look at it... a lot.

If it were any other thing—a food, a drug, alcohol or other substance—we would look at this behavior and say, "Carter, you have a problem. You need to go to a 12-step meeting." Yet because it's social media, it's somehow acceptable. I suspect, though, that whenever something commands our time, attention and focus in such great

quantities, we should be wary of it and ponder what's really going on.

Second, I found a disturbing pattern of inattentiveness to my five-month-old beginning to emerge. She's a daddy's girl, and I'm OK with that; but what lessons is she learning from her father being so easily distracted by a digital device rather than paying attention to her? Is it possible she's being told "I love you," but experiencing something more like "I tolerate you?"

Third, I noticed that when I was stuck in my phone, for whatever reason, my interaction with and affection for my wife was demonstrably lower. I spent an incredible number of years praying for God to bring the one who would be my love, my "person," for the rest of my life. I've prayerfully wept over the loneliness I felt before I met her. So why would I choose to spend hours looking at my phone instead of spending hours with the love of my life?

Above all, I've noticed that the biggest enemy to my relationship with God is not disliking him, or refusing to spend time with him because I don't want to, or not "feeling it"—as though the connection simply wasn't there. The biggest enemy to my relationship with God has been that phone. Why? Because it's easy; it's convenient. Because it's easier and more convenient than God.

Oswald Chambers wrote, "The good is always the enemy the best." But is it possible that in American society, the greatest enemy of what is best is not what is good, but rather what is easy, what is convenient?

I once had a church secretary who loved Michelob Light because it "had the highest alcohol content and the lowest number of calories." She said that it got her where she wanted to go at the lowest possible cost (in



Carter Ferguson

calories). We are a people who settle for spiritual Michelob Light; a people who settle for what gives us the greatest buzz for the least amount of effort, time and energy. But this isn't how faith works. It is creeping into the area of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. (Pull out your smartphone and Google that. You'll see what I mean.)

As I clicked that mouse confirming the switch, I was overwhelmed with a wave of discomfort. However, committed to this exercise and to whatever this digital self-deprivation would bring upon me, I sat with the feeling. I slowly realized that I was experiencing two powerful emotions:

1. Loneliness. Because being in constant connection with others simply wasn't as convenient or as possible as it was before. I couldn't get that shallow and tepid, at best, relational connection that social media so falsely creates.

2. Perhaps more embarrassingly, I felt fear. I was afraid of not having my iPhone. Of the possibility that the LG wouldn't connect to my car. That I may not be able to listen to music while at a coffee house. I may not have that calculator present. How will I post a picture or status on Facebook, garner the likes that somehow inform me about how wonderful or how happy I am?

Over the first few hours without my iPhone, I realized that the removal of the phone didn't create these emotions. The phone hid them from me in the same way alcohol or drugs or pornography can mask feelings. I wonder what it means for pastors and leaders of our churches to be actively engaged in an addiction of this magnitude while trying to spiritually lead others?

The Rev. Ferguson serves as pastor of CanvasCommunity, a United Methodist mission congregation in Little Rock. A version of this commentary originally appeared on Canvas's blog at weloवलittlerock.org.



EDITOR'S CORNER

BY AMY FORBUS

Energy out, joy in

If you're using your spiritual gifts in service to God and the community of faith, they will bring you joy.

It's a simple concept that I didn't know about until I worked for a local church and one of my tasks was co-leading a spiritual gifts discovery class. Before we taught it, my co-worker and I took the course at a neighboring church to get a test run of the curriculum, and to learn about our own spiritual gifts.

The joy-giving element stuck with me from the start: You may work hard and get tired while you deploy your gifts, but it's not a sapped-of-energy feeling; instead, it brings a sense of fulfillment. You've emptied yourself, but during that emptying, you've taken in an equal (or greater) measure of joy.

One of the ways I care for God's creation is by fostering dogs along their journeys to permanent homes. (I'm thankful that my husband long ago agreed to full partnership in this endeavor, because it would never work with just one household member on board.) Last weekend, we looked after two puppies while a fellow United Methodist dog fosterer traveled. Baby-dogs require extra care, but even amid cleaning up messes, we took joy in the progress they'd made since we'd last seen them—especially the runt of the litter.

We also had several human

guests: one friend stayed overnight, two more stopped for coffee on their way to Indiana, another pair dropped by while running errands and on Sunday, my small group came over for our weekly study. I'm pretty sure everyone who came to our house spent time holding a puppy or two.

Small group members pointed out that while the puppies easily took the most energy of all the guests, they also brought joy to everyone around them. Energy goes out, and joy goes in.

I'm not suggesting that puppies are a spiritual gift, but hospitality certainly is among the spiritual gifts listed in the Bible. The weekend that filled my house with guests reminded me that even though I'm not abundantly gifted in hospitality (for example, it finally dawned on me to offer facial tissues five minutes after a friend first needed one), I can and do receive joy from welcoming others in the name of Christ.

What hard thing do you do that is always worth the work, and that never fails to bring you joy? It may not be something you see as a conventional, "churchy" gift, but if you use it in community, it just may have a gift of the Holy Spirit driving it.

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



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Submission Deadlines

Issue Date	Submission Deadline
March 3	Feb. 13
April 7	March 17
May 5	April 17

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GROWING TOGETHER IN CHRIST: A word from the Bishop

BY GARY E. MUELLER

Spiritual revival—again?

I made a statement about 18 months ago that I am even surer of today: The only way United Methodist Christians of Arkansas can be the disciples that Jesus calls us to be and grow the number of vital congregations that make disciples of Jesus Christ, who make disciples equipped to transform lives, communities and the world is to build upon the foundation of spiritual revival.

This is not a strategy to reverse the decline of our denomination. It is fact. It is not something we engineer. It is something we passionately seek, receive as a gift from the Holy Spirit and embrace as the essence of our identity. It is not just another “damn conference program” that we have to fit in. It is

the realization we are at our best when we allow God to lead.

So how are we doing with spiritual revival?

I have heard incredible stories that show the richness and variety of spiritual revival. From unexpected professions of faith to long-time members taking a huge leap in discipleship. From congregations reaching out to serve their neighbors to historically segregated churches becoming a place where racial reconciliation is beginning to occur. From churches that were dying on the vine to those very churches being vital the next year.

Yet transparency demands that I also share what I think you already know. We have a long way to go. A long, long way. And it's why I am

talking about spiritual revival—again—in a very specific way.

I want to ask you to make a commitment to join me and thousands of other United Methodists throughout the state of Arkansas in praying for spiritual revival during the month of February.

Spend *five minutes a day* praying for revival.

Invite *five other people* to pray five minutes a day for spiritual revival.

Invite *five different people* to join you for group prayer once a week.

And if the Holy Spirit moves you, consider *fasting five times* during the week.

We are joining together in this

kind of concerted prayer effort for a very simple reason: We want to experience more of Jesus' love, we want others to experience the same love we have and we want to be the kind of disciples who can't wait to pray for this to happen.

So will we? Honestly, I don't know. And that's okay. Because the Holy Spirit will do exactly the thing we need at the exactly the time we need it in exactly the way we need it.

Grace and peace,

Gary E. Mueller

Our Trajectory

Creating vital congregations that make disciples of Jesus Christ, who make disciples equipped to transform lives, communities and the world.

Would 'Junk Food Bill' be good news for the poor?

BY ROY BETH KELLEY
Special Contributor

Football coach Vic Wallace used to tell his team, “Football fires me up!” Some things just fire me up, including the children and youth at Dover UMC and House Bill 1035 (I'll call it the Junk Food Bill).

This bill is pending in the 2017 Arkansas legislative session that is currently underway. It attempts to legislate what foods are nutritionally appropriate for families receiving federal SNAP benefits (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program—formerly known as food stamps). The bill proposes that the Arkansas Department of Human Services establish a list of foods and beverages that are deemed to have



Roy Beth Kelley

“sufficient nutritional value” using the guidelines set out in the “WIC” program designed to feed women, infants, and children.

Because SNAP is federally funded, the state would have to ask the United States Department of Agriculture for a waiver to implement this plan. Similar bills have been introduced in other states over the last few years, and those that have passed have been denied a waiver by the USDA. However, the potential for USDA policy changes under President Trump gives hope to sponsoring legislators that a waiver might be granted.

As I write, the bill has passed the house committee and may be law in our state by the time you read

this. Either way, it is true that the Junk Food Bill addresses real issues that face our state—poverty, hunger, obesity and poor health. A lot of Arkansans live in poverty, and a lot of Arkansans are obese and

vegetables. I probably wouldn't struggle with that extra 10 (or so) pounds!

But... shopping that way is so much more expensive than buying macaroni and cheese, hot dogs and

ramen noodles. Unfortunately, the Junk Food Bill doesn't provide additional state funding for families to purchase foods of “sufficient nutritional value.” It doesn't provide for education about nutrition, wise shopping or tips on how to

Interested in experiencing what it's like to shop for food using SNAP benefits? Take the SNAP Challenge, outlined at <https://goo.gl/Loeyfz>. To learn more about advocating for hungry children and families in Arkansas, visit <http://200kReasons.arumc.org/resources>.

With the 200,000 Reasons to Fight Childhood Hunger initiative, the United Methodists of Arkansas seek to engage all of the state's United Methodist churches in efforts to significantly reduce childhood hunger through feeding ministries, public witness and education for long-term stability.

unhealthy. But a lot of us who are not living in poverty are also obese and unhealthy. I kind of wish I was forbidden from buying candy bars and chocolate chip cookies. I kind of wish I had to buy nutritionally sufficient foods like fresh fruits and

cook broccoli so that kids will eat it. And most importantly, the bill doesn't address the core underlying issues of the need for a living wage for all Arkansans and the rejection of racism and classism in our public
(continued on page 7)

APPOINTMENTS & RETIREMENTS

The following **appointment changes** have been announced since the last publication deadline of the *Arkansas United Methodist*:

- Paul Marshall—Hartman/Hays Chapel (charge realignment); effective March 1
- Rachel Krest—Alpena; effective March 1
- Susan Kramer—Bellefonte/Valley View; effective Feb. 1
- Lincoln Combs—Hinton (charge realignment); effective Jan. 11
- Gene Ross—Friendship UMC Prescott/DeAnn (charge realignment); effective Jan. 11
- Tommy Rider—Fairview UMC Texarkana (interim); effective Jan. 11
- Henry “Hank” Wilkins—St. James-Pine Bluff/UAPB Wesley Foundation (switch to part-time); effective Jan. 1

And the following **retirements** have been announced (effective July 1, 2017, unless otherwise noted):

- Dan Brand
- Steven Bush (effective Aug. 1, 2016)
- Bobby Coleman
- Doug Criss
- Robert DeBaun (effective July 1, 2016)
- Steve Holyfield
- Mark Lasater
- Tom Letchworth
- Steve Long
- Robin Moore
- LaVon Post
- Clarence Edward Pruett (effective Jan. 1, 2017)
- Bubba Smith
- Rockey Starnes
- Judy Van Hoose
- Garry Wiles
- Mike Wilkie

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

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PEOPLE OF FAITH

Burns, Gill, Lemmer to receive Steel-Hendrix Awards

Cindy Burns, the Rev. David Gill and Christy Lemmer will be honored by the Marshall T. Steel Center Tuesday, April 25, at the 32nd annual Steel-Hendrix



Cindy Burns

Award banquet, held in the Student Life and Technology Center at Hendrix College in Conway.

Burns will receive the Mary and Ira Brumley award for Religious Education. She has been a member of Pulaski Heights United Methodist Church since relocating to Little Rock in Sept. 1985, and has been on staff at Pulaski Heights UMC since June of 2000. She has worked in adult education, missions, evangelism and assimilation. Since June of 2008, Burns has served as director of ministries with children and families.



David Gill

Gill will receive the Ethel K. Millar Award of Religion and Social Awareness. He served churches in rural Indiana for seven years and also lived in Christian community in Boston. He has taken youth groups to Heifer Ranch for summer mission trips and then was invited to join the staff of Heifer, where he served 12 years as their director of church relations and grants. In 1997, he became executive director of Ferncliff Camp and Conference Center. He helped start a Solar School that has graduated 13 classes of students who have



Christy Lemmer

installed more than 60 solar power projects in Haiti.

Lemmer, the ministry program director at First United Methodist Church Morrilton, will receive the Hendrix College Youth Director of the Year award. She attended Henderson State University and the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, where she studied early childhood education. She is currently a certified Lay Servant in the Arkansas Conference of the United Methodist Church.

The banquet begins at 5:30 p.m. Tickets are available by advance purchase through April 20; contact the Hendrix's chaplain's office for more information at 501-450-1263 or mulhearn@hendrix.edu.

The annual Willson Lecture will follow the Steel-Hendrix banquet; this year's lecturer is Dr. Amy-Jill Levine. Levine is the University Professor of New Testament and Jewish Studies, E. Rhoades and Leona B. Carpenter Professor of New Testament Studies and Professor of Jewish Studies at Vanderbilt Divinity School and College of Arts and Sciences. She will speak in the Mills A lecture hall at 7 p.m., and the lecture is free and open to the public.



18 from Arkansas attend Convocation for Pastors of Black Churches

The 10th Convocation of Pastors of Black Churches was held in Atlanta Jan. 10-12, 2017 and included 18 clergy and laity from the Arkansas Conference among the more than 500 participants. Chaired by the Rev. Vance P. Ross, who encouraged attendees to experience the fullness of the Holy Spirit, the event's theme was "Called to Fresh Vision."

The preaching, teaching and music was inspired by the traditions of the Black Church and included influences of the Afro-Caribbean and other diasporic cultural underpinnings. The overarching theological focus rested on Revelation 21:1-5 and Habakkuk 2:1-3, and activities included mentoring sessions for young persons entering the ministry, as well as workshops for more seasoned lay and clergy. A highly popular segment was "Inside the Pastor's Studio" modeled after Inside the Actor's Studio with Kirbyjon Caldwell, pastor of Windsor Village UMC Houston, Texas. Caldwell shared things that he anguished over as well as those things that brought him joy.

Plenaries included Pastor Vision, Worship, and A Vision for Discipleship Development. Featured preachers included Bishop Sharma Lewis, the Rev. Benjamin Kevin Smalls and the Rev. Jasmine Smothers. The event included opening communion with the Ebony Bishops, and a remembrance of baptism for the closing worship led by the Rev. Rose Booker Jones.

COURTESY PHOTO

CLASSIFIEDS

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

First United Methodist Church in Paragould, Arkansas, is seeking a part-time Director of Music Ministries. Our Director of Music Ministries will be expected to lead the volunteer chancel choir at the 11:00 a.m. traditional worship service and to provide music leadership at our 8:00 a.m. traditional service. In addition to these duties, the Director of Music Ministries will lead our handbell choir. It is our hope that the successful applicant will work alongside our Director of Contemporary Worship and will help our staff achieve our mission statement of Loving God, Serving People, Making a Difference. Membership and background in the United Methodist Church is preferred. Strong organizational and communication skills are desired. Please send all questions and resumes to Rev. John Fleming, Johnfleming27@gmail.com or First United Methodist Church of Paragould, 404 West Main Street, Paragould, Arkansas 72450.

Arkansas United Methodist Museum seeking part-time curator. One day a week managing our collection. Contact Paul Brown, 501-454-1485, for information.

Director of Student Ministries position open at First United Methodist Church, Mountain Home, Arkansas. Dynamic church with an active Student Ministries program of 50 youth is seeking a spiritually mature Christian leader to shepherd students and their families in discipleship of Jesus. Must be knowledgeable of, and comfortable with, Wesleyan theology and have excellent communication skills with students and adults. Mountain Home is a wonderful place to raise a family with a quality education system as well as beautiful lakes and rivers. This is a full time position. Email resume to: office@fumcmh.org.

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.

JOB POSTING

Financial Controller

Full-Time Exempt position with the Arkansas Conference of the United Methodist Church
Our Conference Trajectory: *Creating vital congregations that make disciples of Jesus Christ, who make disciples equipped to transform lives, communities and the world.*

Responsibilities

- Maintain the accounting systems and reports for all Conference accounts
- Prepare journal entries, account analyses, financial reports, account reconciliations, and period closing entries and processing
- Prepare operational and management reports for the various committees of the Annual Conference; know and understand the nature of all accounts, balances, their contents and trends
- Responsible for the timely submission of reports and forms to Federal, State and local governments
- Assist the external auditors in the accomplishment of their tasks
- Process payroll; reconcile payroll reports to general ledger
- Review check requests for correct coding and enter data into accounting system
- Remit apportioned and special funds to appropriate agencies monthly
- Prepare bank reconciliations for Conference accounts
- Assist Conference Treasurer with special projects and reports

Position Requirements

Experience in fund accounting • Detail oriented and organized with excellent problem-solving skills • Effective communication skills

Minimum Education or Experience Requirements

Education and/or working experience in accounting • Working knowledge of Abila accounting software a plus • Working knowledge of the United Methodist Church preferred

Compensation

Salary commensurate with experience • 403(b) pension plan • No group medical insurance

Reports to the Director of the Center for Administrative Services

Email resume and cover letter to tburris@arumc.org • Closing Date: February 10, 2017

Wreck

(continued from page 1)

passengers went to the hospital in Alexandria to be checked for injuries. The van, which belonged to St. Andrew UMC Arkadelphia, was totaled. Durand expressed gratefulness to the congregation for all the years they had provided the van as a way of helping young people engage in mission.

After it became clear no one was injured, the team made a unanimous decision to continue on to the mission event.

"I said, 'If this is it, and y'all want to go home, we will figure out a way to get you home, and I will stay with you as long as I need to make that happen,'" Durand said. "But by the time everybody had been checked out at the hospital and had talked to their parents, everybody said, 'No, I want to go on.'"

Coordinated by Little Rock-based Ozark Mission Project (OMP) in partnership with Revive225 (www.revive225.com), a ministry of First UMC Baton Rouge, the winter break mission drew more than 85 attendees, a significant increase from the usual average of about 60. Crews took on a variety of projects; according to Alex Byo, director of

Revive225, the group worked at 11 different homes during their time there, helping a total of about 40 individual neighbors.

This winter break group was the largest that Revive225 has hosted in their relatively young existence. "They are a really neat project and group, and we enjoyed getting to know them," Durand said, complimenting them on the wonderful Cajun food the students enjoyed each night after a day of hard work.

OMP mission coordinator Carissa Tarkington said that this mission had 91 registered to participate, hailing from Arkansas State University Wesley, SAU Wesley, University of Arkansas Wesley and Henderson State/Ouachita Baptist Wesley. The total also includes some students who are not affiliated with a Wesley Foundation. The Arkansas Conference Board of Higher Education and Ministry provided a \$7,500 grant to help make the trip affordable for all college students who wished to go.

Once in Baton Rouge, the group of travelers who had been in the van during the accident dispersed to various teams, but many of them did similar work. "I think everybody in the van was

involved with insulating and putting up drywall," Durand said. She added that while all of the van's passengers experienced some soreness from being jostled around on the way there, "I think we all did OK" doing the work. Durand continues to follow up with the students to provide spiritual care as they recover from the experience.

She says the stories of those they helped have stayed with them after the journey. For example, her team helped a musician who had been unable to live in her own home for months because of the severe water damage. Flood waters outside this neighbor's home had been so high that she had to stand on the roof of a car until someone came by in a boat to rescue her.

"She did not live in the flood zone, so she did not have flood insurance," Durand said. "The work that we managed to get done meant that she was able to move back into her home the day after we were finished."

Durand also says that her campus ministry's bond with OMP is even stronger after this experience. "We've really strengthened those ties, and they're a great help in planning and making all those connections," she said.



Jess Crum, a student involved in ministry with the Arkansas State Wesley Foundation, cuts a piece of drywall.

PHOTO COURTESY SAM MEADORS / ASU WESLEY FOUNDATION

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Methodist Family Health invites church groups, families, friends and neighbors to join us in collecting much-needed items during the season of Lent! Your generosity will bring a smile to the faces of those we serve in our hospital, group homes, emergency shelter and other programs.

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Recreation items such as basketballs, kick balls, footballs, soccer balls, etc. Board games, cards, dominoes, crayons, coloring books, colored pencils

BABY ITEMS

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Crib sheets

MISCELLANEOUS

Paper towels
Toilet paper
Twin size sheet sets
Bath towels and washcloths (white only)

Monetary donations will be used for these needs as well. To view a detailed Wish List, go to www.MethodistFamily.org/wish.

Monetary donations may be sent to: Methodist Family Health Foundation, P.O. Box 56050, Little Rock, AR 72215 (put "Get Up & Give" in memo line).

MethodistFamily.org

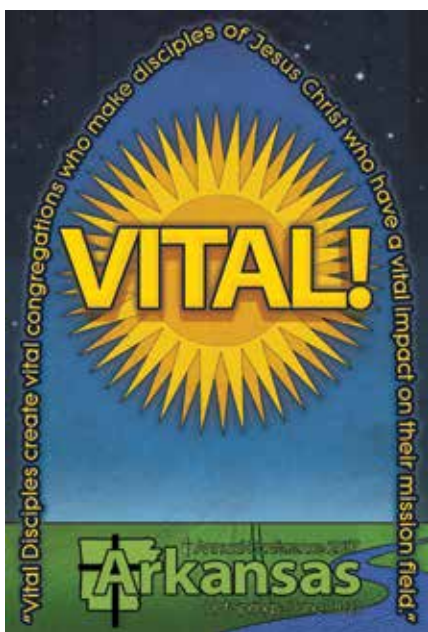
For information: contact Jane Dennis at 501.906.4210 or jdennis@methodistfamily.org.



Stay current with AC2017 plans: website now online

Ready to make travel plans for Annual Conference? Or just want to learn more about what's happening there? Visit ac2017.arumc.org to see who we'll be hearing from, where to stay and more.

When the Pre-Conference Journal is ready, you'll find it there available for download, along with other information being distributed between now and Annual Conference, which is set for June 18-21 at Bank of the Ozarks Arena in Hot Springs.



Holston to preach for opening worship at AC2017

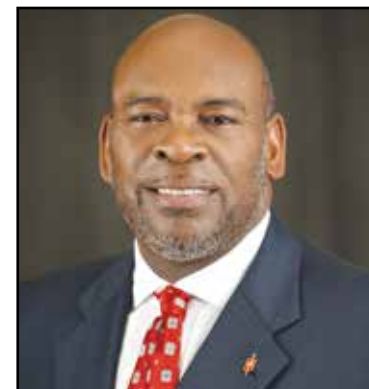
Bishop Jonathan Holston, resident bishop of the South Carolina Conference, will serve as guest preacher for the 2017 Arkansas Annual Conference opening worship service, set for Sunday, June 18. Annual Conference worship is open to all who wish to attend.

Holston served as senior pastor of St. James United Methodist Church Atlanta for seven years before his 2012 election to the episcopacy. He previously served as superintendent of the Atlanta-Decatur-Oxford District from 1997-2005. He earned his Master of Divinity in biblical studies from The Interdenominational Theological Center, Gammon Theological Seminary, Atlanta, in 1983, and also holds a Bachelor of Arts in religion from the University of Georgia in Athens.

Alongside our own Bishop Gary Mueller, he serves on the executive committee of the United Methodist Council of Bishops, and also on the strategy team for the denomination's Four Areas of Focus (engaging in ministry with the poor, improving

global health, developing principled Christian leaders and creating new and renewed congregations).

His love for missions has taken him around the world and gained him the recognition before his election as a mission specialist in the North Georgia Conference Council of Ministries. In his work as conference disaster relief coordinator, Holston served on the United Methodist Committee on Relief, on the Catastrophic Disaster Response Team and as the Church World Service disaster consultant in Georgia. He



Bishop Jonathan Holston

has traveled extensively as a specialist in missions to Uganda, Costa Rica, Haiti, Honduras, Zimbabwe, Kenya, India, China and Hong Kong.

Petitions to 2019 called session of General Conference due by March 15

A message from the secretary of the Arkansas Annual Conference

Brothers and Sisters of the Arkansas Annual Conference, Anyone wishing the Arkansas Annual Conference to send a petition to the specially called session of the General Conference in 2019 may submit them to the Annual Conference for consideration at the 2017 session. Said petitions must be received in accordance with the Standing Rules of the Arkansas Annual Conference, section 5, paragraph 213, in the 2016 Arkansas Conference Journal, available in hard copy and online. The deadline for sending items to be published in the Pre-Conference Journal is March 15.

The General Conference has requirements for both the formatting and, per the Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church paragraph 507, the content of all petitions. The online Instructions for Submitting Petitions to the 2016 General Conference (available at <https://goo.gl/j8NqvN>) will suffice as a summary of instructions for both formatting and content. The dates of the upcoming General Conference session, once announced, will inform the General Conference's deadline for submission of petitions. Their deadline will be chosen to allow the delegates to have all materials in hand for consideration at least 230 days prior to the General Conference session.

Those crafting petitions should be aware that all petitions must address the purpose(s) stated in the official call for the 2019 session to be considered by General Conference. That official call has not yet been issued, and it is not clear when that will happen. It will be published on arumc.org when it becomes available. In the meantime, the wording of the Council of Bishops' statement "An Offering for a Way Forward" (www.arumc.org/2016/05/offering-a-way-forward) is an indication that matters of Church unity, polity and human sexuality will be included within the official call. Consider reading the Council's statement as a part of your writing process.

Having this many variables in preparing for General Conference is highly unusual. Thank you for your understanding as we navigate unprecedented circumstances together. I would welcome the opportunity to assist anyone regarding the submission of petitions to General Conference. Please contact me at aubrietta.jones@arumc.org.

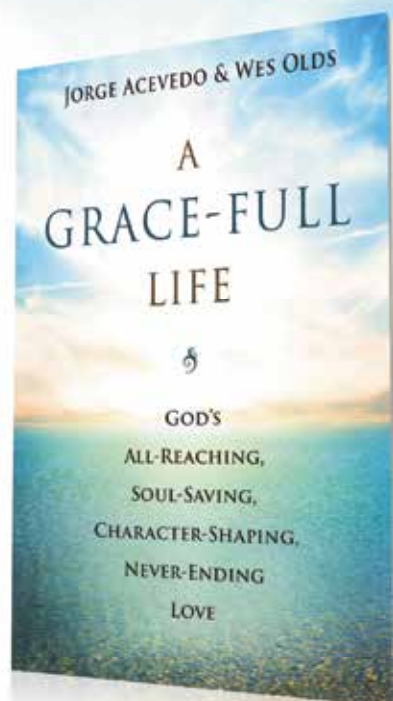
I am grateful for our shared ministry. Let us all be in prayer for the United Methodist Church and our own Annual Conference now and in the coming days.

Blessings,
Rev. Aubrietta Jones, secretary of the Arkansas Annual Conference

EXPLORE THE WONDER OF GOD'S GRACE

Grace. It's a game changer. And when never-ending love comes from God, it sometimes feels like more than you can take. Why does God want to have a personal relationship with me? How can I fully experience and respond to God's grace? What does "grace" really mean?

In *A Grace-Full Life*, you'll examine a Wesleyan understanding of grace for the common person. You'll learn about various forms of grace—prevenient grace, justifying grace, sanctifying grace, and glorifying grace—and you'll come away knowing how God's grace truly works in your life. The book may be used as a standalone resource or combined with a DVD and Leader Guide for a four-session study.



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Sixteenth Section UMC youth take food pantry on the road

Using grant funds awarded by the 200,000 Reasons to Fight Childhood Hunger initiative and contributions from the senior adult Sunday school class, the youth of

200,000 REASONS

to fight childhood hunger

Sixteenth Section UMC have increased the reach of the church's food pantry by taking it closer to Lonoke County-area residents who need it.

The church purchased and outfitted a trailer as a mobile food pantry and on Jan. 22 used it for the first time, taking it to apartment complexes housing families with low

incomes. They provided food to more than 20 families at their first stop. Individuals were able to walk through the trailer and choose the food that would best meet their household's needs.

Options in the trailer included canned goods, milk, eggs, meat, bread and a few household items. Because they are taking the food to



COURTESY PHOTO

'Junk Food Bill' (continued from page 3)

policy.

I'm fired up because according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (www.cbpp.org), 72 percent of SNAP participants in Arkansas live in families with children, and 33 percent of participants live in families with members who are elderly or have disabilities. I'm fired up because 41 percent of people receiving SNAP in my state are working families who still don't make enough to feed their kids. I'm fired up because SNAP gives families an average of \$1.28 per meal, per person to feed their families, and that will simply not stretch to buy oranges and grapes, cucumbers and cauliflower. And I'm fired up because I see the faces of these families every single week. There are families who will be affected by this legislation; they are my friends, and they are members of my church.

Our Lord Jesus Christ came to proclaim good news for the poor. How can we, the church, do the same? How can we bridge the gap that exists for families living in poverty now and even if the Junk Food Bill becomes law?

The Rev. Kelley is appointed to Dover UMC as a part-time local pastor, and is a full-time student at United Theological Seminary.

the people instead of expecting them to come to the church building, they now give away more food in one Sunday than they used to in a year.

The Sixteenth Section youth group came up with the idea for the mobile pantry last fall. They began identifying areas of need and visiting them to offer the food pantry stock

before the trailer arrived. They loaded bins of food in the church van, or members' trucks or SUVs, along with tables and a sign. Youth group members would set up tables, place the food on tables and go door to door to let residents know they were there to give out food.

Youth director Shawna Criswell

prepares fliers to distribute in advance to the areas where the mobile pantry will stop. Currently, they deliver food every other Sunday, but with the trailer expanding their capacity, the church expects to be able to set a more frequent schedule soon.

—submitted by Larry Grace

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In *Restored*, author Tom Berlin encourages us to reflect and meditate through our own brokenness, showing us that it is only when we focus on the cross as a place to surrender control that we can leave our mess and find true redemption.

Study Components: Book, Leader Guide, DVD, Youth Study Book, and Leader Kit

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Griffen brings fierce urgency of prophetic hope to Wesley Chapel

BY K.D. REEP
Special Contributor

The first event in the 2017 Faith in Black and White public speaker series was held Monday, Jan. 16—Martin Luther King Jr. Day—and offered joy, challenges and hope to attendees at Wesley Chapel United Methodist Church on Little Rock's Philander Smith College campus.

McClellan Magnet High School's Sounds of Harmony choir brought the church to its feet with its rendition of "We Shall Overcome," a fitting way to set the stage for the presentation by the series' first speaker, Judge Wendell Griffin, to talk about radical revolution.

"The giant triplets of racism, materialism and militarism beget septuplets," Griffen said. "Now, we must also contend with sexism, xenophobia and techno-centrism. We bred and nourished homophobia. We bred and nourished half-truths with prosperity gospel. We bred and nourished these triplets into birthing corporate profit above care

for citizens.

"We must confront these septuplets, which are re-assassinating Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and his vision with drone warfare, militarizing injustice and worshipping capitalism above God," he said.

Griffen explained the basis of his book, *The Fierce Urgency of Prophetic Hope* (Judson Press, to be released March 1, 2017), which encourages politicians and citizens to focus on the needs of the people God cares about most—those who are oppressed, on the margins of society, who hunger and thirst.

"This is the most important policy concern we have today," he said. "We must insist that our politicians see God in that homeless person, prisoner, child, single mother and Muslim."

Griffen, a U.S. Army veteran and a University of Arkansas School of Law graduate, was the first person of color to become an associate and later a partner in a major Arkansas law firm (Wright, Lindsey, and Jennings in Little Rock). He served as Arkansas Workers' Compensation



Judge Wendell Griffen addresses those gathered Jan. 16 for the first installment in the Faith in Black and White lecture series, a cooperative effort between Hendrix College and Philander Smith College. Philander Smith president Roderick Smothers Sr. looks on.

PHOTO BY CARMEN BRADFORD / COURTESY PHILANDER SMITH COLLEGE

Hendrix College and Philander Smith College Present **Faith in Black and White: The Church and Race in 'Colorblind' America**

A public speaker series to explore the systems of racial injustice in contemporary American culture and the role of the Church in creating a more racially just society.

All events are free and open to the public.



HOLDING UP YOUR CORNER: TALKING ABOUT RACE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Rev. Dr. F. Willis Johnson:
Tuesday, February 21 | 7 p.m.
Mills Center at Hendrix College, Room A

Rev. Johnson is pastor of
Wellspring Church in Ferguson, Missouri

THE BIBLE IN BLACK AND WHITE

Dr. Nyasha Junior: Tuesday, March 14 | 7 p.m.
Kendall Nugent building at Philander Smith College



(IN)JUSTICE

Dr. Emilie Townes: Wednesday, April 5 | 7 p.m.
Mills Center at Hendrix College, Room A



For more information, contact Dr. Robert Williamson at williamsonr@hendrix.edu or 501-505-1559 or Rev. Ronnie Miller-Yow at rmiller-yow@philander.edu or 501-370-5344.



Commission chairman, Arkansas Court of Appeals judge, and University of Arkansas at Little Rock William H. Bowen School of Law Visiting Professor before being elected to his current post as Circuit Judge of the Sixth Judicial District of Arkansas, Fifth Division. He also serves as pastor of Little Rock's New Millennium Church.

Hendrix College and Philander Smith College, both United Methodist-related institutions, are co-hosting the public speaker series "Faith in Black and White: The Church and Race in 'Colorblind' America," to explore the systems of racial injustice in contemporary American culture and the role of the Church in creating a more

racially just society. All events in the series are free and open to the public.

Speakers will explore the ways that churches have both supported and struggled against systems of racial injustice and will try to point a way forward for the Church in the effort to bring about a more racially just society. The series will bring together an interracial audience of Hendrix and Philander Smith students, as well as pastors and church members from central Arkansas congregations.

The next speaker in the series is the Rev. Dr. F. Willis Johnson, senior pastor of Wellspring United Methodist Church in Ferguson, Missouri, who will speak on

Tuesday, Feb. 21, at 7 p.m., in Mills A in the Mills Social Sciences Center at Hendrix College. His most recent book is *Holding up Your Corner: Talking about Race in Your Community* (Abingdon Press, 2017).

For the third lecture, Temple University professor Dr. Nyasha Junior will present "The Bible in Black and White" on Tuesday, March 14, at 7 p.m., in the Nugent Room of the Kendall Center at Philander Smith College. Her work focuses on the intersections of race, gender and religion, in particular through her Womanist approach to biblical interpretation.

The final installment in the series features Dr. Emilie Townes, Dean and Carpenter Professor of Womanist Ethics and Society at the Vanderbilt University Divinity School, will present "(In)Justice" on Wednesday, April 5, at 7 p.m., in Mills A in the Mills Social Sciences Center at Hendrix. An American Baptist clergywoman, Townes is one of the world's foremost scholars of Womanist ethics.

The speaker series is underwritten by the Margaret Berry Hutton Odyssey Professorship at Hendrix College, which is currently held by psychology professor Dr. Leslie Zorwick and religious studies professor Dr. Robert Williamson, director of the Hendrix Miller Center for Vocation, Ethics, and Calling.



Does your church have gently used electronics that could be repurposed by another congregation?

Visit <https://goo.gl/forms/Zw1h7KIIMsLNFwG2> to

donate them to the Arkansas Conference Center for

Technology's REcharge Initiative.

Tithe (from page 1)

“We received a lot of positive feedback around the 2017 tithe, which led to more churches making payments on a regular basis and contributed to us having a higher payout at the end of 2016,” said Todd Burris, director of the Center for Administrative Services and treasurer for the Arkansas Conference.

The Center for Administrative Services treated 2016 as a trial period, asking local churches to begin reporting their income monthly as a way to prepare for the Tithe Initiative taking full effect in 2017. It allowed Council on Finance and Administration to perfect the wording on the income exclusions and allow churches to prepare their internal accounting systems.

“2016 apportionments were calculated on a blend of income and expense factors,” Burris said. “This was to ease the transition to a fully income-based tithe system.”

The 10 percent calculation, based on the biblical model of a tithe, depends upon monthly revenue reports supplied by each local church.

An explanation of how the 2017 Tithe funds are used for ministry in the Arkansas Conference and around the world appeared in the most recent Benevolence Guide, which was included in the Nov. 4, 2016 issue of the *Arkansas United Methodist*. The Benevolence Guide is available at www.arumc.org/tithe; district offices and the Conference Center for Administrative services have a limited number of copies available for local churches, as well.

Earl to lead UMCOR's disaster response and U.S. operations partner relations

BY ELLIOTT WRIGHT
General Board of Global Ministries

Catherine G. Earl, an experienced professional in disaster readiness, response and recovery, is the new director of U.S. operations and partner relations of the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR).

UMCOR in the U.S. has strong ties with United Methodist annual conferences, offering extensive training in readiness for, response to and recovery from natural and human-caused disasters.

“Cathy Earl brings a great deal of experience and keen insight concerning disaster relief to her new role at UMCOR,” said Thomas Kemper, chief executive of the General Board of Global Ministries. “She also brings valuable knowledge of the church, the operations of annual conferences, and the generous, helping spirit of United Methodists.”

“She is widely respected among the conference disaster response coordinators as a person willing to both provide quiet support behind the scenes as well as to be leading from in the field—in crisis situations,” said the Rev. Jack Amick, UMCOR's senior director for disaster response. “Cathy is an equipper of others. Her ministry is grounded in serving the most vulnerable in ways that maintain the dignity of those being served.”

Earl's first work with UMCOR was 14 years ago as disaster case management supervisor, and later

director, for the Greater New Jersey Conference-UMCOR response to the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center.

In 2005 she was deployed by UMCOR to train Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) personnel in case management following Hurricane Katrina. For over two years, she was lead technical supervisor for UMCOR's Katrina Aid Today, a FEMA-funded program that that helped thousands of families displaced by the storm.

Earl joined the core staff of UMCOR in 2008, serving as executive secretary for U.S. disaster response. In her new role, she succeeds Gregory A. Forrester, who left the agency in November to become president and CEO of National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NVOAD), a national association of relief organizations.

Of her new position, Earl says that she “will gratefully continue to reach out to look for new ways for UMCOR to enhance our partnerships with the faith-based, nonprofit and governmental disaster response agencies linked with us in a compassionate response to disaster survivors. I eagerly anticipate that UMCOR's connection within the United Methodist family will continue to provide a strong foundation for meaningful response to individuals and families. Together we can be there and be hope for our hurting neighbors.”

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.

Nearly a year past flooding, teams still needed

Southeast Arkansas is seeking teams to help with repairs needed as a result of the March 2016 floods. The damage incurred is a result of the same storms that devastated areas of Texas and Louisiana. Organization of long-term recovery was delayed for various reasons, but is now in place and operational. Projects are identified and funding secured, but volunteer help is little to none. When considering mission opportunities, please consider our neighbors in Southeast Arkansas. Several priority cases are waiting. To volunteer, contact Ron Jones, Site Volunteer Coordinator, at woodrat3@live.com or Janice Mann, Disaster Response Coordinator, at disaster@arumc.org.

Leadership development mission to Mexico in May

The South Central Jurisdiction of the UMC, which includes the Arkansas Conference, is offering a leadership development mission experience to Manos Juntas in Rio Bravo, Mexico the first week of May 2017. Scholarships are available in the amount of \$300 per person for those willing to participate in partnership as described in the mission brochure: <http://www.scjumc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/SCJ-Leadership-Manos-Juntas.pdf>. For more information contact the team leader, Audrey Phelps, vimpelps@gmail.com.

UMCOR's Sager Brown Depot: Health and bedding kits needed

Because of your past generosity, UMCOR Sager Brown has been able to replenish its inventory of disaster relief supplies, better positioning it to respond to disasters. Although inventory has increased, they are still in need of health and bedding kits. If you and your congregation are able to assist with this request, that would truly be a blessing. Crisis can occur anywhere, at any time, just as with the recent tornadoes that hit Hattiesburg, Mississippi. UMCOR wants to be prepared to answer the call when our brothers and sisters need us. Should you have any questions about the assembly of these kits, visit www.umcor.org/reliefsupplies.

Mississippi tornado response

Arkansas Disaster Response Coordinators have offered tornado tubs from our current stock to the Hattiesburg and Petal, Mississippi, areas after the storms that produced multiple tornadoes across the South and Southeast. They have requested trained Early Response Teams (ERT), trained chain saw teams and heavy equipment teams. ERTs need to be self-sustainable. Recovery and the request for repair and rebuild teams will come later. Updates are being posted on the VIM/DR Facebook group or may be received from Janice Mann upon request: disaster@arumc.org. You can help

by giving to Disaster Response, United States (Advance #901670) through the Arkansas Conference office or at www.umcor.org.

Southeastern U.S. wildfires

The recovery period from wildfires in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, and surrounding areas will be long for many of the affected households. You can help by giving to Disaster Response, United States (Advance #901670) through the Arkansas Conference office or at www.umcor.org. Contact Janice Mann to receive information about any future call for mission teams in that area.

Help alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Syria

The United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) is working hard with on-the-ground partners to develop projects and provide humanitarian assistance, mostly food, supplies and other non-food items to the survivors of Aleppo. Since 2010, UMCOR has been responding to the Syrian crisis by working with partners to provide for the basic human needs of refugees and internally displaced persons. To date, UMCOR has spent approximately \$4 million on this disaster. UMCOR is currently finalizing a grant to assist in Lebanon as that country supports the nearly one-third of its population who are refugees. To support this work, designate your gift with Advance #982450, International Disaster Response, at www.umcor.org.

Travel to Cuba in July or November

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: A Volunteers in Mission team is forming for a one-week journey to Holguin, Cuba, to lead Bible school. 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, craft projects and snacks are needed. Even a few dollars make a real difference in the mission team's abilities to connect with students. Follow-up photos provided.
- November 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.

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

Leadership Unleashed conversations scheduled for Southeast District

More dates to come in other parts of the state

The Arkansas Conference Center for Vitality (CFV) is teaming up with the Rev. Mark Norman, superintendent of the Southeast District, to provide a special opportunity for laity called Leadership Unleashed.

This series of Southeast District events will include a two-hour coffee, dessert and discussion time.

This series of meetings has already occurred in the Central District, and will soon be scheduled in the remaining three districts. Leadership Unleashed gatherings

will provide space for laity to participate in meaningful conversation by sharing stories of fruitfulness, learning from the work of ministry in our congregations, discussing action plans and praying for each other's mission field ministries.

Laity who attended last spring's Grow By One Summit, Lay Servant/ Speaker Training or Church of the Resurrection Leadership Institute have received email invitations, but any layperson active in a local church is welcome. The CFV hopes

that these coffee and dessert gatherings are the first phase in a larger process for unleashing the lay leadership potential in our congregations, in keeping with Step 7 of the Bishop's Mission Plan.

Choose the date, time and location most convenient for your schedule:

- Thursday, Feb. 9, 6:30 p.m., First UMC West Memphis
- Sunday, Feb. 12, 2 p.m., Lakeside UMC Pine Bluff
- Thursday, Feb. 16, 6:30 p.m., First UMC Monticello

"It was very helpful to have this conversation with other churches in the area, to learn and grow from each other. I walked away with several ideas that really spoke to me and I plan on sharing those ideas at our next Administrative Council meeting in hopes others catch excitement and we are able to reach more people for God's kingdom."

—from a Leadership Unleashed attendee in the Central District

- Tuesday, Feb. 21, 6:30 p.m., First UMC Brinkley
To register for any of these free events, contact Cathy Hall Hughes of the CFV, chughes@arumc.org or 501-324-8011.

COMING UP

Confirmation camp: Registration still open for March-April session

Registration is open until March 19 for the second session of Confirmation Camp hosted by Camp Tanako, to be held March 31-April 2, 2017. Visit www.arumc.org/camping-retreat-ministries/confirmation-camp to learn more, or contact Laura Stinett, laura@asbury-lr.org or 501-225-9231.

Registration open through Feb. 19 for Veritas youth gathering, Feb. 24-26

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. Registration ends Feb. 19. For pricing and additional information, visit www.accym.org/veritas.

Spring Lay Servant Academy at Mount Sequoyah March 10-11

The Basic Lay Servant Ministry Course for United Methodists will be offered during Session 1 of this March 10-11 training opportunity at Mount Sequoyah Conference and Retreat Center in Fayetteville. Advanced Course options will be available during both sessions, and include:

- Leading Prayer
- Living Our Connection (United Methodist Polity)
- Discover Your Spiritual Gifts
- Lay Pastoral Care Giving

Session 1 is March 10, and Session 2 is March 11. Commuter and on-campus rates are available. To learn more or to register, visit www.mountsequoyah.org/2809-2.

A Day with the Bishop for grades 5 and 6 at First UMC Little Rock March 11

A Day with the Bishop is a great opportunity for fifth- and sixth-grade students to meet and spend time with Bishop Gary Mueller, and to learn about the connectional ministries of the United Methodist Church. This gathering time also provides a sneak peek at what these students can expect at United Methodist youth events when they're just a little older.

This year's Day with the Bishop is set for March 11, and will be held at First UMC Little Rock, 723 Center Street. Registration will open soon for this time of fellowship and fun; until then, if you have questions, contact Pam Snider, Conference children's ministry coordinator, at 501-240-3535 or pam.snider@arumc.org.

Congregational care training for laypersons April 27-29

Congregational care is critical in every local church, and no one person can address all the hurt of a congregation or community. The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection's Congregational Care Team invites you to join them in Leawood, Kansas, April 27-29 for comprehensive training and networking with other local church leaders regarding congregational care best practices and standards. The seminar is designed to train volunteers to become partners in ministry with pastors and staff to provide care for a congregation.

Several years ago, Church of the Resurrection developed a program transforming the way care is provided for the congregation. The church equipped volunteers to be Congregational Care Ministers (CCMs) and deployed them to work alongside pastors and staff to minister to and holistically care for the congregation. This partnership between lay and clergy has enabled Resurrection to provide a more consistent and deeper level of care to the church family. The ministry of Congregational Care is deliberate in connecting the church with people during difficult times.

New this year is a Pre-Conference, Thursday, April 27 from 10 a.m. to noon, with a choice of two topics: Creating a Care Group or Depression, Anxiety and Addictions.

Registration is limited. Super early bird rate of \$140 for the Seminar and \$25 for the Pre-Conference is available through Feb. 15. The early bird rate of \$160 for the Seminar and \$30 for the Pre-Conference is available Feb. 16 through April 5. The regular registration fee is \$200 for the Seminar and \$35 for the Pre-Conference. For more information, visit www.cor.org/ccm-seminar, or contact Kathy Carter, kathy.carter@cor.org or 913-544-0272.

Clergy golf retreat at Mount Eagle April 30-May 2

Looking for a great opportunity for food, fellowship, worship time and experiencing God's creation at a stunning location? April 30 through May 2 is your opportunity. Stay at Mount Eagle Retreat Center and enjoy some time on the greens at two great golf courses (Mountain Ranch and Tannenbaum Golf Courses). Lunch on your own at the golf course. Grilled steaks for dinner on Monday night. Even if you do not play golf, come for the fellowship, relax and explore God's creation. The Revs. David Baker and Steve Wingo will serve as retreat leaders. For details or to register, contact Sarge Leonard, director@mounteagle.org or 501-723-4580.

Little Rock hosts FUMMWA national 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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OBITUARIES

LITTLE ROCK

Joseph Hughes Jr.

The Rev. Joe Hughes Jr., 82, passed away Jan. 13, 2017.

A retired United Methodist elder, he served in both the Little Rock and North Arkansas Conferences, including appointments to the Marianna Enlarged Parish, Emory Chapel UMC Newport, White Memorial UMC Little Rock and McCabe Chapel UMC North Little Rock.

His daughters, Patricia A. Hughes of Houston, Texas, and Stephanie M. (Percy) Webb of North Little Rock, will treasure their memories of him.

The family offers special thanks to the doctors, nurses, staff and management of Baptist Health Medical Center, Good Shepherd Rehabilitation Center, The Lakes at Maumelle and Arkansas Hospice who seemed as though their job was their ministry as they showed compassion and the highest level of professionalism in ensuring a dignified and loving transition.

A celebration in remembrance was held at Liberty Hill Missionary Baptist Church on Saturday, Jan. 21, 2017.



Joe Hughes Jr.

Arthur Kelly

Arthur Lee Kelly, 69, of Little Rock passed away Saturday, Jan. 21, 2017.

He was born on May 31, 1947 in Texarkana, Arkansas, to Donald and Emma Lee Burke Kelly. He was a member of Concord United Methodist Church and a veteran of the United States Navy. Arthur worked for Cromwell Architectural Firm for over thirty years.



Art Kelly

Survivors include his children, Katherine Kelly McSweeney and Thomas Arthur Kelly; step-children, Tabatha A. Toney and George Toney, III, (Meme); a grandson, Ethan Luke McSweeney; and a brother, William Donald Kelly, Jr. He is preceded in death by his wife, the Rev. Cecilia Malone Kelly, a deacon who served on the Arkansas Conference ministry staff; and by his parents.

Services will be held Thursday, Jan. 26 at 2 p.m. at Pulaski Heights United Methodist Church, officiated by the Rev. Lynn Lindsey and Dr. Kurt Boggan.

HAYESVILLE, North Carolina

Melvin Bitter

The Rev. Melvin Bitter, 96, passed away Sunday, Jan. 8, 2017.

The second son of Mary and Ferdinand Bitter, Melvin was born in Hoisington, Kansas on March 15, 1920. He spent

most of his childhood years with his brothers, Paul, Gehart and Fred in San Francisco, California, where he was All San Francisco basketball and track in high school. While serving his country in the Coast Guard during World War II, Melvin met the love of his life, Gertrude R. Jungen, who was playing the piano at the USO in New York City.

In their wonderful marriage of 71 years, Melvin and Gertrude were blessed with six children, including two sets of twins. Melvin was preceded in death by his daughters Regina and Christine. He is survived by his loving wife, Gertrude; sons Paul (Martha McAfee), John (Mary Johnson) and Mark (whose live-in support was of immeasurable help); and daughter Pam (Cliff Obertuck), along with many grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Melvin lived a fruitful life of service. Having degrees from Concordia Theological Seminary and San Diego State University, his vocational life was spent primarily in ministry having served Lutheran churches in California, First Congregational Church in North Brookfield, Mass., and Methodist churches in Arkansas (where he served appointments through the Little Rock Conference in Dierks, Hope and Pine Bluff), Florida and North Carolina. Melvin also served as a missionary to the Truk Islands in Micronesia and as a hospice chaplain later in life. He taught high school for several years in San Diego, California, and North Brookfield, Massachusetts.

Melvin had a great love for the outdoors, especially enjoying water sports, sailing, motorcycling through the countryside, horseback riding and camping with Gertrude and the family. In his later years, he enjoyed gardening and making walking sticks, which have found their way into the hands of walkers and hikers from North Carolina to Texas.

Melvin began each day with early morning Bible reading and prayer, and attempted however imperfectly to respond to God's call in every aspect of his life. He treasured meeting people and will be greatly missed by his family and many friends who were blessed by his "one of a kind" personality, sense of humor, and devotion to the wellbeing and faith journeys of others.

Visitation and graveside service were held Jan. 12, with interment at Greenlawn Memorial Gardens in Murphy. The Rev. Paul Bitter officiated. Military graveside rites were conducted by the V.F.W. Post #10222, Joe Miller Elkin American Legion Post #96 and D.A.V. Chapter #73 and American Legion Post #532 of Hayesville and V.F.W. Post #6812.

The family wishes to express their thanks to the wonderful caregivers from Four Season Hospice.

In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to The Gideons International, P.O. Box 164, Murphy, NC 28906.



Melvin Bitter

AUSTIN, Texas

Bryce Armstrong

The Rev. Bryce Glen Armstrong, 89, passed away in Austin, Texas, on Jan. 13, 2017.

He was born June 11, 1927, on the family farm in Turtle Lake, Wisconsin, the son of Gus and Agnes Armstrong. Plowing and farm chores developed his strong work ethic and an ability to fix and build using whatever was available. Lifelong fun and brotherly banter with five sisters gave him plenty of reasons to travel "home" as often as he could. He was known for the warm interactions he brought to relationships, his radiant smile, a rich baritone voice, and his storytelling. Road trips around the country with long hours behind the wheel brought him joy—especially if he broke a gas mileage record! A delightful conversation with him almost always included weather updates and car tips.

God's call to the ordained ministry brought him to Indiana Central College and United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. His servant heart led, whether he was in a sanctuary or at a church camp. He grew disciples in Christ through his work in evangelism and pastoral care. His vibrant ministry served churches in Indiana (Montmorenci), Ohio (Yankeetown), and Wisconsin (Clintonville-New London, Neenah, Madison, Wauwatosa Avenue, Viroqua-Liberty Pole, Green Bay and Greenfield). His ministry actively lived on in retirement (Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin; Mammoth Springs and Hardy, Arkansas; and Austin, Texas). He was a member of the Saint John UMC Austin chancel choir, enjoyed tai chi at the church, the men's group and was active in the WOW Sunday school class. He fully retired at the age of 85, but most will say that his ministry ended as he drew his last breath.

Bryce is survived by wife, the Rev. Betty M. Armstrong, who served as a local pastor in the North Arkansas Conference at Mammoth Spring UMC; stepchildren Glenn (Nicole) McCulloch and Karen (John) Chilstrom; his children, Steven (Karen) Armstrong, Rebecca (Don) Zawadiwsky, Paul (Cynthia) Armstrong, Kevin (Rebecca) Armstrong and Brian (Elizabeth) Armstrong; 13 grandchildren; and eight great-grandchildren. He also is survived by three sisters: Phyllis Yelle, Gloria Soldner and Joyce Nelson. Preceding him in death were his parents, his sisters Isabelle and Bernice, and stepson John.

Memorial services were held at St. John's UMC Austin, Texas, on Jan. 22, and at Cargill UMC Janesville, Wisconsin, on Jan. 28.

In honor or memory of Bryce you are invited to make donations to Saint John's UMC choir, the American Heart Association, Rawhide Boys Ranch or UMCOR. The family may be addressed via Betty Armstrong, 11937 Bittern Hollow, Austin, TX 78758-3338.



Bryce Armstrong

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR POLICY

The *Arkansas United Methodist* (AUM) welcomes the opportunity to hear from its readers. To be eligible for publication, letters to the editor must meet the following guidelines:

All letters must be signed with the writer's name, city and church, and include a phone number or email address. Letters may be sent to editor@arumc.org,

or to 800 Daisy Bates Drive, Little Rock, AR 72202.

The editor reserves the right to edit letters for style and length. Letters longer than 200 words will not be considered for publication.

The AUM will not print letters containing personal attacks.

The AUM reserves the right to publish Letters to the Editor in print, online or both.

Want more frequent news from throughout the UMC? *Subscribe to the UMNS Daily Digest email!*

While the *Arkansas United Methodist* focuses primarily on news from within the Arkansas Conference, we are part of a connectional, worldwide church. United Methodist News Service, the official source for denominational news, offers a Daily Digest email, distributed weekdays at 6 p.m. Central time.

Visit www.umc.org/news-and-media/daily-digest to set up your free subscription, then check your inbox for news on United Methodists across the U.S. and the world, as well as for denominational developments that affect every church in our connection.

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.

Use social media? Connect with United Methodists of Arkansas

Want to keep up with happenings in the Arkansas Conference between issues of the *Arkansas United Methodist*? Follow these accounts on social media to receive updates on events and ministries, plus daily thoughts from Bishop Gary Mueller.

Facebook: www.facebook.com/arkansasumc

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An invitation to Experience Spiritual Revival through Prayer

In his 2016 Episcopal Address, Bishop Gary Mueller said, "Spiritual revival is our foundation." With that in mind, Bishop Mueller has set aside the month of February as a special time of intentional prayer and asks all Arkansas United Methodists to pray for spiritual revival throughout the month.

WILL YOU COMMIT TO:

- 🕒 Praying for five minutes a day for spiritual revival?
- 👥 Inviting 5 people to also pray for 5 minutes a day for spiritual revival?
- 🕒 Gathering with 5 other people once a week to pray 5 minutes for spiritual revival?
- 🕒 Fasting 5 times during the week as the Spirit leads you?

"We are joining together in this kind of concerted prayer effort for a very simple reason. We want to experience more of Jesus' love, we want others to experience the same love we have experienced. We want to be the kind of disciples who can't wait to pray for this to happen."

Bishop Gary Mueller

Additional Resources at arumc.org/prayer



24th ANNUAL
CAMDEN
DAFFODIL FESTIVAL
and Garden Tours

MARCH 10 and 11, 2017
2nd Friday and Saturday of March
CAMDEN, ARKANSAS

For more information
log on to:
www.camdendaffodilfestival.com



Faith Funds

A Great Partnership

Brian Swain, Executive Director at Central UMC in Fayetteville, calls the United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas a great partner for his local church. Central UMC endowment funds invested by UMFA have experienced healthy growth under the Foundation's stewardship.

A lifelong United Methodist, Swain had a career in municipal government before his tenure at Central. He has great respect for the Foundation and its leadership, and he is proud of the expansion of UMFA ministries since he first became aware of them while attending his hometown church, Atkins UMC.

"UMFA and Central have worked together on Provide and Protect events for the past five years, and they have been well attended," he said. These seminars can be a valuable resource as members of his congregation deal with family issues, healthcare concerns, current and future finances, estate planning, and charitable giving.

A local attorney and UMFA staff member deliver the two-hour presentations to explain the tools needed to create a plan and provide resources needed to complete those plans. To set up a seminar at your local church, email Janet Marshall at jmarshall@umfa.org or give her a call today.

"Many people don't have a plan," Swain said. "This is an excellent way to help our members with their Christian stewardship."



The United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas

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