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A Way Forward Town Hall gatherings set for early 2018

BY MARTHA TAYLOR
Interim Editor

In a December 12 email message and video, Bishop Gary E. Mueller announced the dates and locations for a series of gatherings to discuss the work of The Commission on a Way Forward, which was organized by the Council of Bishops following the 2016 General Conference.

The town hall meetings—open to all United Methodist clergy and laity—have been arranged to allow participants to learn more about the Commission and to provide feedback and ask questions about the three conceptual models the Commission proposed to the Council of Bishops in November.

According to Mueller, the Commission on a Way Forward Town Hall meetings have a threefold purpose.

- Provide attendees with an overview of the history, process, three preliminary models, and next steps of The Way Forward. (Visit <http://bit.ly/2B0ryAN> to read about the three models.)
- Facilitate discussion among attendees about strengths,



PHOTO BY THE REV. MAIDSTONE MULENGA

The Commission on a Way Forward convened in Nashville, Tennessee, October 30–November 1, 2017.

weaknesses, and questions regarding the three preliminary models.

- Gather feedback to share with The Commission on a Way Forward.

The 2016 General Conference asked the Council of Bishops to provide leadership, to specifically address disagreements associated with human sexuality in the church. In response, the bishops organized the Commission, a group of 32

United Methodist from across the globe, who have been tasked with making recommendations around issues related to human sexuality and church policy. The Commission shared three possible models with the council at its November 2017 meeting, to which the Council of Bishops provided feedback.

“We now are asking annual conferences to engage in reflection, and provide more feedback,” said Mueller in the video. “I would like

the Arkansas Conference to have a facilitated discussion about these three models...to give you a chance to offer input, and ask questions about these models.”

The dates, times and locations for the town hall meetings are:

- Saturday, January 13, 10 am at FUMC North Little Rock
- Sunday, January 14, 2:30 pm at FUMC Jonesboro
- Saturday, January 20, 10 am at Central UMC Fayetteville
- Saturday, January 20, 10 am—Southwest, El Dorado FUMC
- Sunday, January 21, 2:30 pm—Southwest, Arkadelphia FUMC
- Sunday, January 21, 2:30 pm—Northeast, Searcy FUMC
- Sunday, January 21, 2:30 pm—Southeast, Monticello FUMC
- Saturday, January 27, 10 am—Central, Salem Conway
- Sunday, January 28, 3 pm—Northwest, Russellville FUMC
- Sunday, January 28, 2:30 pm—Southeast, Pine Bluff FUMC
- Sunday, February 4, 2:30 pm—Southeast, Forrest City FUMC

Each session will present identical information and will be facilitated in the same manner so those interested

[See GATHERINGS, page 5]

2018 Annual Conference plans echo theme of hope

BY MARTHA TAYLOR
Interim Editor

United Methodists from Arkansas are already making plans for the 2018 Arkansas Annual Conference scheduled for Sunday, June 17 through Wednesday, June 20 at the Hot Springs Convention Center in Hot Springs, Arkansas.

The Bishop, with the assistance of the Annual Conference Planning Committee and Worship Committee, is finalizing details for the event and is pleased to announce that Bishop Ruben Saenz, Jr. will be the guest preacher for opening worship Sunday evening, June 17. The Rev. Junius B. Dotson, General Secretary (chief executive officer) of Discipleship Ministries, will lead daily teaching sessions Monday–Wednesday. The Rev. Mary Jane Cole, an Arkansas Conference deacon appointed to Sacred Path, Inc., will be the worship

leader for the Monday evening memorial service.

Bishop Ruben Saenz, Jr. was elected bishop by the delegates of the South Central Jurisdiction on July 14, 2016 and assigned to be the Resident Bishop of the Great Plains Area, effective September 1, 2016.

Saenz is a graduate of Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas and received his Master of Divinity and his Doctor of Ministry degrees from SMU Perkins School of Theology. He has been married to Maye for 34 years; they have four children, all of which are active in the life of the church with his two sons Aaron and Ruben III serving in the

Rio Texas Conference.

Saenz began his call to ministry in 1993 after successful tenures in the education and small-business sectors in Rio Grande City, Texas. He graduated in 1997 with a Master of Divinity degree from SMU Perkins School of Theology and was awarded the Perkins Faculty Award for the student who best exemplified the goals and mission of Perkins. He would later receive his Doctor of Ministry Degree from Perkins in 2009.

Saenz served as Student-Intern Pastor at Oak Cliff UMC in Dallas from 1995–97. He served his first appointments within the Rio Grande Conference at La Trinidad UMC and El Divino Redentor UMC in El Paso from 1997–2000, where he increased worship attendance by 200 percent over four years. He served as Senior Pastor for El Buen Pastor UMC in Edinburg from 2001–2011. When



Bishop
Ruben
Saenz, Jr.

Saenz left in 2011, the church became known as the largest Hispanic-American United Methodist Church in the country with over 900 members. Worship attendance grew by 150 percent over ten years. Giving increased over 300 percent during both of those appointments. Saenz focused his ministry toward facing the issues of generational, social and systemic poverty in those regions.

In 2010, Saenz was appointed to serve as the Southwest Texas Director of Congregational and New Church Development. He helped start 11 new faith communities for the Conference. He held that appointment until 2014. He was named Director of Conference Connectional Ministries and Executive Director of the Mission Vitality Center in January 2015. As Mission Vitality Center’s Executive Director, he established an extensive

[See CONFERENCE, page 3]

Ringling in the New

BY WILLIAM O. "BUD" REEVES
Special Contributor

I hope everyone in the Arkansas United Methodist constituency had a wonderful celebration of Advent, Christmas, and the New Year. I love a new year. It's like a breath of crisp, cold air. It's time to turn a page and start fresh. It's time to leave the past behind and hope for a better tomorrow.



William O. "Bud" Reeves

Of course, January 1 is not always a clean break with the past. We bring with us the baggage of what has gone before. The consequences of our mistakes, bad choices and sins follow us.

Neither can we wait until the New Year to start the new year. I started making plans for 2018 months ago, from ministry initiatives to family vacations. As I was experiencing the end of 2017, my mind was thinking about 2018. (I am even writing this column in mid-December!)

Nevertheless, the changing of the year is a time to turn a corner, to reflect on the year past, and to plan for a year ahead. It's a good time to change habits that have become destructive and to start practices that will make your life better.

The famous (or infamous) New Year's resolutions are usually futile attempts. Then the diet lasts three weeks, the exercise machine becomes a place to hang clothes, and the daily prayer time becomes weekly, then monthly, then "Where did I put that *Upper Room*?" Studies vary between a 66% and 90% failure rate, with the tipping point being the second week in February. Most resolutions have been abandoned by Valentine's Day. The gym is packed in January, only to be empty again in March.

Any attempt we make at self-improvement is good, but it is doomed to failure if all we depend on is self. Partnering with other people for accountability is a strong deterrent to backsliding. Partnering with God plugs into the ultimate strength for positive change. Real change in our lives—to our waistline, our muscle tone, our relationships, or our spiritual life—requires three things:

COMMITMENT. No surprise here. If you want to change, you have to want to change. You can't change because someone else tells you to. Real change never comes easily nor happens quickly. There has to be a deep desire in the heart to propel us to action. Commitment is not a popular concept in our current self-indulgent culture, but it is a constant with those who excel.

COVENANT. In the old *Disciple Bible Study* series, Dr. David Lowes Watson defined

"covenant" as "an agreement made in a moment of strength so that in a moment of weakness it cannot be undone." The story of human failure is a story of broken covenants; the hope of the human future lies in covenants kept. God, as the strong partner, made covenants with God's people and never abandoned them. Marriage vows are made in a moment of strong love so that the troubles and tragedies of life should not undo them. The New Year is a moment of strength as we gaze out across the landscape of 2018. Our attempts at change will be much more likely to succeed if we covenant with a strong partner or a strong God to make a necessary change.

COMMISSION. Commission is a combination of commandment and call. The greatest commission ever was the command of Jesus to make disciples of all nations. (Matthew 28:19-20) Implicit in the commandment was a call to the disciples who had been with Jesus to commit their lives to this mission. Big change—in churches, schools, communities, nations, and the world—can happen if we believe we are commissioned. God calls us to tell the truth, to seek justice, to promote peace, to make disciples. With God's help, we can apply ourselves to the task, believing we have been commissioned to do so.

John Wesley loved the New Year. He usually had a Watch Night service to mark the changing

of the year. Part of the Watch Night service was a Covenant Prayer Wesley had borrowed from the Puritans. Anytime Christians commit themselves to live more deeply in their faith, these are wonderful words to pray:

I am no longer my own, but thine.
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed for thee or laid aside for thee,
exalted for thee or brought low for thee.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal.
And now, O glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.
And the covenant which I have made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven.
Amen.

I am glad we get a chance—often—to make changes, do better, and go deeper with God. I hope 2018 is that kind of year for you!

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

Welcoming Guests at Church

BY DANIELLE WILLIAMS

I have served The United Methodist Church (UMC) for seven years in communication and development roles. During that time, I worked with approximately 1,000 churches



Danielle Williams

from Minnesota to Texas. Now, I am blessed to be back in the Arkansas Conference serving as the Director of the Center for Communication.

A few years ago, I worked as a consultant and facilitated a strategic planning process for a church in Indianapolis. One of the critical elements of this process is to make an unannounced visit to worship. While the ministry opportunities I have had through the UMC and as a consultant have been life changing in the very best ways, they have also been eye opening to the ways in which we fail to welcome new people into the church.

The weekend I attended worship with the church in Indianapolis, I played a game I like to call *Friendly Church Bingo*. It goes like this: Every time your church shows me how absolutely, fabulously welcoming you are, I give you 5 points. If your church

gets 5 points 5 times in a row, you are officially friendly.

Let's play. I'll be me. You be the church I went to in Indianapolis.

Things started off well. People smiled at me in the parking lot so I am giving your church 5 points. I love seeing happy faces headed to worship.

There were no signs telling me where to go to find your sanctuary (or anything else by the way). I am afraid that's going to cost you 5 points.

I eventually found your sanctuary and made it to worship on time in your beautiful, 13th century inspired building. I will remember people hated signs in the 13th century. As I entered your sanctuary, the nice man standing at your door gave me a bulletin. He did not say hello. He did smile, however. I am going to give you 5 points for this, but I am doing so begrudgingly.

When I sat down, the lady behind me smiled but didn't talk to me. In fact, no one in your beautiful building did, even though I arrived early and I smiled back at all your smiling faces. Consequently, I busied myself by looking at the majesty of

your architecture. Then I noticed someone else decided to sit down in the same pew. Things were about to get exciting; I could feel it and they did...for him. He sat as far away from me as he could and he engaged in a delightful conversation with other people he knew. Your church loses 5 points.

Worship begins. You have excellent liturgy, good preaching, meaningful prayers, and heartfelt music. During *Pass the Peace* people come to talk to me. They quickly say, "Peace be with you." You think I am going to give you 5 points for this, but I am not. If your church members are only going to talk to me when someone tells them to do so, shows me your church members are obedient. It doesn't show me they are friendly. Since your *Pass the Peace* lasted ten minutes and all your church people moved to the front to say peace to one another, leaving the new people in the back standing around wondering what is happening, you lose another 5 points. This is not going well for you.

Church is over now. I am getting up to leave. No one speaks to me. The man who sat as far away from me as possible, unfortunately, is blocking the only exit out of this pew. He is talking to one of his

friends. They kept talking. I am clearly standing behind him. They kept talking anyway. No one speaks to me. I sat down. His conversation ended after 6 minutes and 11 seconds. I had the chance to time that conversation, since no one was talking to me and I was trapped in the pew. It was lovely. Your church loses ALL the points. Oh, but you didn't have any to lose.

As I leave, your nice pastor talks to me. She is warm and caring. It is too late. You lose *Friendly Church Bingo*. You do not pass go. You do not collect \$200. Thank you for playing. Yes, I know that last bit is from

Monopoly.

I really wish this example was not true. It is funny to read about, but it is not funny to experience. That Sunday was one of too many I have spent in a church where no one except the pastor spoke to me. These churches are scattered from Minnesota to Texas, and I am willing to wager Arkansas has some unfriendly congregations, too. Church family, I love you and I say this with love. If you get everything in your service right, but you are only welcoming to the people who are already part

[See WELCOMING, page 3]

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GROWING TOGETHER IN CHRIST: A word from the Bishop



BY GARY E. MUELLER

The Three-in-One-Reality

I want to share my heart with you as we begin 2018. I'm going to be as honest as possible, which is not always easy. But I do so as one filled with hope because of the most potent force in all of creation: the 'three-in-one-reality' who changes everything about everything—God. I also do so with a grateful heart that overflows because of who you are and the difference you are making as Jesus' disciples.

It's an understatement to say that we live in overwhelming times. But it's true. Life is happening at an ever-quickening pace. Catastrophes—whether natural or human-made—are occurring more frequently and on a larger scale. Technology is changing the world in ways that simultaneously enhance and threaten human life. The world is polarized and deeply divided. Scandals are now expected as part of the daily news cycle. Terrorist states and lone-wolf terrorists loom over daily life. Culture is rapidly turning away from faith. And, closer to home, our beloved United Methodist Church is growing older, smaller and facing an uncertain future because of struggles around human sexuality.

These things are real. And overwhelming. And increasingly threatening. No wonder there is so much anxiety—in our world and in us.

So how do we respond?

Our job is not to pretend they don't exist, bemoan them or be overwhelmed by them, as tempting as that may be. Our task is to live with vitality because we intentionally stake our lives on the reality of the "three-in-one reality."

Reality number one: God is still God. We are not alone. We can live with hope, even joy, in every moment because God is at work making God's Will just as real on earth as it already is in heaven.

Reality number two: Jesus is still Lord. He gives us what we absolutely need, but can never acquire on our own: salvation, second chances and a transformed life. Not just in eternity, but starting here and now.

Reality number three: the Holy Spirit is still the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is infusing us with the power of love; guiding us where we need to go and helping us accomplish what we otherwise could not.

This "three-in-one reality" empowers us to see beyond a frightening world to the signs of God that are all around us. Churches starting day cares in communities desperately needing them. 200,000 Reasons having an impact so great that the number of hungry children in Arkansas has diminished to 176,000. Churches offering recovery ministries changing lives. New ways of reaching out, like "Beer and Hymns." Youth discovering the joy of living as Jesus' disciples at Veritas, Refuge and confirmation camps. Accountable discipling groups springing up and shaping lives. Churches experiencing average worship attendances growing in communities where population is declining. Young people experiencing a call to ministry. Churches expanding their ministry by adding second campuses. Hopeless people discovering new life because a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. And so many other things that the list could fill page after page.

So here's the bottom line. When you look at life through the "three-in-one-reality" you see life for what it is—filled with sin, struggles, and suffering. But you see it even more clearly for what it really is—that place where God is making a difference in the lives of Jesus' disciples who are bringing transformation to lives, communities and the world.

My prayer for you this new year is that you invite the "three-in-one reality" of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit to shape you so that you see, experience and live the way God has created you to live.

Gary E. Mueller

Welcoming (from page 2)

of your congregation, you missed the mark. You are not showing God's grace to those God has beckoned to you. If you believe the church belongs to God and not to you, you absolutely must embrace the people God sends to your doorstep with a welcome reflective of God's love.

Why? Unfortunately, not everyone is as willing to experience unfriendly churches as often as I am. Years earlier, a dear friend of mine went to the same church I just described and had a similar experience. She is not going back. More importantly, this church is one of a handful of unfriendly churches she visited when she was seeking and she gave up entirely. She is not seeking you out anymore. She is not seeking God anymore, either. When we are so unfriendly seekers stop seeking the Creator of the universe, we must not only repent of this sin but we must also change behavior. We must embrace the beloved children God sends our way.

How?

- (1) **Clear Information**—People start to decide if you are friendly before they get to your sanctuary. Does your website have helpful information, like worship times and location? Do you have signs clearly posted to help people find Sunday school rooms, the fellowship hall, bathrooms, the sanctuary, etc.? If you do not, this is an important place to start.
- (2) **Trained Greeters**—Volunteers who serve in these roles can be the first contact for guests. They need to be prepared to give a warm welcome and even engage in a brief conversation with people they do not know, in

addition to handing out bulletins.

- (3) **Harness the Power of Extroverts**—There are folks in your church who genuinely enjoy talking to new people. Ask them to serve your church. Place them in strategic locations, where guests typically sit, and ask them to strike up conversations. They can speak to guests before worship, during *Pass the Peace*, and after worship. They are free to talk about jobs, children, school, absolutely anything...
- (4) **Make a Plan**—Have a plan in place that your leadership takes seriously concerning welcoming guests. This plan should include: (a) evaluating your web presence and signage, updating them as necessary and keeping them up-to-date (b) recruiting volunteers tasked with welcoming new guests, job descriptions for those volunteers, and defining expectations for what welcoming looks like in your context (c) train your volunteers and congregation to be mindful of welcoming new people (d) have mystery worshippers give you feedback or invite guests to give you feedback and (e) evaluate your welcoming plan at least once annually.

Not sure this is enough to get you started? Head over to the Lewis Center for Church Leadership and learn 50 ways to welcome guests! <https://www.churchleadership.com/50-ways/50-ways-to-welcome-new-people/>

Williams is the director of the Center for Communication in the Arkansas Conference. Email: danielle.williams@arumc.org; 501-324-8030.

Conference (from page 1)

Collaboration and Cultural System Management to better assist local churches with the resources they need to reach the mission field.

Rev. Junius B. Dotson, a recognized visionary leader in church revitalization, has held the position of General Secretary (chief executive officer) of Discipleship Ministries, an international agency of The United Methodist Church since 2016.

Prior to his present position, Rev. Dotson was pastor of Saint

Mark United Methodist Church in Wichita, Kansas, where he was instrumental in transforming the 3,500-member church into a multi-campus congregation. The church is also the host to the E.C. Tyree Health & Dental Clinic that provides affordable care to thousands of patients annually.

Rev. Dotson received his undergraduate degree in political science, with a concentration in economics, at the University of Texas at Arlington. While attending UT Arlington, he was president of the local chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha, the nation's oldest African-American fraternity. Rev. Dotson began his graduate work at Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist

University in Dallas, Texas, and earned his Master of Divinity degree from the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California. He was ordained in June 1992.

In 1996, Rev. Dotson responded to the challenge of planting Genesis United Methodist Church, a new and innovative church in the Silicon Valley of California, which grew into a diverse faith community of nearly 500 people.

A dynamic preacher and public speaker, Rev. Dotson is highly respected for his ability to establish networks that get things done in the faith and larger communities.

From 2009 to 2012, Rev. Dotson served on the Board of Directors of Discipleship Ministries where he

was chair of the New Church Starts/Path1 division of the agency. Rev. Dotson also served on The Wichita Food Bank Executive Board, Wichita Children's Home Board, W.G. Williams Community Foundation Board, Wichita Ministerial Alliance and as a three-term appointee by the governor of Kansas to serve on the Kansas Sentencing Commission.

Rev. Mary Jane Cole earned her M.Div. from Memphis Theological Seminary and is an ordained Deacon in the Arkansas Conference of the United Methodist Church. In addition, she holds degrees in psychology and rehabilitation counseling. She has served as a hospital chaplain and as an associate pastor of First United Methodist

Church Little Rock, Arkansas.

Cole received a certification in Spiritual Direction from SMU Perkins School of Theology and currently maintains a private practice of spiritual direction, Sacred Path, Inc., and a secondary appointment as a Deacon to First United Methodist Church Little Rock. She is endorsed in Spiritual Direction by the United Methodist General Board of Higher Education and Ministry Endorsing Agency.



Rev. Mary Jane Cole

Leadership Unleashed gatherings equip, motivate laity

BY MARTHA TAYLOR
Interim Editor

Since December 2016 lay persons across the Arkansas Conference have been gathering to share their ministry ideas and mission successes, and to envision how their churches could grow and equip leaders to be in ministry with their local mission fields.

Leadership Unleashed is an initiative of the Center for Vitality focused on equipping and energizing laity. Lay Program Coordinator Cathy Hall hosts and facilitates the events, along with lay volunteers Teresa Bolin and Melanie Churchill, and supported by the Rev. Dede Roberts, the Center for Vitality director and the Rev. Blake Bradford, the Center's assistant director.

To date, 290 laypersons from 106 congregations have participated in Leadership Unleashed small group gatherings. Participants were challenged to look at ministry in new ways and invited to consider how their current missions and ministries could be focused on building community relationships, with the objective of sharing their faith and inviting others into a transformational relationship with Jesus. As participants made the connection of mission and ministry with evangelism and witness, they worked together on personal



action plans to turn their excitement of the day into action for tomorrow. They were encouraged to focus on one idea for implementation that will help their congregation grow by one in worship, professions of faith, small groups and community outreach.

As laity continue to be unleashed for ministry, the Center is clearing the way for next steps. In addition, a new partnership is being forged with the Board of Laity to explore how the two can work together to continue to develop additional processes for unleashing lay leadership. A portion of that conversation will focus on the four characteristics of faithful, fruitful disciples identified in the VITAL initiative launched in early 2017.

Join the Conversations

The New Year is ringing in new opportunities for lay persons to join the conversation. All laity are invited to attend a Leadership Unleashed gathering, hosted by the Center for Vitality. These two-hour gatherings will provide space for laity to participate in meaningful conversation by sharing stories of fruitfulness, learning from the work of ministry in their congregations, discussing action plans, and praying for each other's mission field ministries. Dessert and coffee will be served.



COURTESY PHOTO

Grand Avenue UMC in Hot Springs was one of 106 churches to host a Leadership Unleashed gathering.

Upcoming Leadership Unleashed dates and locations are listed below. Unless otherwise noted, all sessions will meet 6:30–8:30 pm. Additional dates will be announced soon. Online registration will open in early January. Visit arumc.org for registration information.

Thursday, Jan. 25—Hunter UMC, Little Rock
Tuesday, Jan. 30—St. Paul UMC, El Dorado
Thursday, Feb. 1—Hope FUMC

Thursday, Feb. 8—Arkadelphia FUMC
Thursday, Feb. 15—Star City FUMC
Sunday, Feb. 18—Shiloh UMC Paragould*
Tuesday, Feb. 20—Stuttgart FUMC
Monday, Feb. 26—Clarksville FUMC
Thursday, Mar. 1—Beebe FUMC
Wednesday, Mar. 7—Forrest City FUMC

*Shiloh UMC Paragould gathering 3–5 pm

2018 Steel-Hendrix Awards and Willson Lecture set for March 12

The Marshall T. Steel Center will honor three extraordinary church and community leaders at the 33rd Annual Steel-Hendrix Awards banquet on Monday, March 12, 2018, at 5:30 p.m. in the Student Life and Technology Center's Worsham Performance Hall North.

The banquet and lecture are sponsored by the Marshall T. Steel Center for the Study of Religion and Philosophy and the Office of the Chaplain. Tickets for the banquet cost \$25 and are available through March 2, 2018. For more information or to purchase banquet tickets, visit www.hendrix.edu/steelhendrixbanquet.

The annual Willson Lecture follows the banquet, and is free and open to the public. This year's guest lecturer is Dr. Teresa Fry Brown, who is the Bandy Professor of Preaching at Candler School of Theology. An ordained Itinerant Elder, she is the fourteenth Historiographer, Editor of the *A.M.E. Review* and is the Executive Director of Research and Scholarship for the African Methodist Episcopal Church. She earned her Ph.D. in Religious and Theological Studies from Iliff School of Theology and the University of Denver, with an emphasis in Religion and Social Transformation. Her Master of Divinity degree is from Iliff School of Theology, and she also holds a Master of Science degree and a Bachelor of Science degree in Speech Pathology and Audiology from the University of Central Missouri in Warrensburg, Missouri. She is the author of five books, including *Delivering the Sermon: Voice, Body and Animation in Proclamation* (Fortress Press,

2008), and of numerous articles and chapters in edited publications.

The Willson Lecture will take place in the context of a worship service at 7 p.m. in Worsham Hall South.

While visiting Hendrix, Fry Brown also will lead a preaching workshop on Tuesday, March 13, 2018, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. in Worsham Hall North.

2018 Steel-Hendrix Award honorees

Rev. Ronnie Miller-Yow—*The Mary and Ira Brumley award for Religious Education.* A native of Dallas, Texas, the Rev. Ronnie Miller-Yow serves as senior pastor at Little Rock's Wesley Chapel and Duncan United Methodist Churches. In addition, he is Chaplain and Dean of Religious Life and Campus Culture at Philander Smith College, located next to Wesley Chapel.

Educated at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, Yow began his career teaching elementary school, but discerned the calling to preach the Gospel and began teaching a different audience. He earned his Master of Divinity degree from Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University. Membership at Wesley Chapel has grown considerably since Yow arrived, with Philander Smith students taking active roles in leadership



Rev. Ronnie Miller-Yow

and participation.

In 2015, Yow became director of the newly-established South Little Rock Teaching Parish, under which Wesley Chapel, Duncan, and White Memorial UMCs work with Philander Smith College to provide mentoring and practical experience opportunities for young people considering a call to ministry.

Rev. Maxine Allen—*The Ethel K. Millar Award of Religion and Social Awareness.* The Rev. Maxine Allen is the Arkansas Conference UMC's Associate Director of Ministries for Mission Field Engagement. The first African-American woman to be ordained Elder in the United Methodist Church in Arkansas, she has worked extensively for social justice in her local community and globally for women, children, and the poor.

Allen holds a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy and Religion from Philander Smith College, and a Master of Divinity from the Interdenominational Theological Center's Gammon Seminary, where in 2008 she was named Alumna of the Year. Her social advocacy spans five decades, beginning with "Sing Out America," a performance group that contained youth of all cultures at a time when interracial groups remained prohibited in many places. She was a founding member of the Sojourner Truth



Rev. Maxine Allen

Players, a Black community theater group in Fort Worth, Texas.

Moving home to Arkansas, Allen became one of the first on-air personalities at KABF Community Radio, providing children's and public affairs programming. She was instrumental in founding the first battered women's shelter in Arkansas (now Women and Children First) and helped to successfully lobby the legislature to adopt stronger domestic violence laws. She served as founding executive director of Second Genesis, a transitional home for women coming from prison.

Allen now serves on the Arkansas Judicial Discipline and Disability Commission; the Arkansas Women's Project Leadership Team; is the first woman to serve as President of the Little Rock Christian Ministerial Alliance; and is a member of the Gammon Seminary Board of Trustees. Within the UMC, she chaired the first Commission on the Status and Role of Women in Arkansas and the Commission on Religion and Race; served as campus minister at UA Little Rock and Dean of the Chapel at Philander Smith College; and as statewide disaster response coordinator.

Amy Bennett Shores—*Hendrix College Youth Minister of the Year.* Amy Bennett Shores grew up in Houghton, Louisiana. She attended Louisiana College in Pineville, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education, and went on to New Orleans Baptist Theological [See AWARDS, page 5]

Mission Field Appointments Vital for Transformation

A process, yes, but one steeped in prayer

BY MARTHA TAYLOR
Interim Editor

Someone (who shall remain anonymous to protect the guilty) recently said, “Using the Hogwarts’ sorting hat would make more sense than the appointment-making process.” While that may seem like a viable option to some, in truth a great deal of thought, research and time go into clergy appointment decisions.

According to the Rev. Mark Norman, dean of Bishop Gary Mueller’s cabinet and Southeast District Superintendent, the Bishop and cabinet members regularly seek ways to fine-tune how appointment are made. The process, according to Norman, is vastly different now than it was even five years ago.

“Among the cabinet it has been said that the appointment process was about salary sheets and spreadsheets where you looked at years of service and how many years an individual had been ordained,” Norman said. “Then the cabinet would try to bump a pastor up according to their years of service in relation to their salary sheet.”

This is a far cry from what happens now, according to Norman. Several priorities inform both process and decision-making; the first being the

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

“The trajectory statement really is the overarching focus of our work,” Norman said. “We ask ourselves throughout the appointment-making season how a clergy person used their gifts to create opportunities to make disciples of Jesus Christ and how this appointment will help to make vital congregations.”

Data collected throughout the year has played an increasingly important role. Information is gathered from a variety of demographic and church-related databases. The cabinet reviews historical information about a church’s vitality—worship and Sunday school attendance, professions of faith, membership and more—as well as demographic information that paints a picture of the neighborhood surrounding the church.

Once the information is gathered into a workbook and pastor/SPRC consultation forms have been received, each district superintendent carefully looks at the churches in their district, making note of the specific needs for each church. In some cases, a new pastor is needed because there are new opportunities for ministry

or because a neighborhood no longer looks the way it did in years past. All this is noted by the DS in a profile document.

“The profile has information about the church, who they are, the pressing needs of that congregation and what it needs to be vital and effective over the next five years,” Norman said. The church’s Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) report and the pastor’s annual report are important to the cabinet’s considerations. These profiles, along with all the other collected information, are then used by the entire Cabinet to help the

Cabinet make the best missional appointments possible.

Norman said this method of appointment-making has been evolving over the past several years and that Arkansas United Methodists are reaping the benefits of good mission field matches.

“We’ve been able to see a lot of vitality happening in different places with the mission field being the main focus of the appointment,” Norman said. “We are looking for signs of fruitfulness and effectiveness, and we’ve seen that happen in so many of our newer appointments.”

It all revolves around intentional and heartfelt prayer, emphasized Norman.

“The Holy Spirit is first,” Norman said. “We pray throughout cabinet retreat and all of our meetings before making an appointment or calling a pastor about a possible appointment. It’s throughout everything we do.”

The cabinet has begun the appointment-making process and welcomes the prayers of all Arkansas United Methodists. Retirements and new appointment announcements will be posted on the conference website at arumc.org.

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Gatherings

(from page 1)

are encouraged to attend any meeting that is convenient for them. Mueller will host the first three meetings with District Superintendents hosting the other eight sessions. An online survey will be deployed in February to gather feedback from those unable to attend one of the town hall meetings.

Mueller acknowledged that there is a “certain amount of anxiety about what’s going to happen in the United Methodist Church in the coming months.” He encouraged all United

Methodists to take an active role in the discernment process.

“First, keep praying our way forward, it will make a difference,” Mueller said. “Second, know the Holy Spirit is at work in all of this, and we truly can affirm all is well. Third, remember what matters most. We are creating vital congregations that make disciples of Jesus Christ, who make disciples equipped to transform lives, communities, and the world.”

Awards

(from page 4)

Seminary, earning a Master of Divinity. After working in college and youth ministry in Louisiana and Georgia, Amy moved to Arkansas to be closer to family, and spent a few years working as the Associate Director for Habitat



Amy Bennett Shores

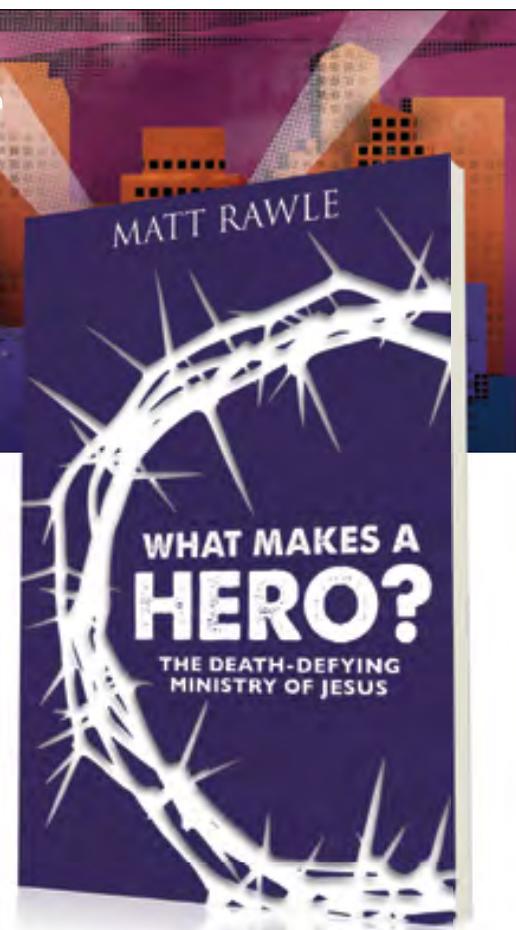
for Humanity of Saline County. She now serves as the Minister of Youth and Young Adults at Asbury UMC in Little Rock. In addition to serving at Asbury, Amy is a volunteer for Ozark Mission Project, and serves on the Arkansas Conference Council on Youth Ministries Adult Resource Team, the Junior and Senior High Assembly Task Force, and the Hendrix Youth Institute Advisory Board.

How does JESUS redefine what it means to be a

HERO?

What Makes a Hero? offers us an image of what it looks like to be victorious over trials and temptations. Looking at pop culture heroes and others through the lens of faith, Matt Rawle shows how Jesus turned the concept of hero on its head. In keeping with his theme, “Pop in Culture,” the book examines how good vs. evil, right vs. wrong, and overcoming adversity are fundamental to how Christians understand salvation. Heroes help us discern the good, fight for what’s right, define identity, execute justice, spark revolution, and save lives.

Rawle enters the Gospel story to tell quite a different victory story—one obtained through humility, obedience to the cross, and an empty tomb. How does Jesus redefine what it means to be a hero?



Additional components for a six-week study include a comprehensive Leader Guide, a DVD featuring Matt Rawle, a Worship Resources Flash Drive, and youth and children resources.

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COMING UP

Beyond Children's Leadership Ministry Conference

Melanie Gordon will be the plenary leader at the Beyond Children's Ministry Conference scheduled for January 26–27 at Philander Smith College in Little Rock, Arkansas.



Melanie Gordon

Gordon is the director of ministry with children leadership ministries with Discipleship Ministries. Melanie is responsible to The United Methodist Church for providing nationwide training and resourcing, and does research and networking for leaders and teachers engaged in ministry for children, including faith formation, weekday ministries, worship, Safe Sanctuaries, and advocacy.

Gordon wrote, *What Every Child Should Experience: A Guide for Teachers and Leaders in United Methodist Congregations, Children's Ministry Guidelines for the 2013–16 Quadrennium*, and co-authored *Guidelines for Weekday Preschool Ministry Programs in United Methodist Churches*. She also blogs regularly on issues that impact how children grow in faith.

Registration for the conference is \$35 and includes two meals and snacks, materials and supplies for each session. A limited number of scholarships are available and for registration only. Registration closes January 12. For registration, lodging and other information, visit <http://kidz.arumc.org/2018-beyond-january-26-27-2018/>.

Confirmation Camps at Tanako and Mount Eagle

Hot Springs' Camp Tanako will

be the location for two confirmation camps for youth. Camp 1 is scheduled for Feb. 9–11; Camp 2 will take place on April 6–8. Registration by January 26 for Camp 1 and March 23 for Camp 2. Confirmation Camp can serve as a final retreat for churches with long standing confirmation class. Information for these camps may be found at <http://arumc.org/camping-retreat-ministries/confirmation-camp/>

A third camp is scheduled for Feb. 2–3 at Mount Eagle Retreat Center in Clinton. This camp is for students in grades 10–12 who haven't yet been confirmed. Registration information is available online at <http://arumc.org/camping-retreat-ministries/confirmation-camp/>

Veritas set for Feb. 23–25

Each year over 1,200 youth in grades 7 through 12 come together to celebrate what it means to be

connected. Through inspirational words and music led by nationally known speakers and musicians, young people encounter the Lord in new and deeper ways. Veritas guest speaker is Jeniffer Dake, known across the country for her "lifestyle evangelism," a theology that encompasses everything the body of Christ desires to impart to young people today—to live in such a way that those around you will be eternally impacted for the kingdom of God. I Am They, a musical group which gained national attention with their 2015 self-titled album will

lead worship. Veritas 2018 will be held Feb. 23–25 at the Convention Center in Rogers. The registration fee up to Feb. 1 is \$45; it will be \$55 after that date. Visit <http://accym.org/veritas/#> for more information.

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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.

Mayflower UMC in Mayflower, Arkansas, seeks energetic part-time Youth Director for its youth group. Must be able to lead youth to Christ through a scriptural based atmosphere of love and youth activities, and maintain a good Christian relationship with the youth. Candidates with a Methodist background would be beneficial. Duties include Sunday school, children's church worship and youth fellowship on certain evenings through out the year. Part time position on average three to five hours per week. May be ideal for a college student or young adult. Salary is \$100.00 per week possibly more depending on experience. To apply for position or for more information please email: brazlewood@yahoo.com or revrickwilkins@sbcglobal.net.

Wesley United Methodist Church, Conway is seeking a part-time administrative assistant (18 hours/week). Job duties include typical secretarial activities and requires the individual to be self-motivating, work with minimal supervision, friendly, and proficient with various computer programs. A resume is required; for more information, please call 501-327-7629.

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. The First United Methodist Church of Batesville has a part time position open for an organist. Interest persons should contact the church office via email batesvillechurch@yahoo.com or by phone (870) 793-3803 to apply.

PEOPLE OF FAITH

UMFA's Trice promoted to Senior VP

The United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas recently announced Clarence E. Trice of Little Rock has been promoted to Senior Vice President and Chief Financial Officer after eight years of service. He is responsible for accounting, administrative, investment, probate and trust activities.

"Clarence is essential to our organization's success in creating endowments to enhance ministries in the Arkansas Conference of the United Methodist Church," said Jim Argue, UMFA President and CEO. "He has provided exceptional leadership in serving our clients and ensuring that the foundation is a good steward of the funds entrusted to us."

Trice earned a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville in 1975. He had more than 30 years of experience in public accounting before joining the Foundation in 2009.

Calico Rock UMC honors member's contributions

Amanda Thornton of Calico Rock UMC is the honoree of the church's United Methodist Women

Special Mission Recognition. Thornton is a Calico Rock native and has been a member of the church since childhood. She is a

volunteer with the church's Christmas and vacation bible school programs and has served on the Staff Parish Relations Committee for several years..

A nurse practitioner with the Center for Women Obstetrics and Gynecology in Mountain Home, Thornton's involvement in church and community activities has a far-reaching effect. She has helped to increase the church's support for the community food room, and is often seen at community events passing out water bottles with the church's invitation to visit on the labels.

Thornton recently engaged the Calico Rock school board in a new program, "Bridges of Calico Rock." The program closes the gap between need and education and provides necessities such as hygiene products, school supplies, food, and clothing to improve local students' chances of success. Thornton serves as the program's facilitator.

A gift to mission work was given in Thornton's honor.



Clarence E. Trice

**Nancy Wood Scholarship deadline Jan. 31**

Incoming college freshman women are eligible to receive scholarship funds from the Nancy McDonald Wood Scholarship Fund. The scholarship was established in 2015 and is administered through the United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas.

To qualify, an applicant must have been a member of an Arkansas United Methodist church, demonstrated a commitment to historic Methodist values, has shown sound academic ability, leadership qualities and

exceptional character. She should have been accepted by an accredited college and plans to begin classes in the Fall 2018 semester. The application deadline is January 31. To download an application form and instructions, visit <https://goo.gl/9fojys>.

Wood, a lifelong Methodist and former high school teacher, hopes the scholarship recipients will become strong lay leaders in United Methodist churches after completing their college education.

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Faith Funds

A Lasting Legacy

Rev. Katie Goss Pearce glows when she talks about the legacy First UMC, Morrilton, receives from the late Lt. Gov. Nathan Gordon's endowment through the United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas.

"In the past, some thought it would have been better to have the \$500,000 gift in a lump sum," said the senior pastor. "But after all these years the principal is still making money for us and we receive around \$21,000 each year to support church ministries. That makes the interest from the endowment one of the top ten annual givers to our church."

At her request, UMFA Vice President of Development Janet Marshall and local attorney Jonathan Kelley presented a UMFA Provide and Protect seminar to about 20 members of the Morrilton congregation. From retirees to couples with young children, participants benefited from the information on creating a will and learned the power of establishing legacy gifts.

"It was really good for us. I'm following up by visiting church members to see what my congregation's legacy dreams are for our church. Where do they see us 20-30 years from now?" said Rev. Pearce. If your congregation is interested in Provide and Protect, contact Janet Marshall at jmarshall@umfa.com.



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OBITUARY

Dorothy Yarnell Warden

Dorothy Yarnell Warden, surviving spouse of the late Rev. Frank Warden, died November 21, 2017 at Searcy Healthcare Center. She was 83. Dorothy was born May 4, 1934 at Searcy to the late John Harbin and Doris Neeley Yarnell. Dorothy grew up in Searcy. She attended Hendrix College, where she met Frank Warden, and they were married August 14, 1954; he preceded her in death November 14, 2012.



Dorothy attended Peabody College in Nashville, graduating with an education degree, while her husband was attending law school at Vanderbilt. After graduation they relocated to San Antonio and California where Dorothy taught school. They returned to Little Rock where Frank practiced law in Little Rock for the Friday firm until he heard the call to the ministry. During this time they were charter members of Lakewood United Methodist Church where Dorothy was active in the choir.

They moved to Dallas in 1969 so Frank could attend seminary. After being ordained, he was assigned to

Highland Park United Methodist Church. Dorothy was very active in the life of the church during his pastorate there, serving as the wedding hostess for the church, among other duties.

They wrote and published Trinity Bible Studies while in Dallas, traveling the world over teaching the methods and training other pastors. Some years later they retired to the Searcy area where both were involved at First United Methodist.

Dorothy was constantly giving to her community as a facilitator in cancer support groups, working with families of the addicted and alcoholic, and as a writer of a weekly column for the Searcy Daily Citizen in addition to her manifold work for the local churches.

Dorothy's great love was music. She was an accomplished soprano and a teacher of voice both in Searcy and Dallas. She was deeply committed to the music programs of every church they attended.

She is survived by one son, Clark Warden of Searcy; daughter, Elizabeth Warden of Dallas, Texas; and grandson, Matthew David Warden (Tiffany) of Mt. Vernon, Arkansas.

A memorial visitation was held on November 30 at First United Methodist Church in Searcy.

The First United Methodist Church of Batesville, Arkansas is hiring an **ORGANIST AND PIANIST**

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