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Caring for the Least of These

BY MARTHA TAYLOR
Interim Editor

From the very beginning, she thought of him as “her boy,” although she would not give birth to him. She stood in the delivery room, next to the hospital bed, while a teenage girl birthed this child who would be named Nathanael.

The Rev. Alicia Finch-McCastlain, pastor of Pleasant Hill UMC in Little Rock, recalled that life-changing experience with a catch in her voice. At the time, nineteen years ago, she had befriended a female student, one of many whose lives she touched in her role as an assistant principal at a public high school. Little did either of them know that a year later their lives would forever be entwined.

“We first became acquainted because she was having difficulties in school and we spoke often,” Finch-McCastlain said. “When I saw her at the beginning of the next school year later, I thought at first that she’d put on some weight. And then I realized she was pregnant.”

Finch reached out to the girl’s mother to see if she could help. As that emotional conversation drew to a close, Finch-McCastlain thought, “Is this supposed to be my child?” She heard a voice—one she says she knows was God’s—say, “Yes.” Without even realizing she was doing it, she called out to the girl’s mother, “Wait, my husband and I have been thinking about adopting a child.” And the mother said, “That would be an answer to our prayers.”

That evening she told her then husband what she had done and it was decided. While the couple had been told they would never be able to have children, just like the Old Testament stories, God found a way.

That story has a happy ending. That baby boy grew up in a home where he was loved and nurtured. He’s one of the lucky ones. Sadly, there are others whom many never know what that feels like.

According to the third quarter 2017 report of the Arkansas Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS), there were 5,135 children in foster care in Arkansas. Of those children, who range in age from less than one year to 18, 45% have been in foster care for 12 months or

longer. The largest percentage of the population (24%) are between the ages of 2 and 4 years. Nearly half of the children resided in foster homes, with the remainder living in family-like settings (therapeutic foster home, relative care, pre-adoptive home, or trial home visit). The report states that the majority of these children have been placed in foster care due to abuse or neglect.

DCFS reports that at the end of the quarter, 689 children were available for adoption. Of the available children, 62 percent were white and 15 percent were black. Half of the children available for adoption were between the ages of six and 13 years old.

There’s hope

This should matter to all of us. It especially matters to a number of United Methodist families who have adopted children, such as Finch-McCastlain, or are living out their faith by becoming foster parents.

These families and others were gratified to see the Arkansas Conference unanimously pass a resolution regarding the church’s role in caring for these vulnerable children. The resolution, adopted during the 2017 Annual Conference held in Hot Springs, urges United Methodists and their churches to find ways to raise awareness about fostering and/or adoption as well as caring for families who have taken on the responsibility of loving the children if even for a short time.

The resolution, brought to the floor by the Rev. Betsy Singleton Snyder, associate pastor at Pulaski Heights, outlines the deficits children, and especially children who age out of the foster care system, have to overcome.

“The majority of these children



Alicia Finch-McCastlain and her adopted son, Nathanael, on a recent vacation to Niagra Falls.



First UMC Morrilton’s Room 29:11 provides shoes, clothing, personal items and support for foster parents in the community.

have less than a GED, will be unemployed, and be dependent on public assistance and many will find themselves in prison, homeless or parents at an early age,” states Snyder in the resolution.

It goes on to cite a portion of the Social Principles in the United Methodist *Book of Discipline* that says, “We support and encourage greater awareness and education to promote adoption of a wide variety of children through foster care, international adoption, and domestic adoption.”

The thrust of the resolution focuses on encouraging every local UMC in Arkansas “to support adoption efforts through recruitment of potential adoptive parents,” and doing so by recognizing November as National Adoption Month.

One Heber Springs family was already well aware of the great need and had responded by living out their faith and God’s will through fostering and adoption.

John and Ashley Herring, members of First UMC in Heber Springs, have been married for 22 years. They have five biological children, ranging from elementary to college age; an adopted daughter who is a senior in high school, two other girls in pre-adoptive placement, and are fostering a two-year-old girl.

Looking back a her journals written years ago, Herring said God gave her a heart for children before she was even aware of it.

“I have journals that go back to 2007 where I have written, ‘foster, adopt, missions,’ Herring said. “I just had that compassion even as a child, that there is an injustice about

kids that didn’t have a family or that weren’t taken care of.”

Herring recounts that even as she and her husband were raising their biological children, God kept nudging them to do something. They began the process of becoming foster parents, despite the counseling of their family and friends from church, who felt the family was taking on too much. But the Herrings forged on, convinced that this was what God wanted them to do.

At first, they worked with a state agency but later became aware of The Call, a faith-based organization that partners with the state and helps train potential foster parents and supports them throughout the process. The Call is currently assisting in 44 Arkansas counties, and Herring has become the coordinator for Cleburne County.

Herring said becoming a foster parent is a tough job and not everyone is equipped to handle the emotional, psychological and financial responsibilities. She also says there is a huge role the church can play by supporting any foster family, whether they have a church affiliation or not.

Herring feels that since they’ve been foster parents and have brought nearly 40 foster children with them to church over the years, the awareness of foster families in the community has changed the culture of their church.

“These children, they’ve had trauma and our home is a healing place,” Herring said. “When a child comes in and they’re different and their behaviors are different, it

[See ADOPT, page 9]

Becoming an Invitational Church

BY WILLIAM O. "BUD" REEVES
Special Contributor

The church I serve just celebrated its "demisesquicentennial" (what a great word!) or 175th anniversary. It was an amazing celebration of our history and tradition, a homecoming for many who had moved away, and a hopeful look forward for a church that still has a bright future.



William O. "Bud" Reeves

In preparation for the "demi," as we called it, I looked at a number of historical documents. I read some church bulletins from the late 1950's and early 1960's. This was the heyday of the church in Fort Smith and America, a sort of Golden Age that is surrounded by a translucent halo whenever we invoke "the way things used to be." I saw something in those church bulletins I had never seen before, and I was intrigued. Each week they reported the previous week's Sunday school attendance. Each class, from nursery to adults, had a goal, and the attendance was reported against the goal. Everyone was accountable weekly and in public!

What was even more interesting was that they reported how many personal contacts had been made by Sunday school class members, from elementary to adult classes. Literally hundreds of contacts were being made each week, about half by cards and letters, a quarter phone calls, and a quarter personal visits. These contacts were checking on absent members (Gotta meet the goal!) and inviting new people.

Back in the day, First Methodist Church of Fort Smith was averaging over 1,000 people weekly in worship AND Sunday school, and sometimes more in Sunday school than church! I have to believe it was due in large measure to the personal contacts being made by the lay people of the church.

I know all the disclaimers. We live in a different culture now. We don't do Sunday school like we used to. Other small group ministries now perform that function. Yada, yada, yada.

What I took away from that brief glimpse into our history was the effectiveness, if not the necessity, of lay outreach for church growth and health. Whatever else has changed, the power of the personal has not, and I suspect it never will.

It's not enough anymore to be a friendly church. As important as smiling greeters, welcome centers, and good signage are, we

simply don't have enough people walking in our doors to overcome decline. We have to reach outside our comfortable facilities and church friends to invite people who might not normally attend a church function.

In the September 20 *Leading Ideas* publication, The Lewis Center shared an article by Doug Powe, "4 Clues for Inviting Others to Church Effectively." In it, the author suggests that:

1) **Invitations should be about a genuine connection.** Rather than a generic invitation, invite people to an event, sermon series, small group, or social occasion that might be interesting or relevant to them.

2) **Invite specifically**, to an event at a particular time and place, and include logistics in the invitation. ("I'll pick you up.")

3) **Be honest** about what you know and don't know. We don't have all the answers. Rather than bluff, be authentic about the incompleteness of your own journey. It will probably increase the comfort level of the invitee, anyway.

4) **Invite with expectant hope**, not with a negative or pessimistic attitude. Believe that your friend will respond positively, and that he or she will actually benefit from attending. Communicate the enthusiasm and joy that

keeps you coming week after week.

Most United Methodist Churches are in decline; most United Methodists are hesitant to invite anyone to church. I see a direct correlation between the two. Despite our well-crafted rationalizations to explain the downward trend, many churches (some of them United Methodist) are booming. I don't believe it is about who has the best show in town. I believe one of the key factors is lay people who are excited and committed enough to do whatever it takes to bring folks into the fellowship of the church.

This is not about simply filling the pews back up the way they were a half century ago. Church doesn't and shouldn't look like it did when Ozzie and Harriet were America's family, and the Beatles had not yet invaded America. But it is about making disciples of Jesus Christ, and the church is still the main place disciples are made. It is about connecting people with a community of love and acceptance and security in a hateful and insecure world. It is about people experiencing the reality of grace so they can ensure a future in eternity.

So go on, invite somebody!

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

The Journey of Me and Pew

BY MICHELLE J. MORRIS
Special Contributor

This week I found myself traveling from Fort Smith to Ozark, Missouri to deliver a little 3-foot pew to Covenant Church Furniture, as Cavanaugh United Methodist Church is redoing its sanctuary and pews. This little one, nicknamed Pew, was our sample, brought to us so we could check workmanship. He was going back for a fabric swap. Along the road, I started snapping pictures of the journey. Then I started posting them to social media, referring to Pew like a fellow person, riding along with me on a grand adventure.

So there was "Me and Pew on the road."

And "Me and Pew stopping at Lambert's" (Thrown Rolls).

And "Me and Pew at Covenant Church Furniture," where I added, "We part ways here, but just for a little while."

Then the guys came to unload Pew, and one of them said, "I know this little guy. I worked on him." He ran his hand gently along the edge. "Why's he back?"

"He had the wrong fabric on him. He was a sample, and you didn't have the fabric we chose in stock."

As they carried him away from me, he said, "I'll take good care of

him!"

And that's when it happened. I started to cry.

Look, it has been a very emotional couple of weeks, and thus far I have managed to keep from really crying. So probably there was a bit of a dam breaking loose in that moment. But I did ask God, "Why am I crying?" Sometimes you ask God a question, and you get an answer in your head that doesn't feel like you came up with it, but someone else is talking in your head. So my head said to me, "Now you know how your people feel."

In the course of this sanctuary renovation, we had a debate while deciding on pews or chairs in our

new sanctuary. I knew it would be an emotional meeting. I also knew what the arguments would be on both sides, including one for those who chose pews: without pews it won't feel like church. I understand the logic of that sentiment. What I could not do prior to that journey to Ozark was *feel* that sentiment.

Why? Because I have never been attached to a physical church. My first church was a new church start with no building. I was baptized in my living room. Then my son was baptized in our "building"—the end of a strip mall. I drive by that strip



mall and point it out to my son—"That's where you were baptized." Since my home church closed, every other church I have been a part of I have KNOWN would be temporary. I serve at the whim of the Bishop, who

[See JOURNEY, page 3]

The Church's Role in Adoption



I was supremely pleased to learn the resolution submitted to the Annual Conference urging every United Methodist Church in this area, "to celebrate and promote adoption," was passed. And as I understand, it passed by a unanimous vote. What made this even more special for me is some of the people who submitted the resolution are adoptive parents themselves, and I have had the pleasure of knowing them for several years.

I am proud to be a United Methodist and am very proud this resolution passed. However, our work is far from done because the need for permanent families for today's waiting children is at an all time high in Arkansas, our nation, and many countries across the globe. Since each of those clergy members are adoptive parents, they understand the importance for the Church to become more involved in assuring every child has the God-given right to be raised in a permanent family. The alternative

would be to languish in long term foster care or residential care until these children reach age 18, only to hit the streets of America with a bag of all their belongings on their shoulder without a G.E.D., legal trade, or a safe place to go. Yes, this is a fact, and every year 35,000 or more make this journey. Many social work professionals believe that fewer than half of these young men and women will survive to reach their 30th birthday.

The Church in America has a very important role in making it possible for these children and youth to have a connection with a permanent family so they can live productively and know from experience how to build a permanent family for the next generation.

The Rev. Bill Barling is the executive director of Families Are Special, an Arkansas adoption agency. Email: familiesarespecial@comcast.net.

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GROWING TOGETHER IN CHRIST: A word from the Bishop



BY GARY E. MUELLER

Thanks that Matter

I've been thinking a great deal about giving thanks these past weeks. Maybe it's because so much good has happened in my life during the past year. Maybe it's because I'm getting older. Maybe it's because I know so many people who experience so much pain and suffering. In any event, I've realized something and you've probably discovered as well. It's easy to be thankful when things work out the way you want. It's a bit more of a challenge to be thankful when you're not completely convinced that's how you really feel. And it's nearly impossible to be thankful when your world has fallen apart.

But did you know that giving the right kind of thanks for the right kinds of things in the right kind of spirit is powerful enough to actually shape what you feel, see, think and do? Well, it's true. What is more, this is exactly the kind of thanks those of us who are disciples of Jesus Christ are called to give. So much so, I want to share with you my personal list of "Thanks that Matter."

I am thankful my head, heart and spirit know that nothing that happens in life or death can separate me from God's love in Jesus Christ.

I am thankful that God uses everything that happens in my life—especially when I mess up or hurt someone—to help me grow.

I am thankful that God has placed amazing people in my life who continue to love me in spite of myself.

I am thankful I have the opportunity to be in ministry with incredible people who long to help people grow as disciples, make disciples and share in Jesus' work of transforming lives, communities and the world.

I am thankful that the Holy Spirit always seems to send me just the grace I need at just the time I need it in just the way I need it.

Why does giving thanks that matter have the power to shape what we feel, see, think and do? Every time we give thanks to God, we draw closer to God. We also invite God into our lives. And God goes to work so that we feel, see, think and act a little differently. After a while, this begins to add up and we have actually changed.

I hope you have a Happy Thanksgiving. But even more importantly, I hope that you discover how giving thanks can change your life. Not next week or even next year, but right now.

Gary E. Mueller

Gary E. Mueller

Journey (from page 2)

is listening to the will of God, and God doesn't leave you in one place very long. So I don't get attached to buildings or furniture.

But riding around with Pew, I realized what was emotionally at stake for many of my people. Many of them have really only known that church and those pews. While they sat on those pews, their children were baptized or married, and their spouses were buried. Such significant points in the journeys of their lives have happened while they sat on those pews. I rode around for one day with one in the back of my van, and I was already attached. They have lived their whole lives on those pews. How could they imagine the journey without them?

The voice in my head was not finished talking, though, because God

knows that pews cannot get in the way of reaching people for Jesus. If we are making such decisions to hold on to our own histories, and we do so at the detriment of someone else making a history with Jesus, then we have missed the point. Pews do not have to hinder such a journey. More often our own hearts are the hindrance. So the voice said, "Teach them. Teach them how to ride around with Pew."

I knew that I had to share my understanding with them, too. No one can take away your history with Jesus. My son and I are still baptized even though you can't point to a church where it happened. That baptism goes with us with every journey that we share Jesus outside the walls of whatever building currently nurtures us. We need a place that provides us safe refuge and prepares us, but we

also need a Holy Spirit companion who goes out and reaches out with us.

So Cavanaugh, when the day comes again when you have to discuss what to do with the seating in your building, know that even though I am attached in some way now, you should not let that sway you. I want you to decide what is best for giving others the foundation of Jesus on which they can build their lives.

But if you ever do decide to get rid of the pews, maybe give me a call. There is certainly one Pew I could take off your hands....

The Rev. Dr. Michelle Morris is pastor at Cavanaugh and Wesley Fort Smith UMCs. Email: michelle.morris@arumc.org. You'll find the original post of "Me and Pew" on her blog at www.grownupbible.org.



Peggy Williams, Bishop Gary E. and Karen Mueller, and the Rev. Keenan Williams, pose behind the Henry's Chapel marker.

UMs gather for 200th anniversary

BY CAROLE TEAGUE
Special Contributor

On a warm fall day more than 140 faithful United Methodists came together to recognize the bicentennial of Methodism in Arkansas. The celebration was held on Saturday, October 14 at the site of Henry's Chapel at Mound Prairie, Arkansas, located near Washington State Park in Cleburne County.

The attendees were entertained by individuals dressed in period costume while waiting for the ceremony and worship service to begin. The Rev. Keenan Williams served as the "exhorter" for the day. An exhorter could be male or female and it was not uncommon for slaves to publicly deliver testimonies and personal conversion narratives. These testimonies were distinguishable from sermon because exhorters did not "take a text" from the Bible.

Named after the Henry family, Henry's Chapel was constructed in 1817 when pioneers moved to the Mound Prairie from Belleville, Missouri in the wake of the New Madrid earthquake. Others joined them seeking a fresh start. The Rev. William Stevenson, a circuit rider, led this colony of Methodists to the area.

Williams is the current President of the Arkansas Methodist Historical

Society and pastor of Washington UMC. Washington UMC was established in 1821 and continues to hold regular worship services. The building was open for visitor tours while across the street, an exhibit of period items were on display courtesy of the Arkansas United Methodist Archives.

Bishop Gary E. Mueller reminded the comingled group—something that would not have been allowed in 1817—that the Methodist movement must be a reality amongst 21st century Methodists if we are to become vital disciples of Jesus Christ rather than members of a particular church. The service concluded with Holy Communion.

"I have great appreciation for the time and effort of so many to bring our Methodist history to life," Mueller said. "The Arkansas Methodist Historical Society, the Williams' family, Helen Guenter, Chair of the Conference Commission on History and Archives, as well as the archivists and others, are to be commended for their faithful commitment to and love for the church and its remarkable history."

Carole Teague serves as archivist of the Arkansas United Methodist Archives, located on the Hendrix College campus in Conway, Arkansas. Email: arkmethodist@hendrix.edu.

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LEFT: Washington UMC, established in 1821, is near the site of Henry's Chapel. RIGHT: The Rev. Keenan Williams, pastor of Washington UMC, "exhorted" the crowd during worship.



Ingathering is Nov. 18; register by Nov. 11

Join hundreds of fellow United Methodists Nov. 18 from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. at the Arkansas Foodbank, 4301 West 65th Street in Little Rock. Those who register online have an additional opportunity to increase their impact by purchasing a commemorative 40th anniversary Ingathering t-shirt for \$10 or hooded, full-front zipper sweatshirt for \$30. The proceeds from the shirt sales will provide for more product for volunteers to pack and sort during the event, and by doing so, will be feeding more hungry children. Participants may also make a donation online when registering. To register online, go to <https://www.eiseverywhere.com/ingathering2017>

UMCOR: hygiene, school kits needed

Following the hurricane damage in the United States and the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico, the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) requested that churches send cleaning buckets to the Sager Brown Depot in Baldwin, Louisiana. UMCOR has now requested that we focus on hygiene and school kits during Ingathering 2017. Visit www.umcor.org/UMCOR/Relief-Supplies for instructions on assembling hygiene and school kits. (Any cleaning buckets your church has already assembled will still be accepted on Nov. 18.)

Volunteers sought for Arkansas recovery

The news has been filled with the needs of those recovering from hurricanes, flooding and wild fires. Arkansas Conference Disaster Response and VIM Coordinators Janice and Byron Mann reminded us that there are several projects in Chicot, Randolph, Lawrence, Clay, White and Greene counties that are ready for volunteers. Email Mann at vim@arumc.org or join the Volunteers in Mission & Disaster Response—Serving Arkansas & Beyond Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/454331884647391/>

Black Friday. Cyber Monday.

#GIVINGTUESDAY™

November 28, 2017

After the hustle and bustle of getting great deals on Black Friday and Cyber Monday, Giving Tuesday, falling on Nov. 28 this year, reminds us that joy is usually found in the giving. Giving Tuesday offers us an opportunity to support ministries and missionaries with our Christmas giving. Learn about ways you can help, and download a toolkit and images for promoting Giving Tuesday in your local church, by visiting www.umcmmission.org/giving-tuesday/resources.

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Fill-a-bag ministries for local churches

What is Fill-A-Bag Ministry?

Church members fill a reusable grocery bag once a month and bring it to church on a specific Sunday. All the items collected will be shared with a local food pantry or distribution ministry.

How do we get the bags?

200K Reasons will supply them free of charge to churches worshipping 50 or fewer. Bags may be purchased at cost plus postage for churches worshipping more than 50 every Sunday.

STEP 1

CHOOSE A PARTNER:

A local partner can be any church or organization that is providing food to children and their families as part of their feeding ministry or program: a food bank, food pantry or backpack program, or a food distribution service that includes children.

STEP 2

WORK OUT THE LOGISTICS:

With your partner, determine if specific food items are needed for each collection and how to communicate this with your congregation. Arrange how the food collected will get to the distribution site.



STEP 3

COMMUNICATE YOUR COMMITMENT:

Email Mary Lewis Dassinger at mdassinger@arumc.org and briefly state your commitment to support the agency with food collections as part of the 200K Reasons Initiative.

STEP 4

RECEIVING THE BAGS:

Expect delivery within one month from the time we receive your information. If the bags wear out, we will replace them at no charge for churches worshipping fewer than 50.

STEP 5

KEEP US POSTED:

Let us know how it is going and once a year we will ask you to find out from your partner agency how many children they think were served the past year.



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FAITH SHARING

"VITAL DISCIPLES CREATE VITAL CONGREGATIONS WHO MAKE DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST WHO HAVE A VITAL IMPACT ON THEIR MISSION FIELD."

It's All About Relationships!

BY JUNIUS B. DOTSON

Editor's Note: This article is excerpted from *Developing an Intentional Discipleship System: A Guide for Congregations* by Junius B. Dotson, published by Discipleship Ministries. Used by permission. The guide is available as a free download at seeallthepeople.org.



Junius B. Dotson

The term missional engagement stands in deliberate contrast to our traditional understanding of outreach. Let me offer some distinctions. Outreach has traditionally taken two forms. It can be missional efforts. These are traditional helping ministries such as food and clothing drives, neighborhood clean-ups, and food pantries. There are some outreach efforts that are more evangelistic efforts. These include activities like attending a street festival and handing out invitations to church, or going to a park to pass out water bottles with the church's information on it. I believe any outreach effort whose goal is simply inviting people to church or only providing ministry "for people" and not "with people" without regard to building relationships is shortsighted—it misses the point of intentional discipleship. Missional engagement entails the building of authentic, organic, and consistent relationships. Only relationships built on these three characteristics will lead to intentional discipleship.

Authentic

Merriam-Webster defines authentic as "of undisputed origin; genuine." Is our missional engagement with people genuine? Does it start from a good place? Does it have good origins? As we grow in our faith as disciples of Jesus, we should become more selfless, having greater concern and care for the world and the people around us. This care and concern should begin to manifest itself in our relationships. As we develop relationships with people outside of our churches, it is important that we check our motivations and make sure they are genuine. The more authentic and honest the encounter, the more effective we are in faith sharing.

Organic

As we engage with others and begin to build relationships, it must be organic—it cannot be forced. Think about organic as being something that takes on a life of its own naturally. A young pastor shared with me that he and his wife decided to turn off their cable in order to save money. This action left him without a place to watch football after church on Sundays, so naturally he started going to a local bar to watch the game. Over the course of several weeks, something unexpected happened. He became friends and developed relationships

with many of the people he would see in the bar each week. Over time these encounters and conversations deepened and suddenly they were talking about Jesus and faith. These conversations resulted in several persons accepting Jesus as Savior and many of them beginning to show up and help out at his church.

Consistent

Any healthy relationship requires a consistent investment of time. Consistent means that our interaction is not transactional. We are not simply trying to get you to attend church. We have a real desire to know you as a person and are committed to being in relationship with you as our neighbor, even if you don't attend our church. Consistent interaction can include a phone call, personal invitations to special events, or a simple acknowledgement that you have been prayed for by our church. You will be surprised by the number of neighbors who will become the biggest cheerleaders for the ministry of your church in the community even if they happen to attend another church.

When engagement is authentic, organic, and consistent, we create the space necessary for people to share their faith. Engagement is not a program, it is an ethos that is deeply rooted in a congregation's understanding of intentional discipleship. This ethos can also fundamentally change the way a church approaches the planning of any activity or event. Consider an outreach event that your church does regularly. Examples might include an Easter egg hunt during the Lenten season, an annual clothing giveaway event, or a community yard/garage sale. How would the nature of that event change if it were planned to ensure that our encounter with people at the event was organic, authentic, and consistent? It could involve a team of people whose sole responsibility is to simply talk to people and listen to their stories. We cannot make disciples without first being in relationship with people!

Finally, consider how you might leverage technology in your ministry setting in order to increase connections and possible future relationships. How can we begin conversations and relationships through websites, social media, blogs, videos, and podcasts?

How can we engage people outside of our church in positive ways which meet them where they are, recognizing and articulating some of their deep spiritual needs? Creating the space for conversations may lead to new relationships. But do not forget, technology does not replace authentic in-person relationships, but it may be a very good starting place. Discipleship begins with relationships—authentic, organic, and consistent.

The Rev. Junius B. Dotson is General Secretary of Discipleship Resources, the general agency of The United Methodist Church responsible for resourcing, training, and supporting spiritual formation, new church development, and revitalization of local churches. Previously, he served as senior pastor of Saint Mark United Methodist Church in Wichita, Kansas.

“When engagement is authentic, organic, and consistent, we create the space necessary for people to share their faith. It's not a program. It is an ethos that is deeply rooted in a congregation's understanding of intentional discipleship.”

"...ONE POINT OF VIEW - TO PROMOTE, SO FAR AS I AM ABLE, VITAL, PRACTICAL RELIGION; AND BY THE GRACE OF GOD TO BEGET, PRESERVE, AND INCREASE THE LIFE OF GOD IN THE SOULS OF MEN."

JOHN WESLEY



Being an Evangelist is everyone's job

BY BLAKE BRADFORD
Special Contributor

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!"

Isaiah 6:8 (NRSV)

While the word *evangelism* may have its Greek roots in the proclamation and sharing of the Good News, one is more likely to see evangelism listed as a department, committee, or "ministry" in congregations today. Evangelism has become synonymous for *marketing*—a line in the budget to pay for inclusion in the telephone book's yellow pages (do those actually still exist?) and for the advertisement in the local newspapers' Saturday Religion Page (which is only read by church folks!).

But evangelism is supposed to be personal. For years now, surveys and research have shared that marketing and "a visit from the pastor" are not enough to convert unchurched folks into church members, much less vital disciples of Jesus Christ. Through the grace and empowerment of the Holy Spirit, it is disciples who make disciples. And that requires vital congregations focused on *disciple-making* and *disciple-equipping*. It requires every one of us, in our own way and through our own giftedness, to answer God by saying, "Here am I; send me."

However, we currently seem quite squeamish about fulfilling Jesus' Great Commission for us. At the 2016 Grow By One Summit held in Little Rock, keynote speaker Kay Kotan shared that the average United Methodist member invites someone to worship once *every 38 years*. Note that her statistic refers to the



Blake Bradford

invitation to worship, which is only one step toward the making of a disciple. As Christians, we seem to be under the mistaken impression that evangelism is somebody else's job. While we debate the applicability the "E-word" to our own lives, the May 18, 2015 issue of the *Harvard Business Review* contained an article by Apple Computer's former Chief Evangelist (seriously, that was his title!) Guy Kawasaki who explains his method of "proclaim[ing] the good news that that Macintosh would make everyone more creative and productive."

In a world of "nones" and "dones" in which our response has been to separate our Sunday identities from our lives in the daily marketplace, the marketplace is claiming the concept of *evangelism* for its own use. In his HBR article, former Chief Evangelist Kawasaki shares:

Many businesses have embraced the idea that customers are potential evangelists; the most ardent of them will spread the word about your company's products or services without pay. But it's important to remember that managers—even those outside the marketing department—can be evangelists too.

If you're a leader, you *should* evangelize for your organization and what it has to offer, and you should feel comfortable playing this role both internally—in break rooms, over e-mail, through collaborative platforms—and externally, at industry conferences and via LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter. In the social age, evangelism is everyone's job.

This article in a business journal convicts us as a people of faith. The author is correct that, "Evangelism is everyone's job," and yet we, as Christ's evangelists, have gotten out of practice. As I read the *Harvard Business Review* explain the step by step process of creating a culture of evangelism for tech companies in Silicon Valley, I felt that I myself have not risen to the standards and aspirations of corporate "evangelism," much less Jesus' Great

Commission.

I believe that today's world—a secular marketplace filled with the "nones" and those "done" with church—needs individual disciples committed to sharing our stories. We need to be open about our own personal walk with Jesus. Vital disciples share our faith.

In order to equip us to share our walk with Jesus with the unchurched and nominally religious folks that cross our path, the Center for Vitality has worked with Kay Kotan, a dedicated layperson and keynote speaker at our 2017 VITAL! Annual Conference, to create a faith sharing process and curriculum titled *Unpacking Your Faith Stories*. The free downloadable curriculum, found at vitaldisciples.org/curriculum/ comes complete with a leader's guide, videos, participant handouts, and promotional tools. We invite every church to use this curriculum in a small group to learn and practice faith sharing. Note that I used the word "practice." This curriculum is not designed for you to simply learn about faith sharing as some theological construct. *Unpacking Your Faith Stories* is designed as a process for a Christ follower to *practice* faith sharing with the other group members. By claiming Christ's Good News and God's good work in your own life during class-time, you are being equipped as an instrument of the Holy Spirit to share Christ out in your community.

As disciples, we are all evangelists. We have all been given the Good News of Christ. Now it is time for us to say "send me" and to use our witness by making more disciples of Jesus Christ, who make disciples equipped to transform lives, communities and the world!

The Rev. Dr. Blake Bradford serves in the Center for Vitality as the Assistant Director of Clergy Development. Email: blake.bradford@arumc.org. Learn more about the resourcing ministry of the Center at vitality.arumc.org.

Faith Sharing made easy with vitaldisciples.org

BY MARTHA TAYLOR
Interim Editor

Years ago at a communication workshop, the facilitator shared that her spouse could go on a week-long camping trip with three of his

best buddies, come home and not know a single thing about what was going on in his friends' lives. In contrast, she said, she could spend an hour with a group of women whom she'd never before met, and would know everything about them: childbirth, ex-boyfriends, favorite place to eat, where they wanted to be buried, and they would have booked a vacation for the entire group.

All that is to say many people (men and women) have never met a stranger and are comfortable talking about their interests, careers, and families. Others hang back to get a feel for the room before starting a conversation.

But ask people in either of these camps to talk about their faith story and the silence is deafening. It's not that they don't have a faith story. What usually holds them back is they don't know how or feel comfortable telling it. This is true even when they know sharing their faith is as important an aspect of their faith life as worship, reading scripture, or prayer.

Happily, Kay Kotan, the author of *Get Their Name* and lay person from the Missouri Annual Conference, has

provided an excellent resource to take the fear factor out of sharing faith. No stranger to Arkansas, Kotan has been a frequent workshop leader and was one of four keynote presenters at the 2017 Annual Conference.

Central to the faith sharing resources on vitaldisciples.org is Kotan's *Unpacking Your Faith Stories* curriculum, written expressly for the Arkansas Conference. The four-week curriculum offers a building block method that begins with participants discovering (or rediscovering) God's presence in their lives. In the second week, participants begin to capture their important or life-changing faith moments. Week three of the study focuses on sharing, or as Kotan suggests,

"gifting" others with your story. And the study concludes by encouraging class members to live out their faith through prayer, presence, gifts, service and witness.

Kotan presents a brief video message to go with the theme for each week and class members have a one-page handout on which to record their thoughts and ideas.

Supporting resources include a PowerPoint presentation that may be shown in worship, graphics for both print and social media, bulletin covers, and wallet cards. All of the materials may be downloaded in either color or black and white. The website offers a suggested

[See SHARING, page 7]



Sharing (from page 6)

timeline for promoting the class and offers short invitations to be used in bulletins, newsletters, or online.

Kotan suggests that the discipline of faith sharing isn't a "one and done."

"Learning to share our faith stories takes time and practice, writes Kotan. "We struggle with the act of faith sharing, let alone the expectation of doing so. Offering this learning opportunity on a regular basis will strengthen your congregation's confidence in sharing their faith stories leading to an invitational culture for your church!"

Annual Conference Teaching, Bishop's workshop

Visitors to vitaldisciples.org may also view Kotan's keynote presentation from the 2017 Annual Conference. Kotan talks about unpacking her "faith" bags: the things that she had experienced that made up her faith story. Also available on the site is a video recording of Bishop Mueller's presentation, "Getting Comfortable with Professing Faith," from the 2016 Grow by One Summit.

To find these and other faith sharing resources, go to vitaldisciples.org/faithsharing.



Nine relational evangelism ideas that work

- 1** Partner with a Christian student group on a local college campus and host a late night coffee/study session during finals week
- 2** Encourage members to have a meal a week with an unchurched family
- 3** Frequent the same coffeeshop/restaurant and develop relationships
- 4** Go to the same non-Christian barber/stylist
- 5** Pray for opportunities each day to develop relationship with non-Christians
- 6** Join an organization to connect with non-Christians
- 7** Develop meaningful relationships with your non-Christian co-workers
- 8** Gift Christmas gifts (like baked goods) to your neighbors
- 9** Teach in an ESL class

This article was originally published at ThomRainer.com on Sept. 15, 2015. Dr. Rainer can be found on Twitter [@ThomRainer](https://twitter.com/ThomRainer) and at facebook.com/Thom.S.Rainer.



Take the next steps toward vital discipleship



Discern Next Steps!

What are actionable next steps, and responsibilities. Pastors and Lay members work together.



Develop a Team!

Pastors and Lay members identify and recruit one person with special skills and gifts in each of the four VITAL! areas of focus.



Start the Journey!

Follow the calendar to start a year-long focus on creating vital disciples.



Plan the Year!

Watch plenaries, become familiar with study materials and resources, answer questions in guidebook, use the calendar to plan your church focus on the four areas of VITAL!



Accountable Discipleship

Experience God's grace in community! Learn how to use Wesleyan small groups to grow deeper as vital, accountable disciples.

- Small Group Leader Tools
- Companion Resources
- Promotional Tools & Sermon Starters



Faith Sharing

Sharing your story creates a doorway to invite others into relationship with Jesus Christ. Equip vital disciples to share their faith with others.

- Curriculum & Video Teachings by Kay Kotan & The Center for Vitality
- Promotional Tools



200,000 Reasons

Vital discipleship means putting your Christian faith into action. 200,000 children in Arkansas, one of every 4 kids, struggles with food insecurity. Fight childhood hunger through feeding ministries, public witness and education.

- Devotional & Teaching
- Feed, Provide, & Garden Toolkits
- Advocacy & Witness



Stewardship

Vital disciples practice a life of generosity. Discover the power of personal stewardship to shape your soul and to invest in building the kingdom of God.

- Month by Month Reason to encourage a spirit of Generosity
- Local Church Resources

Want to know more?

Take a look at these top-notch evangelism resources, all are available at cokesbury.com

Get Their Name: Grow Your Church by Building New Relationships

Bob Farr, Doug Anderson, Kay Kotan

The authors show in practical terms how to change the habits of leaders and entire congregations, so that invitation is natural, constant, systemic, genuine, and easy.

CATCH: A Church-Wide Program for Invitational Evangelism

Debi Nixon

Catch is a comprehensive program for invitational evangelism developed by the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection, one of the fastest-growing churches in the U.S. This newly revised and updated resource shows you how to attract visitors to your church, connect them with your faith community, and help them learn to know, love, and serve God.

The Evangelistic Love of God and Neighbor: A Theology of Witness and Discipleship

Bishop Scott J. Jones

In this comprehensive theology of evangelism, Scott J. Jones proposes to ground the practice of evangelism in an understanding of God's love for the world, specifically as seen in the incarnation of God in Christ. In Jesus, God took on all of what it means to be human. Because of this, evangelism must be a ministry to the whole person. The typical distinctions between soul-winning, social action, and church growth evaporate; individual conversion and acts of mercy are part of the same ministry of bringing persons more fully into the reign of a loving God.

VIRAL: How Social Networking Is Poised to Ignite Revival

Leonard Sweet

The gospel is nothing without relationship. And no one gets it like the Google Generation. God came to earth to invite us, personally, into a relationship. And while Christians at times downplay relationships, the social-media generation is completely sold on the idea. In "Viral," Leonard Sweet says Christians need to learn about connecting with others from the experts—those who can't seem to stop texting, IM-ing, tweeting, and updating their Facebook statuses. What would happen, he asks, if Christians devoted less attention to strategies and statistics and paid more attention to pursuing relationships? The current generation is driven by a God-given desire to know others and to be known by others. Most of them, in seeking to connect in meaningful ways, have found a place of belonging that is outside the organized church. Why not bring the two together?

Unbinding the Gospel: Real Life Evangelism

Martha Grace Reese

Based on a major, four-year study of superb evangelism, funded by the Lilly Endowment, *Unbinding the Gospel* is a book for Christians who want a hopeful, powerful, joy-filled way to learn to share their faith. (It's also a book for people who cringe when they hear the "E" word!)

Clip In: Risking Hospitality in Your Church

Fiona Haworth and Jim Ozier

When a cyclist clips into the pedals, a huge risk is involved because he or she must learn a new way to achieve balance and momentum. Growing a church requires the same kind of delicate interplay: balancing attention toward existing members and generating momentum through reaching new people. Creating a culture of hospitality involves risk and relearning old habits, but facilitating both will yield fruitful results.

Transforming Evangelism: The Wesleyan Way of Sharing Faith

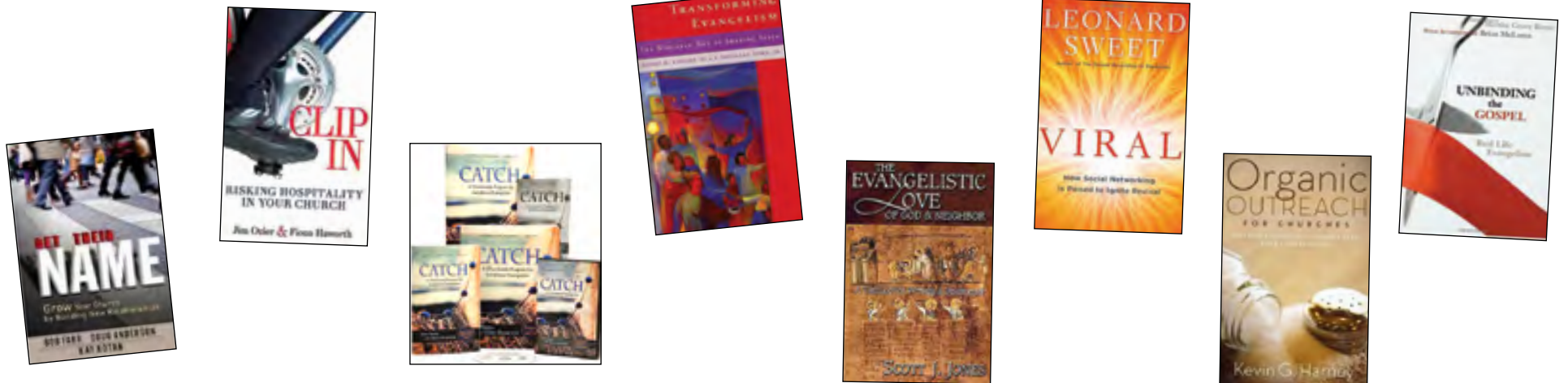
Henry H. Knight III & F. Douglas Powe

Because of the more aggressive and confrontational tactics we hear about, evangelism has developed a bad connotation. Perhaps it's time to re-examine John Wesley's model of evangelism as a full, natural circle—where it's a communal beginning point rather than a solitary end. The central motive of authentic evangelism is: Having received a message that's made all the difference in our lives, we desire to share that message with others in the hope it will transform their lives as well. Wesley models an evangelism that reaches out and welcomes, invites and nurtures, and speaks to both head and heart.

Organic Outreach for Churches: Infusing Evangelistic Passion in Your Local Congregation

Kevin Harney

Nearly all churches and ministries consider themselves dedicated to evangelism, and many explicitly include outreach in their mission statements. But few are actually bearing fruit. Kevin Harney diagnoses this problem and offers guidance for multiplying the outreach impact of churches. *Organic Outreach for Churches* provides direction for local congregations to weave evangelism into the fabric of the church. This book is a roadmap for pastors and leaders who wish to infuse evangelistic passion into every aspect of their church's life.



Road tour aims to unwrap the true meaning of Christmas

People in search of a more meaningful Christmas will have an opportunity to connect with “The True Meaning of Christmas Tour,” coming to Little Rock on December 7.

The United Methodist Church is hitting the road in 16 states this year to offer free hot cocoa, opportunities to lend a helping hand and an invitation to join with others to unwrap the true meaning of Christmas.

“We want to offer our community a different type of gift: an opportunity to celebrate what Christmas is all about by engaging in service with neighbors, boosting joy and building relationships with others,” said the Rev. Richard Lancaster, superintendent of the Central District. “We are also extending an invitation to attend a place of worship or become part of a faith community.”

A number of central Arkansas churches will host the

come-and-go event in Little Rock at the Outlets of Little Rock, located at 11201 Bass Pro Dr., from Noon until 4 p.m. on December. An easy-to-find, bedecked tour truck will be the centerpiece of the festivities. The whole community is invited.

There will also be a collection of non-perishable food items for 200K Reasons to Fight Childhood Hunger, an Arkansas United Methodist initiative, benefiting local food banks.

A survey conducted by Pew Research Center in 2013 indicated that the activities that people least liked at Christmas time are the commercialism/materialism, money/expense, and shopping/crowds. What they most look forward to is spending time with family and friends (69%) and religious reflection/church (11%).

“This tour is a unique way for the church to reach out to people who are experiencing loneliness or who want to give back to the community at this significant time of year,” said Dan Krause, chief executive of United Methodist Communications, which is coordinating the month-long expedition.

“More than 500 volunteers from local United Methodist churches are partnering with us to make this a multi-state effort.”

The True Meaning of Christmas tour will stop in 21 cities, December 2–24. Follow the tour online at UnwrapChristmas.org and #UnwrapChristmas. Watch for additional information later this month.



A rendition of what the Unwrapping Christmas truck will look like when it arrives in Little Rock on Dec. 7.

Adopt (from page 1)

just adds so much more grace to everybody. It helps people to be more open.”

She added that her goal is for the families to be restored, and 90% of families are reunited. Some of them choose to become part of the life of the congregation. Herring believes that is also part of God’s plan.

“Their parents come with us to church, and then people are viewing this redemption of a family, this restoration of a family, this mentorship,” Herring said. “And all that is being watched and viewed within the church, and the church welcoming them and loving them.”

“Our church is about action,” Herring said. “And not just saying it, but people in the church living it. Like somebody in the church has to actually live it out. And people have to wrap around them to see that it can be done.”

Herring is glad, too, that the message of caring for foster children and their families is something regularly preached from the pulpit.

“The pastor has to speak it in a way that is gospel-centered, that’s saying, in a way, that we’re taking care of them is the way that God reaches out and takes care of us,” Herring said.

“That message, over and over, that we don’t get a pass on this.”

How churches are helping

Kaila Parker knows firsthand that being a foster parent can be a tough job but one made easier with the support of the church family.

Parker and her husband are a young couple with no biological children but have already been foster parents to an infant, toddler and preschooler.

Parker says her church, First UMC Morrilton, has been a blessing for her and for foster parents across the county.

“I really wanted us to be supportive of the foster families in the community,” Parker said. “One of my things was if people in the community feel called to be fostering but are not because they feel like there’s no support in the community, we should get some of these support systems in place.”

Parker said it is often the case that children arrive at their foster homes with few personal items and she felt compelled to do something to help. She enlisted the help of Serena Robinette and together with other

[See CHILDREN, page 10]

CLASSIFIEDS

PLACE A CLASSIFIED AD in the *Arkansas United Methodist* for 60 cents per word, no limit. Call 501-324-8035 or email mtaylor@arumc.org. Deadlines appear in page 2 of this issue.

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.

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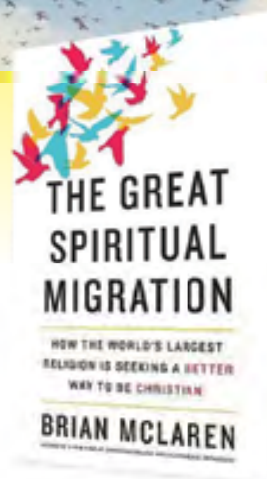
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Help CHRISTIANITY become more CHRISTIAN



Drawing from his work as global activist, pastor, and public theologian, Brian McLaren challenges readers in his book *The Great Spiritual Migration* to stop worrying, waiting, and indulging in nostalgia, and instead, to embrace the powerful new understandings that are reshaping the church. Now, in his new Bible study, *The Way of Life*, McLaren helps groups approach and engage the spiritual, theological, and missional proposals found in his book.

The study includes a participant guide that includes commentary and questions, a comprehensive Leader Guide for small groups, and a DVD featuring Brian McLaren in short video segments for each session.



Children (from page 9)

church members, they started Room 29:11. The name refers to the passage from Jeremiah 29:11, “I know the plans I have in mind for you, declares the LORD; they are plans for peace, not disaster, to give you a future filled with hope.” Room 29:11 houses a store where foster families can shop for shoes, clothes, books, toys, hygiene products and other necessary items.

Parker says the ministry is outgrowing its space so she and Robinette started a tub drive where the congregation donated 20-gallon plastic tubs so clothing items could be stored according to season. Church members have also supported a snack drive because children can arrive at their foster homes having had little to eat.

First UMC Fort Smith held a Foster Care Awareness event where they invited a number of organizations and agencies to talk with the congregation about the ways the congregation could support the foster children and families in the area. Included in the event were state and non-profit organizations what provide direct services, such as helping families through the application process to become foster pattern’s and indirect services such as the Boys and Girls Club which provides recreational and character building programs for the children.

Associate Pastor the Rev. Sara Bayles said a member of Governor Asa Hutchinson’s “Restoring Hope,” special commission spoke with the congregation during worship. They learned that there more than 900 children in foster care in Sebastian County.

Both Herring and Parker



Ashley Herring is proud that her church, First UMC Heber Springs embraces foster families, by commissioning them during worship.

say having the support of local congregations can make a real difference for families considering fostering or adoption. The encouragement and support from a church body assures the family that there will be a support group surrounding them with love and a sense of belonging that may not always be present in a community.

For ideas about how your church

can do more for foster families, the two suggest connecting with local DCFS offices, agencies providing services for foster families and talking with foster families with whom church members are familiar.

“Not everybody is willing or can bring a child into their home,” Herring said. “But everybody has a place in doing something with this. Everybody.”

National Adoption Awareness Month

National Adoption Awareness Month is an initiative sponsored by the Children’s Bureau, in partnership with AdoptUSKids and Child Welfare Information Gateway. Each November, National Adoption Month brings awareness to the needs of children and youth waiting for a “forever family.” This year the theme is building an effective local response system to support prospective families in the initial stages of considering a teen adoption—and the later stages of preparing for and adjusting to it—by offering support services at every step. Teenagers are often hard to place, but they are as much in need of permanency as younger children and risk exiting the foster care system without any legal or emotional ties. A young person bereft of any family ties lacks the foundational support and compass all youth need as they mature into adulthood. For information and resources, go to <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/nam/>

COMING UP

Statewide UMW to meet Nov. 11

The 14th Annual Meeting of the Arkansas Conference United Methodist Women is scheduled at 9:30 a.m. on Saturday, Nov. 11 at St. James UMC, 321 Pleasant Valley Dr., Little Rock.

The meeting will include four town hall style groups around the theme of “Be Bold—Advocate, Experience and Learn.” Registration is \$20 and includes lunch and a program book; at the door registration is \$30. To register, go to <https://www.eiseverywhere.com/acumw>

Spiritual Leadership Practices: Living into God’s Vision (Online)

Jacqui King, Director of Leadership for Congregational Vitality will lead this online event at 7 p.m. Central on Tuesday, November 14.

Focusing on building and transforming small groups, this webinar will share insights about moving forward with implementing healthy annual learning schedules that promote increasing spiritual practices to support small groups, Sunday school, leadership

and community mission experiences. Visit [Spiritual-leadership-practices-living-into-gods-vision](http://www.umcgiving.org/ministry-articles/united-methodist-student-day) for more information and to register.

UM Student Sunday Nov. 26

Special Sundays are designated Sundays throughout the year that provide opportunities for giving. United Methodist Student Day (Nov. 26) is dedicated to supporting students. There are many United Methodists without the resources to attend the school of their choice, or for some, any school at all. These are bright and dedicated students who need scholarships. The United Methodist Student Day offering supports United Methodist scholarships administered by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. For resources, go to <http://www.umcgiving.org/ministry-articles/united-methodist-student-day>. To donate by mail, send a check with UM Student Day in the memo line to: GCFA, P.O. Box 340029, Nashville, TN 37203 or to donate online, go to www.umcgiving.org/giveUMSD

VITAL CONGREGATIONS



Church members distribute school supplies at the annual back to school and health fair where 270 children were served this year.

Sylvan Hills Back to School, Health Fair

For the third year, Sylvan Hills UMC has connected with the families in their neighborhood through their Back to School & Health event. This year, in partnership with Baptist Health, local physicians, nurses and others with medical backgrounds, more than 270 children had to opportunity to receive vaccinations, school physicals, and hearing exams. Each child received a backpack with school supplies and were able to select other items from their school supply list such as whipes, tissues, and headphones. The event included a uniform room, free library and salon/barber shop for haircuts. Snack packs with information about the church were distributed as well. The Rev. Brittany Watson, senior pastor of the church, estimated that there were 30 volunteers from the church and 20 community representatives offering services.

Watson credits the congregation members for making the event

a reality. In particular, Audrey Burks and other nurses and health professionals in the congregation felt that they could use their skills to help people stay healthy.

“We have seen our relationship with students become the most important part of our ministry, Watson said. “We joke that this was not what we had in mind, as we planned for senior citizens and adults, but it was what God had in mind the entire time. We now do many more sports physicals than diabetes screenings, which is a delightfully divine surprise.”

The church holds a free wellness clinic each month with regular activities such as screenings, access to a physician and refreshments; however, each month the wellness theme changes.

“We have seen congregation members live out their call to discipleship and community members find a place where they are loved, body and soul.”

School, church partnership blesses all

Trinity UMC in Little Rock has been a partner to Brady Elementary School for nearly a decade. Over the years the church has expanded from providing needed supplies to helping with uniforms, book giveaways, one on one tutoring, staff appreciation activities, assisting with classroom parties and even improving the school grounds.

Not satisfied to support one school, the church is also partnering with Hall High School in Little Rock.



Trinity UMC members Becky Matthews and Sara Wilf prepare items for distribution to local school children.

OBITUARIES

BRINKLEY

Eugenia Faye Tumey Geisler

Eugenia Faye Tumey Geisler (Nannie) passed away July 14, 2017, following a car accident and hospitalization. She was 87.

Faye was born to Isaac and Ethel Tumey on May 7, 1930 in Lake Village, Ark. She was the oldest child, followed by sister, Florence, who died at birth, and brother, Robert. Her parents divorced when she was a young child and her mother remarried her late sister's husband, Richard Hardwick. The new family included step-sister, Mary Anna, and step-brother, Harry. Later, half-sister, Nancy and half-brothers, Dick and Mack would complete the family.

Faye attended the Idlewild School and DeValls Bluff School. She worshiped in a one room little church that her step-father helped build in the Peppers Lake community near her home. Richard was very involved with the church and was the foundation to Faye's love of church and God.

Faye met her husband Carl Geisler, when she was 18 and the couple married on Aug. 27, 1949 at the



Methodist Church in DeValls Bluff. The couple had seven children over the next seven 1/2 years including two sets of twins. They moved to Brinkley in 1956.

Faye's loves were God, family, friends, her church, yard work, and cooking. She sought to instill in her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren a passion for life, commitment to family and friends, and a love for Jesus. She volunteered many hours for various community and church organizations including volunteering her time at the voting poles and acting as a substitute teacher with Brinkley Public Schools.

Faye was a very active member of the First United Methodist Church of Brinkley and the United Methodist Women's group. Throughout the years, she had been a Sunday school teacher for all age groups and, most recently, was teaching the adults class. She served on the church council, was a lay member to the Annual Conference, and served as president of the local UMW unit. For the last 12 years she has served in a number of capacities at the UMW at Forrest City and the Southeast District level. She served as an UMW officer at the conference level for eight years. She devoted time to other organizations

such as Gli Amica, B & PW, Master Gardeners, and AR Federated Women. For several years she was the chair for the local cancer drive.

Faye enjoyed sewing; she made her children's clothing and mending or hemming the clothing of her grand- and great-grandchildren.

Faye is survived by her children: Dennie Geisler and wife Jacque, Bubba Geisler and wife Terry, Ronnie Geisler, Donnie Geisler and wife Diana, Sissy Fuller, Brenda Lisko, and Linda Rieke and husband Danny; her siblings: Harry Hardwick, Mary Anna Hastings, Dick Hardwick and wife Marilyn, Mack Hardwick and wife Brenda, Nancy Terhune and husband Butch; Carl's sisters, Virginia Byrd and husband Derward, Wanda Fischer and husband Olin, and Shirley Bennett and husband Keith; 15 grandchildren; and 15½ great-grandchildren.

She is preceded in death by her parents, Isaac Tumey, and Richard and Ethel Hardwick; infant sister, Florence Tumey; brother, Robert Tumey; husband, Carl Geisler; and grandson, Caleb Geisler.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations can be made to the Brinkley First UMC.

The family received friends on Sunday, July 16 at the Brinkley First

United Methodist Church Fellowship Hall. The funeral service celebrating her life was held at the Brinkley First UMC on Monday, July 17 with a graveside service immediately following. Officiants were the Revs. Mike Smith and Robert Hunt.

SMACKOVER

Rev. Leon Dixon

The Rev. Leon T. Dixon, Jr., 49, of Smackover passed away Friday, September 29, 2017 at his residence.

Born March 9, 1968 in Little Rock, he was the son of Leon Thomas, Sr. and Loretta Yarberry Dixon. Leon was a graduate of Southern Nazarene University in Bethany, OK where he received both his B.A. and Master's degrees.

From 1988–2006, Rev. Dixon served at Barnett Memorial, Perryville, Cornerstone, Benton, New Hope and Grace Churches of the Nazarene.

In 2006 he transitioned to the United Methodist Church and served in Junction City and Glenwood before becoming the pastor of Smackover and Silver Hill United Methodist Churches.

Leon was preceded in death by his mother. Survivors include his wife of 24 years, Rebekah Dixon of

Smackover along with his son, Robert Thomas Dixon and daughter, Anna Marie Dixon. Also surviving are his father, Leon Thomas Dixon, Sr. (Shelby), one brother, James Thomas Dixon (Tammy), a sister, Teresa Renee' Fowler (Roger),



his mother-in-law, Angela Brackman and brother-in-law, Adrian Brackman. Leon is also survived by nieces and nephews, Dalton (Morgan), Baylee, Ashleigh Ann, and Gentry and a special god-daughter, Sadie along with a host of family and friends.

Visitation was held on Sunday, October 1 at First United Methodist Church in Smackover. Funeral services took place on Monday, October 2 in First United Methodist Church of Smackover. Interment followed the service at Olive Hill Cemetery.

Memorials may be made to First United Methodist Church, 500 W. 7th St., Smackover, AR 71762, Silver Hill United Methodist Church, 2038 Silver Hill Loop, Mt. Holly, AR 71758 or to New Hope Church of the Nazarene, 5519 Atwood Road, Little Rock, AR 72206.

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4
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Matthew 5:15

Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, And it gives light to everyone in the house.



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