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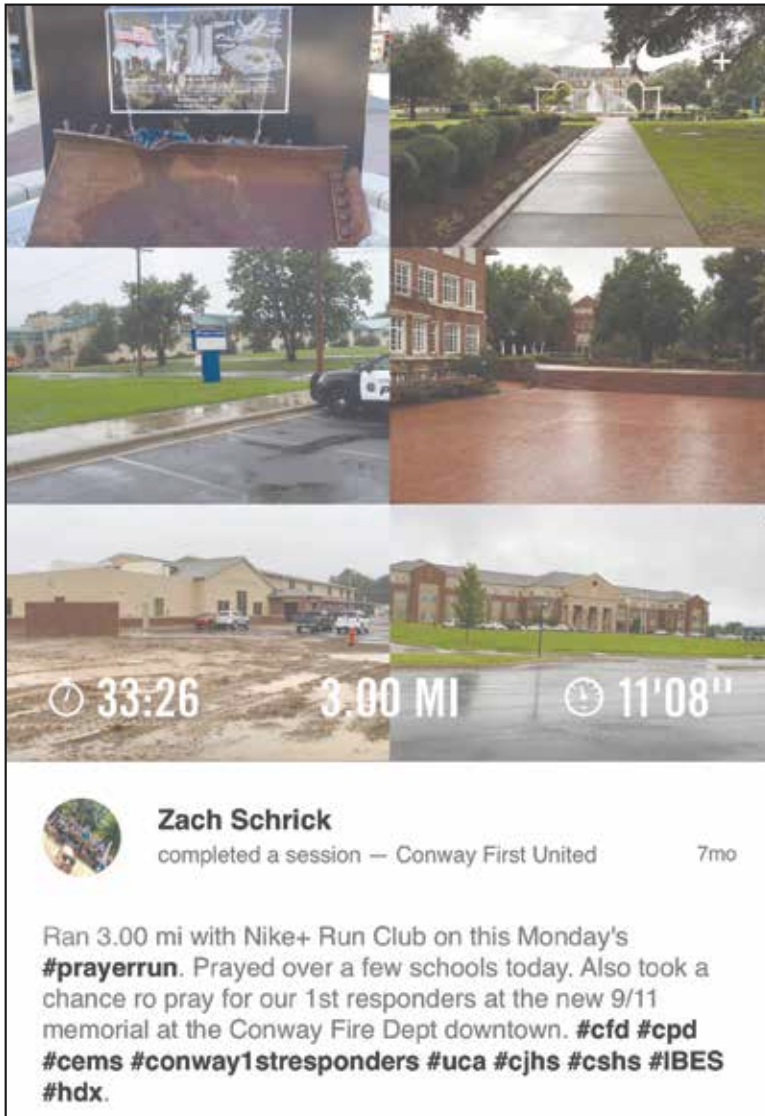


'Holy Hikers' witness God in nature

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'Prayer runs' a physical, spiritual discipline for youth minister

BY AMY FORBUS
Editor



Around the time school started last fall, Zach Schrick started running. And praying. For the director of youth ministries at First United Methodist Church Conway, the two disciplines go together.

"I decided that I needed to do two things: get back in shape and spend some more time in prayer," Schrick said. "I used to run years ago and decided I missed that. It gave me a lot of time to think."

The First UMC Conway youth group had just kicked off the 2016-17 school year with the theme #LeadWithLove, and Schrick decided to use running as a way to do just that—by praying for the community as he made his way through the city.

At first, his runs lasted only a mile or two "because that's about all my 37-year-old body could take," he said, as it had been about eight years since he had run on a regular basis. But soon he was able to cover a three-mile route, which he designed to include running past all the schools the youth of First UMC Conway attend, plus a bit of the downtown area and the city's three colleges.

He started with the schools because of stories he heard from the youth about the types of experiences they encounter there in the hallways.

"As I would see different parts of the city that I would drive by all the time, you see them in a little different perspective... and I began to pray around not just the youth that are in the schools, but the families in the church's neighborhood, to do two things. Number one, that God would lead them to our doors and number two, that he would prepare our church to receive them," he said.

Schrick varies his route around town depending upon where he wants to direct his prayer focus. He has even had friends request that he run past certain schools or areas where people need prayer, so he varies his route. Sometimes he begins from home; other times he drops his children at school, heads to the church and starts his run there.

His prayers change according to his surroundings and circumstances; on more challenging runs, he includes praying for his own endurance. One big change to his prayers since he began has now become a ritual.

[See PRAYER, page 5]

Clergy take theological stance to Capitol steps

BY AMY FORBUS
Editor

The use of the death penalty in Arkansas drew national media attention in April, as the state prepared to execute eight death row inmates by lethal injection over the course of 10 days. The death penalty, which had not been carried out in Arkansas since 2005, has garnered much discussion and debate by faithful Christians. United Methodist clergy have been among those speaking out in opposition to the death penalty, in keeping with the official stance of the denomination as found in Paragraph 164G of the 2016 *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*:

The Death Penalty – We believe

the death penalty denies the power of Christ to redeem, restore, and transform all human beings. The United Methodist Church is deeply concerned about crime throughout the world and the value of any life taken by a murder or homicide. We believe all human life is sacred and created by God and therefore, we must see all human life as significant and valuable. When governments implement the death penalty (capital punishment), then the life of the convicted person is devalued and all possibility of change in that person's life ends. We believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and that the possibility of reconciliation with Christ comes through repentance. This gift of reconciliation is offered to all individuals without exception and

[See CLERGY, page 15]



The Rev. Kathleen McMurray, associate pastor of Grace UMC Conway, joins a Good Friday vigil at the Arkansas State Capitol in Little Rock to protest planned executions. In the background are the Rev. Rob Holifield, left, associate pastor of First UMC Texarkana, and Karen Clark, right, a member of Pulaski Heights UMC Little Rock.

Let's stay together (...with apologies to the Rev. Al Green)

BY WILLIAM O. "BUD" REEVES
Special Contributor

We were privileged recently at First United Methodist Church Fort Smith to have a visit from Bishop Ken Carter of Florida. [Editor's note: See page 12 for coverage of that visit.]

Bishop Carter and I attended seminary together, and he came to share a weekend of spiritual renewal at the church. But a great deal of interest was generated by his position as one of the conveners of the Commission on a Way Forward, the group that is devising a plan for the future of our denomination, despite conflicting views on homosexuality. At a Monday morning coffee, Bishop Carter spoke candidly about the commission and the issues around it to a group of Northwest District clergy and laity.

The most important aspect of the discussion was for us to see a real live human being who is involved in this crucial process. What we saw was a calm, wise, personable, humble leader who nevertheless had a firm grasp of the complexity of the issues facing the church. He assured us that with all the diverse opinions on the commission, nobody wants to do harm to the church or to each other. We all came away with our anxiety level considerably lower.

Bishop Carter offered six reasons he thought the denomination should avoid splitting (as has been consistently rumored of late):

- 1. God desires unity among God's people.** (See John 17:11 and Galatians 3:28.)
- 2. We believe in the doctrine of progressive grace.** Every person is a child of God, endowed with sacred worth, justified by faith in Christ and on a journey of sanctification. There is disagreement about what sanctification looks like. Can an LGBTQ person be on a journey to holiness? Yes.
- 3. We already have LGBTQ persons in our churches—“they” are “us.”** We need to live

in love and harmony with our brothers and sisters in faith.

4. The United Methodist Church has a tremendous global mission. United, we do too much good together to diminish our mission by fragmentation.

5. The next generation of the church wants unity. For most younger people (under 40), sexuality is not a deal-breaker. Even if they don't agree with homosexuality, they live with its acceptance daily.

6. The institutional piece is not insignificant. The United Methodist Church has billions of dollars in assets, from the pension fund to colleges and hospitals, not to mention all the local church property which is held in trust for the denomination. Do we really want to spend untold resources dividing, untangling and litigating for years at the expense of our real mission?

'What has been hard to admit is that we could all be wrong, at least in part.'

As intractable as the issue of homosexuality has been, there is hope. There may be new definitions of unity that will allow us to disagree on some important issues (oh yeah, there's also abortion, war, capital punishment, climate change and politics!) while still being united in our mission and resources for building the Kingdom.

Human sexuality includes a multitude of important issues. But none of them are the main thing or the central purpose of either the church or the disciple. We are here

(as Bishop Mueller has taught us) to make disciples of Jesus Christ who make disciples equipped to transform lives, communities and the world. Homosexuality is not a problem to be fixed; it is a reality to be addressed with the best our church and our faith have to offer.

Over the years our best attempts to discern the mind of God have yielded a spectrum of options, and faithful United Methodists—yes, Wesleyan Christians—have



Bud Reeves

found themselves with differing opinions. What has been hard to admit is that we could all be wrong, at least in part. If so, we should err on the side of grace. Jesus had much to say about those who were too judgmental, but I don't recall him ever criticizing someone for being too gracious or merciful. I don't think Jesus will be mad if we extend the hand of grace to those with whom we disagree. We won't be more gracious than he is.

The United Methodist Church has been called the most American of all denominations. Democracy runs in our structures, and the American dream is in our DNA. In the 1840s, as the largest Protestant body in this new nation, we gave the country an example of how to deal with slavery that was replicated with carnage in the Civil War. Now, as much more of a minority report, we have the opportunity once again to give the nation a model for how to deal with issues that are important yet divisive. The legislative approach has not worked. We need to find a better way forward.

For the sake of the mission, for the sake of the Wesleyan witness to a lost and broken world, for the sake of our churches, and for the sake of disciples yet to be made, we need to find a way to stay together.

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

EDITOR'S CORNER

BY AMY FORBUS

Last meal

“What would you have for your last meal?”

It can be a whimsical question asked among friends, similar to naming one's fantasy dinner party guests, but for Ledell Lee on April 20, the question of what he would like as his last meal became all too real. This death row inmate, who proclaimed his innocence until his life's end, chose Holy Communion as the last food he would eat.

I'm not weighing in on Lee's guilt or innocence; I don't know enough about his case to declare an opinion. What I do know is that he was denied an opportunity to have physical evidence in his case examined with current DNA testing technology. And that he was once represented by an attorney who showed up drunk.

I also know the difference between justice and revenge, and I believe that on the night of April 20, the State of Arkansas carried out the latter.

Lee was given two opportunities to speak last words. He declined both. None of us can presume to know what was going through his mind in his last moments.

But when I awoke April 21 to news that his execution had been carried out just before midnight, I know that my mind filled with the words of Jesus: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

Like many other people of faith who oppose the death penalty, I haven't always felt that it was wrong. But the more I study the words and actions of the One I claim to follow—the only person in human history to quite literally defeat death after an unjust execution by the ruling powers—the more I believe that we cannot kill as an effective way to show people that killing is wrong.

I never met Ledell Lee, or anyone associated with his case or with the murder victim. I know I'm far removed from that particular situation. But if I take at face value his final meal on the last day of his life, it sends the clear signal that he was my brother in Christ. And if I take seriously my status as an Arkansan, it means I had a hand in killing him.

If I were to receive an opportunity to order my last meal, with no input from outsiders, I'd probably make sure it included a steak and a giant dessert. I cannot say in all honesty that it would even occur to me to choose Holy Communion. Does that make Ledell Lee, convicted murderer, a better person than I am? I don't know. But, at least in that moment, it does make him a better witness to the love and grace of Jesus Christ.

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



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Submission Deadlines

Issue Date	Submission Deadline
June 2	May 17
July 7	June 16
Aug. 4	July 17

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BY GARY E. MUELLER

GROWING TOGETHER IN CHRIST: A word from the Bishop

Time to get talking

I engage in conversations all day long. Some of them are short, sweet and to the point, accomplishing exactly what needs to get done. Others meander slowly to a destination that is not worth the investment of time I put into it. But others are so deep and poignant they almost seem sacramental. That's because we are honest with other, vulnerable enough not to worry about impressing anyone, and, by far most importantly, somewhere along the way we discover that the Holy Spirit is prompting us in what to say.

It's nice simply to share holy conversation with someone about those things that ultimately matter most in life; especially in a life saturated with social media, unsubstantiated claims, 24-hour news cycles and more information in a day than you can process in a lifetime. So what constitutes a holy conversation so powerful it seems sacramental? Conversation about the grace Jesus offers that is unconditional, transformational and invitational. Talk about what is truly important—and not just what seems important—in life. And reflection on one of the most important questions you can ever be asked, “How is it with your soul?”

These conversations are increasingly important as I grow older because I am more and more aware of how much I long to discover soul connections with others. So I am looking forward to

talk that matters with those with whom I have shared so much for so long. But I also am anticipating new conversations with all the people God is putting in my path every day.

I'm not sure whether anything I've said connects with you in any way at all. Indeed, I know how far I have to go to fully live out these aspirations in my own life. But I do know this. Jesus came to offer life that is eternal and abundant. And somehow, we experience the most abundant life through these kinds of relationships with others.

Time to get talking!

Grace and peace,

Gary E. Mueller

Grannyland

BY CHARLES COOPER
Special Contributor

After reading my last piece in the *Arkansas United Methodist* (“Lying down in green pastures,” Nov. 4, 2016), a friend observed, “Dinosaur Rex ate your mother-in-law.”

“Yes, he did.”

“You and your mother-in-law had an interesting relationship.”

“No, that was Dinosaur Rex.”

Amber and I had a negotiated relationship—good thing, since she had powers that could defeat spiders, dinosaurs and sons-in-law. She was Granny in a cape.

Amber had a bond with nature, as does Lady Wisdom, who was present with the Creator for the scattering of stars, the digging out of rivers and the carving of mountains (Proverbs 8:22-31).

Amber spent a lot of time in her yard and with her flowers. They bloomed nearly year round, crocuses, jonquils, hyacinths, crepe myrtles, mums, pansies—late into winter, for pansies are no pansies—and, of course, roses.



Charles Cooper

After she died in 2012, we transplanted her irises into our backyard: lavender and a mix of dark purple and white, and all with loud yellow stamens and pistils, as if they were visually calling her name, “Amber.”

So, *Granny was in her backyard one evening and saw a dragonfly. She told the dragonfly to go away, but the dragonfly said, “No, Granny, I’m useful. I eat mosquitoes. You don’t want Beth and Sarah to be bitten by mosquitoes, do you?”*

So, *Granny left the dragonfly alone.*

The next day Granny saw a toad, which looks like a frog with warts and stumpy legs. Granny said, “Go away!”

But the toad said, “I may not be as pretty as a dragonfly or even a frog, but I eat mosquitoes. You don’t want Beth and Sarah to be bitten by mosquitoes, do you?”

So, *Granny left the toad alone.*

The next day, Granny was perched in her favorite lawn chair, and she saw a mosquito. This time she rolled up the newspaper that was across her lap, and she reached back her arm to smash the mosquito on its head, but it buzzed, “The last two evenings you let a dragonfly and a toad go free and seemed happy to have them as your friends. Is it any way to treat your friends to smash

their supper against a rock?”

Granny had to think about this, but when she had thought long enough, she looked up and there on the rock was a smiling toad.

Amber spent her weekdays volunteering in a thrift shop. People would unload their old clothes, furniture and toys. Amber would borrow from the stock when my children came to see her. She would fill the house with stuffed animals, dolls, games and baubles for parties; any day is a birthday if it's a secondhand birthday.

It was not an arbitrary tossing of stuff, for “the clever consider their steps” (Proverbs 14:15). There were strategic surprises—a glamorous doll preening behind a curtain, a wind up frog in the tub, huggables in ambush. It was Grannyland.

When the kids left, she took it all back to the thrift shop and sold what would sell for next to nothing, and she gave the rest away to those in need. All proceeds went to help the local nursing home provide comforts to the old and dying, comforts not provided by the State.

So much good was done with hand-me-downs. Wisdom is efficient like that. She favors the little proverb as a way of conveying her truth. She does not waste time or resources on what is not useful to life.

I am sure the satisfied toad on the rock would agree.

The Rev. Cooper is a retired elder in the Arkansas Conference. Email: brocorbeau@gmail.com.

APPOINTMENTS & RETIREMENTS

The following **appointment changes**, effective July 1, have been announced since the last publication deadline of the *Arkansas United Methodist*.

- Scott Stewart—Pea Ridge UMC/Brightwater UMC
- David A. Moore—Asbury UMC Magnolia/McNeil UMC
- Ben Morgan—Timothy UMC/St. Mark UMC Camden
- Pete Beevers—Bull Shoals UMC/Yellville UMC
- Melvin Moss—Henderson UMC Little Rock
- Naomi Rogers—First UMC Des Arc
- Shari Day—Western Hills UMC Little Rock
- Russ Hall—Highfill/Sulphur Springs UMCs (charge realignment)
- Blake Schrepfer—First UMC Searcy (associate)
- Jerry Pentecost—Tuckerman UMC/Swifton UMC
- Debbie Head—Cherry Hill UMC Mena
- Boyd Savage—Rowell Charge (Mount Olivet/Prosperity/Union UMCs)
- Jemmie Reynolds—Keo UMC
- Dale Richardson—Cecil UMC
- Gina Hamlin—Hartman UMC
- Ryan Bachuss—St. Paul/Adkins Memorial UMCs, Malvern
- Geral Holloway—Vesta UMC
- Jim Lenderman—Central UMC Rogers
- Bill Sardin—First UMC Hot Springs (associate)
- Michael Smith—Booneville/Washburn UMCs
- Beth Perdue—Walnut Ridge/Hoxie UMCs
- Melanie Tubbs—Augusta/Bald Knob UMCs
- Michael Utley—Harrisburg UMC
- Diane Wimberley—Bay UMC
- Jason Sutfin—Leachville/Caraway UMCs
- James Wainscott—Pocahontas UMC
- Mike Daniel—First UMC Murfreesboro
- Travis Langley—St. Paul UMC El Dorado
- Don Hudson—Gurdon/Center Grove UMCs
- Heath Williams—Gravette/Decatur UMCs
- Chanda Adams—Perryville UMC
- Judy Rudd—First UMC West Memphis (associate)
- Carness Vaughan—St. James UMC Little Rock
- Dee Harper—Farmington UMC
- Jeanne Williams—First UMC Bella Vista
- Randy Rowlan—Carlisle UMC

And the following **retirement** has been announced:

- Lonnie M. Landers

Visit www.arumc.org/appointments for the most recent news in appointment changes.

PEOPLE OF FAITH

Sullinger named Nancy Wood Scholar

Lydia Sullinger of Danville has been named the recipient of the Nancy McDonald Wood Scholarship for 2017-18. Bryn Wood Bagwell and Nancy M. Wood presented the \$4,500 scholarship to the high school senior during the April 23 worship service in Sullinger's home church, First UMC Danville.

The daughter of the Rev. and Mrs. Thomas Sullinger, Sullinger plans to enroll at Hendrix College in the fall with the intent to study pre-law and become a civil rights attorney.

The Nancy McDonald Wood scholarship is awarded annually to an Arkansan United Methodist young woman who has demonstrated a commitment to historic Methodist values in her service to her local church and to the community. She must have a strong academic record and a

history of volunteer efforts. The purpose of the scholarship is to encourage young women to continue lifelong lay service in a United Methodist congregation. Scholarship funds are managed by the United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas.

In her application, Sullinger expressed the hope that her church will continue to follow John Wesley's "Rules for Living" by fighting hunger to help the population of Danville. Letters of recommendation for Sullinger stressed her participation in a local food distribution mission, "Food on the Mountain," and her church backpack food program for students in need. She has been a cheerleader and a member of the Danville High School band, serving as the low brass section leader. She also has co-chaired the Quiz Bowl team and played softball. Her high



Lydia Sullinger, center, receives the Nancy McDonald Wood Scholarship from Nancy Wood, left, and her daughter, Bryn Wood Bagwell, right.

COURTESY PHOTO

ACT score was validated by an all-A transcript.

Interested applicants for the 2018-19 year may obtain a copy of the Nancy McDonald Wood Scholarship application through

their local United Methodist youth minister or the Arkansas Conference Council on Youth Ministries website, www.accym.org. Applications will be available in the fall and will be due by Jan. 31, 2018.

Wilkie receives Phillips County Citizen of the Year award



John Mohead, a United Methodist whose restaurant received the 2016 Business of the Year Award, and the Rev. Mike Wilkie, recipient of the Citizen of the Year Award, received their honors at an April 11 Phillips County Chamber of Commerce banquet.

COURTESY PHOTO

The Rev. Mike Wilkie, pastor of First United Methodist Church Helena for the past four years, received the 2016 Citizen of the Year Award from the Phillips County Chamber of Commerce at their 81st annual banquet on April 11, 2017.

Wilkie was recognized for his active spiritual and secular community involvement throughout Phillips County, and especially in Helena-West Helena. With an increase in membership and attendance, he has brought Helena FUMC more into community involvement through membership in the Phillips County Chamber of Commerce; Main Street, an organization dedicated to the preservation and renovation of Cherry Street, the "Main Street" of Helena; and encouraging the church become a sponsor of the of King

Biscuit Blues Fest, the Southbound Music Festival and the Freeman Playground.

A Rotarian, Wilkie is also a board member and treasurer of the Chamber of Commerce; a board member of Main Street; part of the operations staff of King Biscuit Blues Fest; secretary and one of the organizers of the Helena-West Helena Regional Ministerial Fellowship; trustee of the board of Warfield Concerts; the Phillips County Disaster Services representative for the Red Cross; president of the newly re-organized Crime Stoppers; and a volunteer in many other community activities, including being Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny for church, school, civic and private events.

Other United Methodists attending the banquet included the Rev. Mark Norman, superintendent of the Southeast District; Scott Post, vice-chancellor for student services at Phillips County Community College of UA, who presented the award; State Senator Keith Ingram; and John Mohead, owner of Southbound Pizza, which received the 2016 Business of the Year Award.

Wilkie and his wife, Nancy, are looking forward to at least another year appointed to ministry through First UMC Helena, even as he transitions to retired status at Annual Conference in June.

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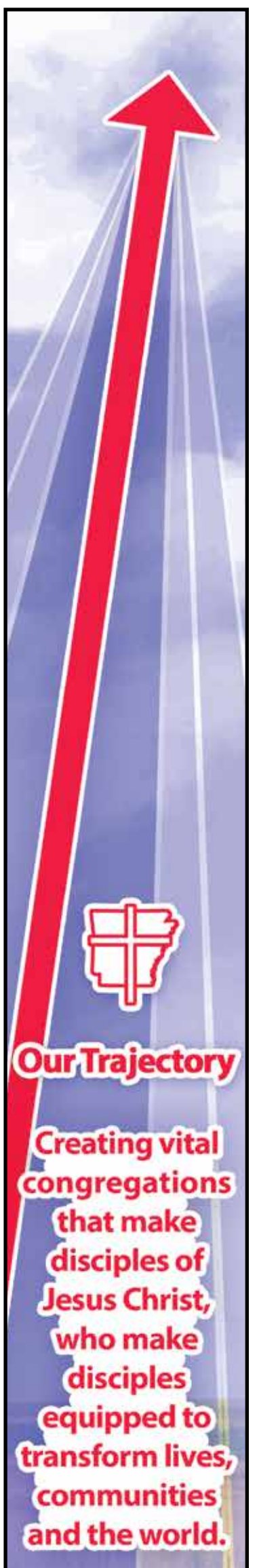


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World War II veteran fought hunger on the home front

Poppy Pennington honored through naming of northeast Arkansas food pantry

BY K.D. REEP
Special Contributor

The great thing about American heroes is they come in all shapes and sizes, rise to a challenge whether they feel prepared or not, and are often unsung.

In the case of Wardell “Poppy” Pennington, what he contributed to his church, community, state and country is no longer unrecognized. The food pantry at Umsted Memorial United Methodist Church now bears his name for his dedication to fighting hunger in Jackson County. Even after his death in 2016 at age 94, Pennington’s dedication to feeding hungry people helps meet the needs of Newport-area children,

some of the 200,000 reasons the United Methodist Church is fighting childhood hunger in Arkansas.

“My dad was a legendary tough guy with a heart of gold,” said John Pennington, Poppy’s son. “All the kids in town wanted to arm wrestle him, which he just loved. He did things his own way, and as a restaurant owner for 66 years, he loved to feed people. He fed generations of families in Newport, and if anyone couldn’t pay, he’d seat them and give them a meal at no charge.”

A retired restaurant owner in Newport, Poppy started his successful business after returning home from serving as a tail gunner in World War II. After 65 missions



Church Little Rock, in a post on social media. “Poppy is an American hero.”

According to the Rev. Thompson Murray, senior pastor of First United Methodist Church

originally organized by members of three United Methodist congregations: First UMC Newport, Umsted Memorial UMC and Emory Chapel UMC. The food pantry operates out of the education building of Umsted Memorial UMC, and it has enjoyed great support from many other individuals, churches and organizations. In November 2015, the food pantry was renamed in honor of a beloved and faithful volunteer, Wardell “Poppy” Pennington.

overseas, Poppy was undaunted by long hours, contrary customers and fluctuations in supplies and prices as a restaurant proprietor.

“He volunteered at the Umsted UMC food pantry every time they opened the doors. Because he spent so much time there, he knew where everything was even after he lost his eyesight. Poppy volunteered there until his death last year,” said Kathy Webb, executive director of the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance and a member of First United Methodist

Newport, the food pantry began in August 2013 at the encouragement of the Northeast Arkansas Food Bank in Jonesboro, which cooperates with the Feeding America program. In July of that year, a new Wal-Mart Supercenter opened in Newport, and the food pantry that would be Poppy’s namesake endeavor was organized to help people in need utilize food donated from the old Wal-Mart location.

What was then called the Newport Regional Food Pantry was

Volunteers from the food pantry pick up food from the Wal-Mart Supercenter each Thursday morning and bring it back to the food pantry where it is weighed and sorted, then refrigerated or frozen until it is given out the following Monday morning. On average, the food pantry serves about 200 households each week, but there are weeks when it serves as many as 250 families. Each household gets a box of food that will generally include some kind of meat or protein, fresh and/or canned vegetables, dairy products, bread and various other assorted items. The food pantry is open each Monday morning from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Today, the Wardell “Poppy” Pennington Memorial Food Pantry showcases Pennington’s legacy of service to others before self, which lives on as one of the countless reasons to continue feeding the hungry in northeast Arkansas.



Volunteers at the Wardell “Poppy” Pennington Memorial Food Pantry in March received a check from the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance providing funds for a new cooler.

PHOTOS BY KATHY WEBB

Want to help feed hungry children through the 200,000 Reasons initiative, but looking for a way to get started? See page 9 of this issue for information on the new Fill-A-Bag Ministry.

Prayer

(continued from page 1)

“I began to start my prayer with thanksgiving,” Schrick says. “I would catch myself starting my run and not really praying, then just all of a sudden, go ‘Thank you for allowing me to be able to move and breathe, and all the simple things,’” he says.

And the half-marathon he ran (and prayed) April 22 in Russellville? “It just kind of happened,” he said, after he ran a 5K with his daughter at her school and realized he could accomplish more. He credits First UMC Conway members and fellow runners Tricia and Todd Burris, who are parents of two youth group members, with providing information and encouragement for participating in that particular 13.1-mile run.

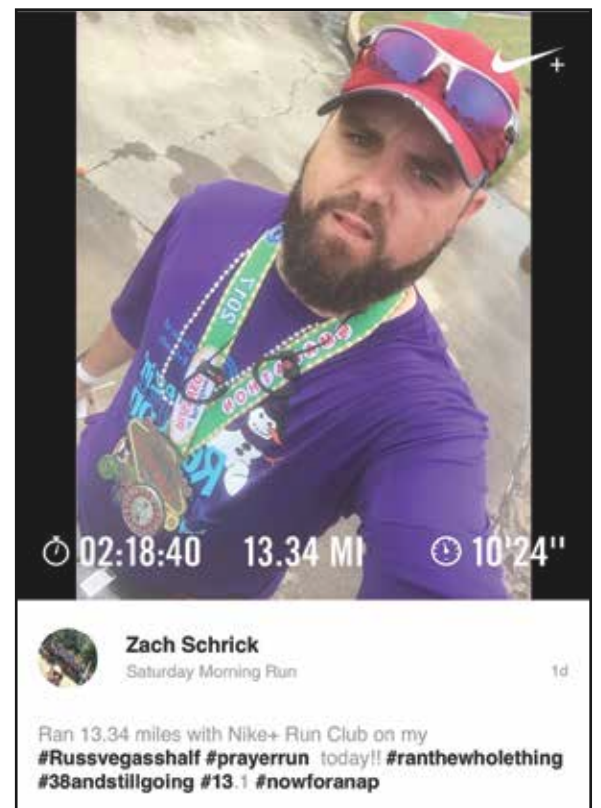
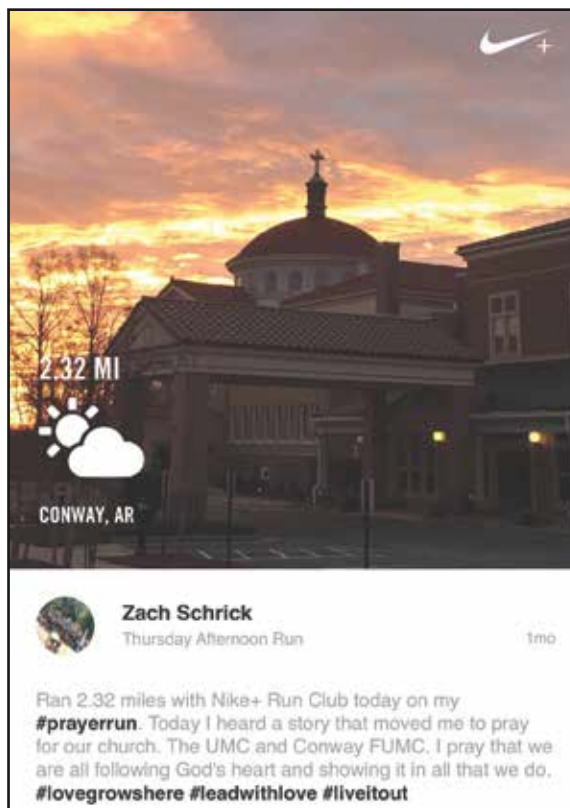
In addition to the obvious health benefits—such as having

energy to do more with his kids when he gets home from work—Schrick has seen spiritual benefits to using his running to focus on prayer.

“When I’d get back from my runs I felt like I was more focused, I felt like I had opened myself up to see some things differently here within the church,” he said.

As God began to answer some prayers for growing the youth ministry, Schrick realized that it was now time to put more action behind his prayers. “One of my prayers was to grow our youth in numbers and in spiritual gifts. So we’re starting to see new kids show up, and it’s giving me ways to look at it and ask, ‘What do we need to do to help these kids as they’re coming in?’

“It isn’t just about the words anymore,” he said. “I actually have to do what I was praying for.”



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.

A truck will leave May 14 carrying the next delivery of disaster relief supplies from

Arkansas to Sager Brown Depot, the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) facility in Baldwin, Louisiana. If your church has items to send, see "Got kits?" in the list below.

COURTESY PHOTOS



Got kits? Add them to next disaster response supply delivery

Arkansas Conference Disaster Response will be driving a load of disaster relief kits and other supplies from Arkansas to the United Methodist Committee on Relief's Sager Brown Depot on Sunday, May 14. If your church or group has kits to send, contact Byron Mann, vim@arumc.org or 870-861-5065.

Flood recovery 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.

Local churches: prepare now to respond to disaster

Disaster begins and ends locally. The local community owns the response. When the event or the damage overwhelms that community and its resources, then it reaches out for regional and, if needed, statewide assistance. Disaster response organizations in Arkansas are outlining the process for requesting and delivering assistance.

Local churches, prepare to be able to offer assistance for those affected by disaster if you should be approached by your local Red Cross, your local emergency manager or other known disaster response entity. That disaster might be a single-family house fire, a wind storm that affects just one or a few homes or a similar disaster (typically called a "low-level event"). Assistance from the local church might come in the form of food from a food pantry; clothes or household items from a local thrift store; or a church member walking alongside someone affected by disaster to help them navigate the available local resources.

To better understand local church response to disaster, whether in a low-, medium- or high-level event, contact Janice Mann at disaster@arumc.org. She and Byron Mann, vim@arumc.org, are available to speak to individuals, classes or groups, or the whole church, as well as to lead training for a group from your church or community. Both Janice and Byron Mann are available by email or phone for consult whenever a question arises (see contact information above).

Mission in central Texas for high schoolers and adults

The Central Texas Conference is looking for groups of three or more people from high school age (with adult supervision) to adults to work on damaged homes in Hood County, Texas. The work varies: installing sheetrock and insulation, laying flooring, painting and more. On-the-job training is available. To inquire about possible work dates, contact volunteer coordinator/case manager Kathryn Meroney, kathrynmeroney@gmail.com. The Corsicana area has homes waiting for the same types of repairs. To serve in that area, contact Agustin Soto, floodrelief.navarroco@gmail.com.

Mission journey coming up? Remember to guard against Zika

This summer you may have the chance to serve on a mission trip. A mission trip is a time to serve, while also experiencing new cultures, meeting new people and building lasting friendships and memories. During your trip, it is important to protect yourself and your loved ones from viruses such as Zika.

Zika is spread by the bite of an infected Aedes mosquito. Zika can also be transmitted sexually. The virus can be passed from a pregnant woman to her fetus and can cause serious birth defects, including microcephaly, which affects a baby's brain development.

Mission trips can lead you to many different destinations across the globe. Zika shouldn't prohibit anyone from sharing positivity with the world, but it is important to be safe and



knowledgeable about its effects and dangers. When preparing for your trip, research your destination to learn if there is ongoing Zika transmission. Visit <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/page/world-map-areas-with-zika> to search for areas with risk of Zika.

If you are visiting an affected area, the best way to prevent Zika is to prevent mosquito bites by using Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered insect repellents with one of the following active ingredients: DEET, picaridin, IR3535, oil of lemon eucalyptus, para-menthane-diol, or 2-undecanone. Also, use protection every time you have sex.

It is recommended that pregnant women not travel to areas with Zika. If travel is necessary, talk to your healthcare provider first and strictly follow steps to prevent infection. If your partner has traveled to an affected area, use protection for the duration of your pregnancy to prevent sexual transmission.

If you have been to an area affected by Zika, it is important to take measures to prevent mosquito bites for at least three weeks after you return home to prevent the spread of Zika to local mosquitoes. If a local mosquito becomes infected, it could spread Zika to someone else. Zika can be transmitted sexually for up to six months after infection; therefore, it is important to use protection every time you have sex.

Symptoms of Zika are typically mild and roughly 80 percent of people infected with Zika will not have any symptoms. The most common symptoms are: fever, rash, joint pain, red eyes, muscle pain and headache. If you have questions before traveling, or believe you may have become infected while traveling, talk to your doctor. You can also visit the Arkansas Department of Health website at www.healthy.arkansas.gov for more information.

—submitted by the Office of Health Communications, Arkansas
Department of Health

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.

Annual Conference Update

Vital! journey to begin at #arumc17

BY MARTHA S. TAYLOR
Special Contributor



While Vital! is the theme for the 2017 Arkansas Annual Conference (#arumc17) set for June 18-21 in Hot Springs, it is also the starting point for a new website loaded with resources for local churches to use throughout the remainder of this year and into 2018.

The centerpiece for Vital! is a new website created by the Center for Technology. The site, www.vitaldisciples.org, is organized into four main sections representing four strategic areas that have been identified as crucial for living into the trajectory of the Annual Conference for the coming years: creating vital congregations who create vital disciples of Jesus Christ equipped to transform lives, communities and the world.

“Vital! is much more than the theme for this year’s Annual Conference,” said the Rev. Jim Polk, assistant to Bishop Gary Mueller and director of connectional ministries. “Vital! is the beginning of a 12-month journey local churches can make toward creating vital disciples in four key areas.” The four Vital! strategic areas are:

- Faith Sharing;
- Accountable Discipleship;
- 200,000 Reasons to Fight Childhood Hunger in Arkansas; and
- Personal Stewardship.

Each of these topics will be addressed in Annual Conference plenary sessions led by guest presenters Kay Kotan, the Rev. Dr. Kevin Watson, the Rev. J.J. Whitney, and the Rev. Dr. Clif Christopher.

Annual Conference attendees will receive a planning guide with a section for each of the four plenaries. The booklet also holds a planning guide for pastors and laity to use to develop a customized plan for their mission fields in the coming months.

The resources available on vitaldisciples.org are rich in content and plentiful in number. Churches will also find an area of the website for submitting their stories of vital discipleship.

Faith Sharing

Under the heading Faith Sharing, visitors to the site will find a four-week curriculum commissioned by the Center for Vitality. Written by author and

[See VITAL!, page 9]



The website www.vitaldisciples.org (above) will serve as a resource for congregations throughout the 2017-18 Annual Conference year.

Nine to be ordained at Annual Conference June 20

Pending approval during the June 18 clergy session of the Arkansas Annual Conference, the following provisional clergy will be ordained in full connection to the Arkansas Conference. The Service of Ordination is set for Tuesday, June 20, at 7:30 p.m., in the Bank of the Ozarks Arena, Hot Springs. All are invited to attend.



Zeke Allen, elder
Hometown: Gentry
Education: B.S. in Science, Arkansas Tech University; M.Div., Memphis Theological Seminary
Current appointment: First UMC Benton (associate)

Zeke Allen



Colin T. Bagby, elder
Hometown: Russellville
Education: B.A. in English, Hendrix College; M.Div., Candler School of Theology
Current appointment: First UMC Maumelle (associate)

Colin Bagby



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

Sara Bayles



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

Todd Lovell



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

Eric Meyer



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

John Michael



Carissa Marie Rodgers, elder
Hometown: Little Rock
Education: B.A. in English, minor in political science, Philander Smith College; M.Div., SMU Perkins School of Theology
Current appointment: Quapaw Quarter UMC Little Rock

Carissa Rodgers



William James Sardin Jr., elder
Hometown: Little Rock
Education: B.S. in speech communication, University of Arkansas at Little Rock; M.Div., Memphis Theological Seminary
Current appointment: First UMC Searcy
Future appointment: First UMC Hot Springs

Bill Sardin



Michelle Whitfield, deacon
Hometown: Little Rock
Education: B.A. in psychology, Saint Louis University; M.Div. and MSW, Boston University
Primary appointment: Wellspring Renewal Center
Secondary appointment: First UMC Little Rock

Michelle Whitfield

Six candidates to become provisional members June 18

Pending the approval of the clergy session of the Annual Conference, six persons will be commissioned this year as provisional members of the Arkansas Conference, one of the final steps in the journey to ordination. The commissioning is part of opening worship on Sunday, June 18, at 7:30 p.m., in the Bank of the Ozarks Arena, Hot Springs. All are invited to attend.



Matt Carter
Elder track
Hometown: El Dorado
Education: B.S. in family sciences, Louisiana Tech University; M.Div., Asbury Theological Seminary
Current appointment: St. James UMC Little Rock (associate)

Matt Carter



Jody Farrell
Elder track
Hometown: El Paso, Illinois
Education: Bachelor of Christian ministries, Ecclesia College; M.Div., Asbury Theological Seminary
Current appointment: Central UMC Fayetteville (Genesis Church campus)

Jody Farrell



George Hull
Deacon track
Hometown: Little Rock (originally from Belfast, Northern Ireland)
Education: The Queen's University of Belfast, Northern Ireland; Edgehill Theological College, Belfast, Northern Ireland; New Brunswick Theological Seminary, New Brunswick, New Jersey
Current appointment: Director of pastoral care and clinical pastoral education, UAMS

George Hull



Gary L. Maskell
Elder track
Hometown: Point Pleasant, New Jersey
Education: Brookdale Community College, Lincroft, New Jersey; Monterey Peninsula College, Monterey, California; Life University, Marietta, Georgia; M.Div., Asbury Theological Seminary
Current appointment: Marvell and Lexa UMCs

Gary Maskell



Brad Moore
Elder track
Hometown: Jacksonville
Education: B.S. in psychology, Southern Nazarene University; M.Div., Memphis Theological Seminary
Current appointment: Huntsville/Presley Chapel UMCs

Brad Moore



Blake Schrepfer
Elder track
Hometown: Pottsville
Education: B.S. in Science, Arkansas State University; M.Div., Asbury Theological Seminary
Current appointment: Calico Rock/Spring Creek UMCs
Future appointment: First UMC Searcy (associate)

Blake Schrepfer

Vital! (continued from page 7)

speaker Kotan, *Unpacking Your Faith Stories* promises to take the fear out of evangelism and help participants to “capture your faith story and practice sharing it.”

“We are excited to share Kay’s curriculum with the conference,” said the Rev. Dede Roberts, director of the Center for Vitality. “I think the study, along with the many other resources we have developed, will equip the people in our pews to talk about how God is working in their lives and authentically share the Gospel of Jesus with the unchurched.”

While the study is a centerpiece resource, complementary faith sharing materials such as videos, graphics and wallet cards will be featured on the website, and all will be downloadable for ease of use. Following Annual Conference, Kotan’s plenary session video will be available.

Accountable Discipleship

The Accountable Discipleship section of vitaldisciples.org features leaders’ tools, preaching and worship helps and companion materials for adults, children and youth. Watson’s plenary session will be placed on the site following Annual Conference.

“I think those attending Dr.

Watson’s plenary on accountable discipleship will come away with a renewed sense of the impact a class meeting can have on making disciples for Jesus Christ,” said the Rev. Dr. Blake Bradford, assistant director of the Center for Vitality.

Bradford added that Watson’s book, *The Class Meeting*, has been customized for the Arkansas Conference, and those attending the Annual Conference plenary will receive a complimentary copy of the book from the Center for Vitality.

200,000 Reasons

As a majority of United Methodists in Arkansas are aware, 200,000 Reasons is a Conference-wide initiative to reduce the number of children who experience hunger in Arkansas. A key section of vitaldisciples.org will provide new and revised resources for local churches to use to engage their mission fields through hunger ministries.

The newest resource is a four week study written by Whitney, convener of the 200,000 Reasons initiative and chaplain at Hendrix College. The study delves into the many ways United Methodist congregations can start or expand their ministries to address the critical issue of childhood hunger.

Additional 200,000 Reasons downloadable materials include a poverty awareness exercise and several toolkits focusing on feeding, education and public witness. A video of Whitney’s plenary session will be available online.

Personal Stewardship

Stewardship materials on the vitaldisciples.org will include Christopher’s plenary session video and will feature a six session small group study, *Living for Giving*. Originally published by the Western North Carolina Annual Conference, the study has been updated and includes a new session with an introduction by Bishop Mueller. Members of the Conference Board of Discipleship, the Rev. David Orr and the Rev. Bruce Bennett, edited and updated the study.

“The website, vitaldisciples.org, is evolving and will continue to do so throughout the summer and fall,” said Polk. “The work of the Center for Vitality, the Board of Discipleship, 200,000 Reasons as well as the Center for Technology has been tremendous. I believe this will be a real gift to our annual conference and look forward to seeing the creative and exciting ways local churches will use the resources provided to them.”

Small churches, big impact

Help hungry kids across Arkansas through the Fill-A-Bag Ministry



Nearly 69 percent of United Methodist congregations in Arkansas—449 of 653 churches—have an average fewer than 50 persons in worship. But small congregations truly can make a big impact.

There is at least one United Methodist congregation in each of Arkansas’ 75 counties. And there are hungry children in every one of those counties, too.

As of the end of 2016, about 45 percent of Arkansas UMCs reported being involved with the 200,000 Reasons to Fight Childhood Hunger initiative. If your church is still looking for a way to participate, the new Fill-A-Bag Ministry provides a great way to start making a difference in the lives of children in your community.

Every church will soon be receiving a letter detailing how to become involved in the Fill-A-Bag Ministry. Additional information will be available at Annual Conference. If you are interested in learning about this opportunity to meet the needs of hungry children, contact Mary Lewis Dassinger at mdassinger@arumc.org or 501-425-9049.

All Arkansas UMs encouraged to attend worship, learning sessions at #arumc17



Holston

The four learning sessions at this year’s Arkansas Annual Conference have practical application in the lives of all United Methodists. For that reason, the Conference encourages anyone who is able to attend to do so. Attendees at these sessions need not be registered for Annual Conference.

In addition to these learning sessions, the two full-scale worship services included as part of Annual Conference appear on this list. All opportunities for the Annual Conference to gather together in worship are open to anyone who wishes to attend.



Kotan

Sunday, June 18, 7:30 p.m.
Opening Worship
(including commissioning of provisional clergy as listed on page 8, and the Celebration of Life Service)
Bishop Jonathan Holston, preaching



Whitney

Monday, June 19, 1:30 p.m.
Vital! Session #1:
Faith Sharing, led by Kay Kotan

Monday, June 19, 3:50 p.m.
Vital! Session #2:
200,000 Reasons, led by the Rev. J. J. Whitney



Watson

Tuesday, June 20, 10:05 a.m.
Vital! Session #3:
Accountable Discipleship, led by the Rev. Dr. Kevin Watson



Christopher

Tuesday, June 20, 1:50 p.m.
Vital! Session #4:
Personal Stewardship, led by the Rev. Clif Christopher



Mueller

Tuesday, June 20, 7:30 p.m.
Service of Ordination
(see page 8 for a listing of those being ordained)
Bishop Gary Mueller, preaching

Registration now open for Annual Conference 2017

Visit <http://ac2017.arumc.org> to register for the 2017 Arkansas Annual Conference. Online registration will remain open through June 2.

The website includes a downloadable, printable registration form for those who wish to register by mail. The form also is being mailed to all clergy and lay members of Annual Conference.

The 2017 Pre-Conference Journal is now available for free download at the website listed above. Print copies may be purchased as part of the registration process or on-site upon arrival at Annual Conference. Special events and meetings, as well as lodging information, reports and more are all included in the Pre-Conference Journal.

New this year: Late registration fee applies to all

Friday, June 2 is the last day to register online. Please note: All members of the annual conference, laity or clergy, active or retired, who register after June 2 will be charged a \$50 late registration fee.

Child care at #arumc17

First UMC Hot Springs and Camp Tanako will be hosting child care for the 2017 Arkansas Annual Conference, June 18-21. All child care is available at no cost during Annual Conference, if you register your child(ren) by June 1, 2017. After June 1, all late registrants will pay \$10 per hour per child.

Children must be registered no later than June 15 to receive care so that adequate workers are scheduled and supplies are purchased for the well-being and safety of the children.

New, closer daytime location for younger children

Daytime child care for children ages 8 months to 5 years on Monday through Wednesday will be held at the Hotel Hot Springs (connected to the Convention Center) in a conference room on the second floor.

Daytime care for those who have completed Kindergarten through 6th grade will be held at Camp Tanako. Check-in takes place Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday mornings at 7:50 a.m. Children will ride church vans to Camp Tanako, and the vans will bring the kids back to the hotel each afternoon at 5:15 p.m.

Child care for Sunday, June 18 and all evening sessions during Annual Conference will be offered at First UMC Hot Springs in the Christian Life Center, 218 Pratt Street. Ages 8 months to 12 years old may attend.

For questions regarding Annual Conference child care, contact Michelle Wilkins, children's minister at First UMC Hot Springs: mwilkins@fumchs.com or 501-318-3977. For questions regarding the day camp at Camp Tanako, contact any of the camp staff, or Kim Carter, camp director, at 501-262-2600.

For details and registration links, visit <http://ac2017.arumc.org/childcare-information>.

Traffic alert for those traveling west to Hot Springs

An ongoing construction project widening Highway 70 between Hot Springs and Interstate 30 in Benton sometimes results in considerable delays. Consider an alternate route to the convention center to avoid traffic delays. For further details and alternate routes, visit ac2017.arumc.org.

A prayer for the 2017 Arkansas Annual Conference

Living God, breathe your Holy Spirit into us, that your life may become our life. Fill these days of conferencing with all that we need to become vital disciples. We surrender this time to you and embrace the bold hope that your church can transform lives, communities, and the world. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, the one who lived, the one who died, and the one who rose, all to enable us to experience the fullness of life in You. Amen.

UMFA sponsors pre-retirement seminar for clergy

Nearly four dozen pastors age 58 or over, as well as some of their spouses, on April 3 and 4 participated in a pre-retirement seminar sponsored by the United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas (UMFA).

“As people retire, they have many productive years left,” said the Rev. Mackey Yokem, UMFA grants administrator who also works on leadership development ministries for the foundation. “Our goal with the seminar was to help pastors and their spouses determine how best to apply their time, wisdom, and creative ideas to the 15 to 20 years after retirement. The foundation’s desire is to help clergy be effective leaders throughout their life, and this seminar brought ideas about how best to apply their passions after the appointment process is over.”

Both clergy members and spouses responded positively to the seminar.

“I do so want to thank the foundation for its investment in this well-thought-out session,” wrote the Rev. Maxine Allen of Little Rock. “You know that I go to a lot of

meetings, and it was well worth the time and effort of attendance.”

Keith Lawrence, a nationally recognized retirement authority and author of *Your Retirement Quest: 10 Secrets for Creating and Living a Fulfilling Retirement*, provided timely and easy-to-use hints about how to deal with retirement even before it starts. Judy Mattox of Rogers, wife of the Rev. Dr. Michael Mattox, characterized the presentation as surprisingly enlightening, entertaining, and dynamic.

“I particularly enjoyed Keith’s idea that couples should write their separate bucket lists and then get together for a combined bucket list,” she said. “Michael and I were working on ours before we got home from the meeting.”

Another speaker at the seminar was Bob Christophel of WesPath (formerly the UMC General Board of Pensions and Health Benefits) who presented retirement facts and figures and demonstrated how to complete necessary forms for retirement benefits. He was available for private consultation so



PHOTO COURTESY UMFA

participants could ask questions about their accounts.

UMFA vice president for development Janet Marshall also made a presentation, speaking about the resources the foundation can provide to help with creating a will and making charitable gift decisions.

Jim Argue Jr., UMFA president and CEO, said that adding Yokem, a

retired pastor, to the UMFA staff this past year has brought a new perspective to UMFA.

“Mackey’s years as a pastor in the Arkansas Conference have allowed us to develop new relationships, expand possibilities and add opportunities for outreach, taking grant-making and leadership development to a new level,” he said.

UMFA manages \$145 million in endowment funds and other charitable assets that benefit local churches and other United Methodist ministries. Founded in 1963 and now one of the largest United Methodist foundations in the country, UMFA is responsible for more than 750 funds that support United Methodist ministries.

The Confessing Movement of Arkansas Annual Breakfast

Monday, June 19, at 6:30 a.m.

Union Missionary Baptist Church
(behind the Convention Center)

“Wesleyan Holiness and the Future of the United Methodist Church”

Rev. Dr. Kevin M. Watson, Guest Speaker

Dr. Watson is Associate Professor of Wesleyan and Methodist Studies at Candler School of Theology, Emory University. He has published multiple books and articles primarily on Methodist discipleship with an emphasis on the class meeting. He is currently working on a book with Scott Kisker on the Band meeting. Dr. Watson will be a featured speaker at Annual Conference.



Kevin M. Watson

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

HUNGER LUNCH

Sponsored by our
Conference Board of Church & Society

Tuesday, June 20

During the lunch break from Annual Conference business.

There is no charge for this simple meal; however, we do ask that you make a reservation on your Annual Conference registration and make a donation at the lunch to 200,000 Reasons, our Arkansas Conference initiative to reduce child hunger in Arkansas.

The lunch will be followed by a discussion of what is important to attendees as our Conference Board of Church & Society moves forward.

Questions? Contact Rev. Jay Clark, jclark@phumc.com

Grand Avenue UMC, 841 Quapaw Avenue, Hot Springs

First UMC Fort Smith welcomes Bishop Ken Carter

Topics include Fresh Expressions, Way Forward Commission

BY DANE WOMACK
Special Contributor

The resident bishop of the Florida Area of the United Methodist Church recently visited First UMC Fort Smith to offer teaching, preaching and conversation.

Bishop Ken Carter is a well-known leader in the denomination, having been a large-church pastor and an author before being elected to the episcopacy in 2012. Carter is currently the president-designate of the United Methodist Council of Bishops, and will serve as president in 2018-2020. He also shares with two other bishops the task of moderating the Commission on a Way Forward, a group called together to address the challenges and future of the worldwide UMC.

On Sunday, April 2, the bishop helped lead First UMC Fort Smith's traditional worship services. He offered a sermon on the temptation of Jesus as found in Matthew 4, challenging worshippers to receive the call to Lenten disciplines of sacrifice and fasting as a gift from God, an invitation to a more simple, more holy life. During the Sunday school hour, he spoke with small groups who have been studying his Lenten devotional book, *Near the Cross: A Lenten Journey of Prayer* (Abingdon Press, 2015).

On Monday, April 3, Carter preached for the Downtown Fort Smith Ecumenical Lenten Lunch worship series. His homily focused



Florida Area Bishop Ken Carter speaks with clergy from across the Arkansas Conference as part of his visit to First UMC Fort Smith in April.

PHOTO BY SARA BAYLES

on Jesus' final teaching and parables in the Gospel of Matthew. The bishop summarized the parables by imploring worshippers to "stay alive spiritually, use their gifts and care for those in need."

Earlier that day, Carter met with 30 pastors and a few laity from the surrounding region regarding the current state and future of the United Methodist Church. In his time with local leaders, he focused on two topics: Fresh Expressions ministries and the UMC Commission on a Way Forward.

Fresh Expressions is a ministry model developed by the Church of England in response to the realization that their "inherited church" model was no longer working; they had been practicing evangelism as a "passive parish." The

future of the church essentially depended on families having their kids, and their kids, and their kids and so on continue to live in the parish and continue as members of the local church. But as generations became more mobile, local church participation is no longer simply passed on to the next group.

At the same time, many people have had little experience or a bad experience with the church. Those people are not likely to casually visit a worship service. Fresh Expressions attempts to reverse the direction of evangelism: Instead of inviting people to church (which they are very unlikely to visit), why not meet them elsewhere?

"We need to learn to meet people where they are instead of lamenting that they are not where

we are," Carter said. The Fresh Expressions model has been adapted by the Florida Conference as a key evangelism strategy. Their recent attempts at new church models include groups like Theology on Tap (Bible study at a local pub), Burritos and Bible (small group at Tex-Mex spot), Crockpot Church (crockpot meals shared at a trailer park alongside a worship service) and Dinner Clubs (shared meals including Christian reflection questions). Traditional worship and traditional churches will continue to be central to our identity, but what new and different approaches can we learn for the sake of engaging new people? To learn more about the Fresh Expressions movement, visit <http://freshexpressionsus.org>.

Carter also spent considerable time in the Monday morning session on the Commission on a Way Forward. He explained the lengthy, intentional effort that went into organizing a diverse and representative commission, and gave a summary of their work to date. He said the Commission has worked hard to move past seeing one another as issues or camps, but instead seeks to understand one another as people with deep faith but conflicting views.

The primary question before the Commission and even our denomination is, "What does it mean, what does it look like, for us to live together in our disagreement? Does it mean restructuring? In what

sense?" Carter said he is hopeful about a unified future, but admitted there will surely be changes.

Attendees asked questions about accountability, discipline and the College of Bishops' leadership. Carter agreed that there is much confusion about accountability and discipline. Often, pastors, boards or groups are being held accountable, but perhaps in private. At this point, Carter spun into a bit of pastoral reflection: "Isn't it true that we all want our foes held accountable publicly while we don't mind if our friends are held accountable privately?" he asked.

He also acknowledged there is some confusion about the role of bishops. While United Methodist bishops are leaders, their power is sometimes overstated. For example, bishops do not present or vote on legislation, nor do they have any say on members of Annual or General Conference. He worries that some frustration aimed at bishops is misplaced or misunderstood.

Carter encouraged those present to remain faithful and patient. He explained that he, the Council of Bishops and the Commission members are committed to a hopeful future for the United Methodist Church for the sake of current and future generations.

The Rev. Womack serves as associate pastor of First UMC Fort Smith.

Bishop Vashti McKenzie in Little Rock for Raney Preaching Series



Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie, presiding prelate of the 10th Episcopal District of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, preaches during April 2 worship at Pulaski Heights UMC Little Rock.

PHOTO COURTESY PULASKI HEIGHTS UMC

Pulaski Heights United Methodist Church's T.J. and Inez Raney Preaching Series in early April welcomed Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie as its 2017 guest. McKenzie serves as the presiding prelate of the 10th Episcopal District of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church; in 2000, she became the first woman to be elected and consecrated as bishop in that denomination. Her latest book, *The Big Deal of Taking Small Steps to Move Closer to God*, will be available this month.

McKenzie preached the evening of April 1 on speaking truth to power, with 1 Corinthians 14:8 as her guiding Scripture. During 11:00 worship the next day, after reading

from Mark 5:21-34 and 1 Peter 4:12-13, she preached on God's power to create sudden and powerful change. Like the woman who was healed by touching the hem of Jesus' garment, we all have hope for a divinely driven turnaround.

"No matter how deep the water or the depth of the muck and mire of politics, no matter, there is nothing impossible with God," she said. "No matter how tense the environment, there is nothing impossible with God. No matter how crazy the situation in our digital landscape that steals more of our personal privacy every day, there is nothing impossible with God."

McKenzie pointed out that we should never give up hope for an

answer or solution from God.

"This woman demonstrates to us that we should never give up too soon," she said. "That's what 1 Peter tells us: Don't jump to conclusions that Jesus is too busy to come see about you, or that you can't ever reach out to the Lord. Isn't that what Peter said, friends, when life gets difficult, don't jump to the conclusion that God isn't on the job. Don't be fooled. God is still at work. You may not be able to see it, but God is working behind the scenes of your life with glory just around the corner. Maybe, just maybe, what you can't change is really meant to change you.... Maybe you're waiting on God, but maybe God is waiting on you."

UMC Council of Bishops calls Special Session of General Conference for 2019

The Council of Bishops (COB) has called a Special Session of the General Conference of the United Methodist Church (UMC) to be held Feb. 23-26, 2019 in St. Louis, Missouri.

In announcing the call, COB president Bishop Bruce R. Ough said the Special Session will be held in accordance with Division Two, Section II, Article II of the church's constitution, as recorded in Paragraph 14 of *The Book of Discipline* (2016).

The purpose of the 2019 Special Session of the General Conference will be "limited to receiving and acting on a report from the Council of Bishops based on the recommendations of the Commission on a Way Forward."

The 32-member commission was appointed by the COB to assist the bishops in their charge to lead the church forward amid the impasse related to homosexuality. The commission's task includes examining paragraphs in *The Book of Discipline* concerning human sexuality and exploring options to strengthen the unity of the church.

Per the Constitution of the Church, the 2019 Special Session of the General Conference shall be composed of the delegates to the 2016 General Conference or their legal successors or alternates, except when a particular annual conference or missionary conference shall prefer to have a new election.

The secretary of the General Conference will communicate with annual conference secretaries regarding updated delegate information, seating of reserve delegates, and the issuance of new certificates of election for annual conferences choosing to hold new elections.

The Commission on the General Conference and the business manager of the General Conference will develop and forward additional information regarding the logistics of the special session of General Conference at the appropriate time.

"The Council of Bishops encourages the entire church to continue in deep, unceasing prayer for Holy Spirit breakthroughs for the Commission on a Way Forward and the Special Session of General Conference," Ough said.

Church spends a Sunday serving neighbors

Members of Greenwood United Methodist Church were blessed with a bright, sunny Sabbath on April 23 as they gathered for their second annual Arms Around Greenwood day of service.

More than 200 met at the Ed Wilkinson Pavilion in Greenwood's Bell Park, sharing a meal before the Rev. John Embrey delivered the day's message from the fifth chapter of Luke.

Just as Christ sent forth his disciples to be fishers of people, Embrey challenged Greenwood UMC members to make Greenwood their mission field with small acts of kindness through personal relationships. Smiling faces and eager spirits were abundant as GUMC began its day of service, which included:

- Delivering handcrafted lap throws and quilts to nursing home residents
- Performing household chores for the elderly and homebound
- Assembling packages of needed personal items and small blankets for new foster parents and children new to foster care
- Mowing and trimming the lawn at the Old Jail Museum and some neighbors' homes, cleaning and landscaping at the church's historic Harper House and clearing trails at Greenwood Lake
- Giving the church's neighbors gifts of potted plants with invitations to worship
- Placing appreciation signs in schoolteachers' yards
- Offering free car washes on Greenwood's main thoroughfare (pictured above)
- "Paying it forward" by placing quarters in laundry



COURTESY PHOTO

- washing machines, buying lunches at fast food restaurants, loading groceries for people in store parking lots and paying for gasoline at service stations
- Assembling boxes of homemade cookies for city Street Department employees and police officers, as well as Sebastian County Sheriff's deputies and emergency medical first responders
- Filling "birthday bags" with items needed to celebrate a birthday to be distributed to Greenwood UMC Food Bank recipients
- Rebuilding a rock wall at a local cemetery
- Collecting dog toys for the Humane Society and a local veterinarian's practice.

After completing their acts of service, participants returned to the pavilion to enjoy faith-based films and fellowship, along with popcorn and drinks. Event leaders were amazed by the enthusiasm displayed as Greenwood UMC carried out its mission to love God, love others and to make a difference.

—submitted by Jan Dunn

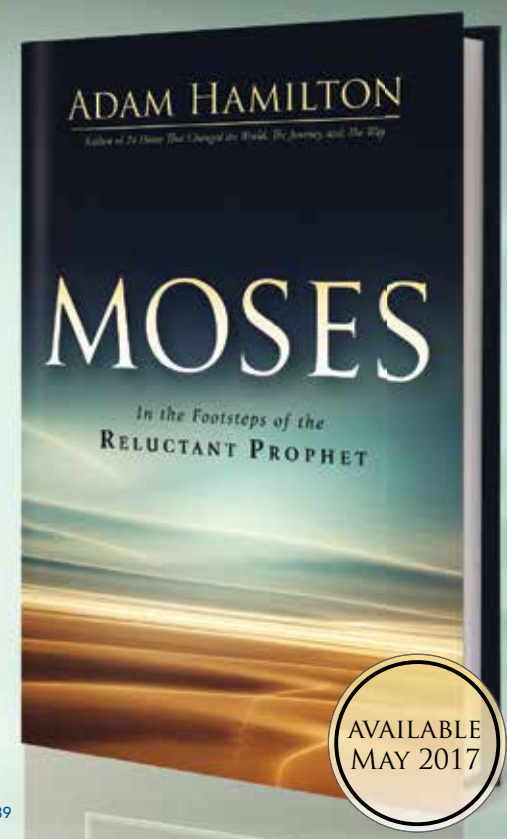
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COMING UP

Retired Pastors Day luncheon in Stuttgart May 8

The 19th Annual Arkansas Retired Pastors Day will be held on Monday, May 8, at noon in the new Christian Life Center at First UMC Stuttgart, located at 307 East Fourth Street. All retired pastors, spouses, surviving spouses and sponsors are invited to attend. Special music will be provided by the Swamp Angels and Amy Law & the Soul Sisters. Questions? Contact the Rev. David Bush, thepastor@stuttgartfumc.org.

Perkins School of Theology dean Dr. Craig Hill at Mount Sequoyah May 15-16

Dr. Craig Hill's most recent book, *Servant of All: Status, Ambition, and the Way of Jesus* forms the basis of an overnight retreat to be led by the author May 15-16 at Mount Sequoyah Retreat and Conference Center in Fayetteville.

Hill currently serves as dean of Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas. A New Testament scholar, he previously served on the faculty of Duke Divinity School, where he was executive director of the Doctor of Ministry and Master of Christian Practice programs.

Visit <http://www.mountsequoyahacademy.org/conferences> to register for this event.

Heritage Day celebrating 70 years of Wesley UMC Conway May 21

Wesley United Methodist Church, 2310 E. Oak Street in Conway, will celebrate on May 21 the founding of the congregation in 1947 as Wesley Memorial Methodist Church. The church grew from the work of Hendrix College students who were preparing for the ministry who canvassed the area to connect with the community. Some of those who helped in that effort included George Wayne Martin, Allen Hilliard, Charles Casteel, Arvis Lawson, Jim Beal, Pryor Cruce and Aaron Barling. Some of these future pastors also served as preachers for the early worship services.

To celebrate this beginning, Wesley UMC will hold a Heritage Day Celebration on May 21. Festivities will begin at 9 a.m. with fellowship time before Morning Worship at 10 a.m. A meal will follow in the Fellowship Hall with remembrances, history, singing and stories of the church's early years.

The Rev. Steve Johnson, Wesley's pastor from 1987 to 1991, will preach for the morning worship service. All former pastors and their families are invited to join the celebration, along with District Superintendents who have served in the Conway, North Central and Central Districts. Former members are invited to share in this event as well.

Randy Mason to perform at Salem Camp Meeting fundraising concert May 21

The Salem Camp Meeting Board, Benton, invites the community to a special evening of music, food and fellowship under the old tabernacle on Sunday, May 21, 2017 at 5 p.m., with Randy Mason performing in concert. Newcomers and folks with longtime ties to the Old Campground are invited to come be part of this special event held under the historic open-air arbor. A love offering will be taken to help with the cost of replacing the decades-old arbor roof.

Randy Mason is known for performing a variety of musical selections. He has performed at many Salem UMC Benton fundraisers, revivals and church services.

This year marks 150 years of uninterrupted annual Salem Campground Meetings. The 2017 Campground Meeting will be held June 11-17. Visit <http://arnet.pair.com/salemcamp> for more information.

The Salem Campground is approximately 4 miles north of Benton on Salem Road.

Mission camp at Mount Sequoyah for grades 3 through 12 in July

Camp Sequoyah Missions Camp provides church teams opportunities for service, fellowship, worship, and recreation both on and off the Mount Sequoyah Retreat and Conference Center campus. Mount Sequoyah is partnering with Destination: Mission of the Arkansas Conference Council on Children's Ministries of the United Methodist Church, but this event is open to

participants all denominations.

There will be two sessions of Missions Camp in 2017: July 5-8 and July 12-15. Junior camp is for kids in 3rd-6th grades and senior camp is for kids in 7th through 12th grades. Both age groups will be available each session. Each team needs to have one adult in attendance for every four children. Youth helpers who wish to come must contact denni.palmer@mountsequoyah.org for an application.

Visit www.mountsequoyah.org/camp-sequoyah-missions to learn more or to register.

United Methodist Men national gathering set for July 7-8

A thousand men are expected to come together for worship, workshops, service projects and fellowship at the National Gathering of United Methodist Men on July 7-8, 2017. Held at St. Luke's UMC Indianapolis, Indiana, the event will inspire attendees to embrace new possibilities for ministry and discipleship.

"This is not an event to just have a good time and learn things—it will change your life and change the lives of people around you," said Gil Hanke, general secretary of the General Commission on United Methodist Men (GCUMM). "This gathering challenges men to change their behavior, encouraging them to become more Christ-like in their daily lives."

Speakers will include:

- Bishop Jonathan Holston, resident bishop of the South Carolina Annual Conference
- Bishop James Swanson, president of GCUMM and resident bishop of the Mississippi Annual Conference
- Shan Foster, director of Men End Domestic Violence (MEND)
- Dr. Kevin Watson, assistant professor of Wesleyan and Methodist Studies at Candler School of Theology.

Attendees will choose among 19 workshops focusing on leadership, ministry development, personal growth and spiritual development. With subjects ranging from cyber bullying and local church visioning to stress management and small group ministries, there are topics to support men no matter their age or their role in the local church. An extensive ministry fair will offer ideas to enrich and support outreach and service initiatives.

Three community service experiences will support people in need both in Indianapolis and around the world. Attendees will build hand-cranked mobility carts distributed internationally through Mobility Worldwide, sort and pack produce for local distribution through the Society of St. Andrew and build wheelchair ramps for local homes.

Visit www.UMMGathering.org for further details, including lodging options and an online registration form.

Music and worship national gathering in Little Rock July 24-27

The Fellowship of United Methodists in Music & Worship Arts (FUMMWA) invites you to Little Rock on July 24-27 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>.

Mountainside UMC golf tourney set for Oct. 9

Mountainside UMC Hot Springs Village has set its annual golf tournament for Monday, Oct. 9, at the Diamante Country Club. Funds raised through this event will support outreach and mission endeavors such as the Arkansas Food Bank, Kairos Prison Ministry, the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) and ministries that support local schools, to name a few.

Contact the church at mountainsideumc@sbcglobal.net to receive more information as it becomes available.

Hamilton to speak at UMFA Bishops' Club Luncheon Nov. 17

The Rev. Adam Hamilton, founding pastor of the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas, will be the featured speaker at the 2017 United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas (UMFA) Bishops' Club Luncheon Nov. 17. He also will lead a conversation for young pastors while in the state.

Hamilton launched Church of the Resurrection with his wife and two children in 1990. Today it is the largest United Methodist Church in the United States, with an average weekend attendance of 8,600. The congregation has a three-fold focus: connecting with thinking people and inviting them to become followers of Jesus Christ, engaging in acts of justice and mercy in the community, and working to renew the United Methodist Church.

He is the author of 24 books published by Abingdon Press and Harper Collins, including *When Christians Get it Wrong*, *Seeing Gray in a World of Black and White*, *The Way: Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus*, *Making Sense of the Bible*, *Revival*, *Creed*, and *Moses*.

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OBITUARY

LONOKE

Lucille Nix

Lucille Holley Nix, 86, of Lonoke, passed away Wednesday, April 5, 2017.

She was born Nov. 16, 1930, to John and Mabel Holley, and grew up in Garland City, Arkansas. Twenty-two years later, after obtaining an accounting degree from Southern State University, Lucille married the love of her life, James Ellis Nix, and they spent 65 years sharing life.

Lucille was first and foremost a Christian who spent her life dedicated to her family, church and community. She served as president of the Little Rock Conference of United Methodist Women and was a delegate to the World Methodist Conference. She lived to help others and was a role model to many



Lucille Nix

younger women. She has left an imprint on every life she touched. As an avid Razorback fan, Lucille was always ready to put on her red and cheer loudly for the Hogs.

Besides her parents, Lucille was preceded in death by her sister Nellie and brothers Buster, Chester, Jesse and Ray.

She is survived by her husband, James; daughter and son-in-law, Karen and Richard Phelps; grandchildren, Peyton Phelps and Garrett Phelps; and sister, Doris Holley. She is also survived by seven sisters-in-law, one brother-in-law and a host of nieces and nephews.

A celebration of Lucille's life was held Saturday, April 8, at First United Methodist Church Lonoke. Memorials may be made to First United Methodist Church, 220 South Center St., P.O. Box 152, Lonoke, AR 72086.

Air Force chaplains encourage outreach

Through the efforts of the Air Force Chaplain Corps Religious Support Teams under the leadership of both 86 Airlift Wing Chaplain Col. Donnette Boyd and 496 Air Base Squadron's Group Chaplain Capt. Chaplain Ronald Feeser, military members from both Morón and Ramstein Air Bases received the opportunity to donate to a designated offering held at both installations in March 2017 to support the Sisters of the Cross Convent in Morón de la Frontera, Spain, which cares for 29 orphan girls.

"The response by the parishioners was overwhelming," Feeser said, as Morón Air Base raised \$3,748 in the Protestant and Catholic services. At Ramstein Air Base, the Kaiserslautern Military Community collectively raised \$16,901. "It is the largest offering I've seen since I've been at Ramstein," said Chaplain Boyd.

Feeser, a member of the Arkansas Conference, says that in addition to meeting specific needs such as school uniforms, the gift to the orphanage shows the local community that those on the base are invested in making a difference in Spain.

"The economy of Spain is hurting and there is a great deal of unemployment, so anything we can do to help the underprivileged is appreciated," he said. "For our folks, it has helped them to appreciate their own blessings as well as be a part of supporting something outside and greater than themselves."



Orphans living at the Sisters of the Cross Convent in Morón de la Frontera, Spain, welcome U.S. Air Force chaplains, including Capt. Chaplain Ronald Feeser of the Arkansas Conference (back left). The chaplains delivered donations raised from a special offering received at their bases.

COURTESY PHOTO

Mission u registration now open

Arkansas Conference Mission u, an opportunity to study current issues impacting society based on recent mission study topics, will take place July 26-29, 2017, at the University of the Ozarks in Clarksville. Mission u is open to members and non-members of United Methodist Women, and offers classes on topics covering three themes: spiritual growth, social issue and geographic studies, as well as studies for children and youth.

At Mission u: Learning Together for Transformation of the World, participants grow in understanding of the mission of the church in the current world context. The studies give particular attention to the responsibilities of women in the fulfillment of the mission work of the church. Mission u events also include:

- Worship and singing
- Interest groups organized around current events and issues
- Audiovisual presentations
- Fellowship events

To register for Mission u, visit <http://armissionu.weebly.com>.

Keep up with UMC news online



United Methodist Now is a new biweekly e-newsletter designed just for readers like you. United Methodist Church members can learn about individuals and congregations who put our faith into action, and get tips on how to have a richer spiritual life. Sign up at <https://goo.gl/ZK0ZE3>.

United Methodist News Service (UMNS), 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 to 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**? Check out the Facebook pages for UMNS, www.facebook.com/umnews, and the Arkansas Conference, www.facebook.com/arkansasumc.

Clergy (from page 1)

gives all life new dignity and sacredness. For this reason, we oppose the death penalty (capital punishment) and urge its elimination from all criminal codes.

A Good Friday vigil on the steps of the state Capitol drew hundreds of death penalty opponents, including a number of United Methodist pastors and laity.

Appeals and court rulings ultimately reduced the eight planned executions to four. At press time, three of the originally scheduled executions had been completed, with one more set for the evening of April 27.



The Rev. Maxine Allen, center, joins death penalty protesters on the steps of the Arkansas State Capitol. Allen is assistant director for mission field engagement for the Arkansas Conference and a board member of the Arkansas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty.



The Rev. Stephen Copley, a Church and Community Worker with UMC Global Ministries and chair of the Arkansas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty, speaks at the Good Friday vigil on the steps of the Arkansas State Capitol.

AUM PHOTOS BY AMY FORBUS

'Holy Hikers' group explores northwest Arkansas with a spiritual focus



The Rev. Blake Lasater prepares to baptize Tom Marler at Kings River Falls.

BY AMY FORBUS
Editor

Round Top Mountain in Jasper. Eden's Falls and Hide-Out Hollow along the Buffalo National River. Hawksbill Crag, Kings River Falls, Lake Leatherwood, Glory Hole, White Rock, Triple Falls. The Swinging Bridge near Oark.

The Holy Hikers of First United Methodist Church Eureka Springs have visited them all, exploring Creation and deepening their walk with God as they walk the trails on monthly hikes. A time of table fellowship at a restaurant near the day's chosen hike caps off each excursion.

"Holy Hikers does entail a tad bit of holiness and a great deal of adventure and fellowship; for some reason they just can't get used to my offensive driving I learned in Iraq, but it's fun to watch the older crowd squeal in delight as we bound over bumps in the road looking for the next trail," said the Rev. Blake Lasater, a former military chaplain and current pastor of First UMC Eureka Springs.

"We usually take 15 to 20 folks, and many outside the church are now joining us," he said. "They range in age from 8 to 83."

One recent highlight: the group hiked to Kings River Falls for the baptism of Tom Marler, a 70-year-old U.S. Army veteran "with a new heart—spiritually and physically," Lasater said.

Palm Sunday's hike featured Hawksbill Crag as the destination, and incorporated the Stations of the Cross as drawn from a Celtic ritual Lasater discovered during a visit to Scotland.

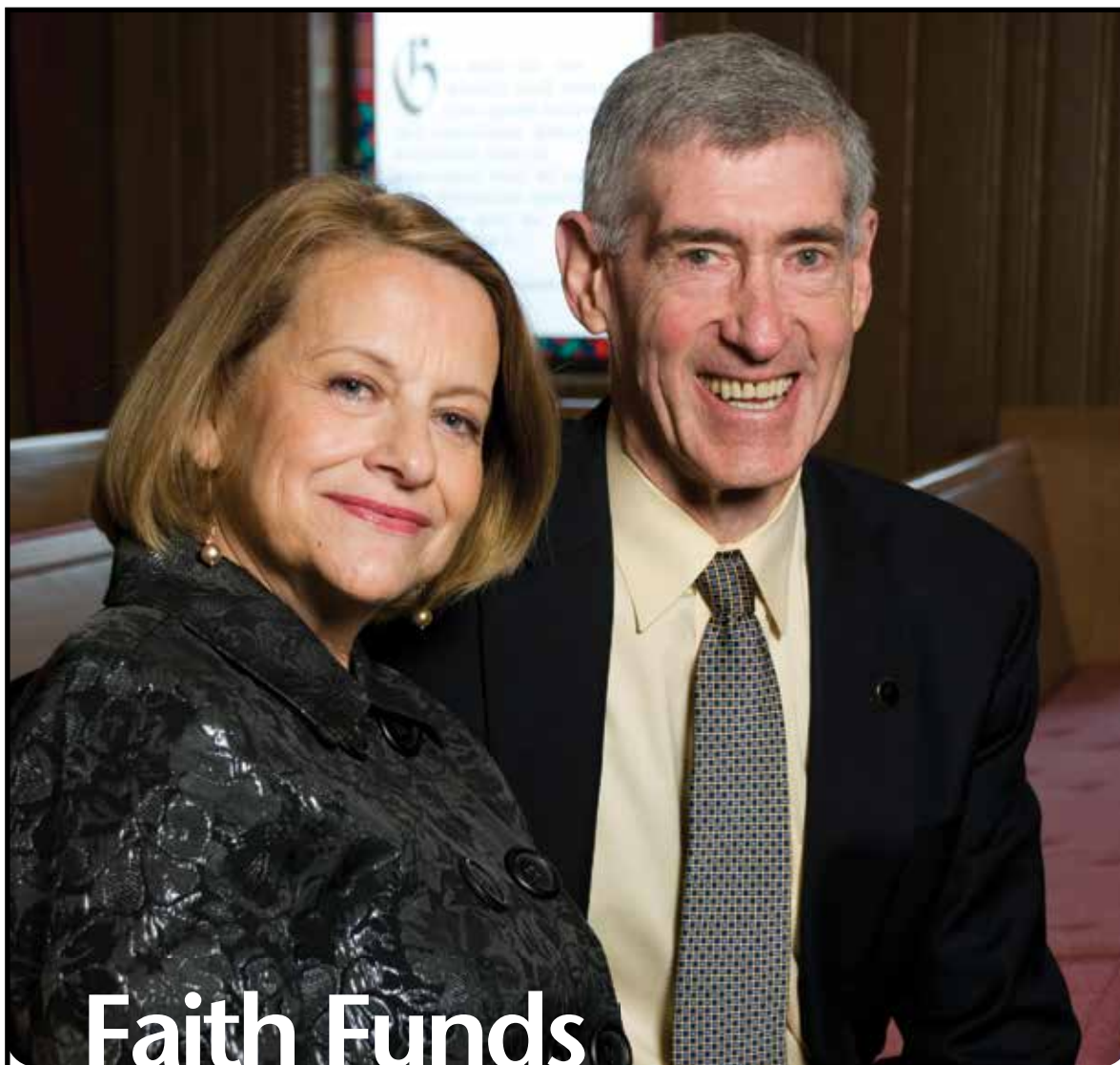
As the weather gets warmer, the Holy Hikers plan to continue their monthly outings, but perhaps with a new activity, Lasater said.

"We are going to switch to kayaking in the spring and see where all that takes us."



First UMC Eureka Springs member D. Rude reads a Gospel lesson during the Palm Sunday hike, which included the Stations of the Cross, and a celebration of Holy Communion at Hawksbill Crag.

PHOTOS BY FAITH KELLY



Faith Funds

A Wesleyan Viewpoint

"My Methodist roots can be traced back to the 18th Century in Virginia; so I was exposed early and often to Wesleyan theology," said Dewitt Smith of Bella Vista. "I believe that Wesleyan theology is more relevant than ever for our children as they are faced with a myriad of 21st century challenges. As United Methodists we are called to be practicing Christians in every phase of our lives."

His wife Cindy said the church is very important to her family, "I didn't grow up Methodist, but I see how it influenced Dewitt, and I am so happy our daughter and our son had good experiences in the church. "It's now being passed on to our grandchildren."

The Smiths support the training of pastors in United Methodist seminaries so they can help the next generation learn and experience the Wesleyan tradition. UMFA Seminary Scholarships fund three-year educations at United Methodist seminaries for student pastors who agree to come back to the Arkansas Conference to serve local churches.

And the Smiths are personally reaping the benefits of the scholarship program. They are members of Oakley Chapel United Methodist Church in Rogers, where two pastors have been UMFA Seminary Scholarship recipients — Rev. Brian Timmons and Rev. Shane Pair, their current pastor.



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