Churches take healthy interest in fighting the spread of H1N1

HEATHER HAHN
Editor

Some Do’s and Don’ts for Worship

- Do celebrate worship and the sacraments fully, and be not afraid!
- Have hand sanitizer available for all worshipers at the entrances to your worship space.
- Wash your hands before you touch food you will share with others.
- Receive the bread (rather than taking it) from servers who have washed their hands.

The rapid spread of the highly contagious H1N1 (swine flu) around the globe has made such health precautions particularly urgent this year.

Beyond bringing out the hand sanitizer, First UMC in Bentonville is also discussing under what circumstances an outbreak would lead the church to close its preschool.

Other United Methodist churches are bringing out tiny individual cups for the Lord’s Supper and have hand sanitizers throughout the building.

Since spring, First UMC in Bentonville has kept hand sanitizer on its altar so that clergy and Communion servers can wash up before touching the elements of the holy meal.

“We have Communion in every worship every Sunday,” Rex Dickey, the senior pastor, said. “As frequently as we take Communion, we thought it was important to do that. . . We’re trying to be very proactive without being alarming.”

He said some of the recipients asked to pick their own corn. Soon, they and others joined parishioners in plucking each stalk clean.

Altogether, the church, which has a regular attendance of about 50 people, gave away more than 2,500 ears through their inaugural “Gardening for God” project.

Longtime member Ronnie Kennett said he couldn’t believe how many cars he saw lined up each day next to the cornfield as people came to glean the excess.

“Some may have been there to get corn to sell,” he said. “But I think most were there because they really needed it.”

The idea for the project began early this year, when congregants drew up a vision statement for the church and talked about how they could do more for their Delta town.

Bev Watkins, who was Leachville UMC’s pastor at the time, said this spring, the congregation drew up a vision statement for the church and talked about how they could do more for their Delta town.

Longtime member Ronnie Kennett said he couldn’t believe how many cars he saw lined up each day next to the cornfield as people came to glean the excess.

“Some may have been there to get corn to sell,” he said. “But I think most were there because they really needed it.”

The idea for the project began early this year, when congregants drew up a vision statement for the church and talked about how they could do more for their Delta town.

Bev Watkins, who was Leachville UMC’s pastor at the time, said this spring, the congregation drew up a vision statement for the church and talked about how they could do more for their Delta town.

Longtime member Ronnie Kennett said he couldn’t believe how many cars he saw lined up each day next to the cornfield as people came to glean the excess.

“Some may have been there to get corn to sell,” he said. “But I think most were there because they really needed it.”

The idea for the project began early this year, when congregants drew up a vision statement for the church and talked about how they could do more for their Delta town.

Bev Watkins, who was Leachville UMC’s pastor at the time, said this spring, the congregation drew up a vision statement for the church and talked about how they could do more for their Delta town.

Longtime member Ronnie Kennett said he couldn’t believe how many cars he saw lined up each day next to the cornfield as people came to glean the excess.

“Some may have been there to get corn to sell,” he said. “But I think most were there because they really needed it.”

The idea for the project began early this year, when congregants drew up a vision statement for the church and talked about how they could do more for their Delta town.

Bev Watkins, who was Leachville UMC’s pastor at the time, said this spring, the congregation drew up a vision statement for the church and talked about how they could do more for their Delta town.

Longtime member Ronnie Kennett said he couldn’t believe how many cars he saw lined up each day next to the cornfield as people came to glean the excess.

“Some may have been there to get corn to sell,” he said. “But I think most were there because they really needed it.”

The idea for the project began early this year, when congregants drew up a vision statement for the church and talked about how they could do more for their Delta town.

Bev Watkins, who was Leachville UMC’s pastor at the time, said this spring, the congregation drew up a vision statement for the church and talked about how they could do more for their Delta town.

Longtime member Ronnie Kennett said he couldn’t believe how many cars he saw lined up each day next to the cornfield as people came to glean the excess.

“Some may have been there to get corn to sell,” he said. “But I think most were there because they really needed it.”

The idea for the project began early this year, when congregants drew up a vision statement for the church and talked about how they could do more for their Delta town.

Bev Watkins, who was Leachville UMC’s pastor at the time, said this spring, the congregation drew up a vision statement for the church and talked about how they could do more for their Delta town.

Longtime member Ronnie Kennett said he couldn’t believe how many cars he saw lined up each day next to the cornfield as people came to glean the excess.

“Some may have been there to get corn to sell,” he said. “But I think most were there because they really needed it.”

The idea for the project began early this year, when congregants drew up a vision statement for the church and talked about how they could do more for their Delta town.

Bev Watkins, who was Leachville UMC’s pastor at the time, said this spring, the congregation drew up a vision statement for the church and talked about how they could do more for their Delta town.

Longtime member Ronnie Kennett said he couldn’t believe how many cars he saw lined up each day next to the cornfield as people came to glean the excess.

“Some may have been there to get corn to sell,” he said. “But I think most were there because they really needed it.”

The idea for the project began early this year, when congregants drew up a vision statement for the church and talked about how they could do more for their Delta town.

Bev Watkins, who was Leachville UMC’s pastor at the time, said this spring, the congregation drew up a vision statement for the church and talked about how they could do more for their Delta town.
Letters To The Editor

I have waited anxiously for three months to see some mention in the Arkansas United Methodist about the recipients of the prestigious Denman Evangelism Awards, which were presented at Annual Conference.

These special people are to be commended for their dedicated efforts to extend God’s love and to make disciples of Jesus Christ. They have touched many lives, and it is my opinion that United Methodists across our state are interested in knowing who achieved this honor.

They are: youth, Jared Waylon Guinn of Searcy; laity, Amy and Jerry Buckingham of Cherokee Village; clergy, the Rev. Carlton Cross of Prescott. I am grateful to Dr. David Bush for furnishing me with this information.

Thank you to these very special people for their active participation in advancing the cause of Christ.

May God richly bless you is my prayer.

Phena Fincher
Prescott

As United Methodists in Arkansas seek to Imagine Ministry into the future, I ask all churches as well as Bishop Crutchfield’s committee to consider the following:

According to an article by Bill Downs in the Sept. 6 Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, in the next 20 years there will be more 80-year-olds in Arkansas than newborns. Today, 13.9 percent of Arkansans are 65 years old or older.

Yet I see no postings on the e-mail network of employment opportunities for a “Senior Adult Activities Director,” “Older Adult Coordinator,” “Reaching out to Elderly Church Members,” “Seeking Seniors for Christian Education” or the like.

Yes, the standard axiom is that “the youth are the future of the church.” But does that mean we abandon the needs, preferences and abilities of the ones who now give and who have, all their lives, given to their churches?

The United Methodist Church at Beebe, for one, has an excellent program called “Shepherd Center.” There may be others, but they are not emphasized the way “praise bands” and “alternative worship” and “blue-jean church” are.

Just a thought for the team and others as you deliberate. Remember that the church you are envisioning will have many gray heads among the worshipers.

Mary Catherine McSpadden
Retired local pastor, Mountain View

I write this with some hesitancy, knowing some will misunderstand my heart in this matter of health care reform. As I read the article on health care reform in the Sept. 4 edition of The United Methodist Reporter, I was shocked to discover that our church believes that it is a “governmental responsibility to provide all citizens with health care” (Social Principles, Paragraph 162.V).

The reading of this article prompted me to re-read the Constitution of the United States of America, and I found there to be no such promises. The general welfare mentioned in the Constitution does not refer to welfare as understood by many in our society.

Would it ever be possible for the several denominations that make up the body of Christ to work together to meet our nation’s health-care needs instead of placing more burdens on the back of our overextended government?

United Methodists teach that we should avoid debt as much as possible; yet we citizens have allowed our government to incur more debt than we can ever reasonably expect to repay.

Could a better plan come from the body of Christ learning to give based on biblical principles? Deuteronomy 14, especially verse 28, addresses the issue of caring for those who can’t care for themselves and could be a starting point for Christians to be the light of God to a hurting world, instead of allowing government to receive the credit due Him.

Jimmie Snow
Pastor of Fairview UMC, Mountain Home

Like most everyone, I have been following the much-heated debate on health care. As a general surgeon, I go back years before Medicare was proposed and remember the same debate at that time.

Physicians were leery of any social program, and we had a recalcitrant attitude. But there is no doubt that Medicare has been successful in saving millions of lives. The treatment of millions of surgical conditions have been made possible. I do not believe this would have occurred otherwise, except on a sub-optimal charity hospital basis.

I am proud of our statements in the Discipline on “Right to Health Care.” I would like, in some way, to remind our church of our stance as a moral and ethical issue.

I know it would not solve the debate in Arkansas, but at least the debate would be brought to a higher level. To provide health care for all is a test of our character!

Thank you for your consideration.

Dr. Bill Scrulock
El Dorado

The Arkansas United Methodist welcomes letters to the editor. Letters should be no longer than 200 words and include the address and phone number where the writer can be reached.

FOR HEAVEN’S SAKE by Mike Morgan

THE PREACHER’S SERMON WAS AWFULLY TAWD, BUT WE COLLECTED AN UNUSUALLY LARGE OFFERING!

Our church has its own “Cash for Clunkers” program!

Could this be true? Not at a church I am aware of. But, then, I have not been everywhere. What a real shame! What a real opportunity!

It’s always dicey trying to interpret statistics. But I am guessing many Nones are turned off from their churches? Could a better plan come from the body of Christ learning to give based on biblical principles? Deuteronomy 14, especially verse 28, addresses the issue of caring for those who can’t care for themselves and could be a starting point for Christians to be the light of God to a hurting world, instead of allowing government to receive the credit due Him.

Bringing in the ‘Nones’

This is the time of year when even incorrigible city dwellers like me start thinking about the joys of harvest and God’s bounty at Ingathering.

Yet I see no postings on the Web site www.10thousanddoors.org where those interested can find a United Methodist church near them. The site now attracts more than 400,000 page views each month.

Do you want to join the harvest of the Nones? One easy way is to visit www.Find-A-Church.org and update the information about your church’s ministries.

When people visit the “10ThousandDoors” site, they can click on “Find” and enter their ZIP Code and the ministry that interests them. If, say, a site visitor from your neighborhood is interested in “Helping the Hungry” and your church has a food pantry, that’s information the denomination wants the visitor to know.

My hope is that by updating their sites, Arkansas churches can capitalize on the denomination’s advertising and bring in the “Nones.”
To heed God’s call to ministry, we must heed the body’s needs

DEENA MARIE HAMILTON
Special contributor

In the world of fast pace and fast food, it shouldn’t be a surprise that Americans have such an issue with weight. I have been battling this for years, but this time, I am ready to make some lifestyle changes.

Being a pastor, a nursing student, a CEO and a mother is not easy. I have been conditioned to have the “I can have it all mentality.” I do have it all — including an expanding waistline. I have gained the typical 15 to 20 pounds my first year of nursing school which was predicted by most of my nursing school instructors.

Paul wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians, that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit which we have received from God, and that our lives are not our own, and that we should honor God with our bodies because we were bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

I have noticed as I passed by the TV set as a football player scored a touchdown, he lifted his hand and pointed to the sky (or was it the JumboTron in the stadium ceiling?).

Then I saw it again as a tennis player scored a winning point.

I wondered, “Are these exceptional athletes saying, ‘I’m number one!’? Or, were they pointing up to heaven and giving praise to God for the touchdown scored or the point won on the court?”

I am serious. I really wondered.

Later, I clicked on an interview with a well-known coach. He was talking about the way in which faith was important to him as he coached young men.

He spoke of the importance of seeing yourself as an individual as being part of something much larger than just yourself. Church was like a team and the challenge was to help the church, made up of many individuals — each with sacred value — pull together to achieve a common goal, in this case to be the church that Christ calls us to be.

He spoke of the importance of his family upbringing. They were disciplined in worship. Though they were people without significant means, he always had enough to give to the offering each Sunday. His parents made certain of that.

He was taught generosity and good stewardship at an early age and came to understand that his small gift, added to other gifts large and small would make a difference.

Then he spoke of his mother, of the importance of her influence on his faith experience. He is a Roman Catholic, and he spoke of always taking his mother’s rosary with him to the games he coached.

It was like having a little bit of her with him even though she has been deceased for some time.

The coach then said, “I always say a prayer before the game. Not for good luck or to win. I would never pray to win. I would never pray for luck. That’s not right. I simply pray to be as good and as strong as I can be.”

Now, that is refreshing. And of course, he is right.

He understands the importance of prayer and the appropriateness of prayer. It is not about winning or losing or good luck / bad luck.

It is about putting yourself in the hands of God to be the best person, the best father, mother, sister, brother, teammate, friend, husband, wife and disciple of Jesus Christ that you can be. It is not about the score at the end of the game. It is about who you are in the hands of God that really counts.

Have a good (see the first paragraph) season.

Faithfully,

Deena Marie Hamilton is the senior pastor of McCabe Chapel United Methodist Church in North Little Rock. She can be reached at rev. deenamarie@gmail.com.

Handy Snacks for Grazing Days

- Bagels, bran muffins, crackers, pita bread, cereal bars, raisin bread and rice cakes
- Yogurt, hard cooked eggs, cheese, cold cereal, deli meats and milk
- Dried fruits, fig bars, fresh fruit, raw veggies and juice
- With minute consideration and preparation you can ensure your food choices are healthy ones.
- Healthy living also includes physical activity as well as good food choices, and we have to commit to some sort of physical activity at least five days a week for 30 minutes.
- Go for a walk on your lunch break. Take a cleansing hike. Get your iPod and dance your worries away. It doesn’t matter how you look. Just keep moving!
- With a combination of better food choices and increased physical activity, this is a task that doesn’t seem so insurmountable. It can be done. It just takes work. We must remember that anything that honors our Creator is worth it. And I’m sure over time my waistline will thank me for it.

Health care reform principles

STEVE COPLEY
Special contributor

Somewhere in the state today, a person will receive a bill from a recent stay in the hospital that will force him to file bankruptcy. There will also be another person who will receive a notice that his insurance policy is being rescinded. Another person will not be able to get a policy because of a pre-existing condition. Then, there are the nearly 47 million in the United States who have no insurance.

There are numbers in our congregations who are losing their jobs and health coverage. Food programs, health ministries and safety-net clinics are overwhelmed.

Now is the time to transform our realities of family bankruptcies, lack of access to care and unnecessary suffering to stories of hope, healing and shared responsibility. Even those who have health insurance are telling us that they cannot afford the care they need, a problem that is getting worse as health care costs rise three times faster than wages.

All of us have a Scriptural mandate to honor the sacredness of life through offering healing to the sick, extending special protections for the vulnerable and to live as good stewards of God’s resources.

As people of faith, we are united in our focus on health care solutions that work for America’s families and our nation. Recently, more than 70 clergy in the state signed a letter that called for four basic principles to be included in any comprehensive health care reform legislation. These are rooted in our understanding of our faith journey.

Health care reform must:

- Cover everyone, so that no person relies on an emergency room for their health care or delays treatment because they lack insurance or have been denied coverage;
- Provide families with quality health insurance choices that are truly affordable regardless of income;
- Protect and enhance the health care of lower-income families and children by strengthening Medicaid and SCHIP (AR Kids); and,
- Rest on a financially sustainable foundation, providing people with the care they need when they need it and controlling costs.

It is important that our voices be heard in the current debate in Washington.

In the New Testament, it was clear that Jesus was concerned about those who were sick. In Matthew 25, we are called to “visit those who are sick.”

One of the signs of the Messiah, was one who would come and care for those who were ill. It is important to remember that in Jesus’ time, those who were sick were often placed at the very margins of the society.

We need to assist in changing the stories of those who are suffering because the current health care system has failed them. This is where Christ would be found.

Steve Copley is an ordained United Methodist elder and the director of Justice for Our Neighbors. He can be reached at scooley43@aol.com.
Disciples require steady diet of soul food

BUD REEVES
Special contributor

Everyone knows that one of the keys to good health is diet. Personally, this has been an area of struggle my whole life. You might say it has been my “growing” edge.

Since my childhood in “husky” sizes, I was trained to eat, and I still love to eat. I have been able for the last 25 years or so to maintain the same waist size, but it has not been without extreme pressure sometimes on my waistband. It has required constant caloric vigilance and a perpetual discipline of eating less rather than more. For too long, we have been content to let seekers become wanting more. For too long, we have allowed spiritual anorexia to curb our growth in faith. Our spiritual body is like a living organism. We must get together often with the Creator and Creator’s people for spiritual sustenance. We have access to the spiritual platter of good things to eat and drink that are available to us. We have a privilege to choose what we will eat and drink, and we have a responsibility to do so wisely.

So, how do we get into that kingdom of grace? First, we must make a commitment to personal contact with the Author of life and grace. Daily prayer — no matter the style — is power for the kingdom. Second, we must get together often with the Creator and Creator’s people for spiritual sustenance. Third, we have an opportunity to give our money and time for the kingdom in our churches. Fourth, we need to be discipled by others who can guide our spiritual growth. Fifth, we need to be discipled by others who can guide our spiritual growth. Sixth, we need to be discipled by others who can guide our spiritual growth. Seventh, we need to be discipled by others who can guide our spiritual growth. Eighth, we need to be discipled by others who can guide our spiritual growth. Ninth, we need to be discipled by others who can guide our spiritual growth. Tenth, we need to be discipled by others who can guide our spiritual growth.

Spiritual development. Personal contact with the Creator is the foundation of our relationship. Daily time in prayer is indispensable, and other strategies of spirituality — like determining our spiritual giftedness — can lay the groundwork for discipleship.

Worship. The spiritual body of a disciple withers without worship. We must get together often with the community of faith to corporately worship our God. Nutritional worship — no matter the style — cannot be like broccoli in a buffet: overdone, mushy and tasteless. Rather, like a healthy salad, worship has to pop, snap, refresh and invigorate the hungry disciple.

Fellowship. Growing disciples get together with others on the journey. This is one of the purposes of small groups in any local church — classes, ministry and mission groups, social functions. Discipleship demands an authentic and personal community of faith.

Study. Discipleship is a learning process. I have taught and preached the Bible for over thirty years; there are still new insights every time I research a passage. Scripture is the filet mignon of discipleship. (Or if you’re vegetarian, imagine a big, juicy slab of eggplant.)

The depths of tradition, history and doctrine are deeper than I will ever fathom.

Disciples have to be constant learners, asking the questions and struggling with the answers until they are all resolved on the other side.

Stewardship. Effective disciples know how to deal with their stuff. We live in a selfish, materialistic, consumer culture. How do we make faithful sense of that? We live on a planet that is a gift. How do we take care of that? Disciples have to learn how to use money, time, talent and creation in a godly way if we want to be nourished.

Outreach. It’s not about us. Discipleship is about developing our faith so we can help others. We want to help the sick and the poor and the oppressed. We want to help the lost find Christ. Learning how to witness and engaging in compassionate service are like the dessert platter. That’s why you eat your vegetables; it’s the sweetest part.

Methodism. Particularly for disciples who follow Wesley as well as Jesus, it is important to know our distinctive heritage. Methodism as a movement grew out of a troubled time much like ours. We have a gospel of grace and holiness that can speak to our contemporary culture and transform our society — if we will let it. We need to celebrate our heritage, claim our inheritance, and develop a new generation of Wesleyan Methodist disciples.

Churches that provide a balanced diet for their disciples will be more healthy, prosperous and effective.

In this season of the year, as the competing voices of the secular world call us in many directions, I know it’s hard to eat right, spiritually speaking.

But it’s no small matter. It’s about the care and feeding of the Body of Christ. It’s about developing dynamic disciples who will have the courage and strength to transform the world. It’s about having enough energy to make the journey to the Kingdom of God. Let’s eat!

William O. “Bud” Reeves is senior pastor of First UMC, Hot Springs. He can be reached at brobud@fumchsc.com.
United Methodist News Service

Continued from Page 1A

in time for World Communion Sunday on Oct. 4.

At press time, five Arkansas residents had died of the H1N1 virus, according to the Arkansas Department of Health.

But even the seasonal flu can be fatal for the elderly and those with chronic medical conditions. About 36,000 people in the United States die each year of influenza, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

The H1N1 virus is most dangerous for:

- Pregnant women.
- Teenagers and young children.
- Frail elders.
- Those with underlying health conditions such as asthma and diabetes.
- Those with weakened immune systems.

Starting in late October, the state health department plans to distribute free vaccinations — one for the seasonal flu and one for H1N1 — at sites in every county in the state. The department also will distribute vaccines through the state’s public schools.

Ed Barham, the department’s public information officer, said he expects it will be the most massive vaccination campaign in the state’s history.

In the meantime, the department encourages Arkansans do what they can to minimize the transmission of the germs.

Dr. James Phillips — the department’s branch chief who deals with infectious disease — recommends churches use intinction (that is, the dipping method) or individual cups for Communion, rather than drinking from a common cup.

But because the virus is airborne, the primary risk is from the people around you — not Communion, said Barham, who is also a member of Pulaski Heights UMC.

“Th e best advice we can offer is: People who are feeling ill ... stay home,” Barham said. “You also should stay away from anyone who is ill.”

Chaplain John Wilcher, the director of clergy and conference ministries at Methodist LeBonheur Healthcare in Memphis, says church leaders can play a role in promoting awareness.

He hopes pastors will stress the need for people to get shots for both the seasonal flu and H1N1.

Methodist Healthcare also is distributing bottles of hand sanitizer emblazoned with the hospital logo.

Chris Cooper, the senior pastor of Cornerstone UMC in Jonesboro, hopes his congregation can do something similar — pass out small bottles at Arkansas State University tailgate parties.

Cooper got the idea after some family members came down with the flu and couldn’t make it to Jonesboro for a football game.

The following Sunday, he used hand sanitizer before consecrating the Communion bread and grape juice. He also passed the bottle of Purell around to the Communion servers with the blessing. “Take this in remembrance of your neighbor.”

“That got people to snickering,” Cooper said. “Everybody was pleased that we did this. People said, ‘Thank you.’”

During worship, Dickey says he’s talked about the importance of regularly washing your hands.

“We’ve talked about singing the ABC song in your head as you wash with soap and water,” the Bentonville pastor said. “I think health and holiness go together.”

To learn more, visit the Arkansas Department of Health Web site at www.healthyarkansas.com, or U.S. Department of Health and Human Services site at www.flu.gov.
With Rice Depot, United Methodists sha

Laura Rhea
For the Arkansas United Methodist

In Arkansas, 500,000 individuals live in poverty and far too many face hunger. Thanks to a partnership between the United Methodist Churches in Arkansas and Arkansas Rice Depot, 374,000 of them have food on their tables, and the knowledge that someone cares.

Founded 27 years ago by the Arkansas Inter-Faith Hunger Task Force, Arkansas Rice Depot was built on a foundation of rice — appropriate when you consider that rice is the largest food crop in Arkansas.

Rice growers and the rice industry were the first food donors, and more than 300 of them have been faithful donors over the years.

In 2009, Arkansas Rice Depot will distribute more than 7 million pounds of all different kinds of food, and a wide assortment of personal care and household items, as well Ingathering kits and disaster supplies.

Arkansas Rice Depot distributed 4,785,716 pounds of food and supplies during the first eight months of 2009, an increase of 374,667 pounds — or nearly 8 percent over the same period last year.

Arkansas Rice Depot distributed more than 15 tractor-trailer loads of food and supplies per month, or more than 28,000 pounds per day.

Arkansas Rice Depot is the only statewide foodbank in Arkansas, and provides food to more than 13 percent of the population of the state. It is a ministry dedicated to honoring Christ's command to feed the hungry and care for the poor.

Arkansas Rice Depot's mission is simple: "to find sensible solutions to hunger in Arkansas." The programs of Arkansas Rice Depot reach out to individuals facing a food crisis in four distinct ways.

We Empower: We believe the key to ending hunger in Arkansas is found in the Arkansas tradition of neighbors helping their needy neighbors. Through Food For Families we provide almost 7 million pounds of food each year to over 300 church and community hunger agencies.

We Serve: No senior citizen should receive a life sentence of hunger. Our Food For Seniors program enables volunteers to deliver 50 pounds of food and household items monthly to homebound seniors.

We Innovate: Because it's hard to be hungry for knowledge when you're just plain hungry, Arkansas Rice Depot started Food For Kids, a food pantry for students in public schools which has been replicated by 118 food banks across the nation. In Arkansas, Food For Kids serves more than 25,000 children in 600 schools by providing backpacks filled with food, and other items that is sent home with students facing hunger. A backpack filled with food is making a difference that will last a lifetime for these students.

We Respond: From house fires and tornados to ice storms and even large factory closings, Arkansas Rice Depot's disaster relief program provides emergency relief through our food pantry partners, public schools, direct disaster service events, and even door to door if necessary. Our emergency relief efforts continue in a community as long as needed.

We Depend on You: United Methodist churches have been a key ministry partners with Arkansas Rice Depot for the past 27 years. Through financial support, donations of Ingathering kits, bulk items and food, performing volunteer service, operating food pantries and hosting Simple Pleasures Alternative Holiday Markets, United Methodist churches and individuals have made the work of Arkansas Rice Depot possible.

Without you, hundreds of thousands of Arkansans would face an empty plate. With God's grace — and neighbors helping neighbors — those who hunger will hunger no more.

Laura Rhea is the president and chief executive officer of Arkansas Rice Depot. She can be reached at endhunger@ricedepot.org or (501) 565-8855.

The Arkansas Conference will celebrate the 32nd Ingathering from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Nov. 7 at the Arkansas Rice Depot, 3801 W. 65th Street in Little Rock.

All churches are encouraged to participate in this annual effort to stop hunger and provide disaster relief.

The conference emphasizes “Bulk is Better”; receiving bulk items saves time and money when they reach Sager Brown, the United Methodist Committee on Relief depot in Baldwin, La.

The District offices will provide collection dates and times in your district.

An Ingathering form can be downloaded from the conference Web site at www.arumc.org.
re God’s bounty

What Arkansas Rice Depot can do

YOUR COMMUNITY FOOD PANTRY
How the Arkansas Rice Depot (ARD) can help you:
- We can provide food and volunteer training for your community food pantry or soup kitchen. There is no charge for either food or training.

How you can help:
- Encourage the manager of your local pantry to find out how to get food from Arkansas Rice Depot.
- If there is no food pantry serving your area, consider whether your church can organize one.
- Ask us to speak at an event at your church.

FOOD FOR KIDS
How ARD can help you:
- We provide food and backpacks for local schools to supply kid-friendly, simple-to-prepare food to children who have little or nothing to eat at home.

How you can help:
- Make sure your local school nurse or counselor knows about the availability of the Food for Kids program.
- Pick up, store and package food for the program monthly, delivering it to participating schools in your area once a week.
- "Adopt" a school to help free up resources for more schools. An average school program costs Arkansas Rice Depot $2,000 a year.
- Host a Food For Kids food drive.

FOOD FOR SENIORS
How ARD can help:
- We can provide senior assistance boxes that include food, personal care products and household supplies for elderly people at risk of hunger who are unable to get to a food pantry.

How you can help:
- Identify elderly people in your area who qualify for Food for Seniors.
- Pick up food from our warehouse in Little Rock and deliver to qualified seniors in your area.
- "Adopt" a senior for $20 a month, or $240 per year, to help expand the program.

THE COAT PROJECT
How ARD can help:
- We provide new winter coats for school children referred to us by school nurses and counselors. We also provide new socks, underwear and gloves as available.

How you can help:
- Host a Back-to-School sock and underwear drive.
- Host a Deck-the-Tree sock and glove drive. Put up a Christmas tree and ask church members to decorate the tree with new socks and gloves. Send us the socks and gloves for school children in need.

To learn more about opportunities at Arkansas Rice Depot, visit www.ricedepot.org
A sudden downpour played havoc with Havana United Methodist Church’s plans for its third annual “Antique Car Show and Gospel Singing.” The classic cars remained indoors and away from public view. Still, the rain didn’t dampen the church’s efforts to sing God’s praise.

Church member Delvin Williams and the congregation’s pastor, Ed Seay, spent the day calling area church groups to move the evening concert originally scheduled for the city park inside the church. By 4 p.m. Sept. 12, visitors were crowding into Havana UMC’s pews to see groups and soloists perform such familiar songs as “I Saw the Light” and “His Eye is on the Sparrow.”

Williams, who originated the idea for the annual car show and concert, was already thinking of plans for next year’s event. But he was relieved the singing still happened. “It’s the most important part,” he said. “You can’t save someone with a lot of old cars, but with a gospel song, you can bring someone to the Lord.”

Pictured at left, members of Havana UMC’s Monday Night Bunch — Roger Turley, Tracy Turley, Margaret Steward, Amelia Turley, Hazel Foster, Johnny Foster and Williams — perform for an appreciative crowd. Not pictured is Emma Turley on piano.

-- Billie B. Finch

### OBITUARIES

#### PINE BLUFF

**Robert Edward Turner**, 77, of Pine Bluff, passed away June 7 at Arkansas Hospice, St. Vincent Doctors Hospital in Little Rock, after a valiant fight against cancer.

He was a United Methodist minister who served as pastor of Humphrey United Methodist Church and most recently was pastor of Traskwood UMC and Ebenezer UMC in Tull.

Turner was born in Morrilton and reared in Perry County. He graduated from Watson Chapel High School, and later in life served as superintendent of the Watson Chapel School District.

He also served in the U.S. Navy and ultimately earned his doctorate in educational administration from what is now the University of Louisiana at Monroe.

His parents, Baxter Elam Turner and Alma Swope Turner, preceded him in death. He is survived by his wife, A. C. Turner; three brothers, Herman Cravens, Carl Augusta Cravens and Lester Henry Cravens; two sisters, Ruth Elizabeth Wright and Esther Lanesia Cravens Sampson.

Two nieces, nephews and cousins, as well as her parents, her husband, A. C. Turner, and her brothers, Herman and Lester Henry Cravens, preceded her in death.

She was also survived by four grandchildren: Chris Love and his wife, Amy; Jason Love, Wesley Lemons and his wife, Janet; and Jocelyn Love, and his wife, Kiersten.

### LITTLE ROCK

**Norris Steele**, 82, a longtime United Methodist pastor and the father of three ordained elders, passed away Aug. 29.

He was born March 24, 1932, to the late Charlie P. and Trudy Jones Rogers near Village. Preceding him in death were three brothers, C.P. Rogers Jr., Billy Ray Rogers and James Nolan Rogers; also three sisters, Bernell Andrews, Nettie Fay Rogers and an infant.

He was succeeded by his wife of 59 years, Ida Carol (Foster) Rogers; one son, Joseph Glenn Rogers and his wife, Bee, of Village; two daughters, Carol Jean Love and husband, Kenneth, of Sparkman; and Linda Faye Lemons and David Dickerson of Dalar.

He is also succeeded by four grandchildrens: Chris Love and his wife, Amy; Jason Love, Wesley Lemons and Dorothy, and Timmy Rogers and mother, Lynette. He also has four surviving granddaughters: Kay Dukes and husband, Jim; Pam Combs and husband, Terry; Mandy Low and husband, Tracy; and Jessica Chandler.

Also among his survivors are three brothers, Ron, of Bentonville; and his son, Kett Turner of White Hall.

He is also survived by five great-grandchildren; and a sister, Dulcia Smith.

### LITTLE ROCK

**Norris Steele**, 82, a longtime United Methodist pastor and the father of three ordained elders, passed away Aug. 29.

He was born March 24, 1932, to the late Charlie P. and Trudy Jones Rogers near Village. Preceding him in death were three brothers, C.P. Rogers Jr., Billy Ray Rogers and James Nolan Rogers; also three sisters, Bernell Andrews, Nettie Fay Rogers and an infant.

She is preceded in death by a brother, John Wesley Cravens and Oscar Cravens Sampson.

She was a graduate of Southern State Teachers School, and later in life served as superintendent of the Watson Chapel School District.

A graduate of Southern State Teachers School, and later in life served as superintendent of the Watson Chapel School District.

A graduate of Southern State Teachers School, and later in life served as superintendent of the Watson Chapel School District.

She was a member of the Watson Chapel Church, as well as a homemaker and wife of pastor. She was a member of the Macedonia United Methodist Church of Locksberg, and enjoyed sewing, flowers, gardening, fishing, and spending time with family.

She was preceded in death by her parents, her husband, A. C. Turner, and her brothers, Herman and Lester Henry Cravens, and two sisters, Ruth Elizabeth Wright and Esther Cravens Sampson.

She is also survived by two daughters, Ann Rawls and Barbara Jean Turner of Pine Bluff; one grandson, Bradley Turner Byrd of Bentonville; his niece and her family.

The family requests memorials be made to The Dr. Robert E. Turner Scholarship Fund, c/o Simmons First National Bank, 501 S. Main St., Pine Bluff, 71601; or to Arkansas Hospice, c/o St. Vincent Doctors Hospital, 6101 St. Vincent Circle. Little Rock. 72205.

Funeral services were held June 10 in the chapel of Ralph Robinson and Son. Burial with military honors followed in Memorial Park Cemetery.

Daisy Cravens Cabe, 100, of Lockesburg died July 8, in a local hospital.

She was born to Oscar and Mary Turrentine Cravens at Lockesburg on Nov. 27, 1908.

She was a retired deaconess in the United Methodist Church, as well as a homemaker and wife of pastor. She was a member of the Macedonia United Methodist Church of Locksberg, and enjoyed sewing, flowers, gardening, fishing, and spending time with family.

She was preceded in death by her parents, her husband, A. C. Turner, and her brothers, Herman Cravens, Carl Augusta Cravens and Lester Henry Cravens; two sisters, Ruth Elizabeth Wright and Esther Cravens Sampson.

She is survived by two brothers, John Wesley Cravens and Oscar Cravens Sampson.

She was preceded in death by a brother, John Wesley Cravens and Oscar Cravens Sampson.

She was a graduate of Southern State Teachers School, and later in life served as superintendent of the Watson Chapel School District.

A graduate of Southern State Teachers School, and later in life served as superintendent of the Watson Chapel School District.

She was a member of the Watson Chapel Church, as well as a homemaker and wife of pastor. She was a member of the Macedonia United Methodist Church of Locksberg, and enjoyed sewing, flowers, gardening, fishing, and spending time with family.

She was preceded in death by her parents, her husband, A. C. Turner, and her brothers, Herman and Lester Henry Cravens, and two sisters, Ruth Elizabeth Wright and Esther Cravens Sampson.

She is also survived by two daughters, Ann Rawls and Barbara Jean Turner of Pine Bluff; one grandson, Bradley Turner Byrd of Bentonville; his niece and her family.

The family requests memorials be made to The Dr. Robert E. Turner Scholarship Fund, c/o Simmons First National Bank, 501 S. Main St., Pine Bluff, 71601; or to Arkansas Hospice, c/o St. Vincent Doctors Hospital, 6101 St. Vincent Circle. Little Rock. 72205.

Funeral services were held June 10 in the chapel of Ralph Robinson and Son. Burial with military honors followed in Memorial Park Cemetery.

### LOCKESBURG

Daisy Marie Cravens Cabean, the elder who served churches in Hermitage, Dalark, Tolar, Texas; Italy; Texas; Sardis; Gillett, Mena, DeQueen, Camden, Fairview. After retiring for a number of years — yet still ministering — he was serving Rushing Memorial UMC in Chidester.

He was born March 24, 1932, to the late Charlie P. and Trudy Jones Rogers near Village. Preceding him in death were three brothers, C.P. Rogers Jr., Billy Ray Rogers and James Nolan Rogers; also three sisters, Bernell Andrews, Nettie Fay Rogers and an infant.

He was succeeded by his wife of 59 years, Ida Carol (Foster) Rogers; one son, Joseph Glenn Rogers and his wife, Bee, of Village; two daughters, Carol Jean Love and husband, Kenneth, of Sparkman; and Linda Faye Lemons and David Dickerson of Dalar.

He is also succeeded by four grandchildrens: Chris Love and his wife, Amy; Jason Love, Wesley Lemons and Dorothy, and Timmy Rogers and mother, Lynette. He also has four surviving granddaughters: Kay Dukes and husband, Jim; Pam Combs and husband, Terry; Mandy Low and husband, Tracy; and Jessica Chandler.

Also among his survivors are three brothers, Ron, of Bentonville; and his son, Kett Turner of White Hall.

He is also survived by five great-grandchildren; and a sister, Dulcia Smith.

A celebration of his life was held Sept. 2 at Henderson United Methodist Church.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests memorials be made to Henderson UMC, 13000 Baseline Road, Little Rock, 72210.

### PENSACOLA, Fla.

**Billy Vernon Dennis**, 82, passed away Sept. 6 at his home in Pensacola, Fla.

Born in Arkansas on July 3, 1927, Dennis graduated from Hendrix College in Conway and Duke University Divinity School in Durham, N.C.

He also did graduate work in Boston.

He was a Methodist preacher in Arkansas from 1945 to 1966 when he joined the U.S. Navy. As a U.S. Navy Chaplain, he served in Vietnam and later Okinawa, Japan. He returned to Arkansas in 1988 and retired in Elaine in 1994. Then moved to reside in Pensacola to be close to his family.

He is preceded in death by his parents, Tommy Dennis and the former Agnes White.

He is survived by his wife of 59 years, Esther; sons Tech Sgt. David W. Dennis; Storekeeper 2nd Class James V. Dennis and his wife, Merri; and John Wesley Dennis and his wife, Tracey, all of Pensacola.

He is survived by adopted family members, Petty Officer 2nd Class Bob Thompson and his wife, Marlene, and Petty Officer 3rd Class John Niemeyer of Pensacola.

He is also survived by five grandchildren and three great-

grandchildren.

A memorial service was held Sept. 14 at Warrington United Methodist Church.

Burial followed at the Ebenezer Cemetery north of Village under the direction of Lewis Funeral Home Inc. of Magnolia.

**Norris Steele**, 82, a longtime United Methodist pastor and the father of three ordained elders, passed away Aug. 29.

Steele of Little Rock, was born March 10, 1927, in Jonesboro to John Chambers Steele and Della May (Hinonll) Steele. He was a graduate of Hendrix College and Southern Methodist University’s Perkins School of Theology. He also served as a Merchant Marine during World War II before serving 43 years in the United Methodist ministry.

He was preceded in death by a daughter, Allidel Steele Whitwell. He is survived by his wife of 64 years, Virginia Davidson Steele. He is also survived by his children, Bill Steele, pastor of Tuckerman and Swifton United Methodist churches, and wife, Mary; David Steele, pastor of Batesville UMC, and wife, Diane; Rodney Steele, North Central District superintendent, and wife, Becky; and son-in-law, John Whitwell of Maumelle. Additional survivors include 13 grandchildren; five great-grandchildren; and a sister, Dulcia Smith.

A celebration of his life was held Sept. 2 at Henderson United Methodist Church.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests memorials be made to Henderson UMC, 13000 Baseline Road, Little Rock, 72210.

---

Photo by Heather Hahn
During its opening convocation on Aug. 27, Philander Smith College honored Nigel Haskett, with the first Ozell Sutton Medal of Justice in recognition of his extraordinary act of courage in the face of adversity. Haskett was an employee at a west Little Rock McDonald's restaurant in August 2008 when he was shot multiple times breaking up a fight between a customer and her then-boyfriend. The award is named for 1950 Philander Smith graduate Ozell Sutton, who became the first black reporter for the Arkansas Democrat in 1950. Pictured from left are Haskett, Sutton and Philander Smith president, Walter Kimbrough.

Photo courtesy of Philander Smith College

**Hendrix College celebrates record enrollment**

Hendrix has surpassed 1,400 students for the first time in the college's history. That enrollment includes 42 United Methodist Youth Fellowship Leadership scholars. The 11 new freshman scholars were the beneficiaries of Hendrix's decision to increase the financial award to $2,000 from $1,000, which had been the award amount for the past 12 years.

The official census numbers were released following the 10th day of class, revealing Hendrix has an overall student enrollment of 1,463.

The second-largest freshman class in the college’s history, one of the college's most academically talented with an average ACT score of 29 and boasting 62 Arkansas Governor's Distinguished Scholars, created the new milestone for Hendrix.

The increases correspond with Hendrix’s ranking as the nation’s top “Up-and-Coming” liberal arts college in the September issue of U.S. News & World Report. Hendrix is among 13 liberal arts colleges recognized as having “recently made the most promising and innovative changes in academics, faculty, students, campus or facilities,” and “firmly focused on improving the job they’re doing today.”

Tied for second on the list are Agnes Scott College in Georgia, Davidson College in North Carolina and Furman College in South Carolina.

“As witnessed by all the attention we are receiving nationally, the momentum at Hendrix is exceptional and the accomplishments of our faculty and students are extraordinary,” said J. Timothy Floyd, Hendrix President. “We welcomed a freshmen class of talented students this year who come from New York to California, and they are preparing for the educational rides of their lives.”

**Volunteers in Mission**

This Volunteer in Mission listing includes mission opportunities offered by local churches and districts. Often there is room for additional volunteers to join the team. For more information on any of these projects, contact the individuals listed or Don Weeks, Arkansas Area Volunteers in Mission coordinator, 18 Montague Court, Little Rock, AR 72223; (501) 868-9193 or 681-2909; dweeks@arumc.org.

Feb. 6-12, 2010: Rio Bravo, Mexico. Construction help needed to build a casita, a small house. Contact Larry Acton, lacont@ritternet.com or (870) 520-3969.

March 6-14, 2010: Costa Rica. Painting, flooring, Bible School. Larry Acton, lacont@ritternet.com or (870) 520-3969.

Ongoing: "This Olde Church" Volunteers in Mission project. Help restore and repair churches in the Arkansas Conference. Teams will be painting, weather-proofing, doing general repairs, landscaping and other jobs. Teams DO NOT do roofing, plumbing or electrical. The church that asks for teams will provide housing, help prepare meals and provide showers. The teams will supply their food, the materials, tools and labor. Any church can apply for help through their District Superintendent. Teams can sign up by contacting Don Weeks at dweeks@arumc.org.

Wesley Foundation, UALR: Help needed with general maintenance, cleanup, painting, etc. Contact Maxine Allen at malen@arumc.org, her office at (501) 663-1153 or her cell phone at (501) 539-9286.

Mount Eagle Christian Center, 935 Beal Road in Clinton, is requesting chain saw and cleanup crews. E-mail Lu Harding at lu@mounteagle.org or call her at (501) 753-4580.

**Classifieds**

PLACE YOUR CLASSIFIED in the Arkansas United Methodist for 50 cents per word, no limit. Call 501.324.8005 or mail to: Arkansas United Methodist, 2 Trudie Kibbe Reed Drive, Little Rock, AR 72202; or e-mail: ntyaylor@arumc.org

Home Study: Save $$$ Christian Bible College, P.O. Box 8968 Rocky Mt., NC 27804 Phone (252)451-1031; http://www.christianbiblecollege.org

Minister of Music: Lonoke UMC, Lonoke, AR. Seeking person with callings and expertise in traditional worship, contemporary worship, hand bells and children's choirs. Please send resume to First UMC, P.O. Box 152, Lonoke, AR, 72086. Call (501) 676-8266 for more info.

Theresa Hoover United Methodist Church is currently seeking a part-time (½) Youth Director to continue our energetic youth program. The Youth Director must have a strong desire to see the youth and their families grow in their love and faith of Jesus Christ. We are seeking a director who is energetic, well-organized, a self-starter capable of developing new programs and someone who is willing to enable other adults to be involved with them. For an application please contact: Dumas First United Methodist Church, 230 Court Street, Dumas, AR, 71639, or call (870) 382-6626, or e-mail dumasfmc@centurytel.net

Theresa Hoover United Methodist Church is seeking a part-time Church Secretary responsible for administrative support of the Pastor and various auxiliaries in the Church. Minimum requirements: high school diploma/GED or Equivalent, previous experience as secretary/administrative assistant desired and understanding of United Methodist connectional system desired. Send a resume to: hooverumc@aristotle.net, Attn: Ruth Jones or call (501) 379-1561 for a complete job description.

Student Travel: Kimberling Kids Travel is now booking Spring Break 2010! Chartered bus quotes are also available. (specializing in student group travel since 1982) (501) 227-8447 * (800) 476-2291 * kimberlingkids@aol.com
Three clergy to hold interfaith ‘Triologue’

HEATHER HAHN
Editor

A priest, a rabbi and a United Methodist pastor walk into a room.
That’s not the set up of a joke
but what the leaders of three west Little Rock congregations plan to do
over three Sunday afternoons in
October and November.

Fred Haustein, senior pastor of
St. James United Methodist Church;
Monsignor Francis Malone, pastor of
Christ the King Catholic Church,
and Rabbi Eugene Levy of Temple
B’nai Israel will rotate among
their houses of worship for what they are
billing a public interreligious
“trialogue.”

Haustein said the goal of the
discussions is to emphasize the areas
where the three faith traditions
agree.

“There is so much division and
alienation in the world that people
too often get pulled into their own
‘tribes,’” Haustein said. “As a result,
we lose our common fellowship.
We’re trying to change that.”

The three gatherings will be
held at 3 p.m. Oct. 18, 25 and Nov. 1.
Each session will focus a different
topic.

In order, they will discuss:

I Social issues such as feeding the
hungry, caring for the sick
and relieving poverty at Temple
B’nai Israel, 3700 N Rodney Parham Road,
Little Rock.
II Their prophetic role in the
community at St. James UMC, 321
Pleasant Valley Drive.
III Matters of faith and theology at
Christ the King, 4000 N. Rodney
Parham Road.

The trialogue was the
brainchild of Levy, who held a
similar series in the early 1990s with
one of Haustein’s predecessors, John
P. Miles, and Monsignor Gus Hebert,
Malone’s predecessor at Christ the
King.

The three congregations are
among a group of
west Little Rock
congregations
that have a joint
worship service
each year shortly
before
Thanksgiving.

“I’ve been wanting to do this for
a number of years,” Levy said.
After the rancorous debates
over health care and other political
issues, he feels now is the ideal time
to emphasize shared goodwill.

“This is a way of saying here are
three fairly strong religious
denominations that don’t have to go
around pointing fingers and saying,
‘If you don’t believe our way, you’re
going to hell,’” Levy said.

“We know we have some
liturgical differences and some
theological differences, but there are
many, many issues we can agree on
and we want our congregants to
know that.”

Over the last six months, the
three clergymen have met together
three or four times to plan the
trialogue.

All three clergy hope the
discussions will be the beginning of
further collaboration among their
three congregations.

“I think people who attend will
be pleasantly surprised by how
much we have in common,” Malone
said. “Preparing for this has been a
delight.”

To learn more, call St. James UMC at
(501) 217-6700.

To see more
photos of church
activities, visit
www.arumc.org/news

Arkansas United Methodist
www.arumc.org
First UMC in North Little Rock, North Little Rock, 6701 John F. Kennedy Blvd., will have a pumpkin patch that is open from 10 a.m. to dark daily through Oct. 31. Proceeds support the church youth program. To learn more, visit www.nlifumc.org.

Trinity UMC, 1101 N. Mississippi St., Little Rock, will host a presentation by the C.A.L.L., which stands for “Children of Arkansas Loved for a Lifetime,” at 9:30 a.m. Oct. 4 during its Sunday School hour. The group seeks to encourage Christians to become foster and adoptive parents. To learn more, call the church at (501) 562-2813 or visit www.thecallarkansas.org.

Graham Chapel UMC, 467 Arkansas 64 East, five miles east of Conway, will have a revival service at 6 p.m. Oct. 6. David Bush, the chairman of the Arkansas Conference’s Committee on Evangelism and pastor of First UMC in Stuttgart, will preach. Bill Mann will lead music. To learn more, call Tom Lukas, the church’s pastor, at (501) 513-0844.

Pulaski Heights UMC, 4823 Woodlawn Drive, is continuing its “People Helping People” ministry at 6:8 p.m. Mondays through Oct. 26 for those who have lost jobs or experienced reduced income because of career changes or investment declines.

Forthcoming sessions include “Career Opportunities at Waffle House Inc.” with Andy Brown, district manager; “Job Interviewing Skills;” “The Interview: Role Play with the Experts” and “Stress Management.” To learn more, call the church at (501) 664-3600 or e-mail Nancy Milbourn at namilbourn@comcast.net.

The United Methodist Women of First UMC in Osceola will host a county fair starting at 9 a.m. Oct. 10 at the church, 303 S. Pecan St. The event will include a bakery and attics. A vegetable soup and chili lunch will be served at 11 a.m. Tickets cost $5 at the door. To learn more, call the church at (870) 563-2688.

Harrell UMC, 223 Eighth St., will have a revival beginning with supper at 6 p.m. and worship at 7 p.m. Oct. 11-13. Hammett Evans, pastor of First UMC, will speak. Dale Lindsey will lead music. To learn more, call Harry Hamner, the pastor, at (501) 951-0036.

Hampton UMC, 417 E. Main St., will have its biennial homecoming service at 11 a.m. Oct. 11 with a meal following at noon. Steve Copley, director of Justice for Our Neighbors and an ordained United Methodist elder, will speak. To learn more, call Harry Hamner, the pastor, at (501) 951-0036.

Plainview UMC (Yell County), 411 W. Fifth St., will celebrate its 100th anniversary at 10 a.m. Oct. 11. A meal will follow at noon. A commemorative church plate also will be on sale. To learn more, contact Pat Bailey at (479) 272-4766 or pathalley@arkwest.com.

First UMC in Benton, 200 N. Market St., will hold its Williams Preaching Series at 8:15, 9 and 11 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. Oct. 18 and noon and 7 p.m. Oct. 19-20. Nursery will be provided during all services. Brent Strawn, associate professor of Old Testament at Candler School of Theology, Emory University in Atlanta, will be the preacher.

Strawn, an ordained elder in the Church of the Nazarene, has a special interest in ancient Near Eastern iconography, the Dead Sea Scrolls, legal traditions of the Old Testament and Old Testament theology. The series is made possible through the generosity of the late Ruth Stancil in memory of her husband, Curtis Williams. To learn more, call the church at (501) 778-3601.

Mount Eagle Christian Center, 935 Beal Road, Clinton, will present “Something to Nail To — Practices for Building a Spiritual Life,” a spiritual formation retreat for clergy and laity, on Oct. 18-21. Based on The Sacred Way by Tony Jones, the gathering follows the Academy for Spiritual Formation/Benedicite retreat model. The cost is $165 and includes room, meals and activities. Partial scholarships and continuing education units are available. To register, visit www.mounteagle.org.

The United Methodist Women of Fairview UMC, 16th and Laurel streets, Texarkana, will have a holiday bazaar from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Oct. 24. A soup and chili lunch will be served from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. A drawing for a Christmas quilt will be at 2 p.m. To learn more, e-mail the church at fairviewumctx@uno.com.

Ashbury UMC, 1300 E. University St., Magnolia, will celebrate “40 Years of Grace” at its 10:45 a.m. worship Oct. 25. Bishop Charles Crutchfield will bring the message. A potluck will follow. To learn more, call the church at (870) 234-5594.

Mount Sequoyah Conference and Retreat Center, 150 N.W. Skyline Drive, Fayetteville, will host a seminar Nov. 6-8 for clergy and lay ministers preparing their Advent season sermons. The cost is $395 per person, $155 for a commuter, $155 for a participating spouse and $120 for a non-participating spouse. To learn more, e-mail Kim Ross at spiritualdirector@mountsequoyah.org or call (800) 760-8126.

Marriage Encounter — United Methodist weekend will be Nov. 6-7 at Mount Eagle Christian Center, 935 Beal Road, Clinton. Couples can register for the marriage-enrichment retreat at www.encounter.org. The reservation fee is $90. To learn more, contact Phil or Karen Gier, at (479) 876-5371 or plgi@eoffice.com.

Refuge ‘09, a conference-wide weekend spiritual-growth retreat for youth in the seventh through ninth grades, will be at 7 p.m. Nov. 6 through 11 a.m. Nov. 8 at Camp Wyldewood in Searcy. The registration cost is $51 if postmarked by Oct. 16, $61 after Oct. 16. To register, visit www.fumc.org/register.

First UMC in Magnolia, 320 W. Main St., will have a “Rethink Children” conference for children’s ministers and child-care workers from 9 a.m. to 3:45 p.m. Nov. 7. Registration is at 8:30 a.m. Registration costs $15 and includes lunch and materials. To register, call the church at (870) 234-4530.

St. Paul UMC, 2223 Durwood Road, is planning its 100th anniversary celebration on March 6, 2010. The church is searching for addresses of former members and friends. Addresses of former members can be e-mailed to the church at stpaulumc@sbcglobal.net.

The deadline for the next edition of the Arkansas United Methodist is 5 p.m. Oct. 14. E-mail information to hluhn@arumc.org.

COMING UP

Shoal Creek Camp will celebrate its 50th anniversary and its longtime commitment to Methodist youth with an open house from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Oct. 17 at the camp, 571 Youth Camp Road, New Blaine, and dinner at 5 p.m. Oct. 18 at the Family Life Center of First UMC in Fort Smith, 200 N. 15th St. Retired Arkansas Razorback football coach and athletic director Frank Broyles will speak and John Tolleson will play music from the 1950s. Pictured from left seated are Paula Texerman, Doug Kelley, Bill McCrisco and Flora McClurkin. Barbara Bell, Kenny Bell and Gilbert Holt. For reservations, call Flora McCristo at (479) 394-4478 or the West District at (479) 783-0385.

Photo by Debbie Hicks

Devotional writer to discuss prayer at Conway church

COLLEEN HOLT
For the Arkansas United Methodist

Internationally known author and retreat leader Robert Benson will speak Oct. 11 at First United Methodist Church in Conway about living a more contemplative and prayerful life in a busy world.

He will lead the church’s Good News Celebration at 9 a.m. in the Great Hall and the traditional worship service at 11 a.m. in the Sanctuary. He also will lead a community-wide “Living Prayer Lecture and Discussion” at 6:30 p.m. in the Sanctuary.

A native of Tennessee, Benson has published more than a dozen books about searching for the sacred in people’s everyday lives.

Several First UMC members have studied Benson’s words in their personal devotions and at retreats.

“I have wanted to meet Robert Benson for the last four years, ever since I was given his book, Venite, A Book of Daily Prayer, by a dear friend,” member Sue Higgs says.

“The morning I opened the book to start the morning office, the birds outside my window started going nuts. It seemed every bird in Conway must have flown to the tree by my window to rejoice, to show how pleased God was with the sound of those prayers.”

Robert Benson will visit 9 and 11 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. Oct. 11 at First UMC in Conway, 1610 Prince St. To learn more, call the church at (501) 329-3801.

Attention Happy Couples

The Marriage Encounter weekend scheduled for November 6-8, 2009 is approaching fast. Don’t miss this great pre-holiday gift for your marriage. Please call or email now for information. 479-876-5371 or plgi@eoffice.com. Register at www.encounter.org.
School of Christian Mission provides eye-opening and tasty lessons

BY HEATHER HAHN
Editor

More than 300 of the state's mission-hungry United Methodists received lessons they could sink their teeth into at this summer's School of Christian Mission.

With the theme “Together at the Table,” the school's main spiritual growth study was on food and faith. Participants also could choose a study on the ongoing war in Sudan or the culture of Native Americans.

The gathering, sponsored by Arkansas Conference Board of Global Ministries and the Arkansas Conference United Methodist Women, took place July 30-Aug. 2 on the campus of Hendrix College in Conway.

Mary Short of Pangburn United Methodist Church was among those who attended the school for the first time.

"I thought it was amazing," she said. "I came back to work refreshed and feeling like I could deal with just about anything."

For Martha Altom, a member of First UMC in Jacksonville and a jurisdictional officer for United Methodist Women, this was her 15th year to attend the school. She also reported feeling spiritually replenished afterward.

Both women found this year's main study on Food and Faith especially nourishing. The study focused on how people's Christian faith is nurtured, strengthened and enhanced by food and all the ways meals touch their lives. Snacks were a big part of the lessons.

As part of her class, Short for the first time ate hummus, a spread of mashed chickpeas and various seasonings that's popular in Greek and Middle Eastern cuisine. She also tried shortbread cookies from Scotland and chocolate-covered apricots.

One particular emphasis of the study was the importance of hospitality — being willing to open one's home and dinner table to neighbors in need of food.

"It reminds me of the story of the beggar who comes to the door who could be Jesus," Short said.

Altom said the lessons also reminded her of how important the practice of hospitality was in the Scripture.

"We talked about how often in the Bible people sat down together to share a meal and the importance of doing that in Jesus' ministry," she said.

Short chose to take the course on Native Americans, which dealt with key issues affecting today's tribes.

"I learned that most Indians don't really approve of casinos, but they are caught between a rock and a hard place," Short said. "They feel that's the only way [that] they can have any income to support what they need. They want to use the money toward better schooling and scholarships for Native Americans."

Altom chose this year's geographical study on the ongoing conflict in Sudan, the largest country in Africa. It was eye-opening, she said, to learn of the continuing United Methodist presence in the war-ravaged nation. The United Methodist Committee on Relief is one of the few international agencies still working in Sudan. In the past three years, the conflict has displaced 2.5 million people and claimed the lives of more than 400,000 victims (including women and children).

"The Sudan course — like the geographic studies always do — made me so much more aware of social issues and justice issues we need to know about," Altom said. "The School of Christian Mission is a wonderful educational tool for learning about social injustices."

The Women's Division of the United Methodist Church begins planning five years in advance each of the course offerings at Schools of Christian across the country, said Diane Vogler, a former Women's Division director and the Arkansas Conference's Sending Team leader.

The course on Sudan will be offered again at next year's school in late July at Hendrix College. The main spiritual-growth study will focus on the three epistles of John. Participants will also be able to choose a course on mission and evangelism.

Activities also will be offered for children and youth.

Short, for one, can't wait until next summer's offerings.

"I plan on coming next year, and bringing my daughter and her kids with me."

Where will you go?

Theological education is a sacred journey, an inward journey of discovery and an outward journey of leadership and action.

Women and men from more than 20 different denominations are choosing Phillips Theological Seminary as their sacred path of learning for faithfulness and service. They take courses online or on campus toward a variety of degree and certificate programs.

Join us at PTS to begin your journey today. Call Linda Ford at 918.270.6463 or visit www.ptstulsa.edu for more information.

Following Jesus, Engaging the World
Phillips Theological Seminary
901 North Mingo Road • Tulsa, Oklahoma 74116
1-800-843-4675 • www.ptstulsa.edu
Mike Felder’s prayers for church outreach were answered in a most unlikely place: an old Pontiac dealership converted to a coffeehouse.

Mr. Felder, then a youth pastor at First United Methodist Church in Springdale, Ark., had been driving around town and praying, asking God to show him a place where his church could “connect with the community differently.”

His discovery led to the February 2008 launch of The Pontiac Church, a satellite campus of First UMC that draws about 140 worshippers every Wednesday night. The congregation borrows space from the coffeehouse, just six blocks from the main church but worlds away in terms of the people it attracts.

“Our target audience is people who have been hurt by the church, people who wouldn’t walk into a traditional church,” said Mr. Felder. The coffeehouse’s garage-like environment serves as an ideal place to meet them.

“Starving Artists Café” is a local coffeehouse within the city’s arts district. The name is a reference to the local art scene, and it reflects the church’s commitment to engaging the community in a meaningful way.

Mr. Felder’s vision for the church has been realized, and the church has grown significantly as a result. The church now has a vibrant community of young people who feel welcomed and connected.

Q&A:

Allowing Jesus to show up

The Rev. Jorge Acevedo will receive the 2009 Distinguished Evangelist of the United Methodist Church award later this month from the Foundation for Evangelism. Since he became lead pastor at Grace Church, a multi-site United Methodist congregation in Cape Coral, Fla., church attendance has grown to more than 2,600 in weekly worship. He spoke recently with staff writer Mary Jacobs.

Obviously, you have a heart for evangelism. Why?

I wasn’t raised in a church. I know what it’s like to be very far from God, what it’s like to be purposeless, what it’s like to be lost in a world of addictions in my own life and the life of my family. Out of my personal experience I bring a real passion to reaching people who are far from God. God has given me a passion for reaching the unchurched, the once-churched and the over-churched.

The over-churched? Explain.

The “over-churched” person is the second son in the prodigal son story, who never left home. The over-churched have lived a good life. They lived in the father’s house, but didn’t
have the Father’s heart. Churches are filled with men and women who’ve been in church every Sunday, but in their hearts they are very far from God. The intimacy of their relationship with Jesus is but a faint memory. There are a lot of over-church people who are United Methodist in name, but not Christian by their own testimony.

How do you convert the over-church?

It’s a slow process. Converting the convinced is really hard! They are convinced that everything is OK, and yet they don’t bear the fruit of a faithful follower of Christ. They are not engaged in the personal and social dynamics of the gospel. You reach them by modeling faithful discipleship in the life of the church. The best way is for them to see these unchurched people who come into our church and see the vitality of a new relationship with Jesus. It’s pretty contagious.

My philosophy of church growth is pretty simple. If you look at the Gospels, wherever Jesus showed up, a crowd showed up.

“Allowing Jesus to show up”—what does that look like?

It’s not just a matter of worship style, I can tell you that. But I don’t know the answer to that. You know when He’s there and you know when He’s not. It’s like asking somebody what it’s like to be in love. You know it when you’re in it.

What about reaching the unchurched?

It’s about meeting people at their point of need. That’s nothing new. In our case, what God has allowed us to do is be part of our healing and recovery ministries. At all three of our campuses we have Celebrate Recovery, which reaches every week between 600-700 people. Six nights a week we offer some kind of recovery ministry, Bible study, step study, support groups.

Let me frame what I mean by recovery because we tend to think of just drugs and alcohol. Everybody needs recovery, because sin is the ultimate addiction. Sometimes that sin is spending too much money, getting in bad relationships, letting anger get out of control, shopping too much, eating too much, or doing too much alcohol or drugs. Everybody needs recovery. It’s just a matter of what you need recovery from.

We’ve tried to create a culture that says everybody is in recovery from something. There’s a culture of deliverance and healing that pervades everything we do. We major in life change.

It occurs to me that “recovery” is another way of describing the kind of transformation described in the hymn “Amazing Grace.”

Absolutely. We put it this way: “We want to rescue people from the hell they’re living in as well as the hell they’re heading to.” Salvation is not just about pie in the sky until you die. It’s that rescuing and redeeming my life right now, Jesus said in John 10:10, “I came that you might have life and have it overflowing more abundant.”

So we have all kinds of recovery groups, support groups, small groups, Bible studies that are helping people recover.

I wouldn’t call it a renaming of what we read in “Amazing Grace;” it’s a fleshing it out. From something that’s spiritual and eternal in the sweet-and-by-and-to, something that’s practical and livable right now this side of the grave.

You’ve presided over some pretty amazing change at Grace Church.

When I came here in 1996, the church was averaging about 400 in attendance on Sundays, and had been in a five-year decline. My first Sunday here, they told me we had $29.16 in our checking account and owed $1.2 million on a building. The church was filled with wonderful people who had just kind of lost their way, they were good people who had just been haled to sleep. Yet there were 30 people who had been on the Walk to Emmaus who were praying for renewal. They were the unusual heroes of this story: that group of people prayed that God would do a new thing in their church.

I was a first-time lead pastor, 36 years old, younger than anybody else in the room, and God just started to work. I’m a pretty optimistic person. I just started picturing a future that we could be the body of Christ, the way the Bible defines us. For the last 13 years, we have worked diligently, just trying to be faithful to what the Bible says the local church can be.

A large portion of our membership is people who would call us “the working poor.” Our challenges, they’re typically financial; we don’t have problems with volunteers. We’re a hard-working, working-class congregation that just happens to be real big. We average a little over 2,600 every Sunday in 10 services.

What made you grow?

We had an inner transformation that led to an outer transformation. I think we grew because of the grace of God. We were very gracious to us and God honored the work that we did and have continued to do.

It’s not formulaic. Growing a church is more art than it is science. It’s listening to the Holy Spirit and being willing to obey whatever God asks us to do. Most of the time it feels like we’re in a train running 60 miles an hour and we’re laying the tracks before us as we go. It’s a fast-moving machine. A dozen initiatives have grown our church: We have great music, great children’s programs, great recovery programs. But the reality is that our people have listened to what God asks us to do and then just did it. It’s a dance.

As you know, Methodists are not known for evangelism. We lost thousands of members last year.

Are there any lessons to be gleaned from your experience?

We suffer from spiritual and heritage amnesia. We’ve forgotten what the Bible says about the local church. [Willow Creek Community Church pastor] Bill Hybels says the local church is the hope of the world, God has given the local church the primary responsibility of doing out the grace of God to a broken and hurting world. But we’ve forgotten that.

We have also forgotten our historical tradition as Wesleyans. We were a movement primarily among the white col- lar. We’ve forgotten our roots of personal piety and social holiness.

We have part of our church that is passionately committed to mission outreach and another part that’s passionately committed to meeting human need. The genius of the Wesleyan movement, to quote [Good to Great author] Jim Collins, was the “genius of the and, not the tyranny of the or.” Churches that seem to be working well are those that seek to live out the Wes- leyan vision of the spiritual life. Churches that forget that, die.

To rediscover the church that is living into that, live.

How has God surprised you in the last 13 years?

I’m surprised that people keep coming back. It’s a miracle. I’m amazed at how far down God can reach. There are thousands of people whose lives have been radically transformed by the grace of Jesus through the ministry of Grace Church. One of my earliest friends, Jim, was a fifth-grade vodk-a-day drinker, two drinks of beer and a handful-of-Vicodin taker, a womanizer, who, when his wife came to see me and I told him to “Run, don’t walk, get in recovery.” Her husband got into treatment, came back to our church and got busy walking the walk as a disciple of Jesus. Today he and his wife, Kim, lead our marriage ministry.

If you had told me that eight years ago when I first met Kim, I would’ve told you that you were smoking something. But now I’ve seen the amazing life change in this one guy’s life and it reminds me that it’s God that does this, not us. There are thousands of Jims out there with stories like that.

Our job is to set the table. God’s job is to serve the meal. What we try to do every day is set the table so God can come in and serve the meal. How do we do that when He serves the meal, people don’t leave hungry. They leave transformed.
SATELLITE CAMPUSES Continued from page 18

Zan Holmes to speak at Sojourners event

Zan Wesley Holmes Jr., pastor emeritus of St. Luke “Community” United Methodist Church in Dallas, will be a keynote speaker for the Sojourners Justice Revival Nov. 10-12 in Dallas. Other speakers will include Jim Wallis, president of Sojourners, Dallas mayor Tom Leppert and author Lauren Winner. The first Justice Revival was held in April 2008 in Columbus, Ohio, and drew 10,000. For information, visit www.justicerevilv.org.

Windsor pastors set for Prayer Institute

Pastors, spiritual leaders and Christian educators will gather Oct. 7-10 in Houston for the Prayer Institute’s 13th Annual Prayer Explosion Conference Revival. Leading the event are Suzette and Kirbyon Caldwell, pastors of 15,000-member Windsor Village United Methodist Church in Houston. Other conference participants include pastors Steve Riggle, Rudy Rasmus and ChiChi Bismark, evangelist Joyce Rodgers and Bishop Raphael Green. The Prayer Institute, a non-profit organization committed to praying for the community and teaching people how to pray more effectively, is the event’s sponsor. For information, visit www.prayerinstitute.org.

Shivley, Foundation honored by Hendrix

Hendrix College recently awarded an honorary doctorate to Lucile Esmon Shivley, 97, of Little Rock, Ark., for her service to the college. Mrs. Shivley attended Hendrix in 1930 but had to drop out due to the Great Depression. The United Methodist-affiliated college also presented the Spirit of Hendrix Award to the Tulsa, Okla.-based J.E. and L.E. Mabee Foundation, which has supported major building projects in every capital campaign at Hendrix College for the past 50 years.

—Compiled by Mary Jacobs

Stillwater UMC in Dayton, Ohio, has a satellite campus at a local YMCA. Sunday morning worship takes place in the gym, and as an added bonus, worshippers can exercise for free during the hour after worship, until the Y is open to the public.

Starting a new satellite church is “a full contact sport,” according to the Rev. Wayne Botkin, pastor of Christ UMC’s south campus in Dayton, Ohio. Getting out into the community—like this YMCA spin class—occupies much of his time.

“The Stillwater satellite that meets at a local YMCA now worships with about 100 people every Sunday morning in the gym. Most of those 100 are new folks; about 50 of the 75 members who helped start the Y campus have returned to the main church.

“Every time you send a group out, it’s a chance for people to step up to leadership,” said the Rev. Duane Anders, senior pastor at Stillwater’s main campus.

Mr. Griffith recommends the rent-a-member approach, warning that “launching too soon with too few people is the number one reason new churches fail.” Ultimately, satellites that succeed will eventually separate from the main campus and become their “own planets,” says Dr. Crossman. But pastors of satellite churches that are geographically near their mother churches say they see opportunities for sharing resources. Argenta doesn’t have a youth ministry, for example, partly because few families have children. But when they do begin having kids, Mr. Choa says he hopes church members will draw on programs offered by First UMC.

At Mr. Acevedo’s Grace Church, all three campuses team up for outreach programs. Making the three-campus church work demands a measure of flexibility as well as a clear vision.

“We are always in flux,” says Mr. Acevedo. “What unites us is a common vision, a common DNA, a common strategy and a common structure.”
The troubled economy in Zimbabwe has severely affected scholarships at Africa University.

ASHVILLE, Tenn.—Grace Muradzikwa is a successful executive in Zimbabwe. But it was her mother’s heart that responded when she heard more than 300 Africa University students didn’t have the money to go back to school.

Ms. Muradzikwa turned to the business community of Zimbabwe and raised $100,000 for scholarships in a country where the economy has collapsed and many companies are only operating at 25 percent of capacity.

The effort gave some 60 students the opportunity to continue their education, and showed how a nation could come together to provide a better future for the next generation, Ms. Muradzikwa said.

“I have three children who are currently attending university,” she said at a recent Africa University advisory development committee meeting. “And I couldn’t imagine what any mother or parent must be facing if they had a child in the middle of their studies but did not have the money to let them complete their education.”

**Education first**

More than 300 students have not been able to register at Africa University for the 2009-2010 academic year. Rampant inflation in Zimbabwe, where the school is located, made Zimbabwean dollars worthless.

In 2009, Zimbabwe switched to a currency of U.S. dollars and South African rand. Africa University can only accept U.S. dollars and many Zimbabwean parents have no means to pay for their children’s education. The cost for sending a student to Africa University for one year is $5,400, while the average salary for a worker in Zimbabwe is $100 to $200 a month.

As the chief financial officer for Nicoz Diamond, the largest insurance agency in Hurare, Zimbabwe, Ms. Muradzikwa has ties to the business community. As a board member of the Africa University development committee, she also has ties to the United Methodist-related institution.

She said the chaplain of Africa University called her to discuss what Zimbabweans could do to help their children.

“We then agreed we would start a fundraising campaign within the Zimbabwe community mindful of the fact many of the Zimbabwean businesses were also going through very difficult times,” she said. “They were also battling with the new currency, trying to restart their operations. But we had faith that since this was something that had to do with the education of their children the business community would be responsive to such a call.”

Ms. Muradzikwa printed photos and bios of the students in need and took them to companies, where she...
asked the firms to adopt “two, three or 10” and commit to seeing they completed their degrees.

She found many companies recognized they also were making an investment in their own future.

“One company was particularly interested in students pursuing accounting degrees. Some of the mining houses were interested in engineering students, some others in agriculture students,” she said.

The response was “absolutely awesome.”

“We would walk out of an office and they would say they would take five—it wasn’t an argument, it was just a question of how much they could do.”

**Generous response**

Ms. Muradzikwa’s also organized a fundraising event held in conjunction with the annual Nicoz Diamond charity ball. The event was held in the Nicoz Hotel and the Nicoz family donated a three-course dinner for $15.

“It was a lovely three-course meal—you just don’t get that in Zimbabwe,” she said. “We sold the plates for $50 so we were able to make a profit of $35 on each plate.”

Everyone involved in the event from decorators to musicians donated their skills.

With the money raised from the various efforts, Ms. Muradzikwa said, 30 students who were in their final year of study will be able to finish and about 30 other students in their third year will be funded.

“I have always said as Africans in Africa there are pockets we can tap into. It is not all about fundraising in the U.S. and Europe,” she said. “We have Africa University day in our churches and collect a special offering.

“I think if all churches in Africa were to do this, it would go a long way toward the funding requirements for the university.”
A wife’s tribute: amazing Steve’s final day

By Tyra Damm
Special Contributor

Tyra Damm, with her children Katie and Cooper, pose at Easter in this 2008 file photo.

Editor’s note: This is an account written about the final hours of the author’s husband, Steve, a United Methodist who died Sept. 7 at age 40 of a brain tumor that he had battled for more than 20 months. They had called the tumor “that Damn Spot.”

On the evening of Sept. 5, Steve wasn’t feeling well, but he was certainly improved over that afternoon. When we woke at 5:30 a.m. Sunday, Sept. 6, his congestion was much, much worse. His throat was burning. His mouth and tongue were swollen. He felt miserable all over.

I spoke with the triage hospice nurse, who sent the on-call nurse to check on him. When “R,” a nurse we really love, arrived, I knew from the look on her face that we were in trouble.

After I gave her a list of symptoms, she evaluated him and took me to the dining room to visit. She explained that his body was shutting down. She thought he might have, at the most, seven days left.

A crisis plan was put in place immediately. We started liquid drugs for comfort and to ease breathing. Steve would require 24-hour nursing care.

All this time, Steve’s breathing was increasingly difficult. The noises were terrible.

Our children, Cooper, 8, and Katie, 4, were across the street at a friend’s home for most of this activity. I called Steve’s parents, Jim and Betty, who called Steve’s brother Jim. I called my sister Melanie and a few other relatives and friends, along with Pastor Andy.

Susan, a friend from church, had already planned to serve Communion at home. She and her husband, and another friend, arrived for an abbreviated service.

The three from church, plus Jim, Betty and I surrounded Steve’s bed. We sang and prayed and received Communion. Susan gently put a few breadcrumbs on Steve’s tongue. She sprinkled white grape juice on his lips. Cooper and Katie left to play at another friend’s house, giving us more time to plan how to discuss the rapid changes with them.

We continued to give Steve morphine, which was helping with his breathing and agitation. He tried desperately to communicate, first trying to talk. I strained to understand him but couldn’t. He tried to type but couldn’t find the letters. Melanie wrote the alphabet, and he pointed to letters to spell.

He said, “I love you” and “Thank you.” I held his beautiful face in my hands and told him how very much I loved him and how so very many people loved him and that God loved him and that he was the perfect person for me.

Surrounded by love

Around the time the second nurse reported for duty at 2:30 p.m., he was starting to drift into a sleep-like state.

R, the first nurse, returned and told me that his symptoms were progressing much more rapidly than she had expected. We might have 24 or 48 hours left.

Cooper and Katie came home, and we waited for the hospice’s music therapist and social worker to arrive. Pastor Andy was here, too.

I sat with our children on the sofa and told them that Daddy was very, very sick and that he was going to die soon.

Cooper cried out and bolted for his bedroom.

Katie said, “I don’t know why he’s so sad. When Daddy dies, he’ll still be in our hearts.”

She asked, as she often does, what it looks like when you die. When I felt comfortable enough, she had the answers she needed, I found Cooper in his room.

The music therapist and Andy were with him. They had explained to him why I told him the news.

Cooper told me that he wanted to run away or be locked in a closet.

Somewhere along the way I lost count of how many people came in our doors that afternoon and night.

Some hurried over. Uncle Jim came in from Houston. Another delayed her outgoing flight to Los Angeles. Still others drove in from Austin or flew in from San Antonio.

Neighbors and friends streamed in and out. Food and drinks were delivered. We moved more chairs into the bedroom.

Steve couldn’t talk back to us and his eyes were closed, but I just knew he heard the laughter that filled the room all night long.

We were all devastated, of course, and there were many tears, but you just can’t help but tell funny stories when you’re talking about Steve.

At some point during the afternoon, I talked with Dr. M. She praised Steve’s courage and will to live. She praised my care. She cried with me. She told me to hold his hand and deliver him to the angels.

I was snuggled next to my one true love, and I just couldn’t bear to let go of his hand.

By midnight most everyone had found a place to sleep—either here or at the neighbors’. I stayed awake until about 1:30 a.m. and finally fell asleep. I woke at 2:30. Betty was up, too. She helped tuck me back in, and she went back to sleep in my bed.

I couldn’t sleep. I couldn’t shake the sense that the time was near.

I didn’t say a word aloud, but I was talking to Steve in my head. And I could hear him reply.

“It’s OK to go now, sweetie,” I would tell him, as I continued to clutch his right hand with my left hand. “You can let go.”

And he would reply that he was ready. We did this again and again, in a special unspoken language.

His breathing was very shallow and slow. And then there was one loud breath. The hospice nurse, who was sitting in the corner of the room, hurried over and gave me a sad nod.

We woke Betty. And we sobbed. In minutes, everyone in the house (except Cooper and Katie) were in the room. In those first moments after Steve’s death, we were all supporting one another. Steve’s mom. My sister and her husband. Beloved aunt and cousin. My best girlfriend since eighth grade. The friend who introduced me to Steve. Then Steve’s father and brother.

Farewell

I waited until about 5:45 a.m. to wake Cooper. I didn’t want to wait too much longer, fearing that as Steve’s body changed in appearance, Cooper and Katie would be more frightened.

I told him that Daddy had passed away. I carried him to our bedroom, and he gave Steve’s body a hug and a kiss. And again. And then he wanted to go back to bed.

I then woke Katie and gave her the news. She chose to snuggle in his bed, with me on one side and Steve’s body on the other. She asked about his white skin and his stillness.

As we waited for the proclamation of death and the UT Southwestern Medical School staff to pick up Steve’s body (which he had donated to continue fighting that tumor), I held his hand. I traced my fingers over his distinguished eyebrows and over and over again. I told him again how much I love him, how I’ll always love him, how I wished that we could have beaten that Damn Spot, but that we did all the very best we could. I thanked him for giving me the two most amazing children.

In the silence, I kept hearing Steve sing to me. He was singing “Was There Life” by Pete Townshend. It was the first song at our wedding reception in 1994. I can’t count the number of times we danced to that song in the kitchen or family room or Steve would just sing it to me out of the blue.

Was there life before this love
Was there love before this girl
I can see
Was there ever love for her before me
You can count on me to stand and say
Was there ever life before this wonderful day?

When Cooper woke again, Melanie and I were concerned that maybe he had forgotten the events earlier. He was cheerful.

I asked if he remembered. He said yes.

“Bu’t’s OK, because Daddy believed in God and Jesus, so he’s in heaven.”

Ms. Damm is a member of Holy Covenant UMC in Carrollton, Texas. Reprinted from her blog at checkonsteve.blogspot.com.
Key Wesleyan fundamental: holiness of life and heart

By Donald W. Haynes
UMR Columnist

Editor’s note: This is the fourth column in a series about Methodist fundamentalism. See archived columns at www.umportal.org.

Question: Who has heard of Hidayet Tuksal, and what does she have in common with Anglican Archbishop Rowan Williams and United Methodist Bishop Larry Goodpaster?

Answer: All are seeking “middle ground” as they try to hold religious extremes together within their global faith communities, even as religion around the globe is tending toward polarization.

Hidayet Tuksal is a Muslim in Turkey seeking some middle ground between women’s rights and fundamentalist Islam across the globe. As a feminist, she wears the traditional headscarf to retain her “place at the table.”

Rowan Williams is trying to hold together the 80 million-member Anglican Communion, which ranges from conservative African dioceses to the Episcopal Church in America, which has elected openly gay bishops.

Larry Goodpaster is the president-elect of the United Methodist Council of Bishops, ready to lead the denominational with its extremes on the left and the right! We are another “middle ground” church feeling our way into “Rethink Church.”

The bad news is that the moderates are losing ground in Christianity, in Islam, in Buddhism and in Hinduism. Those who demand more discipline of members and converts are growing. Methodism, on the other hand, has adopted a large theological umbrella and a large measure of cultural accommodation.

Can we “rethink” our identity amid the rumble of a seismic shift in American religion? We cannot ignore the need for teaching our fundamentals. If we are faithful to God’s vision for United Methodism, we must affirm who we are, determine what we have to say and to do, and truly re-think United Methodism! We must discover anew what our message is.

What are the fundamentals, then, of United Methodism?

Thomas A. Langford pointed out in his historical overview of developing theology in Wesleyan scholarship that it’s much easier to demonstrate tolerance and pluralism in Wesleyan theology “than it is to track down its distinctive characteristics which promised . . . to provide a concrete shaping power for the future of theology, church, and world.”

I have attempted in this series to enunciate the fundamentals that make United Methodists both a part of the Christian communion and also a distinctive and unique denomination with elements that are quite precious to our identity.

I have already outlined the following as Methodist fundamentals (in omitting the word “United” we do not denigrate the important contribution of the Evangelical tradition, but rather seek to reflect a pan-Methodist posture):

1. God is a never-ending love; God is a proactive, seeking love;  
2. Every child of God has fallen short of the beauty of God’s plan;  
3. Every child of God has a quickening, awakening “karios” moment;  
4. Convicted of our sin, awakened to our true selfhood, we can repent;  
5. We can know our sins are forgiven.

Now comes the seventh fundamental: We must practice “holiness of life and heart.”

Theologian Albert Outler wrote, “Wesley’s irreducible minimum of Christian fundamentals were three: the self-knowledge of one’s sin and need for repentance; pardon and assurance; and ‘holiness of heart and life.’” The latter fundamental defines a “holiness without which no one shall see the Lord.”

Emotional experience must be followed by holy living. In his spiritual journey, Wesley’s disciplined spiritual life preceded his experience of “the strangely warmed heart.” As he later detailed the “way of salvation,” he recognized that most people first come to Christ in some experience of saving grace, which Wesley called the “threshold” of salvation, and then move into perfecting grace, which, for Wesley, was God’s taking us “room by room” through our thoughts, words, deeds and attitudes.

After his years at Oxford leading the “Holy Club,” Wesley preached in the various colleges of Oxford and went on to become a missionary in Georgia. The Moravians became his mentors, leading to his certain confidence that his sins were forgiven.

In the aftermath of Aldersgate, he immediately spent the summer with the Moravians in Herrnhut, Germany. He left deeply impressed by their assurance of their salvation and permanently convinced that even unlettered men could be spiritual directors, but his in-bred Anglicanism was troubled by their doctrine of “stillness.”

Back in London, he pushed them on the relationship of “weak faith” to “maturer faith;” the necessity of good works and the use of the Church’s “means of grace” as disciplines through which we grow. Wesley was deeply disturbed when a Mrs. Turner reported that her Moravian mentor advised her to “be still” and “cease any outward works.” A Mr. Bray spoke of the “folly of people that keep running about to church and sacrament.” Others spoke of “ceasing from their own works” and “lying still at Jesus’ feet.”

This brand of pietism was more than Wesley could take! On New Year’s Eve in 1739, he wrote to the Moravians from whom he was separating: “Much hurt has been done by the doctrine of false, unscriptural ‘stillness.’” Many who were beginning to build holiness and good works on the true foundation of faith in Jesus, are now wholly unsettled and lost . . .”

Wesley re-claimed the formative years of his own spiritual journey. As a child in Ewphorst, as a student and a teaching fellow at Oxford, he had deeply internalized books like Thomas á Kempis’ Imitation of Christ and William Law’s Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life. From these, Wesley developed a lifelong conviction that every action has moral value, good or evil. He gave prominence to his 1733 sermon “Circumcision of the Heart,” which he preached to the Oxford faculty and townspeople. Wesley insisted that the heart be “circumcised” by “refusing to be led any longer by his senses, appetites and passions.” He reminded his congregation that “Jesus calls us to ‘take up our cross daily’ and all of St. Paul’s virtues would be ‘insecure, even with his salvation in danger’ had Paul not practiced ‘constant self-denial.’”

Of his 52 standard sermons—the essence of Methodist doctrine—13 are on Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Wesley would not disconnect the love of God from the love of neighbor. For Wesley, being a Christian means more than doctrinal affirmation.

Wesley argued with the Moravians that we can indeed have weak faith—“not yet having been purified in heart”—before we have mature faith. Wesley confessed in his letters that we have a “dark night of the soul” or “walk through the shadows.”

Methodists were therefore not shocked when Mother Teresa confessed this same spiritual phenomenon.

The antidote to slipping away from what Psalm 51 calls the “joy of our first salvation” is the spiritually disciplined life, which Wesley called “holiness of heart and life.” From his days at Oxford, Wesley insisted on acts of mercy—love of neighbor, charitable ministries and continuing expressions of what he called “social holiness.”

Early Methodism was intricately interwoven with the problems of the poor—clothing, food, housing, child labor, sickness and what we could simply call “welfare”—and he set up a cottage industry for women to knit. Clothing was distributed to those in need. He organized what we would call a “child development center” for children who roamed the streets while their parents worked.

Holiness living carried moral responsibility and the imperative of acts of love, mercy and grace. In Bristol, the society fed up to 150 people a day. The Foundry in London featured a “clothing ministry” through which in a two-month period in 1744 he provided 360 people with “needful clothing.”

In his famous tract, “The Character of a Methodist,” Wesley defined genuine Christianity as “simply love of God and love of neighbor.”

According to Wesleyan scholar Richard Heitzenrater, Wesley’s goal was a Methodism that moved “beyond a life of formalized religion to one worthy of God, and that is love—love of God and love of neighbor, seated in the heart and showing its fruits in virtue and happiness.” Dr. Heitzenrater says Wesley “pressed hard on the question of holy living.” That is a Methodist fundamental!

As Outler wrote, “I take comfort and courage in the undeniable fact that John Wesley believed and taught an explicit doctrine of ‘holiness’ as the goal and crown of the Christian life, and if this gives you trouble, the burden of proof shifts over to your side if you claim to be Wesleyan at all” to explain why you are prepared to reject or ignore what he regarded as not only essential but climactic.

Though the intent for this series was to have four columns, we cannot stop short of naming the “perfecting grace” as a Wesleyan fundamental in the next column.

Dr. Haynes is an instructor in United Methodist studies at Hood Theological Seminary. e-mail: dhaynes11@triad.rr.com.
WORDS HAVE POWER TO BLESS OR CURSE, ANALYSTS SAY

BY KATHY L. GILBERT
United Methodist News Service

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—Public displays of rude behavior seem to roll out daily, leaving many of us to wonder if civility and good manners are dead or at least on life support.

The Internet, television and newspapers are ablaze with opinions on the intertemporal remarks of musicans Kanye West, tennis star Serena Wilson, and U.S. Rep. Joe Wilson.

How should their actions be judged?

The church and the world must hold each other accountable “for the stewardship of words,” says United Methodist Bishop Ken Carder, professor of Christian ministry at United Methodist-related Duke Divinity School.

“What is needed is a transformation of character—hearts and minds that evidence respect for the dignity and worth of every person as a beloved child of God, humility that acknowledges the limitations of our own perspectives and commitment to a vision that transcends political polarities,” he said.

A few incidents of bad behavior do not portend the fall of civil society in America, says nationally syndicated columnist Amy Dickinson, who is a United Methodist.

Civility may be in decline this week, “but next week probably not,” she says.

“Honestly, I think we’re going through something now and people are acting a little haywire. But I think it’s a mistake to make grand and sweeping statements based on what Kanye West does. And that’s because Kanye West always does what he did the other night. He’s sort of a jerk, unfairly. But a great musician.”

Wilson’s statement doesn’t concern me too much—anyone who enjoys watching the workings of British Parliament couldn’t possibly be fazed by this outburst. And Serena—well, I hate the cursing, but I don’t think it’s anything John McEnroe didn’t do 30 years ago. And we all survived,” Ms. Dickinson says.

Ms. Dickinson, author of the Ask Amy column, adds, “The United Methodist Church should do what it does best—worship, share and be in community in a Godly way.”

All these public figures behaving badly present a great opportunity for pastors and congregations to talk about respect, she says.

“And of course we parents can and should continue to mentor our kids at home, starting when they are very young and continuing as long as they will listen to us.”

The Rev. Mark Terwilliger of Beach Lake (Pa.) United Methodist Church used the example of Ms. Williams’ tirade to illustrate a sermon on “taming the tongue,” based on James 3:1-12.

“In the case of Serena, Kanye and Wilson, all spoke without giving themselves enough time to process their emotions,” he says. “Our words do not just come from out of our mouths, but increasingly our e-mails and our Facebook feeds are products of impulse. Would people be able to tell from what we text to others that we are disciples of Jesus Christ? Everybody’s mothers probably have said, ‘If you can’t say anything nice, don’t say anything at all.’”

Words can hurt, Bishop Carder says.

“Contrary to the proverb, ‘Sticks and stones may break bones, but words will never harm me;’ words can be weapons of mass destruction,” he says.

“The church is the one institution that has as its basic purpose to embody the reconciliation wrought in Jesus Christ. How we deal with our differences and disagreements is as important as the specific decisions we reach.”