

The Arkansas United Methodist

LIVING OUR FAITH

October 2018 | Volume 166, Issue 3



What

Kind of Christian
do I want to be?

**WORLD
COMMUNION
SUNDAY**

Q&A
with
BAKER KURRUS

**QUEST
RECAP**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

From the Editor	2
Growing Together in Christ	3
Reader's Nook	6
Domestic Violence Awareness Month	7
Camp Aldersgate Fish Fry	16
World Communion Sunday	17
Arkansas Fall Foliage Trail	21
EQUIP: Sabbath	22



Q&A with Baker Kurrus:
 Asbury UMC lay leader and Little Rock mayoral candidate speaks on faith, the Church, and his vision for the city.



VOLUME 166, NO. 3 • OCTOBER 5

Caleb Hennington, Digital Content Editor

Amy Ezell, Director of The Center for Communication

The *Arkansas United Methodist* is the publication of record for the Arkansas Conference of the United Methodist Church. It is issued monthly, on the first Friday of every month, and distributed in both print and digital formats.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

For information on subscribing to the digital edition, visit www.arumc.org/our-news/arkansas-united-methodist/ or call 501-324-8023.

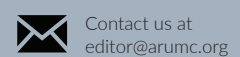
FOLLOW US



VISIT US ONLINE



STORY IDEA?



Front and back cover design by Stephen Gideon

Finding hope after tragedy



Caleb Hennington
Digital Content Editor

This past month has been a tough, confusing, and at times, chaotic month for many Americans across the East Coast of the United States.

Hurricane Florence -- a Category 1 storm that had been labeled by North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper as a “1,000-year rain event” -- made landfall on Sept. 14 on North Carolina’s coast, and brought with it heavy rain, high winds, and dangerous flooding as it slogged its way across the Carolinas.

When natural disasters like Hurricane Florence happen, many people’s first response is to ball up their fists, raise them toward the sky, and cry out “Why? Why did you allow this to happen to us, God?”

I don’t think that’s an odd thing to question. Why does this happen? After all, God is in control of the entire universe; everything that happens -- from the tiniest butterfly emerging from its chrysalis to the awe-inspiring and luminous galaxies that speckle the night sky -- can be wiped out or put into motion at any instant by The Almighty above. It would make sense that if God wants his creation to thrive and live happy lives, then he wouldn’t allow us to suffer, right?

If you’re looking for a quick and easy answer to “why do we suffer?” in this column, then I’m afraid you’ll need to turn your attention to someone much smarter than I. I’m not a pastor. I don’t have a fancy theological degree from a prestigious seminary. I don’t have the right answers. I have just as many questions as you do.

As Christians and Methodists, we know that the Bible teaches that suffering is a direct result of sin and evil entering the world. But knowing why something happens doesn’t necessarily bring comfort. In all honesty, understanding why something happened often brings even more pain because you then begin to think about all of the things you could have done differently to prevent the results.

Even John Wesley couldn’t answer the question of why humans are forced to suffer tragedy, saying in one of his many famous sermons “we cannot say why God suffered evil to have a place in his creation; why he, who is so infinitely good himself, who made all things ‘very good,’ and who rejoices in the good of all his creatures, permitted what is so entirely contrary to his own nature, and so destructive of his noblest works.”

But even though we can’t answer the question of “why did this happen?” it is completely within our power to answer the question “what are we going to do now?”

As troubling as the news coming out of the East Coast has been these past few weeks, I am also not completely without hope. I have heard countless stories of the amazing ecumenical work that Christians have done to help folks who are no longer able to help themselves.

United Methodist congregants, both clergy and laity, sacrificed their resources -- and at times their own safety -- to ensure that no one was forgotten and left out in the storm.

The United Methodist Committee on Relief gave \$10,000 in emergency grants to the North Carolina and South Carolina conferences.

Even those who do not reside in the conferences affected by Florence continue to give what they can through donations of money, food, clothing, soap, shampoo, bedding, clothes and more.

We’re never going to be able to find the answers we seek for why suffering and tragedy happen. It’s just not within the capacity of our tiny little human brains to understand. But when I hear stories like this of good people coming together to sacrifice their own time and resources to give others the assistance they need, I no longer ponder the question “why?” Instead, I reflect on the goodness of people and the hope I have that when disaster inevitably strikes again, there will always be a helping hand available -- both heavenly and earthly -- to pierce through the darkness and pull us out of despair.

What kind of Christian do I want to be?



Gary E. Mueller
Bishop of the Arkansas Conference

Maybe it's my age. Maybe it's the fact that I am in my 40th year of full-time ministry. Maybe it's that I've been a bishop for six years and see the church from a different perspective. Or maybe it's the Holy Spirit at work. Probably it's all of them – as well as some other things I still haven't figured out. But for some reason, I've recently been asking myself a question (and, yes, I do talk to myself – a lot!) over and over, “What kind of Christian do I want to be?”

The interesting thing about my response (remember, I do talk to myself – a lot!) is that it always begins with the kind of Christian I don't want to be. I don't want to be one kind of Christian in public and another in my private life, although I'm sure that happens far too often. I don't want to be a “super-Christian” fixated on trying to prove how holy I am. I don't want to be a Christian who says I want to do God's will, but then goes ahead and does what I want to do and lives the way I want to live, assuming God is fully on board with my plans. I don't want to be mean-spirited, especially in an age that has perfected the art of shade throwing. But most of all, I don't want to be one of those Christians others look at and say, “Well, if he's what a Christian is like, there's no way I want to be one of them.”

So, what kind of Christian do I want to be?

I want to be a Christian who knows what it's like to have every bit of my life grounded in the unconditional love of God – especially when it gets up-close and personal. I want to be a Christian who actually experiences what it's like to have God's love be more powerful than all my insecurities, failures and mistakes

when life falls apart, and not just when it's on cruise control. I want to be a Christian who doesn't just call on Jesus when I think I need him, but because this is the heart and soul of who I am.

So, what kind of Christian do I want to be?

I want to be a Christian who believes with every fiber of my being that because Jesus died on the cross and was resurrected from the dead, he gives me what I absolutely need but can never do on my own. I want to be a Christian who accepts Jesus' invitation to be in a relationship with him as Lord and Savior every single moment of every single day. I want to be a Christian who is a Jesus-follower all the time, not just when it's time to go into disciple mode. I want to be a Christian who is head-over-heels in love with Jesus for all of eternity.

So, what kind of Christian do I want to be?

I want to be a Christian who is becoming the person God dreams for me more and more every day because the love of Christ is transforming my attitude, beliefs, temperament, intentions and actions from the inside-out in. I want to be a Christian who not only can name the fruits of the spirit, but also can actually exhibit some of them. I want to be a Christian who will stand up boldly in the face of injustice. I want to be a Christian who is filled with joy regardless of what is going on in the moment. I want to be a Christian who can be honest – even gut-wrenchingly honest – because my hope is in Jesus.

So, what kind of Christian do I want to be?

When all is said and done, I want to be a Christian who so longs for everyone to experience the depth, meaning, purpose and joy Jesus offers that I am willing to share it with them.

So, how about you – what kind of Christian do you want to be?



Faith Funds

A Bonded Fellowship

Retired Pastor Ed Matthews and his wife Pat, now of Little Rock, have United Methodist friends all over Arkansas. Every year they join many of these friends in an event of bonded fellowship, the United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas Bishops' Club luncheon.

"We're bonded because we are committed to the same things," Pat said. "We believe in the Foundation's mission." The Bishops' Club helps UMFA accomplish that mission — to create and administer permanent charitable endowment funds to strengthen and expand United Methodist ministry in Arkansas.

"The Foundation is a good investment," Ed said. "It helps people make gifts to churches and Methodist causes that will go on after their lifetimes."

Ed and Pat remember participating in most of the luncheons and hearing excellent keynote speakers. They are proud to be a part of this tradition of giving that strengthens Church ministries, brings glory to God, and supports the United Methodist connection.

"We are so thankful for Ed, Pat and all the other members of the Bishops' Club," said Janet Marshall, Foundation Vice President. "Their vision of a stronger church in the future inspires us every day."



The United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas

5300 Evergreen Drive • Little Rock, Arkansas 72205

501-664-8632 • Toll free 877-712-1107 • Fax 501-664-6792 • www.umfa.org

UMFA encourages churches to schedule valuable Provide & Protect seminars

BY JESSICA SZENHER
UMFA Contributor

Provide & Protect seminars are a valuable resource in planning for the family's distributions of personal property and financial assets, discussing estate matters and charitable giving opportunities," said Janet Marshall, United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas Vice President of Development. "Making important life and death decisions is part of being a faithful Christian disciple."

Free Provide & Protect seminars are available to local United Methodist Churches or groups of churches. These informative seminars familiarize congregation members with the tools needed to plan for their legacy, and provide resources needed to complete those plans. Each participant receives the book, "Provide & Protect" by Charles Schulz, as well as a free Wills Guide from the Foundation.

At the seminars, the UMFA works with a local attorney to present information on important options about estate planning. Participants learn how essential it is to make or update a will so that the decisions for sharing their assets are known. It is also important to plan now, to determine if any inheritance tax might be avoided later for the family.

"UMFA and Central have worked together on Provide and Protect events for several years, and they have been well attended," said Brian Swain, Executive Director at Central UMC in Fayetteville. "Many people don't have a plan. This is an excellent way to help our members with their Christian stewardship."

"The United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas wants to make sure United Methodists in our state have access to the most up-to-date and understandable will planning tools," Marshall said.

To set up a seminar, contact Janet Marshall at 501-664-8632 or email her at jmarshall@umfa.org.

Hope vs. The Toilet Bowl Effect

BY KAREN MILLAR

Featured Contributor and General Conference Delegate

Each time I've gone to General Conference, I have gone with a sense of anticipation and hope that much will be accomplished to honor God and to further His Kingdom throughout the world. I have left home feeling prepared after much reading and secure, knowing that prayer warriors in my church and all over Arkansas were lifting me and the entire Arkansas delegation up daily. I have relished the opportunity to represent the Arkansas Conference and to serve alongside the awesome Arkansas delegates; to reconnect with friends from all over the connection, as well as the chance to make new friends; to experience great worship, both in word and in music; and to work with others to make a difference in our church and in the world.

Each time I have hoped for civility and Holy Conferencing with my brothers and sisters in Christ, and for several days my hopes have become reality. However, after five days or so, despair sets in over parliamentary minutia, harsh words from delegates, Bishops, and guests, confusion from the delegates, confusion from Bishops chairing the plenaries, interruptions, a lack of adequate translation for Central conference delegates, etc.

As the days march on toward General Conference, I become more and more weary, homesick, angry, and frustrated that our time has not been productive. My thoughts become more and more negative as I reflect on the brokenness of the General Conference and even the United Methodist Church.

Sometimes, we all find ourselves in a situation that is so difficult that it seems like a long drawn out crisis; we cannot solve it and we can't escape from it. Such a situation can occupy our thoughts continually...round and round it goes, like a toilet bowl churning. The more we think about it, the more we are engulfed in despair. Our thoughts are spinning in a downward spiral. So went my thinking the last week of this last General Conference.

Life is hard. We go along and the sky is blue and our hopes are high, but then a storm or flood comes that turns our hope into despair. We are caught off guard by our children or grandchildren in crisis, by a fractured marriage, or by a deadly diagnosis for ourselves or someone we love. When these trials occur, we begin spiraling down in our thoughts and allowing the toilet bowl syndrome to have its full effect; forgetting that the Master of the Universe is able to do far more abundantly beyond what we ask or think.

Last summer, I returned from a delightful trip to Denver where I visited a dear friend for four days. I felt great in Colorado and felt fine when I returned. However, the morning after my return, I was dizzy and weak. After several days in bed, trying to treat myself and getting progressively worse, I visited my doctor



Photo by Samuel McGarrigle on Unsplash

who was insistent that I enter the hospital, especially after he reviewed my chest X-ray. I was placed on IV antibiotics, received breathing treatments, and had multiple blood tests and X-rays. The doctors were puzzled over my illness and its cause, but they finally settled on a diagnosis of interstitial lung disease. I was really sick physically but I was also very discouraged and doubtful that I would ever be able to be healthy and active again. My thoughts were spiraling down, churning like the toilet bowl.

After five days in the hospital, I spent an additional two weeks at home feeling lousy. Thanks to my husband who turned out to be a good cook and nurse, the encouragement I received from friends who supplied food, notes and calls; and especially the many prayers on my behalf, I gradually got better and was able to return to pretty much my usual activities.

Life and problems are real. As Christians we are not promised that our lives or church politics will be a rose garden. However, we can face our difficulties with hope, knowing God is present with us and will carry us through whatever hardships we face. Conversely, we can allow discouragement and despair to propel us into the toilet bowl thinking effect.

As I move closer to the special called session of General Conference in February, I have great hope for our church, even more than I have had prior to other General Conferences. I know that whatever happens, I will not allow myself to spiral downward into the toilet bowl of despair. My hope is in the One who never changes, is always faithful, and whose promises and presence I can count on.

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and Righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame but wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ the Solid Rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand; all other ground is sinking sand.

This is part of a continuing series from members of the Arkansas Delegates who will be traveling to St. Louis for General Conference in February 2019.

The Reader's Nook

Each month, we ask a featured contributor to the *Arkansas United Methodist* to tell us what they're reading and why we should be reading it as well. This month's contributor is the Rev. Roy Smith, pastor at Trinity United Methodist Church in Little Rock, Arkansas.



Living Without Enemies: Being Present in the Midst of Violence *By Samuel Wells & Marcia A. Owen*

When Marcia Owen returned to her hometown of Durham, North Carolina, she was deeply troubled by the gun violence that plagued it. This book chronicles her journey from concerned mother and citizen to activist to witness as she engages directly with persons whose lives had been affected by gun violence.

She coauthored this book with Sam Wells, who was serving as Dean of the Chapel at Duke University. Her journey led to discovering different ways of engaging the work of reconciliation. The movement took her from “being for” to “working for” to “working with” and finally to “being with.” The descriptions of these various ways of engaging others is extremely helpful in understanding our own witness. Owen and Wells offer insightful theological reflection throughout the book. This reflection is balanced with powerful accounts of experiences at prayer vigils with persons whose loved ones have died violently. There are also stories of working with perpetrators of violence as they seek to reintegrate into mainstream society. These accounts are poignant and moving.

I first read this book five years ago. I have read it again several times since. I commend it to you as a book, which is quite helpful as you continue to discern your own call to transform your world.

Everything Happens for a Reason and Other Lies I Have Loved *By Kate Bowler*

Kate Bowler is a professor at Duke Divinity School. Her scholarly interest is the study of the “prosperity gospel.” At the age of 35 she was married to her high school sweetheart and the mother of an infant son, Zach. That is when she discovered she had Stage IV cancer of the liver.

In this book she shares her journey living with cancer. She confronts her own mortality and thoughts and understanding of life and death. Along the way she engages people of all types. These include family, friends, colleagues and students, as well as a number of people she meets through her blog. She also hears a number false and silly things as others try to make sense of her journey. She shares stories of those who are there for her in powerful ways as they do not seek to control, fix or explain her disease. These stories are powerful accounts of bearing witness.

The serious and the silly, the poignant and the profound, come through in this book. It is beautifully written. I found Bowler's two appendices particularly helpful. In one, she shares a list of statements that were made to her, which were not the least bit helpful. Then she shares a collection of ideas of ways to bring comfort to a friend who is living with a serious illness.

You owe it to yourself to read this book. It is one of the best things I have read this year.

Who Do We Choose to Be: Facing Reality, Claiming Leadership, Restoring Sanity *By Margaret Wheatley*

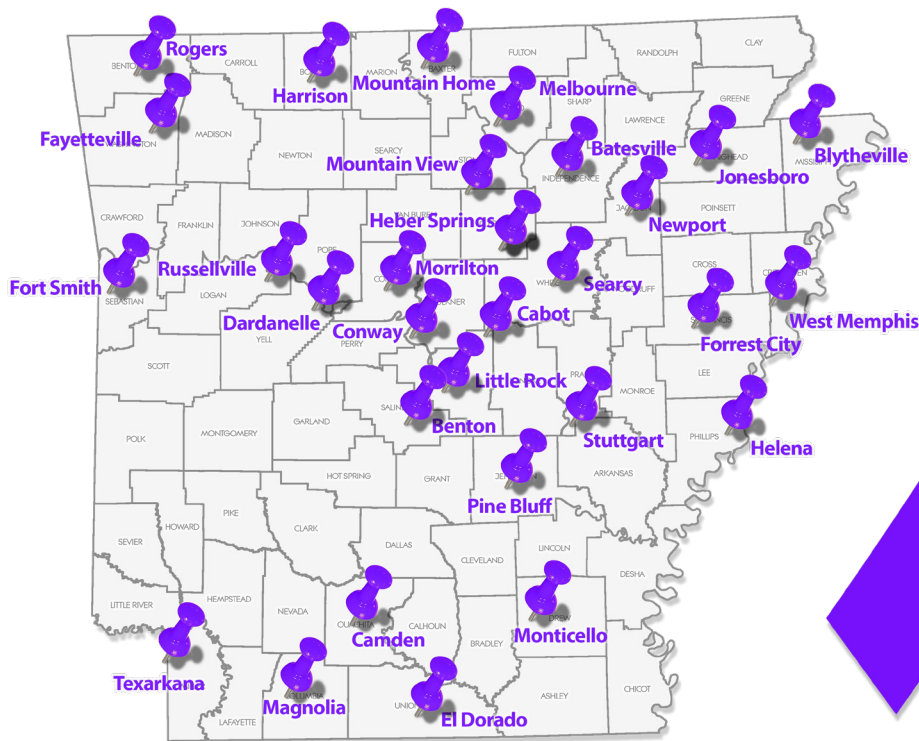
I first discovered Margaret Wheatley's writing on leadership about 20 years ago. Her book “Leadership and the New Science” was extremely helpful in understanding that organizations and leadership are organic phenomena. In this, her latest book, she offers a candid and straightforward assessment of the world we are living in and its challenges and disruptions. She notes various moments in history when fear and turmoil have been powerfully present. In such moments, leaders have arisen. They have often been “warriors.” Wheatley cites current the need for “warriors of the human spirit.” Their tools are not weapons of violence. Their tools will come from valuing our interconnectedness and leading as servant leaders. In the digital age, in which the world is more connected than it has ever been, Wheatley calls for leaders working “locally” to create what she describes as “islands of sanity.” Wheatley continues to sound her theme that even in the midst of chaos and destruction, living systems have the power to adapt. Such adaptive behavior can happen. She calls leaders to have the courage to step forth and speak and show a different path.

This book has caused me to think deeply about how we seek to transform the world as disciples.

Are you an avid reader? Contact Caleb Hennington at caleb.hennington@arumc.org to submit your list for consideration.

Arkansas UMC opposes domestic violence

How Methodists can take steps to prevent abuse in the church



Pictured are the locations of all of the shelters from the Arkansas Coalition Against Domestic Violence around the state of Arkansas.

BY REV. SARA BAYLES
Featured Contributor

Until I became a pastor, I had no clue that October -- a month full of autumn temperatures, changing leaves, and a month typically focused on gearing up for stewardship and Advent in the life of the church -- is also Domestic Violence Awareness month.

Beginning in the 1980s, October became nationally recognized as "Domestic Violence Awareness Month" with the tri-fold intention to mourn the lives lost to domestic violence, celebrate the survivors, and connect the people and resources that work to end domestic violence.

My earliest memory of observing domestic violence was on a Sunday morning from my place in the church sanctuary. As I sat in my pew, I was shaken to my core as I saw a male punch through the windshield of his female partner, all the while the congregation sang the opening hymn.

A few years later, at a national United Methodist Women gathering I continued to find many women who spent their entire lives serving in the church had experienced domestic abuse in some form -- physical, mental, emotional, psychological, and financial -- at some point in their lives and had never had any support from their church and/or pastor during such abuse.

Both of these experiences taught me that the church is not immune from domestic violence. Yet, I did not hear anything from the pulpit or the pew on domestic abuse until I sought to learn more about how the church can respond to this crisis.

The math is both simple and shocking, one in four women, at some point in their lives will experience domestic abuse. Domestic violence is not only physical, it can also occur through any behavior in which the spouse, partner, girl/boyfriend or intimate family member seeks to gain power and control over another individual.

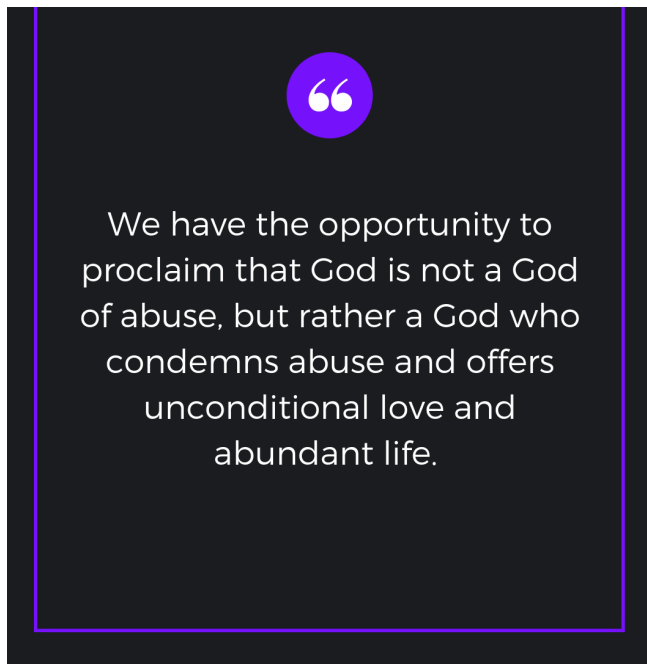
Most often thought of as violent, physical action, domestic abuse can include mental, emotional, psychological, financial, digital and sexual abuse. According to a 2010 Center for Disease Control survey, an estimated 420,000 women and 375,000 men in Arkansas have been victims of physical abuse, rape and/or stalking by an intimate partner at some point in their lives.

Domestic abuse can happen regardless of sex, gender, age, race, ethnicity, geography, economic and education status, religious affiliation, or creed. If we are honest with ourselves and with the sobering statistics, when we look around the congregation during worship, our churches can be powerful places of healing for those among us -- and even us -- from the domestic abuse. We hold the Christ-light for a broken, bruised and pain-filled world. We have the opportunity to proclaim that God is not a God of abuse, but rather a God who condemns abuse and offers unconditional love and abundant life.

The United Methodist Church, in our social principles, affirms that "family violence and abuse in all its forms verbal, psychological, physical, sexual is detrimental to the covenant of the human community. We encourage the Church to provide a safe environment, counsel, and support for the victim and to work with the abuser to understand the root causes and forms of abuse and to overcome such behaviors." (UMC Social Principles 161.H). In an era when we continue to hear the stories of #metoo and #churchtoo, we must know and continually lift up that the United

Methodist Church believes that “sexual assault is wrong.” (UMC Social Principles 161.P). As a church, we are called to be in ministry to the community and world. In doing so, we are to share the good news that Jesus came to bring abundant life; life that is full, healthy and whole.

I challenge you and your congregation to take the first step this October in being part of the church’s healing work towards domestic violence in Arkansas.



Here are some ways that pastors, church leaders, and congregations can become involved in the ministry aspects of ending domestic abuse:

Get Connected

The best advice I ever received from my preaching professor were guidelines for the first week at a new appointment, after you’ve outlined your sermon in the morning, take an afternoon trip around the town to learn the location and services offered, including local agencies that work with domestic violence/sexual assault. Get to know the staff and needs of these agencies. There are ways to tour, learn and get involved in the mission of the domestic violence shelters and recovery programs. If you need a

place to start connecting, visit the [Arkansas Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#) to learn about the work being done in your neighborhood to put an end to domestic violence.

Become Informed with Faith-based Resources

A number of resources are available to United Methodists regarding domestic violence awareness, including:

[United Methodist Women](#)

[United Methodist Men](#)

[General Board of Church & Society](#)

[Faithtrust Institute](#)

Print a Poster

Make a simple flyer to post bathroom stalls at church or in a discreet location. It’s a powerful statement that abuse is not tolerated and a way to engage in pastoral care without making a phone call. Include information on the poster such as: the local shelter name and location with a phone number and/or website, as well as the national hotline phone number. It may also be beneficial to include a line from the Social Principles about the church’s recognition that family violence and abuse in all forms is harmful.

Pray and Take Action

Host a community prayer service in October for the community by inviting other churches and the local domestic violence shelter staff. You can also simply include the women, men, and children across Arkansas in situations of abuse in your personal prayers or Sunday morning prayers of the people. Then, take action to reach out and meet the needs of your local domestic violence shelter.

Whatever this October brings in your life and in the life of the church, take a step in shedding the light of Christ in places of hurt and healing. Be the presence of Christ’s peace for those women, children, and men struggling in situations of abuse.

About the author: Rev. Sara Bayles is the pastor of Sylvan Hills United Methodist Church and serves as the Convener of the Arkansas Clergywomen as well as the Chair of the Arkansas Conference Committee on the Status and Role of Women. In her time away from church ministry, she enjoys contributing to her community as a certified Sexual Assault Response Advocate (S.A.R.A.).

STATISTICS ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN ARKANSAS

According to a 2011 report from the Center for Disease Control, “More than 1 in 3 women (35.6%) and more than 1 in 4 men (28.5%) in the United States have experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime.

According to the survey by the CDC, an estimated 420,000 women and 375,000 men in Arkansas have been victims of physical abuse, rape, and/or stalking by an intimate partner at some point in their lives.

In 2012, Arkansas ranked 17th in the nation in female deaths caused by males with a rate of 1.33 homicides per 1,000 females.

People between the ages of 18 and 34 have the highest rate of domestic violence by an intimate partner.

Data gathered from the Arkansas Administrative Office of the Courts Domestic Violence Program



‘God truly blessed our day at Quest!’ Inaugural Quest event a fun, faith-filled success

BY MELINDA SHUNK
Children’s Ministry Coordinator

Sept. 15 was our first Quest ever and it won’t be our last, so don’t be sad if you missed it! Just be sure to mark your calendar and share pictures with your students for next year. We have no doubt that word of mouth will do most of the publicity for next year’s event and will surely double this year’s attendance of 150.

St. James Christian Life Center was the perfect host church for this event under the leadership of their Children’s Minister Sean Dunbar who made sure we had everything we needed to make the event run smoothly. Michelle Wilkins, Sadie Wohlfahrt, Peaches Smith, and Tiffany Jones helped with all the registration, set up and take down throughout the day.

The lessons were written by Karen Swales who spent countless hours planning and writing appropriate third through sixth-grade lessons. We were blessed to have the Rev. Zach Roberts, the Rev. Jonathon Bevil, Pam Snider, and Melinda Shunk to teach each group of about 30 children.

Sure we had bounce houses, an amazing playground, nine square, photo booths, and box lunches, but what touched children’s lives the most was bagging rice for the food pantry, worship with students serving Communion, and hands-on fun rotational lessons that taught kids that our God Loves Us, our God Chooses Us, our God Gives Spiritual Gifts and God Calls each of us.

“Wow! We had a great time! Kids showed up Sunday to church with their crosses on from the Lesson from Pastor Zach,” said Anne Stocks, Children’s Minister at Trinity United Methodist Church. “They seemed so much more plugged in and invested



The Rev. Jonathon Bevil helps to shepherd children tasked with leading Holy Communion. Each pair of servers was guided by an adult.
|| Photo by Melinda Shunk



Children's Ministry Coordinator Melinda Shunk speaks to the gathered group of third, fourth and fifth-graders at Quest. || Photo by Stephen Gideon

in each other. I think we will be reaping the benefits from Quest for some time yet. The kids want to know when we will be doing something like that again. They are all in.”

Bishop Mueller was able to Skype into the morning worship to share with the students his call for the larger church, and the Rev. Jim Polk led the student-assisted Communion. Craig Williams used his gift of music to get everyone rocking and out of their seats for praise while calming us back down as we learned that we can even offer prayer in song!

We also worked hard on the Quest Connector's Challenge! Students were challenged during the opening to connect with and remember the names of at least five or more people outside of their home church. Twelve students were awarded a Cross Quest necklace and candy for standing up on stage at closing and naming at least seven new people that they met by the end of the day.

The goal of this event was to give the tween students something that was a statewide event tailored just for them. Quest was an Arkansas Conference event that brought them outside of the walls of their hometown church to show them we are called to be one church. God truly blessed our day at Quest!



Quest kids pose for a photo in front of the Arkansas Conference step and repeat banner. || Photo by Stephen Gideon



A Quest participant signs the flag of his team for the day. || Photo by Stephen Gideon



Quest kids have fun during a worship time led by Craig Williams. || Photo by Stephen Gideon



Baker Kurrus: faith in action

Asbury UMC lay leader bids for spot as mayor of Arkansas' largest city

BY CALEB HENNINGTON
Digital Content Editor

Baker Kurrus has always been interested in helping others through leadership. As the lay leader of Asbury United Methodist Church in Little Rock, his main goal is to lead others in the congregation in what it means to be a servant of Jesus Christ and to keep the church together by building bridges between people.

His leadership prowess and heart for teaching is also what ultimately led him to serving 14 months as the superintendent of the Little Rock School District. Although the district has gone through a number of hardships in the past few years, many residents of Little Rock, including Kurrus, believe that all hope is not lost; there's still time to fix the problems.

So, it came as no surprise to many who know Kurrus that he chose to run for the open position of Little Rock mayor in the November election. Little Rock's current mayor, Mark Stodola, is stepping down after more than 10 years in the position, and a new crop of leaders from all walks of life have chosen to enter the race and offer up to the city what they think are the best plans for improving not only the education system, but the livelihood of neighborhoods around the city as well.

Kurrus was gracious enough to allow the *Arkansas United Methodist* to sit down with him at his campaign headquarters for an interview covering not only his bid for the mayoral position, but his journey with faith and what it means to be a United Methodist member, as well.

Editor's Note: The Arkansas United Methodist: Living Our Faith - and by extension the Arkansas Conference of the United Methodist Church - does not endorse Baker Kurrus for mayor of the city of Little Rock. The magazine, as well as the Conference office, exists as an unbiased entity in the realm of local, state and national politics.

Caleb Hennington: So, from what I've read about you, you're a lifelong Methodist. Can you tell me a little about that?

Baker Kurrus: Well, I didn't really go to church much as a kid, so "lifelong Methodist" would be an exaggeration. I was baptized when I was 13 in a Methodist Church -- First Methodist Church in Hot Springs -- and since that time I've drifted in and out of the church. Until 1982. And then after I was married in 1982, I've been in a church almost every Sunday and it's been very important to me. So, my real walk with Christ started, I think, in a really deliberate way maybe when I was in my teens. But since then, I've always been a Methodist. I've never been a member of anything other than a Methodist Church.

Hennington: What made you come back to attending full time?

Kurrus: I met a woman in Dallas, that I'm now married to, in late 1979. Her name is Ginny. And I remember one day we had been out on a Saturday, and I said "I would love to see you tomorrow" and she asked me to go to church with her. And I wanted to see her (laughs). I'm not saying I necessarily wanted to go to church but I wanted to see her. And so we went to the church that she was a member of. Even though she had only been in Dallas a matter of months, she had already joined a Presbyterian Church, which was her denomination growing up. And I thought that was interesting. Then I went to the service, and I enjoyed it. And I thought it was likewise interesting when they passed the plate around and she put a check in there. I mean, all of those things added up. I already knew it, but I knew right then and there that this is a much different woman than many people I've known as a young man. We married in '82, and long before we got married we discussed the fact that we wanted to have a church family. We wanted to raise our kids with a church home. And that we wanted our kids to grow up in a youth group at church, which was very influential in my wife's life. And then of course I fell in love with it. It's become a part of who I am.

Hennington: Did you ever consider going into ministry at any point or was that never the plan?

Kurrus: You know, I've given talks from the pulpit. I wouldn't describe them as sermons. Some of them are on the web. If people wanted to hear me speak about things, they could go to our Asbury United Methodist Church website. But that was never my calling in that strict sense. But I have been called to serve. I think that's different than being called to ministry. And then the other thing is that, you know, I wasn't forced to do anything as a human being. I mean I never was. But on the other hand I had some practical considerations that kept me from the ministry. I mean, I went to law school. I didn't go on a trip for a year after I got out. I didn't take a sabbatical after I went to college. I had to work. I had things I wanted to accomplish and things I wanted to do, and all of them required that I get busy and get to work. So, I never had that contemplative time. And I know many people who are ministers don't. But I never heard that call.

Hennington: Right. Well I know you are a lay leader in your church.



From right to left: Andrew Kurrus, Baker's son; Madeline Moore, daughter; Ginny Kurrus, wife; Finley Moore, granddaughter; Sarah Bemberg, daughter; and Baker. || *Photo courtesy of the Kurrus campaign*

Kurrus: Yeah I am the lay leader at Asbury.

Hennington: How did that come about? And what do you do in that role?

Kurrus: Well, you know I love my church. And it's a vital part of who I am and who my family has become; my church is my family. So, since I've been in the church I've held I guess about every position you can hold. And every committee you can be on. From back when we had administrative board chairs of large administrative boards to finance chairs to chair of the staff Parish Relations Committee. And lay leader. Lay leader is an interesting position. You're called to sit as a member of certain committees and you're also called as a person who knows the church and understands the church. I've been involved in decisions we've made as a church because I have a working knowledge of almost every person in our church. As a practical matter, what it (lay leader) has meant at our church is that I've been a facilitator; a servant who has helped with everything from personnel decisions to interfacing with trustees to working with music programs. Everything is done to try to build bridges in the church to keep us all together. That's what lay leaders do.

Hennington: Regarding your candidacy for Little Rock mayor, how do you see your experience as a lay leader translate into your experience you could bring to the mayor position?

Kurrus: I'm heavily influenced by the best executive I've ever heard of or met; his name is Jesus Christ, a servant leader. And if you look at his life on Earth and his ministry, it was founded on a very serious form of servant leadership -- a very humble form of servant leadership -- where he never was judgmental. Well, I shouldn't say he never was judgmental; that's not quite true. He turned over a few tables when he felt like he needed to do that. But by and large, he was kind, understanding and forgiving. Willing to undertake any task. He wanted to serve others rather than himself and felt a call to sacrificial service when that was necessary. And I think that's really the model that suits me best. Because, whatever

Continued on pg. 13



Kurrus stopping for a picture in front of the Broadway Bridge during one of his daily bike rides. || *Photo courtesy of the Kurrus campaign*

you do, it has to come naturally to some extent. And I want to serve the city for the same reasons. I love this town. That doesn't qualify me uniquely to be the mayor. But I think it's an essential qualification. And I've got a lot of experience in a leadership model that's worked in the past.

Hennington: I know from reading on your website you are a part of a prison band. Can you tell me a little bit about how that works and how you get involved in it?

Kurrus: Yeah, that's been one of the great blessings of my life. That happened back when traditional church services were transitioning in some areas to what we called "blue jeans" service; what's now become known as contemporary worship. I was asked to play the guitar in one of those services at our church really early on, when this type of service was just becoming something that was reaching new people. And I said "yes!" So, I stood up in front of the church and played a guitar song. I remember it was a John Denver song. I played a little harmonica at some point in it and after that a guy came up to me named Ray Phillips, and he said "Look I play guitar in the same style that you do. Maybe next time we can play together." So, Ray and I got together and before long we had a whole band. We brought in other people into this band and began to play at the contemporary service in our church, and it was so much fun. But, actually, I was called in a different direction because at that point there were lots and lots of people who wanted to play in these contemporary worship bands and we had lots of musical talent in our church. And a friend of ours named Joe Wilkerson, who is a Methodist minister, was involved in a prison ministry. And he and some other guys in the band decided that maybe we ought to go to the prison and play. Well, then it was really clear that if we went with Joe once a month people would come to the service. And so we sat around one night and talked and said if we can do this, and if we could bring one single person to Jesus Christ who otherwise wouldn't have come, would it be worth it? The answer was a resounding

"yes." Seriously, if you could just bring one single person to Christ, it would be worth it. And so we said "yes, let's do this!" So, we've been doing it ever since. Since 2002. And it is great fun and very rewarding. And you do see people who come to Christ through this ministry. I think we're called by Matthew 25 to visit those in prison, to visit the sick and feed the hungry. I think if we -- and I certainly don't do all I could -- but if we could live by some of those wise admonitions, we would all be better off.

Hennington: I'm sure you're aware right now that the United Methodist Church is going through a lot of debate over A Way Forward. Are you familiar with what that is?

Kurrus: I am.

Hennington: So, at General Conference in February the delegates are going to vote on three different plans that could rewrite portions of the Book of Discipline: the traditionalist plan, the one church plan, and the connectional plan. I'm not going to ask you what your thoughts are on these plans, but what kind of advice would you have toward the people that are going to be voting? What do you think they need to consider before they have to make such an important vote in February?

Kurrus: Well, you can ask me whatever you want to ask me because I think a lot of good people have spent a great deal of time in these deliberations, and they're sincere in their views and I understand that. But I wouldn't approach it in the same way. I think this idea of "we're going to vote" is divisive, and that's not what Christ called us to be. So, this is not my original idea, this is really my wife's idea; she gets the credit. She asked what if we took a vote and we said "we're going to vote on whether we're going to love one another" and just simply asked "will we love one another?" And if the answer to that is "yes," then let's go back to work. There's so much work to be done, and there's so little time for long meetings. And I'm not going to judge anybody. I've got

gay friends that I love. And God made them just like he made me. But the main thing is we're not called to be judgmental, and we're not called to be divided. We are United Methodists. And now we're going to say "but we're not going to be united, we're going to divide ourselves along these lines" in order to satisfy some need that we must have. And people sincerely have it. I just don't understand it. I think if the vote were simply, "Shall we love one another and love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind and soul and love our neighbor as ourselves?" I would vote "yes." That's the only vote I want to take.

Hennington: So, you would say your advice for those that are having to make that decision is just to consider what's in their heart?

Kurrus: Well, I guess the answer is yes. I love everybody in my church, and I guess there are diverse views in our own church, but I'm not going to dwell on that. I'm not going to sit around and wonder what we're called to be or what we're called to do or judge anyone else based on who they love and how they love. I'm just glad people love one another. I think if we're compassionate, and focus on the things that are common in humanity, wouldn't we be better off? I still don't understand why we have to vote to divide ourselves. I don't understand that. And I know I've read what I can about it, but I'm not going to spend my life dividing a marvelous church. I think I would prefer if the people in that building locked their arms and said "We're going to vote to love one another," and then let the people in the churches work it all out. And that's essentially what a lot of this is about: leaving it to local churches, which is a great idea, but I think it's overly formalistic and I think it ignores some basic teachings of Christianity that I'm never going to give up on. I'll never be satisfied if we have a divided Methodist Church which calls itself united. That's simply a contradiction in terms that are not satisfactory to me, but I'm not judging anybody that wants to do that. I've got to be true to that principle as well.

Hennington: Well, let's move away from Methodist politics and

get into normal politics. So, you've had a lot of experience in the Little Rock School Board. That's kind of one of your main issues that you've been campaigning on. You were a superintendent of schools for the Little Rock School District. Your kids all attended public schools. I believe you and your wife also attended public schools.

Kurrus: Yes, I did until I went to law school. I went to a private school.

Hennington: Right now, a big issue with the city of Little Rock is whether to maintain control over the school district or return it to local control. As mayor, what would be your plan for fixing some of those problems with the Little Rock School District?

Kurrus: First and foremost, I believe in local control, as you know. I was elected three times to the school board. So, that meant a lot to me. And we did a lot of hard work in our school board, and local representation was important. So, I believe in that, for certain, and the sooner we get that back the better. We've got big decisions coming up right now that need to be made by the community, not by the people who really aren't represented fully in the community. I think the notion that somehow schools can be fixed and then neighborhoods get better or dramatically change is rooted in fact; that is true. You want quality education everywhere and nice buildings that are well-constructed and well-maintained. But the key to successful schools is having successful communities. Most people think of schools as leading indicators of community health; meaning to say we're going to build a new school and it will improve the neighborhood. It certainly won't hurt the neighborhood, but the best way to improve a school is to fix that neighborhood and have stable families. Have kids who aren't moving all the time. One of the biggest impediments to real academic gain is mobility. If you have a student who has an unstable home life -- if that kid goes from one school to another and then to another all in a matter of one school year -- the interventions in the dedicated efforts of these marvelous people that educate

Continued on pg. 15



Kurrus visiting with students from the Mabelvale Elementary School drumline. || Photo courtesy of the Kurrus campaign

our kids are largely ineffective. And so if you want to fix schools, then think about fixing neighborhoods. That doesn't mean they are full of upper income people; that's not the point. You have to ask, "How can we build stability into our local economy and give people an opportunity to have a safe environment in which to live and work and thereby raise children in that stable environment?" That will translate into higher school performance. A mayor can impact those things. And that's what I'll do.

Hennington: Speaking on revitalizing some of those neighborhoods, a big debate is south of I-630 and how to revitalize that part of town. What can be done to bring people into that part of town that want to stay and raise their families and go to the schools there. What are some of your ideas for improving areas like that? Not just 630 but there's, you know, scattered areas throughout Little Rock that need help.

Kurrus: I've written a lengthy piece on neighborhood revitalization which focuses on that area. And, although you're right that people talk a lot about that, I'm the first person in this race -- and maybe the only one -- who's been there and talked to the people who live there and really focused on revitalization. For years, people have complained about it and talked a lot about it, but nobody's done anything. In the meantime, things have gotten dramatically worse in that part of town. It's easy to blame that interstate highway, but it's there and it's there to stay. It's ridiculous now to sit back and talk at length about what we can't do and how bad things are. I want to go positive and figure out how to revitalize neighborhoods in that part of town. I've talked to people who are literally doing that. They are taking older homes that have great potential and revitalizing those homes and either renting them or selling them. And that has happened a lot. And so rather than me thinking in terms of what I would do, I've talked to the people who know how to do it and I want to empower them and support them and collaborate with them and focus with them on how to make neighborhoods function in a much better way. And it's doable. It won't happen overnight, but you can change neighborhoods when you focus on connectivity and you focus on neighbor-to-neighbor interaction. There are so many wonderful people who live south of 630 who must be outraged -- and I've talked to many who are -- when they hear their neighborhood maligned over and over again. And these are people who've lived in that area for 50 years who take great care of what they own.

Hennington: And they have great pride in their neighborhoods.

Kurrus: They do. They take pride in their neighborhoods. I've talked to these people. Riding this bicycle is not some kind of a publicity stunt. It's the same thing that community police officers do. If you want to get acquainted with people, don't windshield this thing. Don't drive by in your SUV. Either walk or bicycle. Get out and talk. Put your boots on the ground where the issues are and meet the people who are there who have great ideas about how to make things better. And that's what I've been doing and that's what I'll continue to do as mayor. I won't be a mayor that sits in a corner office eatin' a box lunch. I'm not into that. I'll do some of that, you have to. But primarily I will be on my feet: collaborating, communicating and facilitating, because the mayor can't be Mr.

Fix-It. They can't be the Wizard of Oz. But you can be a person who shows that you care, shows that you know, and then shows that you're willing to take bold action with a bias toward action. Don't just talk about it; let's do something. And that's what we can do south of 630. Think of it in terms of a quilt that's got some tears in it, but it's got some wonderful pieces as well. Well you find a solid ground and you build from there. You intentionally look at the number of lots that are vacant and how to motivate people to build there. You incentivize that. And then you begin to get a sense of a place where young people, like you, who would say "this is a neat area." It's got big trees and wonderful parks. There are all sorts of pocket parks scattered about and it has easy access to downtown and to SoMa. It's hip. It's happening. We can do this. But it takes vision and leadership and hard work, and that's where I'm going to try to plug in.

Hennington: Let's talk about your bike riding since you brought it up and you said that it's not just a publicity stunt. What have you learned from going on your bike rides? What have you observed?

Kurrus: This morning, for example, I observed a heavy mist and I got really wet (laughs). But that's my quiet time. Even riding downtown. But I'll give you an example. Yesterday morning, I was on my bicycle before the sun rose. I saw the sun come up on the banks of the Little Maumelle River. I was looking East over Two Rivers Park. I watched geese fly in. Deer wandering all over the place. And I counted my blessings. And I think that's important to do. It's important for people in leadership positions to have that kind of quiet time. To just stop. Be still and listen. And I do a lot of that on a bicycle. You know, I don't get down on my knees like some people do, but when I pray I want to be in a quiet place with quiet time. But that's why I ride my bike.

Hennington: Lastly, let's just say come November you are not the winner of the mayoral race. You know, maybe Frank Scott Jr., Warwick Sabin, Vincent Tolliver or Glen Schwartz is the winner. What kind of advice would you give to the winner if you happen to not win it? And what is your hope for the future of Little Rock under someone else's leadership?

Kurrus: Well, I don't know how to answer that. So, if you're asking me what I would say to anyone who is the mayor, then I'll say the same thing I've told those other men; I'll support whoever the mayor is. I mean, that doesn't mean I'll support everything they do. But I wish them well and want to contribute any way I can to the health and success of our city whether I'm the mayor or whether I'm not. I've been doing that for 40 years. Nothing's going to change. This is my home. This is where I've raised my family. All three of my kids were baptized at Asbury United Methodist Church. My two daughters were married there. I've got grandkids now. I love this town, and I'll support whoever the mayor is just like I did at the school district with superintendents that got elected over my "no" vote. I was in that superintendent's office at 8:30 a.m. the very next day, and we had a candid conversation about my feelings but then I said to that person "I will support you. You are the superintendent and I want to work with you and I will be as helpful to use I can for the best interest of these students that we are called to serve." I'll do the same thing for the city. I always will.

Camp Aldergate hosts “afternoon of friends, fun” at 35th annual Fish Fry

BY CALEB HENNINGTON
Digital Content Editor

On Oct. 14, families will have an opportunity to participate in a fun-filled day of great fun, great food, and fundraising for a great cause. The 35th Annual Camp Aldergate Fish Fry takes place from 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Camp Aldergate in Little Rock, Arkansas.

This event will help fund the daily expenses required to operate Arkansas’ only non-profit that benefits children, youth and adults with special needs and medical conditions in a summer camp environment.

According to Kerri Daniels, Director of Development for Camp Aldergate, 100 percent of the proceeds from tickets sold for the event will go toward benefitting their mission of serving individuals with special needs.

The day will be filled with lots of family-friendly activities, including live music from Jubilation Jazz, a petting zoo, carousel rides, cupcake walks, face painting, a fishing derby, a bake sale, and more.

There will also be a Merchants pop-up shop with around 15 merchants who will be selling a variety of gifts, like handmade jewelry, books, and even wood crafts.

“Fish Fry is such a special event because all of the many, many volunteers who make it a success,” Daniels said. “We truly couldn’t make it happen without them. This is our 35th year and I anticipate nothing less than an afternoon of friends and fun.”

All of the fish provided for the Fish Fry comes from Sysco Arkansas, one of the sponsors of the annual event.

Founded in 1947, Camp Aldergate was originally created as a place for interracial fellowship, meetings and Christian training. A group of women from the Little Rock Methodist Council saw a need for social change and racial harmony, which led to them requesting a \$25,000 grant from the Women’s Division of the General Board of Global Ministries to establish the camp.

Camp Aldergate now provides year-round social service programs for more than 1,700 people of all backgrounds, ages and needs.

Tickets for the Fish Fry are \$15 per person, but children 6 years old and under can attend for free. They can be purchased online at www.campaldersgate.net or by calling 501-225-1444.



MEETING SPACES
**VACATION
VIEWS**

DEGRAY LAKE RESORT STATE PARK

#ARStateParks

Choose from five Arkansas State Park lodges that offer first-class accommodations in the most scenic settings in the state. Whether it’s a private getaway or corporate retreat, we can help personalize your experience.

888-AT-PARKS • LodgesofArkansas.com



World Communion Sunday

Giving event brings together
United Methodists from
around the globe

BY CALEB HENNINGTON
Digital Content Editor



Every year, the United Methodist Church joins with Christians from around the world for World Communion Sunday, a day to celebrate Christian and ecumenical unity.

World Communion Sunday has been observed for more than 80 years, but many United Methodist members may not know how the observance came to be or its intended purpose.

The annual event – celebrated on the first Sunday of October – was actually conceived in 1933 by Dr. Hugh Thomson Kerr, pastor at Shadyside Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Later, due to its mass popularity and promotion of unity within the church, the celebration spread to other Presbyterian churches within the United States, and eventually it spread to various denominations all around the world.

For the United Methodist Church, World Communion Sunday is one of six special Sundays each year that are celebrated church wide. This year, World Communion Sunday takes place on Oct. 7.

During World Communion Sunday, United Methodist Churches from around the globe, as well as churches from other Christian denominations, will participate in holy communion together in celebration of the Eucharist.

According to the [UMC Giving website](#), World Communion Sunday's purpose is to "reach out to all people and model diversity among God's children."

It also serves as a reminder of the commonality of faith in Christ that all believers share.

"We live in an increasingly fractured, even polarized, world. Sadly - and sinfully - those of us who are Jesus' Followers have allowed this to infect the Body of Christ," Bishop Mueller said. "World Communion Sunday is an opportunity to experience how much we share in common with other believers and a challenge to begin living it in new ways."

But the event is not just a time to remember the Lord's Supper and Jesus's sacrifice; it is also a time to give monetarily to the needs of students. Every year on World Communion Sunday, an offering is taken that benefits leadership scholarships for national and international students – both graduate and undergraduate – who are a part of the ethnic scholarship program and the Ethnic In-Service Training program. The offering allows many first-generation ethnic students the opportunity to attend a higher education institute.

Fifty percent of the offering taken during World Communion Sunday is allocated to World Communion Scholarships, while 35 percent goes to the Ethnic Scholarship Program and the remaining 15 percent is allocated to the Ethnic In-Service Training Program.

For more information on how you can assist in the education of a future United Methodist student, visit the UMC Giving website at www.umcsgiving.org, give during your church's offering time on Oct. 7, or send a check in the mail addressed to GCFA at P.O. Box 340029, Nashville, Tennessee 37203.



World Communion Sunday

Preparing our hearts,
remembering his sacrifice

PLEASE GIVE NOW

Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors.
The people of The United Methodist Church®

www.umcsgiving.org/WCS

Graphic courtesy of UMC Giving



Children's Ministry Matters

Coordinator for Children's Ministries seeks to equip church leaders with vital resources

Photo by Aaron Burden on Unsplash

BY CALEB HENNINGTON
Digital Content Editor

From a very young age, Melinda Shunk knew she wanted to pursue a life of faith. Even as a kid growing up in Iowa, Shunk loved spending her summers at church camp, attending youth events at her church, and being what many would consider your typical youth group kid.

“My mother thought it was very odd that I wanted to pursue a faith at such a young age, you know, as a 12 and 13-year-old,” said Shunk. “She just thought that was too young, but I just felt pulled and called by God.”

Shunk's faith journey took many interesting twists and turns growing up, first attending a Lutheran Church as a teenager and then later attending an Evangelical church as a high schooler. These two very different faith worlds – one liturgical and progressive, and one contemporary and conservative – led Shunk to see two sides of the Christian faith growing up. But by the time she reached college she had started to actively push away from organized religion.

According to Shunk, however, it was during those formative years in college that she felt the closest to God.

“I was having an authentic, genuine relationship with God during that time. Growing up, I was given rules and damnation and fear from the Evangelicals, and then I was given strict tradition in the Lutheran Church but I wasn't given reasons why we had those traditions,” Shunk said. “So, because I was given traditions versus shame and scare tactics, then when I could just be authentically me with God, I felt a much closer connection with God when I prayed or when I just talked to God.”

It was also during her time in college that she realized teaching

was where she was being called by God; specifically, teaching children in public schools.

Ministry was nowhere on her radar at this time. Even though she was encouraged by many friends and family to go into some sort of ministry, Shunk saw it as a male-dominated industry and didn't see a place for herself in the church.

So, Shunk went about her chosen career and spent many years in the public education sector. Although teaching in public schools gave her great joy and she loved helping kids, Shunk felt restricted by the rules of public education; specifically, rules preventing her from sharing her faith with them.

“I would see a child having a problem, and I would have to stop myself from saying things like ‘oh, it's okay, sweetie, because God made you that way.’ You can't say what you want to say to these kids in school that are struggling with all of these different problems,” Shunk said.

After seven years, Shunk decided she needed to take a break from public education. In 2004, she took a year off from teaching when her second child was born.

At the same time, a position had just opened up in at her church in Iowa for early childhood ministries. The position was the perfect answer to her questions of where she belonged, and she eagerly took the position soon after.

Working with kids and getting to talk about God was the perfect merger of her two worlds, and it's what ultimately led her to the position she's in now as the Arkansas Conference Children's Ministry Coordinator.

Shunk's position requires her to promote and strengthen the [Children's Ministries of the Arkansas Annual Conference](#) by leading the Conference Children's Council and District Children's Coordinators to resource local church children's ministries and leaders.

What that means is Shunk is basically in charge of making sure every church has the resources they need to effectively minister to the children in their congregation and grow them into amazing and faithful future leaders in the church.

You would be hard pressed to find someone who thinks and breathes and lives children's ministry like Shunk does.

"Children's ministry and children's ministers are the foundation of the church. They are the ones that we need to make sure we reach out to. And when you bring in children, then you bring in their parents who can be reached as well. When you minister to children, then that's where you're going to find your future church. I know it's cliché and it's been said before, but children are the future!"

Shunk says that when you minister to children, you have to consider the age of the child. For very young children, it's best to use light versions of Bible stories that cover the basics. Something that gives them a hands-on experience of who God is and His love for other people. For older children, you can start to dive into a deeper understanding of who God is and what it means to be a Christian. Once they're in junior high and high school, you can begin to really explore larger ideas that affect teenagers' daily walks with Christ.

Quest – a new children's program created by former Children's Ministry Coordinator Karen Swales – is one way that Shunk and her team are hoping

to reach a new group of kids in the church. The event – which is geared toward ministering to third, fourth and fifth-graders – is a way for kids to learn what their "call" is, in terms of Christian faith. It's also a time for children to learn the meaning of baptism, spiritual gifts and God's love, and connect with a diverse range of kids from different areas of the Arkansas Conference.

For the future of Children's Ministry, Shunk is looking to speak with children's ministers and pastors from around the state to see what their needs are, and look at the different ways the Conference office can help them to acquire the resources they need to have authentic connections and a vibrant children's ministry in their own church.

"Children's ministry is all about having authentic relationships. A lot of times we get caught up as children's ministers with just growing your program with the next big thing or the cool music and videos you're using," she said. "But what it really boils down to are the relationships that we build with those people in the church because the Holy Spirit is found when people are together."



Melinda Shunk, Coordinator for Children's Ministries
|| Photo by Stephen Gideon



Photo by Samantha Sophia on Unsplash

Changing seasons, changing leaves

Explore the beauty of autumn with a trip through Arkansas



|| Photo by Timothy Eberly on Unsplash

BY CAROLINE EZELL
Featured Contributor

Fall is the season where God’s handiwork is uniquely alive. Leaves emerge in yellow and golden hues and begin to float around your feet. Temperatures settle into lower registers, giving the wind an exciting chill to carry and reminding you to unpack your favorite sweater. The air turns crisp and you find yourself on the porch wrapped in a quilt and sipping tea, hot with cinnamon. Foliage can vary from tree to tree, luscious reds from Black Gums, Sassafras adopts oranges and yellows, and Sweetgum can offer a brilliant purple. You are unwittingly lulled into a gratitude and kinship with nature’s bounty.

My grandparents, James and Allamae Ezell, started their lives together as farmers in a yellow fieldstone farmhouse in a grove of old oak trees surrounded by rice fields in Weiner, Arkansas. Fall is my grandmother’s favorite season and although the expansive land they lived on was beautiful, it was relatively flat and did not host the autumnal splendor she adored. While the farm was always busy during autumn’s harvest season, James always made time to take Allamae on an annual tour of Arkansas’ finest foliage. They would travel into the Ozarks and stay in Eureka Springs, down into [Petit Jean State Park](#), and through Harrison and Russellville, admiring trees from the car and on foot. When it comes to fall, Arkansas is something special.

In Buffalo River country, expect nothing short of breathtaking. [Hawksbill Crag](#), also known as Whitaker Point, is home to one of the most sought after views in Arkansas. At sunrise, you are guaranteed an awe-inspiring expanse of wilderness and watercolor skies. It’s a place for people seeking an experience off the grid requiring certain precautions and a sizable hike. The trail might be long, but there are many stopping places to rest, one featuring a waterfall. Trust me, this one is worth the effort.

For those who prefer scenic drives to hiking endeavors, the stretch of [US 62](#) from Rogers to Harrison is dense with changing

trees lining the road, perfect for complete immersion. [Highway 7](#) is another course bursting with picturesque displays of autumn, Arkansas’ first state-designated scenic route. It winds through four separate regions from El Dorado to north of Harrison.

At its highest point, [Mount Magazine State Park](#) in Paris, Arkansas reaches 2,753 feet. For sweeping views of the Arkansas River Valley and Blue Mountain Lake in the crisp October air, this is the place. This park welcomes mountain bikers, rock climbers, hang gliders, horseback riders, and hikers of all skill sets. Whether you desire a grand adventure or a simple walk to ground yourself in nature, this state park will sate you.

[Hot Springs](#) is a haven for all things natural, including [Garvan Woodland Gardens](#). The botanical gardens belong to the Faye Jones School of Architecture at the University of Arkansas and boast a number of trails and attractions suitable for anyone wishing to rejoice in this season’s opulence. Accessibility is a priority making wheelchairs and strollers functional on the trails and offering golf cart tours. Their mission statement establishes their goal of “preserving and enhancing a unique part of the Ouachita Mountain environment” and “providing people with a place of learning, research, cultural enrichment, and serenity.” Their manicured gardens are in harmony with native growth, a graceful balance affirming their tranquil ambition.

For our Southwestern denizens, [Logoly State Park](#) is a great retreat for relishing in this season’s offering. Six miles south of Magnolia, this park has stunning mineral springs, campgrounds, and walking trails, but Logoly doesn’t stop there. This park considers itself a resource for environmental education. At the heart of their 368 acres of coastal plain, the visitor center offers several interactive exhibits to educate visitors about conservation. The park encourages visitors to learn about the dangers of pollution and the energy crisis so that, in return, Logoly can stay the beautiful destination it is for years to come.

Autumn in Arkansas is a spectacle to say the least. In every corner of the state, we are greeted with spectacular feats of nature only enhanced by fall colors. Get out there and enjoy it while the season is right.

Equip: Sabbath

On the weekend of Sept. 14 - 15, volunteers, part-time and full-time youth workers from around the Arkansas Conference came together for a weekend retreat at Shepherd of the Ozarks. Youth workers spent around 24 hours learning from facilitator Jim Hightower about the Sabbath: what it is, the importance of remembering the Sabbath, and how to keep Sabbath in the midst of all the chaos and busyness of daily life and ministry.



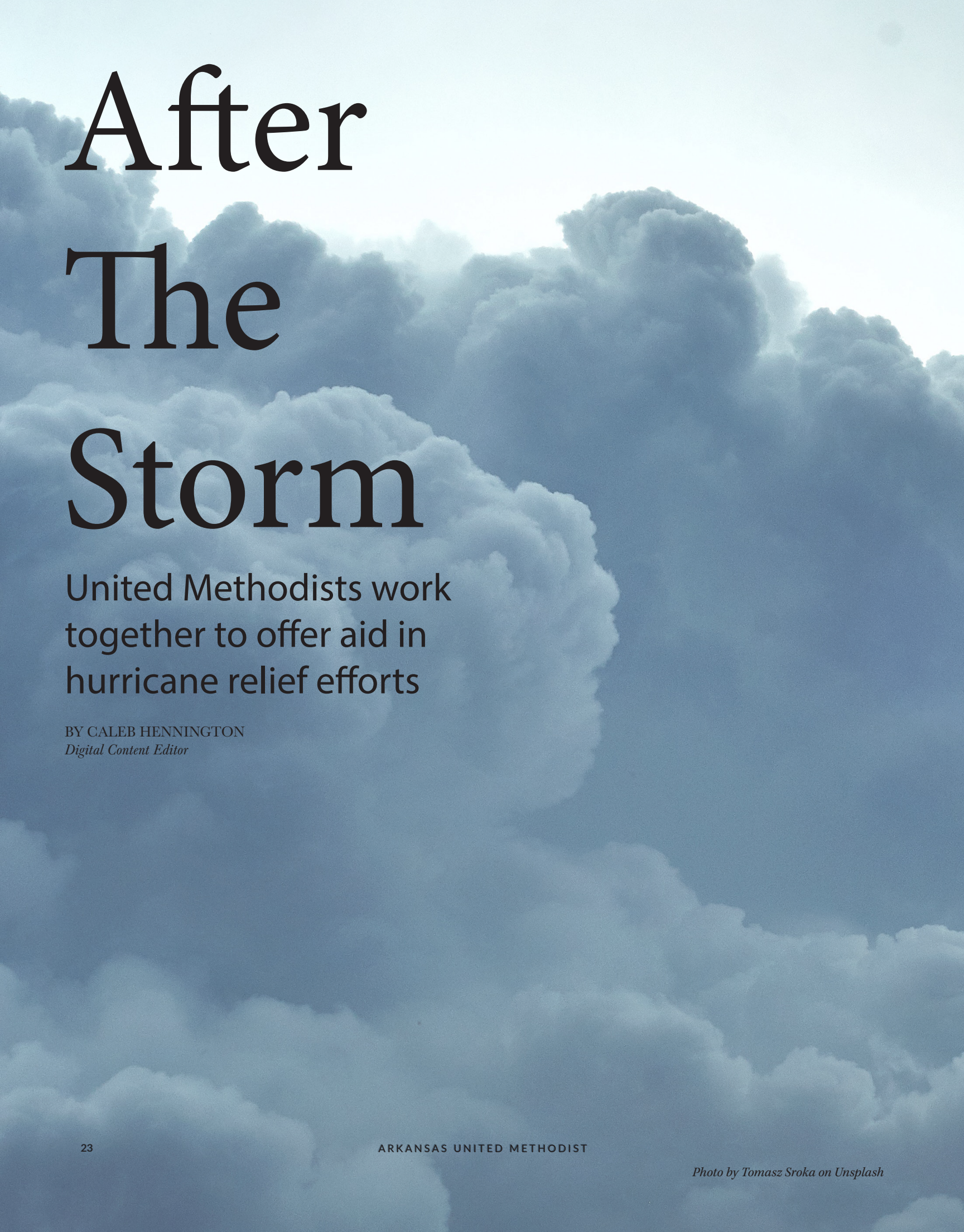
From left to right: Jim Lile, Jennifer Harrison, Claire Smith, Jessica Holt, Josh Holt, Jared Guinn, Bailey Guinn, Michelle Anderson, Elysa Turner, and Noelle Nielson. || *Photo courtesy of Michelle Moore*



Facilitator Jim Hightower (front of the room in striped shirt) speaks to the group of youth workers gathered at EQUIP: Sabbath. || *Photo courtesy of Michelle Moore*



Back row: Bailey Guinn, Jared Guinn, Jim Lile. Middle row: Claire Smith, Jennifer Harrison, David Andrews, Josh Holt, Jessica Holt. Front Row: Rebek Marlatt. || *Photo courtesy of Michelle Moore*



After The Storm

United Methodists work together to offer aid in hurricane relief efforts

BY CALEB HENNINGTON
Digital Content Editor

In the weeks leading up to Hurricane Florence's arrival on the Carolina coast, residents had been warned that this was not going to be an ordinary storm for the East Coast.

Although the Category 5 hurricane – with wind speeds of 157 mph or higher – was reduced down to a Category 1 hurricane – between 74 and 95 mph winds – by the time it hit the coast, the winds were not the main worry with this storm; it was the immense amount of rain that was going to be dumped on North and South Carolina for the next week and the flooding that would occur soon after.

Nearly 1.7 million residents from North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia were told to evacuate before the storm came ashore, but many residents remained anyway, whether out of an inability to leave due to finances or disability, or because of a fear that leaving meant they wouldn't be present to protect their homes when the flood waters came.

For the ones that stayed in their homes when the storm came, they soon found out that they were at the mercy of the storm. Hunkered down in attics and lofts or left to wade in the waters as it filled single story houses, their only refuge were the women and men who volunteered to head into the storm and rescue people from homes.

UMCOR, the United Methodist Committee on Relief, is one group that is ready to assist in disaster relief whenever these big weather events occur. UMCOR – originally known as The Methodist Committee on Overseas Relief – was founded in 1940 by the Bishop Herbert Welch as response to those who were displaced during the bloody events of World War II.

In an address to General Conference that year, Bishop Welch stated that MCOR existed to “be the voice of conscience among Methodists to act in the relief of human suffering without distinction of race, color, or creed.”

These days, UMCOR still carries on that original mission set forth by Bishop Welch. UMCOR has three major areas of response: humanitarian relief and disaster response, sustainable development, and global health.

Janice Mann, who oversees the Arkansas Conference Disaster Response team along with her husband Byron, says that when disasters like Hurricane Florence occur in other conferences, the Arkansas team has to be ready and on standby to assist if the need arises.

During a conference call with UMCOR on Sept. 17, United Methodist Conferences from the affected areas gave a report of the state of their situation.

In the North Carolina and Western North Carolina Conferences, heavy flooding made it hard for emergency responders to get to the areas where people needed to be rescued from their houses. In addition, the storm surge and flooding caused sewage systems to rupture and waste to spread through the waters.

In South Carolina, many of the same issues exist, and they are expecting to need volunteers in the coming weeks and months to help with cleanup efforts.

Emergency supplies will be the main need for many residents recovering from Florence.

UMCOR Sager Brown, which deploys relief supplies to disaster areas around the world, currently has ample inventory in their warehouse, but if more supplies are needed once the cleanup effort begins, a call will be sent out to request donations.

In the meantime, some United Methodist Churches in Arkansas are already doing what they can to assist in the relief efforts.

Lakewood UMC of Little Rock has already begun putting together flood buckets which will be filled with supplies that will help residents recover from the storm damage.

Joe Roitz, Communications Director at Lakewood, said that the church has been working hard to put together these disaster relief buckets through various donation drives. He said the idea for the buckets came up after VBS last summer.

“The theme was Rolling River Rampage and we always used some type of mission drive along with our vacation bible school, so that year we decided to do flood buckets.” Roitz said. “So every day, the kids would bring their supplies or their quarters to help out. And we ended up with quite a few filled buckets just from the kids bringing supplies.”

Roitz said that when Florence arrived they decided they needed to get going collecting flood buckets once again and figure out a way to send them to the people that needed help in the Carolinas.

Each flood buckets contains different supplies that allow people affected by flood waters to begin the process of cleaning up, such as liquid laundry detergent, dish soap, household cleaners, air freshener, insect repellent, and other various items. A full list can be found on [UMCOR's website](#).

If you or your church are looking to help out with the disaster relief efforts for Hurricane Florence, visit <https://arumc.org/our-ministries/vim-and-dr/> or contact Byron and Janice Mann at 870-861-5065. They can also be reached by email at disaster@arumc.org.

Want to know how you or your church can help with flood relief from Hurricane Florence? Check out the helpful infographic on the next page to see what kind of flood buckets you can put together for residents in North and South Carolina and other parts of the East Coast affected by the hurricane.

CLEANING KIT

MATERIALS



One five-gallon bucket with resealable lid

- ♥ 4.35" h x 12.19" w x 12.19" d
- ♥ No screw lids
- ♥ May be used, but must be free from all residual product
- ♥ Advertisements on the outside acceptable



One 32-64 oz. bottle liquid laundry detergent



One 16-40 oz. bottle liquid concentrate household cleaner

- ♥ No spray cleaners



One 16-34 oz. bottle dish soap



One 4-8 oz. pump spray air freshener

- (three solid, or three gel fresheners also acceptable)
- ♥ Pump spray bottles must have protective covers



One 6-14 oz. pump spray insect repellent

- (pack of 10-20 wipes also acceptable)
- ♥ Pump spray bottles must have protective covers



One scrub brush

- ♥ With or without handle



Eighteen re-usable cleaning wipes

- ♥ No terrycloth, microfiber or paper towels
- ♥ Remove from packaging



Five scouring pad sponges

- ♥ No stainless steel pads with soap in them
- ♥ Remove from packaging



36-50 clothespins



One 50-100 ft. clothesline

- (cotton or plastic line)



24 roll of heavy-duty trash bags

- (33-45 gallon sizes)
- ♥ Remove from packaging



Five N95 particulate respirator dust masks

- (1-3 mm thickness)
- ♥ No surgical masks



Two pairs kitchen gloves

- ♥ Durable for multiple uses
- ♥ Remove from packaging



One pair work gloves

- ♥ Cotton with leather palm or all leather

These supplies enable people to begin the overwhelming job of cleaning up after a flood or hurricane.

Cleaning Kit Value: \$75 per bucket

Assembly Directions

- Place all liquid items in the bucket first.
- Place remaining items in the bucket fitting them around and between the liquid items.
- Scouring pads and trash bags can be separated in order to fit all of the items in the bucket.
- Clothes pins may also be placed in a small re-sealable bag.
- Secure the lid on the filled bucket.

Important Notes

- All items must be new with the exception of the bucket and lid.
- All cleaning agents must be liquid form. No powders are accepted.
- If items have been omitted, label bucket. Please indicate which items are missing.
- Sponges have been removed from the list of supplies due to the challenge of locating the non-cellulose sponges that prevent mildew. Non-cellulose sponges will be added to each bucket upon arrival at the affiliate warehouse.
- Do not include any personal notes, money or additional material in the kits.
- Contents of kits or the containers of kits should not be imprinted with cartoon characters, advertisements, religious, patriotic, military or camouflage symbols.

Packing Instructions

- Packed box cannot exceed 70 pounds.
- Complete two packing lists, one for the box and one for your records.
- Place the shipping label/packing list on the outside of the box.
- Please send a check to Sager Brown for the total number of buckets times \$3 per bucket for the cost of sponges and shipping.
- One check may be written for all of the kits.

UMCOR.ORG

UMCOR

United Methodist Committee On Relief

RELIEF KITS

These supplies enable people to begin the process of recovering from conflict and disaster.

Infographic by Stephen Gideon

SCHOOL KIT

MATERIALS



One pair blunt scissors
▼ No plastic scissors



One box of 24 crayons
▼ Only 24-count boxes are accepted



Three one-subject notebooks
▼ No marble composition books
▼ No 3 or 5-subject notebooks



One pack of loose-leaf paper
▼ 100-200 page packets are acceptable
▼ Wide or college rule accepted



One hand-held pencil sharpener
▼ 1-inch or longer
▼ Remove from packaging



One ruler
▼ 12 inches or 30 centimeters long
▼ Sturdy or flexible material accepted



Six unsharpened pencils



One eraser
▼ 2 inches or larger



One two-gallon re-sealable plastic bag

In some countries, children don't have books or school supplies. Many have no schoolrooms; classes are held in inadequate or half-destroyed buildings, tents, or even the open air. School kits may be these children's only educational resources.

School Kit Value: \$11 per kit

Assembly Directions

- Stack all paper items on top of each other.
- Place all loose items on top of paper. (Small loose items may be placed in a smaller re-sealable bag.)
- Place kit inside of re-sealable bag and seal.

Important Notes

- All items must be new.
- Do not include any personal notes, money or additional materials in the kits.
- Contents of kits or the containers of kits should not be imprinted with cartoon characters, advertisements, religious, patriotic, military or camouflage symbols

Packing Instructions

- Packed box cannot exceed 70 pounds.
- School kit item can be packaged inside of the large plastic re-sealable bag.
- Complete two packing lists, one for the box and one for your records.
- Place the shipping label/packing list on the outside of the box.
- Please send a check for the total amount of hygiene kits times \$2 per kit for the cost of toothpaste and shipping to Sager Brown.
- One check may be written for all of the kits.

HYGIENE KIT

MATERIALS



One hand towel (15 x 25 - 17 x 27 inches)

One washcloth



One comb
▼ Must be sturdy with at least 6 inches of teeth
▼ No pocket combs or picks
▼ Rattail and combs without handles are acceptable but must have at least 6 inches of teeth



One toenail or fingernail clipper
▼ No emery boards or metal nail files



One Bath-size soap (3 oz. bar or larger)
▼ No Ivory or Jergen's soap
▼ Do not remove from packaging



One adult toothbrush
▼ Do not remove from packaging
▼ Personal advertising not acceptable



Ten adhesive bandages (¾ by 3 inches)
▼ Common household bandages acceptable



One one-gallon size re-sealable bag

Hygiene kits provide basic necessities to people who have been forced to leave their homes because of human conflict or natural disaster. Hygiene kits are also used as learning tools in personal hygiene, literacy, nutrition, and cooking classes.

Hygiene Kit Value: \$12 per kit

Assembly Directions

- Lay hand towel flat on a table.
- Lay the washcloth in the center of the hand towel.
- Place all remaining items on top of the washcloth (except the plastic bag).
- Fold the sides of the hand towel to cover the items.
- Grasp the bundle tightly and roll over the remainder of the towel.
- Place the tightly rolled bundle in the plastic bag, remove air, and seal.

Important Notes

- All items must be new.
- Do not wash any of the items as they will no longer be considered new.
- Do not include any personal notes, money or additional materials in the kits.
- Contents of kits or the containers of kits should not be imprinted with cartoon characters, advertisements, religious, patriotic, military or camouflage symbols

Packing Instructions

- Packed box cannot exceed 70 pounds.
- Complete two packing lists, one for the box and one for your records.
- Place the shipping label/packing list on the outside of the box.
- Please send a check for the total amount of hygiene kits times \$2 per kit for the cost of toothpaste and shipping to Sager Brown.
- One check may be written for all of the kits.

