2007 apportionment receipts finish at 91 percent

Total from local congregations a full percentage point ahead of 2006

By Paul Black

Congregations of the Illinois Great Rivers Conference finished the year with apportionment receipts at over 91 percent – the 19th consecutive month of improvement toward the goal of full payment of apportionments.

The 2007 finish was more than a full percentage point above the 2006 payment totals. A total of $12.68 million of the $13.9 million apportioned was received.

“I think by the time we close out the books and do our transfers and adjustments, we will be closer to 92 percent of apportionments received.” commented Rick VanGiesen, Conference Treasurer.

“We were hoping to do a little better, but almost every area of our Conference had two bad-weather Sundays in December and some had three. We didn’t get the usual year-end push that we have experienced in previous years.”

Payment of Clergy Support and Administration – funds which pay for the facilitation of the appointment process and caring clergy and local church relationships as well as supporting the mission and ministry of the annual conference and General church – received payment at a 92 percent level conference-wide.

Benevolence and Connectional Ministries – funds which support conference benevolences, World Service and Congregational Development – received 91 percent payment. The apportionment also provides funds to assist ministerial education, the Black Colleges and Africa University.

Since general church apportionments are paid in full, $231,841 will be taken out of conference reserves to make up those shortfalls.

The Spoon River and Iroquois River districts – each with 97 percent payment of apportionments – led conference giving. Six districts paid 90 percent or more.

The pension and health benefit apportionment was phased out by the 2006 annual conference and the World Service Fund was folded into to the Benevolence and Connectional Ministries apportionment beginning in 2007.

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Decatur Grace UMC offers gift of education

Students at the John Wesley School, located in the Wealah District of Liberia, are receiving an education due to the generosity of Decatur Grace UMC.

Grace recently completed a $25,000 financial commitment to Liberia by completing the last school building at John Wesley School. The site includes a church, classrooms and will also provide housing for District Superintendent Paye Mondolo.

Grace provided half of their support to finish the final school building and then raised scholarship money to provide funding for a year of elementary education for all 253 students.

Rev. Danny Cox, pastor of Grace UMC, was one of several large-membership church pastors that traveled to the west African country in October.

The Sangamon River District is the partner district with the Wealah District and is working to raise funds to finance a district parsonage and transportation for Mondolo, who itinerated in the Sangamon River District in late November and early December.

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Connectional Table tackles 2009 budget

Members of the Conference Connectional Table will gather on Tuesday, Jan. 22, to begin the process of working on a 2009 conference budget to be presented to the annual conference in June.

Various ministries have already done their assessments for the year and have submitted budget requests.

Recommendations from the Jan. 22 meeting will be forwarded to the Conference Council on Finance and Administration, which is responsible for recommending a budget to the annual conference session.

Due to press deadlines, details of the Connectional Table meeting as well as the Feb. 25 CFA meeting will be posted to the IGRC website within a few days after each meeting.
New Horizon UMC hosts Small Groups Conference

Champaign New Horizon UMC will be hosting its 8th Annual Small Groups Conference on Saturday, April 19. To register online, please go to www.newhorizonchurcho.org. Or you may contact Deb Wonderlich at 217-359-8909 or Deb@NewHorizonChurch.org.

Dr. Steve Cordle, founding pastor of Crossroads UMC in Pittsburgh, Pa., will be speaker. Crossroads is one of the fastest growing United Methodist churches in the country and has focused intently on small groups.

Cordle is the author of The Church in Many Houses: Reaching your Community Through Cell-Based Ministry, published by Abingdon Press. In addition to the main teaching sessions with Dr. Cordle, there will be break out sessions focusing on how to start small group ministries in established churches, the essential characteristics of a healthy small group, and other helpful topics.

Annual Conference deadlines announced

Annual Conference co-secretaries the Rev. J. William and Terry Werner have announced the following deadlines as they relate to the 2008 annual conference session to be held June 4-7 in Peoria:

Feb. 15: deadline for all materials for the Pre-Conference Workbook that have financial implications.

March 1: deadline for all other materials for the Pre-Conference Workbook.

April 1: deadline for submitting Reports from Boards, Committees and other entities for printing in the next Journal.

June 30 is the deadline for ALL OTHER materials for the 2008 Journal.

Applications for Harkness Scholarships sought

Women clergy over the age of 35 who are certified candidates for ordained ministry as an elder and seeking a master’s of divinity degree at an approved school of theology are eligible to apply for the George Harkness Scholarship Awards.

The program grants a $5,000 award to scholars for printing in the next Journal.

The Current — IGRC, in cooperation with The Upper Room Ministries, is sponsoring the 2008 Five-Day Academy for Spiritual Formation which will be held Aug. 5-10 at the Chiara Center (formerly the Franciscan Apostolic Center) in Springfield.

The retreat will be held at Hoopeston Area High School, 615 E. Orange, Hoopeston, IL 60942.


The retreat will be held at Hoopsto...
Bell awarded Air Force Commendation Medal

Army Reserve Chaplain Bryce Dean Hays of Streator, Ill., has received the Air Force Commendation Medal. Chaplain Hays, who is also pastor of Streator United Methodist Church, received the award on Jan. 8, 2008. The award was presented by Col. Thomas A. Moyer, commander of the 375th Air Wing at Scott Air Force Base, to Chaplain Hays, who was deployed to Afghanistan in April 2007.

Chaplain Hays, who has served in the U.S. Air Force for 23 years, is a graduate of Wartburg College in Waverly, Iowa, and has served as a chaplain in missions in the Dominican Republic, Guatemala and Jordan.

The award is the second highest medal for a chaplain in the Air Force and recognizes Chaplain Hays’ contributions to the mission of the 375th Air Wing.

Bryce Dean Hays

Judy Miller discontinued as a local pastor

Judy Miller, a local pastor of the Monmouth College United Methodist Church, has been discontinued. She was dismissed by the Illinois Great Rivers Conference for failure to meet the requirements of the Itinerancy. She will be reappointed in a lieu of the local church. Judy Miller will be reappointed to the Illinois Great Rivers Conference for the remainder of the year.

Judy Miller

WW II veteran talks with Monmouth College class

Augsburger, who was raised as a Mennonite, was originally expected to avoid entering the conflict. However, after his older brother had served and Augsburger lost his exemption because of the coming of age of his younger brother, he was forced to enlist.

Andrew McLaren, a junior in the class, said, “It was interesting that even though he was a Mennonite he was still willing to serve in the war.”

He served in the Air Corps and was a ball gunner, much in part to his small stature. Never a very big man, Augsburger fit the profile for one of the most risky jobs on an airplane; he was part of a B-17 flight crew.

Everyone wanted to be a pilot, but not everyone could,” he said. Though Augsburger filled all the requirements and passed all the tests to be a pilot, he was made ball gunner. After he concluded his service, he received his pilot’s license.

“I was interested that the military would be looking for more gunners than pilots,” McLaren said. “I would have thought it would have been the other way around.”

McLaren also commented, “The pictures of the ball turret that he showed us were amazing to see. It is astounding how long he had to be in such small quarters and what he had to go through.”

Augsburger, a family friend of junior Tim Iverson, was pleased to have the opportunity to speak in front of a college class. It was the first time Augsburger has been in a college class. Despite his humbleness, Augsburger was a captivating speaker. Like most World War II veterans, he had stories that could perk the ears.

He discussed with the class his experiences through training and how he and his flight crew became very close through their experiences. At the end of his service, he was rendered nearly deaf.

At this time planes were not pressurized, and this caused his near deafness. Because of this, his crew flew a mission without him. He referred to this as one of the hardest experiences of his life. He recalled being relieved when he was his

See WW II veteran on page 10 . . .

Banks announces departure from CCH

Cunningham Home CEO Sam Banks, who has guided the child welfare agency for the past 20 years, will be leaving his current post Feb. 29 to return to the Chicago area.

In early March, Banks will become CEO of Glenwood School for Boys and Girls, a community-supported nonprofit organization that provides educationally and economically disadvantaged children with a comprehensive residential, education and life-skills program on two campuses in Glenwood and St. Charles.

In honor of Sam’s service, the UM沃of the IGRC are collecting money toward a gift. This gift will be used toward the building program on the grounds of CCH.

All individuals and units who wish to add to this collection, are encouraged to send checks to the UM Conference Treasurer, Sally Smith, by Feb. 27. Her address is: 902 Eldridge, Washington, IL 61571. Checks should be payable to IGRC UMW.
Trip to Cambodia eye-opening experience

_Lay speaker sees the effects of human trafficking of children in southeast Asia_

By Naomi Roberts
St. Joseph UMC

On a recent mission trip to Cambodia, I was able to chab dai (join hands) with the missionaries in Cambodia who are trying daily to stop the human trafficking of little children. Human trafficking works in one of two ways; the parents either sell the children, or the children are kidnapped and sold into the sex trade operation.

The mission trip I took was sponsored by World Hope, and one of the things World Hope asked us to do was to talk about what we saw and learned is to make sure that people do not confuse human trafficking for sex with prostitution. A prostitute makes money, these little children never make a dime and they are forced to do unspeakable things. The children are so damaged by this forcible sex slavery, they can never go home even if they were kidnapped, because of the shame they bear.

When we went to one of the safe houses, it was not a good visit for me. Some of the girls had just been rescued a few days before we arrived. They had a stunned look as if something sacred had been taken from them. They were also leery about us. No doubt they were thinking here is another bunch of adults, more strangers, and what will they do to us. The girls seemed emotionally bound to their captors. Some of the older girls strutted around and when they stopped they would take on a stance like a model on a runway modeling clothes. It made me want to say, “Don’t do that. That is what your captor taught you to do.” Of course we couldn’t because they were in a proverbial fish bowl with a captive audience. It would’ve been wrong.

Later in the week, we went to a safe house out in the province and I was able to see in action the good work the missionaries in Cambodia are doing. The girls in this safe house had been there for six or seven months. The light in their eyes had returned and they acted like children again. Several of them did a cultural dance for us. They danced to the “Prayer for Cambodia.” One of the teachers interpreted the words for me. As the children danced, she said:

_No need to be sorry.
God will save us._

_I pray according to God’s promise._

_The Lord is faithful in answering prayers._

_So I kneel and pray._

_God will bless and He will reign in Cambodia._

I have no doubt that God is blessing Cambodia and reigning there too.

While World Hope also took us out to the Krang Yaw school in the province. These children were from the village nearby. It was fun to see the excitement in their faces when we handed each one of them a bag of school supplies. Someone in our group had brought with them a bunch of Christian coloring books. The children all seemed to open the book and find Jesus, and then color him green. The color green was consistent with the children, and although I asked, I never got an answer as to why green was used for Jesus. I wondered if it had to do with the beauty of their land. There were luscious green palms, rice fields and banana trees everywhere.

I am not sure we helped in a major way like on some mission trips. We didn’t paint a house or put a new roof on, but in retrospect, I believe the work we did was just as important. It was like when Christ said, “Let the little children come unto me.” We offered them the love of Christ by

See Cambodia on page 6 . . .

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Geneseo Grace UMC work crew provides Christ’s hands, feet in Mississippi

_Congregational work teams provide ongoing post-Katrina disaster relief effort in Gulf Coast_

By Connie McCammon
Terre Haute Memorial UMC
Terre Haute, Ind.

VANCLEAVE, Miss. — “You are the hands and feet of Christ,” said Charleen Smith to the 45 to 50 Hurricane Katrina disaster-response volunteers who gathered in the sanctuary of the Vancleave UMC for nightly devotions Oct. 30. Smith serves as a case manager specialist for the Mississippi Conference United Methodist Church Disaster Response, a partner of The United Methodist Church Committee on Relief (UMCOR).

More than two years after the destruction of Hurricane Katrina, many people of the Gulf Coast are still living in substandard housing. Many people have no homes or continue to live with friends and family or in tents or in Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) trailers. Ignored by state and federal governments as well as the media, it’s easy for people living elsewhere in the country to believe life is back to normal along the Gulf Coast. This couldn’t be further from the truth.

But thanks to the quiet efforts of the faith community, people along the Gulf Coast have not been forgotten. Immediately after the hurricane’s landfall, people from all over the country wanted to help. That assistance came in the form of prayers, money, food, water and volunteers to help clean up the destruction. UMCOR stepped up to the plate to organize assistance, and local churches opened their doors to house and feed the myriad of volunteers.

Camp Hope was established at Vancleave UMC when the first volunteers arrived Sept. 8, 2005. The Rev. Larry Maugh, former minister of the two-point charge of Vancleave and Mount Pleasant UMC’s, converted Sunday school class rooms into dormitories and members of both churches provided hearty breakfasts and delicious suppers for all the volunteers. In the spring of 2007, a large facility that houses a warehouse full of supplies and equipment as well as men’s and women’s dormitories and restroom facilities was completed with funds from the Mississippi United Methodist Church Disaster Response. Sixty people can sleep comfortably on bunk beds and eat their morning and evening meals, which are still provided by local parishioners, in the fellowship hall of the Vancleave UMC.

While the camp is located at a United Methodist church, the effort is truly an ecumenical one. Five United Methodist churches, several Baptist churches and one Catholic church have worked together since Hurricane Katrina hit to coordinate efforts at the camp and work sites as well as to provide hospitality to the volunteers. One of the many churches to answer the call of “Here I Am, Lord” has been Geneseo Grace UMC in Geneseo, Ill. In March 2006, several members of the church volunteered their time and skills to

See Geneseo on page 5 . . .
Dr. Clarence “Pete” Hughes, missions chairperson of Roanoke UMC, Vermilion River District, recently completed his 16th short-term mission trip to Russia. A key focus of the Roanoke program is the support of an alcohol rehabilitation program in Vibliie. Hughes was asked to support the rehabilitation program in 2003 by Pastor Anatoli Korabel of the Evangelical Christian Church in Novgorod, at a cost of $6,000 a year. The program is housed in a large structure and is one of the first in Russia, a nation plagued by alcoholism. At any one time, six to eight men are at the center.

Hughes notes that he visits the men on his annual trip, advising, “It is always an emotional day,” he said. “There are successes and failures, but we are seeing some men regain their health and assume productive lives. So the work is very rewarding.”

In addition to supporting the church financially, Hughes has taken hundreds of new pairs of reading glasses to the church as well as large supplies of over-the-counter medicines. Annually, materials are taken to an orphanage in Vibliie and books to a Novgorod school which are used to assist in the instruction of English to Russian students. Hughes has a connection with a university in Novgorod and on each trip, visits Russian students in English-speaking classes. During one period of time, Hughes also secured and took numerous musical instruments to the church to support the establishment of an orchestra.

A career educator and professor emeritus at Eureka College, Hughes first went to Russia in 1993. On this initial trip Hughes established a connection with the Evangelical Christian Church and its pastor. Hughes has led the Roanoke congregation’s mission outreach which has been to take financial resources to the Novgorod church and its 21 satellite Christian churches.

Hughes seeks to raise money over a year’s time and has been going to Novgorod annually in November for a number of years. His wife, Carol, has accompanied Hughes on two recent trips. Russ Johnston, a Russian missionary from Russia Mission with churches and civic organizations. He may be contacted at 309-923-7730 or by emailing: phughes@mtco.com

Hughes completes 16th short-term mission trip
Normal First celebrates the creative Spirit of God

Rev. Cheryl Peterson-Karlan leads the congregation in honoring the financial support from the entire church and the creative spirit of God that inspired and guided the entire project.

By Susan Scott

Fellowship Hall is the heart of Normal First.

It is a gathering place for both sacred and secular events involving children, youth, and adults. It is also a receiving area for those meeting with the pastoral staff for counseling or business matters and for students participating in ISU Wesley. Many visitors to Normal First may never see the sanctuary but they do see Fellowship Hall and it shapes their impression of the congregation and how it honors God.

The importance of Fellowship Hall within the life of the congregation, combined with a growing need for more flexible space, led Normal First UMC to launch a revitalization project last June. In just thirty days, congregation members pledged and donated more than $56,000 to cover the cost of the renovation. Volunteers worked hard throughout the summer and early autumn to paint and prepare the space for new wiring, theatrical lighting, and a large, portable stage.

Work also began on a large mural. This project was carefully designed so that most of the materials used can be recycled should the church undertake a capital building/remodeling project in the future.

On Sunday, Nov. 25, the newly-remodeled Fellowship Hall was officially dedicated during a Soulscape worship service that combined elements of celebration and thanksgiving. Rev. Cheryl Peterson-Karlan led the congregation in honoring the financial support from the entire church; the countless volunteers, preschoolers to senior citizens, who so generously shared their talents and skills to transform the appearance, versatility, and functionality of Fellowship Hall; and the creative spirit of God that inspired and guided the entire project.

Highlights of the service included a four-part reading on God-inspired creativity; the uplifting music of Ignite, the Soulscape band; and a worship center that was both beautifully seasonal and cleverly conceived to incorporate some of the tools used in the renovation.

Pastor Cheryl’s sermon spoke to the creative gift of the divine that lives within each individual. A video scrapbook detailing the remarkable transformation of the space was shown during worship. The photos documented what can be achieved when Christians work together to achieve a goal.

In a memorable presentation, Normal First artist, Shana Parker, shared some of the steps that went into the design and creation of the mural on the north wall of Fellowship Hall. She also explained some of the images depicted in the mural, bibliocal and contemporary, and how they celebrate God’s creative spirit. A similar mural for the south wall will be completed this spring.

The Normal First congregation now regards Fellowship Hall as a space that honors God during worship and provides a welcoming environment in which to enjoy fellowship.

Geneseo

Continued from page 5

come from such long distances to help her. But throughout the week, it became very apparent that the true blessing was bestowed upon the volunteers. Miss Virginia’s strong faith was a beacon of hope to each volunteer who felt that there was so much more work to be done along the Gulf Coast. The volunteers learned to trust God that other concerned people would step up to the plate and offer their time, talent and treasures. Miss Virginia also taught each one of them that there is grace not only in giving help, but also in receiving it.

Each evening at Camp Hope after the evening meal was cleaned up, the volunteers, some of the parishioners of the local churches and guest speakers would gather in the Vancleave UMC sanctuary for devotions. And every night, the group sang songs, but one song they sang every evening, Lord Prepare Me to be a Sanctuary. In that song are the words asking the Lord to prepare people to be “living sanctuaries.” Anyone who travels to Vancleave and the Gulf Coast see these living sanctuaries every day in the form of the people of Vancleave and Mount Pleasant United Methodist churches and in the faces of people like Miss Virginia.

A second, less well known verse to this song reads, “When he comes in clouds of glory and our work on Earth is done/How long to hear him saying/faithful servant, well done.” Pastor Robbie Murden, Charleen Smith, Curt and Sally Brown and the parishioners of Vancleave and Mount Pleasant churches, you deserve a well done long before your work on Earth is complete.

If you would like to financially assist local communities in Mississippi with Hurricane Katrina relief, donations can be made through the United Methodist Committee on Relief by clicking on the Hurricane Katrina and Rita Icon on the IGRC homepage or by visiting: h t t p : / / n e w . g b g m . u m c . o r g / umcr/work/emergencies/

Cambodia

Continued from page 4

being friendly and playing with the girls and doing crafts with them. Now that we are home, I think part of our mission is to make the world aware of the horrible human trafficking that is taking place in Cambodia. Hundreds of children are being sold into slavery for sex. The safe houses I visited had approximately 30 girls in each one. This is just a handful compared to the many that are forced into the human trafficking trade.

If you feel called to help, you can contact World Hope at 625 Slaters Lane, Suite 200, Alexandria, VA 22314, or you can go on-line at www.worldhope.org and donate there.

As a certified lay speaker in the Iroquois River District for The United Methodist Church, I feel very blessed that I had the opportunity to go to Cambodia. My home church, the St. Joseph UMC helped make this possible in two ways. They helped me monetarily and they also donated school supplies and school bags. I also owe a big thank you to Batestown UMC, Broadlands Community Church, Fithian UMC, Ogden UMC, and Middlefork UMC. These churches also helped me with monetary donations for air travel and accommodations while in Cambodia. I couldn’t have done it without all of them.
New shelter will assist women through mid-April
Champaign First partners with local churches, agencies to bridge gap in safety net

By Julie Wurth
Champaign News-Gazette

CHAMPAIGN – A new winter emergency shelter for women quietly opened its doors Jan. 1, a cooperative effort between local churches and agencies that serve the homeless.

Housed at the First United Methodist Church downtown, the shelter will provide overnight accommodations for up to six homeless women through mid-April.

Driven by federal funding requirements, most local shelters focus on longer-term programs that help homeless women get education, job training and life skills to transition back into society. But that leaves a hole in the safety net, said Kerri Spear, neighborhood programs manager for the city of Champaign.

“Ultimately, we’d like to see everyone go through a transitional program,” Spear said, “but we understand that sometimes circumstances dictate a short-term emergency need.”

The transitional shelters are also usually full. John Sullivan, executive director of the Center for Women in Transition, said his agency gets calls weekly from women seeking emergency shelter, but there’s no room.

“Women just turn up here saying, ‘I’ve got nowhere to live.’ We’ve got no way to help them,” he said. “You’re not going to solve the problem overnight by giving them a bed in a homeless shelter. But when you see somebody who says, ‘I’m sleeping in a car,’ you really want to help them.”

The emergency shelter’s only client so far is a woman who’d been living in her car for two months, said Cathy Koerber, volunteer coordinator for the project. The woman had health problems, lost her job and eventually was evicted from her apartment. She now has a temporary job, but nowhere to live.

“This is a prime example of how people become homeless,” Koerber said. “She just needs a boost, somebody to help her get back on her feet.”

Sullivan, who used to work at the TIMES Center for homeless men, helped set up an overflow men’s shelter several years ago that rotates among First Presbyterian Church in Champaign, First UMC in Savoy and Restoration Urban Ministries. That program has worked well, housing from three to 14 men a night in the winter.

Spear, a member of the council and First United Methodist in Champaign, approached Associate Pastor Mary Brady, and the church agreed to take on the project. Brady said it fit in well with the congregation’s mission work with Empty Tomb and other agencies. The church also supplies the van that transports men from the TIMES Center to the overflow shelter.

“This is right up our alley,” she said.

More than 100 volunteers signed up to help. The church spent about $400 on cots and mats, but businesses and church members have donated money and supplies, such as water bottles, snacks, bedding and socks. The Presbyterian Church also helped with planning and logistics.

Women are directed first to the Center for Women in Transition, where they will be screened for alcohol and drug abuse, weapons, medical or mental health problems and referred to other agencies if needed, Sullivan said. If they have young children, they will be taken to the Crisis Nursery of Champaign County for the night, he said.

“A day may come when we’ll accept families, but we’re starting out pretty simple to see how it goes,” Brady said.

The women will then be transported to the church. In the morning, they will be taken to the TIMES Center for a shower, breakfast and, if needed, lunch. Each woman gets a small toiletry bag with a washcloth, soap and shampoo.

To spread the word about the new shelter, Spear is contacting local police and fire departments, and church members are posting fliers in laundromats, grocery stores and other places where homeless women congregate. The Council of Service Providers to the Homeless will gather data to determine whether the shelter needs to be expanded next year, Spear said.

Anyone interested in volunteering can contact Koerber at koerber353@gmail.com. The TIMES Center, Center for Women in Transition and First United Methodist Church will also accept donations to help defray expenses, Sullivan said. More information about the shelter is available at the Center for Women in Transition at 217-352-7151.

(Reprinted with permission from the Jan. 8 issue of the Champaign News-Gazette)
Camping, Youth and Young Adult Ministries

Applications still open for Global Justice volunteers

Applications are being accepted for the 2008 Global Justice Volunteers program through the General Board of Global Ministries.

Young adults between the ages of 20 and 30 may apply for short-term volunteer mission service in Africa and Asia. Each intern is expected to contribute $2,200 to the program and many finance this cost through fundraising in their community and church.

The Asia trip will focus on migrant farmers and workers. Applications are still being accepted for the trip, which will be March 3 to April 24.

A summer trip to Africa, which will focus on HIV/AIDS and substance abuse will take place June 30 to Aug. 17. Deadline for application is Feb. 15.

The Global Justice Volunteers program offers young people the opportunity to live internationally for two months and explore the issues of justice and its advocacy as a component of mission. The internships relate to grassroots and eccumenical partners of the General Board of Global Ministries, the international mission agency of The United Methodist Church with cultural exchange as a focus.

The program is sponsored by the Mission Volunteers Office of GBGM in collaboration with the Women’s Division of the mission agency.

Promotional DVDs and the 2008 Camping Brochures are now available from the IGRC Camping Office. Call 217-525-3007 or check the web site: www.igrcamp.org. Brochures are in the mail to IGRC congregations and campers who attended a 2007 camp.

Upcoming events

Confirmation Camps: Feb. 9-11, East Bay Camp, Hudson. Keith Michaels speaker; Feb. 23-25, East Bay Camp, Hudson. Keith Michaels speaker; March 2-4, Epworth Camp, Louisville. Randy Azbell speaker. Registration for the two night event is $78 per person. The confirmation retreats follow the Claim the Name curriculum and are designed to support confirmation classes in the local church.

Registration materials are available for download at: http://youth.igrcamp.org or by calling Office of Camping and Retreat Ministries.

Senior High YAR: March 28-30, Lake Williamsion Retreat Center, Carlinville. Theme of YAR is Unleashed. Shane Claiborne, founding partner of The Simple Way community, guest speaker. Kenny Carter, leader of Theta Band from the Church of the Resurrection and Rockford’s Muster Commission drama group return. Registration materials are at: http://youth.igrcamp.org/ and then clicking “Senior High YAR.”

Conference Bible Bowl: April 6, East Bay Camp, Hudson. Competitions include elementary, junior high and high school. Bible texts for each level can be found at: http://youth.igrcamp.org or by contacting John Hauck at john.hauck@gmail.com or revevan1@mtco.com or calling 309-363-1901. Regional Bible Bowl sites prior to the April 6 date will be announced in the near future.

Marked Youth Leadership Institute: June 15-21, Living Springs Camp, Lewistown. A weekend discovery of your strengths that enable you to be shaped for the future. Participants have the opportunity to move through four years of leadership training and experience a new level of “Marked” each summer. Applications can be obtained at: http://youth.igrcamp.org and then clicking on “Leadership Camp.”

2008 Bible Bowl slated for April 6

The Conference Bible Bowl for 2008 will be held in the Dining Hall at East Bay Camp Sunday, April 6, from 2:30 to 5:30 p.m. The elementary, junior high and senior high Bible bowls will be conducted at the same time.

Regional Bible Bowls are being organized, but it is not required that teams participate at the Regional level in order to be in the Conference Bible Bowl.

The cost for the Conference Bible Bowl is $2.50 per participant (please note change from previous years). Send registrations: Bible Bowl, Attention: Peggy O’Neal, United Methodist Center, P.O. Box 19207, Springfield, IL 62794-9207.


For more information on Bible Bowls and locations and dates of Regional Bible Bowls, contact John Hauck at john.hauck@gmail.com or revevan1@mtco.com or call 309-363-1901.

Summer internship applications available

The internship program provides individuals who are interested in exploring ministry an opportunity to experience a church leadership role in a mentor/intern relationship. Interns will be working in different settings, from urban to rural, single church to cooperative ministries.

Applications for both the intern and the church may be downloaded from the IGRC website (www.igrc.org). Click on Ministries, then Young Adult and find the link to the applications and letters at the bottom of the page. Send the completed application to: IGRC, Attn: Internship Program, P.O. Box 19207, Springfield, IL 62794-9207 or camping@igrc.org.

The deadline for applications is Monday, March 3.

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**Youth Leadership Institute**

**June 15-21**

**Living Springs Camp**

Students...

Have you started to wonder what your greatest strengths might be? Would you love to really get involved as a leader in your church, your school, or your community? Are you wondering what God might be calling you to do with your life?

At “Marked” we are all on a journey to look for God’s mark on our lives. Join us for a weekend discovery of your strengths, and be shaped for the future. If you’re interested, you will have the opportunity to move through four years of leadership training and experience a new level of “Marked” each summer.

And of course there will be all the typical summer camp happenings like games, swimming, camp fires...and much more! Head to www.youth.igrcamp.org to get an application, or ask your youth leader about how you can get involved!

See you this summer!

Youth Leaders...

If you have a student that is ready for a little more and always seems to be ahead of the group, or maybe has a little something special about them, then consider passing along some information about “Marked.” This is an opportunity for the leaders and potential leaders of your youth group to continue their development and discover their strengths.

The goals of “Marked” Leadership Institute are below. Please prayerfully consider sending your students to “Marked” this summer! Let’s help them discover their strengths so they might discover the mark of God on their lives.

**Our Mission**

To equip and empower youth for spiritual leadership and faithful participation in The Body of Christ

**Our Goals**

Identifying the youth leadership of this conference

Training for spiritual leadership by focusing on spiritual formation

Identifying their individual strengths and their use in the church and the world

Foster fellowship and support among youth leadership

This year we will discover.....

Vision, Faithfulness, Discipline, Compassion, Identity — led by IGRC clergy.

Strengths-finder Training by Rev. Jeremy Henson

First-time and returning students must complete reference forms and applications. Call Brenda Harris, 529-3007.

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Promotional DVDs and the 2008 Camping Brochures are now available from the IGRC Camping Office. Call 217-525-3007 or check the web site: www.igrcamp.org. Brochures are in the mail to IGRC congregations and campers who attended a 2007 camp.
Announcements
Continued from page 2

person if non-member. If postmarked after Feb. 9, add $10 per person. All fees are non-refundable after Feb. 16. However, substitutions with same bell assignment can be made at any time by notifying the conference coordinator.

Motel accommodations are available at Northfield Suites by calling 217-523-7900. Be sure to mention the Handbell Festival to ensure group rate.

Hart Morris, minister of music at Asbury UMC, Tulsa, Okla., will be the festival conductor and teacher.

For more information, contact Marilyn Hirschman at 309-928-2067 or by emailing mjh1@aol.com.

The purpose of the Fellowship is to be a sharing and enabling fellowship that affirms the sacramental life, embracing preaching, music, drama, dance, architecture, and all the visual arts appropriate for the inclusive life of the Church.

Light Kids Conference at three sites

Children ages first through fifth grades are invited to participate in a daylong adventure at Light Kids Conference, to be held at three locations within the IGRC.

The conference includes lunch, video, teaching, drama, music, entertainment, recreation and Bible study all centered around the theme CLIMB!

Each conference will begin at 9 a.m. and conclude at 2:15 p.m. The dates and sites within the IGRC include: Saturday, Feb. 9 at Marion Aldersgate UMC; Saturday, March 1 at Washington Crossroads UMC and Saturday, March 29 at Troy UMC.

For more information, visit www.kidconference.org or contact Tim Price at 618-667-6241 ext 414 or email tim@harvestministyteams.com and we will send you a registration packet and poster.

UMW Spiritual Growth Retreat Feb. 22-23

The Conference United Methodist Women are sponsoring a Spiritual Growth Retreat Feb. 22-23, at the Conference Center in Springfield.

Rev. Anne Ferguson is leading this enriching time on prayer. All are invited. To get the registration flyer, visit

See Announcements on page 13 . . .

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The practice of Natural Multiplication

(Editor’s note: This is the first of two articles which were inspired by the recently-published book, Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations, by Bishop Robert Schnase of the Missouri Area. In his book, Bishop Schnase identifies five practices present in all fruitful congregations: radical hospitality, passionate worship, intentional faith development, risk-taking mission, and service, extravagant generosity and faith development, risk-taking mission is the ultimate fruit of a vital congregation.

Organisms throughout creation. In fact, it is the dreaming and planning for this congregation that had gone on far longer than the 15 months that the pastor had been on site. It had begun at least 10 years earlier when the “mother church” had launched. In its beginning, the pastor had cast the vision that theirs would be a ministry of multiplication. In its time of greatest passion, the Methodist movement was rapidly multiplying its life and ministry through new congregations. In the late 1950’s, this was experienced in the United States. Growing, established congregations saw their communities expanding so they sent out groups of people to start new churches in the suburbs. Though the most obvious way, the Natural Multiplication of fruitful congregations is not limited to giving birth to new chartered congregations. In recent years, many churches have multiplied their ministry by starting new sites for ministry. These are designed to become separately chartered churches, but are new locations of worship and ministry.

There are a lot of different roles a church can play in starting new congregations. From financial support to use of facilities to membership becoming a part of the new church, a fruitful church can multiply its life and ministry through new congregations. But it’s not only in new congregations that the life of a church can be multiplied. A vital church can also reproduce the kingdom life it has discovered in the life of other existing congregations. Many churches find joy in serving as teaching churches. They realize that they have the experience the wisdom they can share with others. Of course, we have all heard of the large churches that hold leadership conferences. Hundreds, if not thousands, of people attend. But a church doesn’t have to be a large church to be a teaching church. One congregation that had gone through a building relocation invited other churches to learn from their experience. They hosted a workshop that told their story. They shared key elements that led to success and some of the mistakes that hindered their progress. In breakout sessions, those who attended could learn more of the nuts and bolts related to capital stewardship campaigns, securing financing, utilizing volunteers in the building process and other elements of interest. But it didn’t start with them. Prior to their decision to relocate, the study team had visited other congregations that had gone through major building programs. They saw the facilities, but even more importantly, they heard people share the story of what led their church to that point. Five of those congregations sent representatives to an all church meeting and by telling their stories, helped the whole congregation dream new dreams for their life and ministry. This teaching congregation has been taught by many others. Congregations have served as teaching churches as they have coached others through developing visitation ministries, rotation Sunday School, youth ministry and other vital ministries. Congregations that practice Natural Multiplication willingly share the stories of what God has been doing in and through their ministry and share that with others. In their sharing they help other congregations to give birth to new life and fruitful ministry.

Impacting other churches is a part of the vision of The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kan. Their vision is, “To transform lives, to transform our community and to renew the mainline church.” They are not satisfied with having a local impact. This vital congregation understands its potential and responsibility to impact others. And the ways Church of the Resurrection does it are legion.

In seeking to live into this vision, Church of the Resurrection hosts conferences, develops resources for ministry, plays a vital role in starting new congregations, and joyfully pays apportionments that provide a large percentage of the budget of The United Methodist Church.

Another congregation that practices Natural Multiplication is Ginghamsburg UMC in Tipp City, Ohio. One of their key strategies of multiplication is to send out small teams of people, including a lay pastor, to work with small congregations in the area to re-emerge as fruitful congregations. Each team agrees to serve for a minimum period of time (1 to 2 years) to help the smaller congregation begin to live more fully as the church God has called it to be. This team approach has proven effective in bringing about kingdom transformation to churches and to lives within each church and within its community.

In southern Illinois, there is a small congregation (less than 120 in average worship) that has a heart for Natural Multiplication. Jesus es el Senor UMC is a regional congregation that understands it is called to develop leaders who will be sent out to start new Hispanic congregations. Jesus es el Senor has started four other congregations (two in Illinois, one in Missouri and one in Kansas). In addition, they offer equipping events to train other leaders and congregations to start ministries.

Multiplication is a natural part of life. Healthy churches that are full of life seek ways to multiply the life that God has birthed in them. Though your church may not be the size of Ginghamsburg or Church of the Resurrection, God calls you to naturally multiply the life and ministry that God has planted within you.

How are you and will you exercise the practice of Natural Multiplication?

Mike Crawford

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― ...it’s not only in new congregations that the life of a church can be multiplied. A vital church can also reproduce the kingdom life it has discovered in the life of other existing congregations.‖

— Mike Crawford

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IGRC website goes multimedia

Several features have been added to the IGRC website.

Two videos have been posted to the IGRC website and with the use of Windows Media Player, these videos can be streamed or can be downloaded and saved to your computer.

The two videos featured are a video of Bishop Christopher describing her call to ministry. To visit the media center, go to: www.igrc.org and click on the link at the bottom of the page “More News and Events.”

More videos will be added in the upcoming weeks, so check back regularly for new videos that can assist you in ministry. To visit the media center, go to: www.igrc.org and click on the link at the bottom of the page “More News and Events.”

Electronic e-newsletter rolls out, need subscribers

A new electronic e-newsletter, aimed at providing timely news about the Illinois Great Rivers Conference, was unveiled Jan. 5 and already more than 350 persons have signed up to receive it.

The Current Week in Review, which will arrive by email on Friday mornings, will provide a summary of news throughout the Illinois Great Rivers Conference. The newsletter will provide a brief summary of the news with a link to the full story on the IGRC or other related websites.

Persons wishing to subscribe to The Current Week In Review may do so by visiting the IGRC website at www.igrc.org and click on the “E-news” link on the right-hand column and follow the prompts. If one is already on a subscription, the person will be asked to update their profile. Updating profiles will allow persons to subscribe to one or more of the e-newsletters currently being produced by districts and ministries throughout the conference.

The e-newsletter also includes Quick Links, which link to the latest appointment announcements, job listing, classified advertising and various events of interest.

The Current newspaper was published every other week prior to September, so when we went to a monthly publication, we wanted to provide a vehicle that could provide breaking news and timely dissemination of that information while still being cost-effective,” said Paul Black, director of communication ministries.

“We believe The Current Week in Review bridges that gap.”

The newsletter is another in a series of changes aimed at providing United Methodists throughout the southern two-thirds of Illinois and throughout the world. Rather than having news items “held” until the newspaper is published and then published to the website, news items are posted to the website with a longer, more detailed story published in the monthly Current.

7 Villages now operational

The social networking site, 7Villages, is now operational and persons are invited to set up a profile and be a part of the Illinois Great Rivers Conference village.

The network can be a tool for churches, organizations and businesses that wish to organize and order their work. Because 7Villages is truly global, it is also possible to network with other conference organizations and persons around the world.

Visit the IGRC website at www.igrc.org and click on the 7Villages icon in the right-hand column.

The first step is to set up an account.

There you will set up a user name and password as well as fill out a questionnaire about your interests. One can also upload their photo to accompany their profile.

Using your user name and password, login to 7Villages. There you will have a listing of new postings and new people who have joined. Click on browse and look at the general areas of the site: environment, helping, healthy living, education, spirituality. From each of these broad areas, one can search for people, villages, needs and events in which to connect.

Sign up now. The possibilities are endless.

The Current to be available electronically

Persons preferring to receive the conference’s monthly newspaper, The Current, in electronic form may do so by contacting Michele Willson in the communications office. Willson can be contacted at mwilson@igrc.org or by calling 217-529-3122.

Churches receive a certain number of free subscriptions and for every person who currently receives a free subscription that opts for the electronic version, an additional free print subscription will be provided to the church. Willson can also assist churches in updating their free subscription list.

A church can also provide an unlimited number of email addresses for free electronic subscriptions.

Beginning with the March issue of The Current, the electronic version will arrive on Wednesday prior to the Friday publication and will be as a PDF, which will require Adobe Acrobat Reader to view. The reader can be downloaded free of charge at: http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html?ogn=EN_US

Back issues of The Current are already archived in PDF format on the IGRC website at: http://www.igrc.org/Communications/The-Current/Archives.aspx

Download page coming soon

In an effort to provide “one-stop shopping” of downloadable forms on the IGRC website, a new Download link on the right-hand column of the home page will be added in the near future.

The page will provide an area that will have all of the downloadable forms and resources in one place.

The download area will be organized by the four general areas – Communications, Administration, Districts and Ministries. For instance, charge conference forms, because they are issued by the Cabinet, will be located in the District section of the Downloads. Forms for mission trips will be located in the Ministries area since Missions falls under the Ministry section of the website.

The download page is the latest in a series of ongoing developments with the IGRC website aimed that began with the site’s unveiling in October. Additional features are on the drawing board and will be added as soon as they are completed.

WW II veteran

Continued from page 3

plane land safely.

In his last mission, on April 28, 1945, Augsburger and the rest of his crew flew over Pilsen. He recalled this mission as being the worst of his entire service career. He retold the story, remarking that BBC radio had released the target of the attack in an effort to protect the civilian workers of the factory. But what this really did was give Augsburger and his crew time to fortify the area with anti-aircraft guns.

Augsburger returned stateside after his service in Europe because he had enough points to avoid going to the Pacific. His ear problem also presented an obstacle for any further service.

At the end of the time with the class, a smile broke across Augsburger’s face when he was happy to report that he could still fit into his uniform. He also recalled that he was able to climb back into a B-17, a memory that also brought a glint of joy to his aging eyes.

(Reprinted with permission from the Dec. 7, 2007, issue of The Monmouth College Courier, the student publication of Monmouth College.)
Bias
Continued from page 20
Board of Church and Society, following Winkler’s meeting with Caterpillar Jan. 11. “The church, at its best, doesn’t stand in the midst of the controversy, we speak in the midst of it. Our church is a global church and the growth of the church south of the equator has tremendous implications to us who live in the United States.”

Bias said the changes are challenging. “I am reminded that in my lifetime, The United Methodist Church has been the home of Barry Goldwater and George McGovern,” he said. “More recently, The United Methodist Church has been the home of George W. Bush and Hillary Clinton.”

Part of the problem that comes from such diversity is that United Methodists are also members of different groups that have their own agendas.

“Only one body speaks for the entire church and that is the General Conference,” Bias said. “We don’t always understand that and neither does the secular media. So when a series of articles were published in the local newspaper concerning legislation being brought to General Conference, it generated an opportunity to have him (Winkler) be with us.”

Bias characterized the meeting between Winkler and Owens as “good, open and cordial,” noting that when Christians have a difference of opinion, they sit down together so there is greater understanding.

“It is my hope that we’re modeling what it means to live in the world today as Christians,” Bias said. “The purpose of the meeting wasn’t to change anyone’s mind. It was to have greater understanding.”

Winkler
Continued from page 20
Following the meeting, Caterpillar released a prepared statement, noting that the company sells its equipment to all branches of the U.S. military, which then ships some to U.S. allies and that the company encourages its customers to use the equipment responsibly.

“We won’t always agree with external organizations that challenge Caterpillar to do more to promote responsible product use, but by listening and engaging in dialogue with one another, we can both take big steps toward building better understanding and positive, productive relationships,” the statement read.

Speaking to a group of 60 persons, several wearing Caterpillar jackets and caps, Winkler spoke about the divestment issue.

“Over the past 40 years, the General Board has issued statements of concern and one of the methods used to bring about peace in disputes has been to target companies with boycotts and divestment. He noted that in the 1960’s the grape boycott brought about equity in pay for migrant workers and a similar boycott, approved by the 2004 General Conference, against Mt. Olive Pickle Co. brought a similar resolution to wage issues for farm workers.

The petition is now in the hands of General Conference. The General Conference will assign the petition and other divestment petitions to a legislative subcommittee that will then work to perfect what is brought to the floor of General Conference.

Bias encouraged his parishioners if they wish to voice their concerns that they need to contact the 1,000 General Conference delegates who will ultimately vote on the matter.

Winkler acknowledged that a meeting with Caterpillar prior to the petition’s filing would have been helpful in that the petition should have included the positive contributions of humanitarian aid in providing a balanced picture of the company.

“As general secretary, I do not have voice or vote in either the committee or on the General Conference floor,” Winkler said. “However, if asked to speak, I will be glad to share what the company shared with me about their humanitarian work around the world and the good work to which they are engaged and committed.”

Peoria
Continued from page 20
dominantly black church and a white suburban church merged to form Heaven’s View. The tragedy is that temporary events are not strong enough to overcome the divide in our community. We have to pray as Jesus prayed that we all become one.”

Pierce said that the name of Christian is dependent upon living out that oneness Christ expressed in the gospel of John.

“You begin in Jerusalem and all Judea with people like you, then you move to Samaria, where people are somewhat like you and then into the world, where people are different,” Pierce said. “We like to say that the ground is level at the cross but do we live it out?”

The prayer services have already generated some dialogue. On Jan. 15, the Rev. Harvey Burnett, director of the Peoria Association of Pastors for Community and Spiritual Renewal, met with Ardis and asked that police, other city officials and pastors meet monthly to share information aimed at lowering the crime rate.

Burnett called the 40 Days of Prayer and the ongoing communications “essential elements of things that should be done” to transform Peoria.

Ardis agrees. “It’s too early to know the impact the prayer services will have on the community, but we are sowing seeds for eternity not just the short-term.”
Book offers blueprint for Wesleyan way of living

By Kathy L. Gilbert*

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (UMNS) - In a world divided and filled with fear for what tomorrow may bring, comes a still, quiet voice saying “God loves us all.”


The rules from Wesley, the founder of Methodism, are simple: “Do no harm. Do good. Stay in love with God.”

“These simple rules then and now applied to everyone,” Job says. “No one was left out. No one was too good, too mean, too rich or too poor, too educated, too illiterate.”

Drawing parallels between Wesley’s time and the world today, Job says the feelings of disenfranchisement, doubt and fear are much the same.

“Our world is deeply divided, highly cynical about its leadership, greatly disappointed in its structures and systems that seem so flawed, broken and corrupt, broadly conflicted and gravely afraid of tomorrow.”

With so many hurting, frightened people Job says a radical change must take place.

“There are two enormously encouraging truths for us to remember,” Job says. “One, God is with us. God continues to woo us, seek us out, love us, speak to us, enable us and lead us into the future. Second, it has been done before.”

Wesley’s three simple rules transformed women and men and started a movement that became a denomination and transformed a forming nation in North America, Job points out.

“Today we also need a message that can be clearly understood by persons of every age, every educational and economic level, every condition and circumstance of life,” he says. “And today these three simple rules provide that message.”

**Primer for holy living**

“In *Three Simple Rules*, Rueben Job tells the truth about God and about our relationship with God. He makes plain the way of life that, in John Wesley’s day, launched a dramatic movement that transformed the personal lives of millions and their communities,” says Susan Salley, executive director of adult resources at the publishing house.

“Job provides a straightforward path that leads to the joy of deepening our love of God and living every day the way Jesus shows us,” she says.

Bishop John L. Hopkins of the Ohio East Annual (regional) Conference, says Job’s book offers “a more faithful way of living as a disciple of Jesus Christ with personal practices that have the power to change the world.”

“If you want to change the world, you must begin with changing yourself,” Hopkins says. “Three Simple Rules is a primer for holy living that is both personal and social.”

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**Discipleship for the individual**

Do no harm.

Do good.

Stay in love with God.

*Wesley’s General Rules*

“Every year I review the three general rules of The United Methodist Church with those who are being ordained,” says Bishop Sally Dyck of the Minnesota Area. “I try to get them to envision these historic rules in contemporary terms along with the historic questions. Now I have a wonderful ordination gift to give them in Bishop Job’s, *Three Simple Rules*, to start and deepen the conversation as they enter a new relationship with the church.”

**Daily practice**

An important component of the book is lessons on daily practice that will help Christians live a faithful life. “It is not what many of us have been doing, so to adopt this way is a radical shift in our lifestyle,” Job says. “It is a radical departure from our regular way of living, so of course it will be difficult.”

The book offers a liturgy for the beginning, middle and end of the day with prayers, scriptures, reflections and blessings.

The book closes with a song adapted from John Wesley with music by Raquel Mora Martinez, “Stay in Love With God.”

“The rules are simple, but the way is not easy,” Job writes. “Only those with great courage will attempt it, and only those with great faith will be able to walk this exciting and demanding way.”

The core of Wesley’s message was that God loves us all, Job says.

“All of us are the apple of God’s eye. We can all claim our full inheritance as God’s children.”

**Three Simple Rules**

Three Simple Rules is published by Abingdon Press and can be ordered at www.cokesbury.com for $5 each. A video to go with the book is in production and will be available in April.

*Gilbert is a United Methodist News Service writer based in Nashville, Tenn.*

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New Streams

Wait!

Go back and read what’s in the box.

You might have read it dozens of times before. But read it again. Read it slowly. Read it aloud. Read it again.

Now let’s take a careful look at that statement, because each word is crucial. The first word is *The*. Yes, we all know what that word means. But in this sentence that word carries a special meaning that we might miss. The sentence does not read “A mission” or “One of the missions.” No, the statement reads loudly and clearly that the one, single, exclusive mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

What about the second word: mission? What is a mission? Put most simply and directly, a mission is what we are supposed to be doing and what we are to do. Our mission is our reason for being. It is the cause for which we exist. It is the way we are to be spending ourselves. Our mission is the reason why we are here. Our mission is what we are about. Our mission is what we are given to do by a higher authority. Our mission is not something we choose or define or modify. Our mission is given to us and we are charged with and held responsible for fulfilling that mission. Our mission is not optional. Either we undertake our mission joyfully and enthusiastically or we fail completely and endure the consequences of our failure.

Back up a minute: Did you catch the sentence in the previous paragraph that says our mission is given to us by a higher authority? That higher authority is not The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church or the General Conference of The United Methodist Church or a group of bishops. That higher authority is God through Christ. It is God through Christ who gives us our mission. The United Methodist Church may put that mission into a set of words, but the mission is given to us by God. The Church did not select or choose this mission. God through Christ charged the Church with this mission. Matthew 28:18-20 is but one of many, many passages of Scripture that could be cited to demonstrate this.

Whose mission is it? The Church’s. Note that the word “Church” iscapitalized in this statement.

That suggests that the Church on every level and in every form is charged with this mission.

That means that the Church, no matter how we define it, has this as its mission.

That means that the huge cathedral, the tiny rural frame building, the established congregation in the suburb, the little group of folks meeting in a storefront in the inner city, the new congregation that is just beginning to grow, the handful of related folks who have always called that crossroads building their church – all of these and every other example you can imagine – share in one common mission, one common calling, one common task given them by God through Christ.

The Church, as a body of believers in Christ, does not choose its mission, does not decide whether or not it will accept this mission. Instead, one definition of the church – capital C or small c – is that the church is a group of persons committed to fulfilling the mission given to those persons by God.

And what is that mission?

Our mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

Now, what about your church? Is it about making disciples? Is the congregation that gathers weekly in the building you call your church actively engaged in making disciples? Are the folks who make up your congregation disciples themselves?

If your congregation needs assistance with developing an understanding of the nature of disciple-making and how you might go about this essential task, the New Streams Team would love to partner with you! Pull out the DVD your church received at Annual Conference 2006 – Opening Ourselves to Grace. It illustrates specific practices that form persons as disciples of Jesus Christ. Open the workbook that was distributed with the DVD “Charting the Course of Christian Discipleship. Chapter 2 will help you discover how to know if your church is making disciples, and what a disciple looks like once “made.”

If you still have questions, please contact Beth Fender, Coordinator of New Streams, at 217-529-2611 or bfen01@igrc.org. Team members are available to come to your church to help you fulfill the mission of the church – to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

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This article is adapted from chapter 1 of *Charting the Course of Christian Discipleship* by Teresa Gilbert, Patty Johansen, and Jay Regennitter, with John P. Gilbert.

Additional copies of the book are available to IGRC churches for $5.00 each by contacting Beth Fender at the United Methodist Center.
Mission opportunities

North Indiana Conference: Teams of volunteers will be needed to help with the cleanup and recovery of the homes damaged by flood waters in the Monticello and White County (Ind.) region. About 200 families have been displaced by the flooding. A number of other families have damaged homes but have been able to remain in them.

Volunteers will be needed for the next six months if not longer. Contact the Monticello (Ind.) UMC office 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. (Eastern time) Monday through Friday to schedule a time, ask questions, and indicate your willingness to serve or you may call Pastor Brian Beeks at 574-583-5545 or email: bbeeks@montumc.com.

Guatemala: Mary Micikas, individual volunteer has started her work in Guatemala around Lake Atitlan. She needs work teams to come down and help work on an approved project of the Methodist church of Guatemala. They are converting an abandoned Methodist church into a clinic and community multi-use building in the village of San Juan La Laguna.

“It is an amazing place down here, they say it is the most beautiful lake in the world and I would have to agree, and I have already met some of the nicest people!” Micikas said. “So if you would be at all interested in bringing a group down to help build the clinic that would be wonderful!”

Groups are needed year-round and Micikas will coordinate arrangements for teams once they arrive in Guatemala City. Micikas can be contacted at: Mary.Micikas@gmail.com

Crow Reservation, Montana: May 2-5: UMVM teams will be housed in the Pryor High School Gym where there are showers available. Volunteers will need to bring their own bedding, cots or whatever for sleeping. Local churches will provide meals.

Fundraising is ongoing to raise an additional $30,000 to complete the project as originally designed but there is sufficient funds and equipment to keep work teams busy. The Pryor community has raised enough money for one segment of the playground, which has already been purchased.

A celebration with drummers and dancers will be part of the dedication of the playground on the final day. Contact Barbara Galusha Karst, High Plains Coordinator, bkargarst@vcn.com for details and needs.

UMCOR responds in Kenya

More than a week of violence following disputed elections has left the lives of many Kenyans in shambles. Nearly 200,000 people have been displaced by the crisis—many of them fleeing to neighboring Uganda.

The United Methodist Committee on Relief is working to bring supplies and shelter for the displaced. UMCOR is assisting the East Africa Conference in their efforts to provide food and shelter to Kenyans who have fled to Uganda. Schools, churches and other structures are being used as shelters both in Kenya and Uganda. An additional concern for the entire region is that the conflict in Kenya has cut off Mombasa, a major port that supplies much of East Africa.

UMCOR is working to bring food, water and other necessities directly to the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology in Karen where many people are seeking refuge. United Methodist communicator John Makokha, lives on the campus and is working to provide those sheltering there with sufficient food and water.

The truckload of supplies will directly help Makokha in his efforts. UMCOR is also in contact with the Methodist Church of Kenya and anticipates assisting Action by Churches Together partners in their response. “We continue to monitor the situation and are working diligently to bring relief and assistance to all our church families and others in Kenya,” said Sam Dixon, UMCOR’s chief executive.

You can take part in UMCOR’s response by giving to UMCOR’s response in Kenya. To give by check please make it out to UMCOR and mail it to UMCOR PO Box 9068, New York, NY 10087. Write “UMCOR Advance #982450, International Disaster Response - Kenya” on the memo line of your check. Or you may place your offering, payable to your church, with the UMCOR Advance number and it can be sent in by your church treasurer with the monthly remittances to the Conference.

Announcements

Continued from page 9
http://www.igrc.org/forms/08SpiritualGrowthRetreat.pdf

Items available (free)

Bushnell UMC has a “stair-trac II” chair lift available at no charge to any church who needs a portable wheelchair lift. Manufactured by Garaventa, the chair lift is designed with a strong motor and able to attach to most manual wheelchairs. For information please call George Pensinger, Chair of the Trustees, at 309-255-3531.

Positions

Chatham UMC is seeking a part-time sanctuary choir/bell choir director. Contact Rev. Sara Isbell at sisbell@springnet1.com or Chatham UMC, 104 W. Chestnut, Chatham IL 62629 217-483-2132.
Generous giving: Why don’t we do it more?

By James K. Varner
Special Contributor

As a pastor and stewardship consultant, there are some special memories I will never forget. At times I will even sit quietly and relive the experiences:

The single mother with two teens and a preteen, whose truly sacrificial pledge, although financially small, enabled her church to build a new sanctuary. As we stood in the just-completed building she said, “I never dreamed I would have a part in something this beautiful for the glory of God!”

The man in his mid-30s, whose very large pledge enabled his church to raise over four times the annual budget for a relocation project. “All these years I have wondered why God has blessed me with business and financial success,” he said. “In this fund-raising campaign, I found a new understanding of God’s claim on my life—all that I am and all that I have.”

The very successful radiologist who decided with his wife to sell their 5,000 square-foot gated community mansion and move to a more modest 3,000-square-foot home in a middle-class neighborhood. Why? Because they were concerned their teenage sons were being influenced by their friends and neighborhood with a lifestyle and financial expectations that were not consistent with their personal faith.

The pastor who decided with his wife to sell their personal home and move to a smaller home, realizing a $25,000 equity, which they gave to the church’s capital campaign.

God’s Spirit in the hearts and lives of God’s people still surprises me after 45 years of ministry. But nothing in my experience prepared me for a visit in the pastor’s study of a Texas United Methodist church where I witnessed a man who gave the congregation $1.2 million in cash.

He simply asked two things: how the gift would be used and whether his gift would be anonymous. Then he said, “Give me the church’s bank routing number and the money will be there in two days.” And it was!

That church is launching new and exciting ministries because of this man’s generosity. That man is not even a member of the church, though he and his family worship there.

What strikes me is not the size of the gift or that he did it. Instead, it’s a “God-thing” that we often miss because we are not looking for it.

This type of giving happens regularly with educational institutions and community organizations. But when I tell this story to pastors and lay leaders, they typically respond: “Can I have his name and telephone number?” “Do you think he will give to my church even if he doesn’t live here?” and “Do you think he would consider moving to our town, our church?”

Not one pastor or lay person has ever asked, “I wonder if there is anybody like that in my church, my community?”

In his book Generous People: How to Encourage Vital Stewardship (Abingdon Press, 1992), stewardship consultant Eugene Grimm shares some interesting statistics: “One out of every 426 Americans is a millionaire. Some people have such large incomes that they can spend one-third, give one-third, and save one-third. For every 40 giving units in a church, there is one unit capable of making a one-time gift equal to the church’s budget.”

“If no one ever asks them, they are not likely to think of giving to it the church. Instead, they will think of giving it to a university, a hospital, or some other worthy cause. Why? Because those institutions will think to ask. Such people will, however, contribute to special offerings over and above their regular budgetary gifts.”

We can disagree about the amount of potential, but every church has someone who can and should be given the opportunity to consider a significant gift.

The significance of such giving is both spiritual and financial. If we believe that life is a grace-gift of God, and all that we are and do is a blessing from God if we diligently seek God’s will, then how does one express a thanksgiving except through generous giving?

This type of giving should not, and will not, be given for the regular budget. Most generous stewards do not want the church to be dependent on their giving for ongoing ministry.

Churches that want to receive this type of gift should consider whether they have a vision big enough to inspire this kind of giving. One man who made a million-dollar gift to a community agency was asked why he had never considered a similar gift for his church. He replied, “My church would not know what to do with a million-dollar gift.”

(Note: The pastor at the Texas church did not ask for the $1.2 million gift; it was actually influenced by a friend who also gave generously to the church. But this pastor is a visionary leader who can articulate with passion and clarity the potential for the church’s ministry in the community.)

Pastors and key lay leaders must also have the courage to recognize and cultivate persons with this kind of giving potential. Some committed laypersons are well-known by their circle of influence to be very generous to their local church. They can use that influence in positive ways to influence others.

In most United Methodist churches today, one can witness the prayer life, service on church boards and mission involvement of potential givers. Such laypersons might even be recognized in the church newsletter for their generosity toward community programs like Habitat for Humanity.

Yet if someone talks specifically about giving to the church, eyes drop to the floor and an embarrassed quiet fills the room.

I know the proof texts for anonymity in giving; I’m not talking about “ trumpet- ing” our giving. But I also know how Barnabas sold a field he owned and brought the money to the apostles (Acts 4), and I also know how Jesus used the resources of the wealthy in his ministry.

Without the home of wealthy Mary, probably the mother of John Mark, there would be no Upper Room and Last Supper. The Bethany home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus was a spiritual retreat for Jesus. The home of a wealthy neighbor, Simon the Leper, is the site of Mary’s anointing of the feet and head of Jesus. In the early church, the 120 disciples met in a large home for prayer prior to Pentecost. Peter and Paul preached and ministered in large homes of wealthy people.

We have “consecrated” the real sacrificial offering of the poor widow Jesus recognized in Luke 21 as the model for generosity, but ignore the fact that Paul lists “giving with generosity” as one of several spirit-filled gifts for the ministry of the church (Romans 12).

Why are gifted musicians and teachers sought by church leaders while gifted donors are never challenged? Surely the spiritual gift of remarkable giving is just as important to the church.

Mr. Varner is vice president for Stewardship Services for the Texas Methodist Foundation and a stewardship consultant who has directed more than 200 campaigns, raising in excess of $250 million. Reprinted with permission from the Nov. 20 edition of the online edition of the United Methodist Reporter, www.umportal.org
By Linda Bloom*

Members of Churches Uniting in Christ are seeking to bring two of its historically black partner denominations back to the table.

The absence of representatives from the African Methodist Episcopal and African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church during the organization’s Jan. 11-14 plenary in St. Louis overshadowed the ecumenical event, according to United Methodist representatives. The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, which is also historically black, was present at the meeting.

United Methodist Bishop Albert “Fritz” Mutti, interim leader of Churches Uniting in Christ for the AME and AME Zion Churches, said the suspension of participation by the two denominations “dominated our discussion.”

Churches Uniting in Christ was inaugurated in early 2002 as an outgrowth of and successor to the Consultation on Church Unity. For 40 years, members of the consultation had discussed how to unify across denominational lines. At the 2002 event in Memphis, Tenn., the then-nine members formally agreed to maintain their own identities and structures but engage in tangible acts of cooperation.

Besides The United Methodist Church and the three historically black Methodist denominations, member communions include the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Episcopalian Church, International Council of Community Churches, Moravian Church Northern Province, Presbyterian Church (USA) and United Church of Christ. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is a “partner in mission and dialogue.”

During the group’s latest meeting, “the question that was in the room but not on the table was what to do about those who are absent,” said Mutti, interim leader of the United Methodist Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns.

The answer agreed upon by about 60 participants in the Churches Uniting in Christ plenary was to seek reconciliation with the two denominations, specifically through a joint effort by the heads of member communions.

A letter sent

A letter was sent on Jan. 16 to the top leaders of the AME and AME Zion churches, with copies sent to the ecumenical officers of both denominations, according to United Methodist Bishop William Oden.

The letter, signed by each head of communion, stressed that “we are incomplete without you,” Oden told United Methodist News Service.

Oden, who serves as ecumenical officer for the United Methodist Council of Bishops, said questions of ministry and a lack of progress regarding racism seem to be the two major issues of concern regarding Churches Uniting in Christ for the AME and AME Zion Churches.

Participants at the plenary were very aware the group “has not lived up to its goal of dismantling racism,” according to Oden, but believe the AME/AME Zion presence “is essential” to fulfilling that priority.

The first call to action for Churches Uniting in Christ was a pledge to combat racism. On Jan. 21, 2002, participants in the Memphis event marched in support of Martin Luther King Jr.’s dream and signed an appeal to its churches on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel, where King was killed in 1968.

United Methodist Bishop Melvin Talbert, the ecumenical officer at that time, said the appeal was the first public step for the new group. “We didn’t want to start something simple, something easy,” Talbert said that day. “By making combatting racism our No. 1 priority, we’re showing that we’re serious about responding to God’s call.”

Jerry Ruth Williams, a member of the Commission on Christian Unity, remembered the Memphis event as “a great experience.” As a participant in the St. Louis plenary, she said she is “totally in agreement” about the need for reconciliation. “I think that it is very important that we get our members back into the family,” she said.

The idea is to try to work through the concerns “to listen to them and hear what they have to say and hope that they decide to return,” she said.

Top priority is reconciliation

The Rev. W. Douglas Mills, an executive with the Commission on Christian Unity, pointed out that although the AME and AME Zion Churches have not officially withdrawn from Churches Uniting in Christ, “the top priority is to seek reconciliation with the CUIC family. There’s no moving ahead until we get that reconciliation.”

A consultant, Billie Mayo of St. Louis, helped plenary participants focus more closely on priorities around the issue of racism. Rather than just setting goals, “we learned that dealing with racism is dealing with relationships,” Mutti explained.

Beyond the racism issue, the overwhelming barrier to moving forward “with any form of unity” is the issue of reconciliation with Ministry, Oden said. This issue, especially regarding the role of the episcopacy, was to be resolved by last year but was not.

Bloom is a United Methodist News Service news writer based in New York.

By Linda Bloom*

A UMNS Report

Over the next two years, both the United Methodist Church and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America will ask its members to approve “full communion” between the two bodies.

That step follows an interim agreement and the conclusion, in December, of the last round of dialogue between the two denominations. The vote will take place this spring for United Methodists and in 2009 for Lutherans.

According to the Rev. W. Douglas Mills, an executive with the United Methodist Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns, full communion essentially means “acknowledging one another’s ministries as valid,” as well as wanting to be involved in mutual decision-making.

Being in full communion is a visible step toward full unity, he said, but added, “We don’t know what full unity is or can look like.”

Over the last three decades, ELCA-UMC dialogue teams have explored the sacrament of baptism (1977-79) and issues of episcopacy (1985-87). The third round of dialogue, from 2001 to 2007, explored the two churches’ understandings of Eucharist and resulted in the 2004 recommendation for an interim agreement.

In 2005, an interim “Eucharistic sharing” agreement was approved by the United Methodist Council of Bishops in May and by ELCA representatives at a churchwide assembly in August.

The terms of the agreement encouraged “mutual prayer and mutual support, study together of the Holy Scriptures as well as the histories and theological traditions of both churches, and joint programs of theological discussion, evangelical outreach and social ministry endeavors.” Looking toward full communion, the agreement also encouraged joint services of Holy Communion following guidelines established by both churches.

“Confessing Our Faith Together: A Statement Toward Full Communion by the ELCA-UMC Bilateral Dialogue” was completed in 2005 and distributed for feedback and comment.

*Bloom is a United Methodist News Service news writer based in New York.
Nigerian United Methodist Bishop Mavula dies unexpectedly

By Linda Green

United Methodist Bishop Kefas K. Mavula of Nigeria died Jan. 11 of an undetermined illness, less than a year after his election as bishop. He was 40.

Mavula died at the ECWA Evangel Hospital in Jos City, Plateau State, Nigeria. He was taken to the hospital Jan. 8 after complaining of stomach pains and vomiting blood. Mavula is survived by his wife, Jessica, and six sons between the ages of 4 and 19.

Elected bishop on March 3, 2007, his 40th birthday-Mavula, “quickly garnered the love and respect of the people of the United Methodist Church in Nigeria,” said Houston Bishop Janice Riggle, expressing sadness on behalf of the Council of Bishops. “He had already earned a reputation for fairness, for spiritual depth and for his deep commitment to the United Methodist Church.”
Vietnamese pastor/General Conference delegate spreads God’s word around world

By Kathy L. Gilbert*

LOS ANGELES (UMNS) – The Rev. Bau Dang would rather not talk about himself. He shies away from the spotlight. That is really too bad, since he just made history by becoming the first Vietnamese American elected as a delegate to the 2008 United Methodist General Conference, the denomination’s top lawmaking body that meets every four years.

Oh, and another thing: He has just finished translating the New Testament into Vietnamese and published 10,000 copies at his own expense. Vietnam’s communist government has issued a permit to the National Religious Publisher of Vietnam to print the translation, and now Christians in his home country are begging him to send them 100,000 more.

“To me, this is a miracle,” he says. “Praise be to God!”

Dang’s translation is spreading the word of God throughout the country, which he is no longer able to enter. Because of his stand for human rights, he has been placed on a list of people not allowed into Vietnam.

“My philosophy in ministry is if you keep yourself low key and under the water, you can get a lot of things done … and I don’t want to get attention, to be frank with you.”

Born in Vietnam, the son of a pastor, Dang served in the South Vietnamese armed forces and moved to the United States as a refugee after the war. Dang’s friends thought he was going through a midlife crisis when he gave up a lucrative job as a manager for Xerox to become a United Methodist associate pastor. Some of his Vietnamese pastor friends thought he had chosen the wrong denomination because no United Methodist church existed in Vietnam before 1975. “Some even thought that Methodism was a heresy!” he says, laughing. Dang and his wife, Binh, both left jobs with Xerox in 1988. Since then, the Xerox operation they worked at has closed, but the church where he started as associate pastor – Wesley UMC in San Diego – has grown into a thriving ministry with four different languages spoken at six worship services to more than 400 people on Sunday mornings.

As senior pastor, Dang plans services in English, Cambodian, Spanish and Vietnamese, “in whatever style fits each group,” he says.

“We have traditional, contemporary, blended, Pentecostal and even free style,” he says. “Well, we are United Methodists, aren’t we? I take seriously the statement, ‘In the essentials, unity; in all things, charity.’”

One bite at a time Dang worked on his translation of the New Testament for 10 years. His knowledge of Greek, Hebrew, English and Vietnamese helped him with the task. He also received training from the United Bible Society.

When explaining how he was able to take on such a huge task, he compares himself to a mouse eating an elephant, “just one bite at a time.”

“I preach from the Bible every Sunday, and the version that we had was translated by missionaries in 1926 in Vietnam,” he says. When they came to the country, they were learning the language and hired a non-Christian to help with the translation.

“We had to live with that Bible for years and years,” he says. He felt uncomfortable with many places in the Bible and didn’t believe they were clear to the reader.

One example he cites is the passage in John 2, in which Jesus talks to his mother about turning water into wine.

“The way that passage is translated is very offensive to the Vietnamese culture,” he says. The translation made Jesus sound like he was speaking harshly to his mother.

“Non-Christians say, ‘How can I believe in a God who responded to his mother so impolitely?’ and it turned them right away.”

Dang, who is now working on translating the Old Testament, believes the printing of the new translation has the power to change the people and nation of Vietnam.

“Only the word of God can change people’s lives, and if people can read the Bible or the scripture in the language that they understand, they understand the love of God.”

Asian Americans are still a minority in the denomination, he says. “We come from different cultures and backgrounds. We think this denomination has opened their hearts and minds and doors to welcome us in, and we are grateful for that.”

UMCOR begins fourth year of tsunami assistance

By Michelle Scott*

NEW YORK (UMNS) - The United Methodist Committee on Relief is working to help tsunami survivors find a “new normal” more than three years after one of the world’s worst natural disasters killed an estimated 230,000 people and displaced millions in 11 countries.

In Indonesia and Sri Lanka – the countries most affected by the tsunami – UMCOR offices continue to work daily to help survivors recover whatever possible. UMCOR also provided relief and recovery assistance in Somalia, India and Thailand.

United Methodists and others have contributed approximately $42 million to UMCOR’s tsunami relief response since the Dec. 26, 2004, disaster.

UMCOR emphasizes a shared approach that encourages participants to take ownership of their recovery and to act as project partners in an effort to empower survivors to restore their lives.

UMCOR officials offer this update on their ongoing work in the two hardest hit countries:

■ Sri Lanka

UMCOR’s recovery efforts in Sri Lanka have involved collaboration with the Methodist Church of Sri Lanka, including helping Sri Lankan Methodists expand their own capacity to respond to disaster. The work is interrupted from time to time by ongoing political and military conflict in the tsunami zone.

The challenge spurred UMCOR to seek ways to overcome the causes of the violence, a determination enhanced by a partnership with Muslim Aid, an aid agency based in the United Kingdom.

UMCOR’s programs support survivors of both the tragedies of tsunami and civil strife, providing homes and food, improving agriculture production, rebuilding infrastructures, and generating jobs and business development. Rural reconstruction and development ranks high on the list of priorities. More than 100,000 people have been helped through these projects.

*Scott is director of communications for UMCOR.
Agency clarifies General Conference survey concerns

By J. Richard Peck*

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (UMNS) — The United Methodist Church began its official online survey in December of the 992 delegates to its 2008 General Conference. In November, however, some U.S. General Conference delegates were asked to participate in a telephone survey by the Conquest Communications Group, a Richmond, Va., firm that declined to identify the survey’s sponsor.

General Conference organizers emphasized that the Conquest survey is not being conducted by or for The United Methodist Church.

“The denomination’s survey will be done by e-mail and will come directly from my office,” said the Rev. Alan J. Morrison, business manager for General Conference and an executive staff member of the United Methodist Council on Finance and Administration.

Unofficial survey

Paul Black, a General Conference delegate from the Illinois Great Rivers Annual (regional) Conference, says he received a call Nov. 26 from Conquest. When he asked who was sponsoring the survey, the caller responded that it was The United Methodist Church. Pressed about which church agency had commissioned the survey, the caller was unable to offer specifics. Black declined to participate in the survey.

Morrison said two other delegates reported being asked by Conquest to participate in a survey.

Contacted by United Methodist News Service, Conquest officials cited a “non-disclosure” agreement with its clients and declined to identify the survey’s sponsor.

“The agent who was conducting the surveys declined to talk about policy specifics,” Black said.

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“The agent who was conducting the surveys declined to talk about policy specifics,” Black said.

“Does it teach us how to purposefully win souls for Christ?” I taught them the ways of purposeful evangelism; to lead by example and so a pastor’s position is important. The lost already know they are sinners, but knowing that their sins can be forgiven is what they long for, and conversation can not begin without it, “We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”

Bishop Sharon Brown Christopher had it right when she said, “The church should function. We bring them into the church; we train and disciple them, and then we send them back out to bring in more, and the process continues. Do not worry; people won’t mind the back wall of the church missing, because they know that they are just making room for new Christians.”

Discipleship begins with purposeful evangelism

Editor, The Current:

It has been many years ago now, although it seems like yesterday, that while the prevalent grace of God was calling to me, someone told me about Jesus. It was a great and glorious day in May when Christ removed my burden of sin and my life has never been the same.

I can still remember the first act as a new Christian. I went home and led my wife and family in prayer, and I can never get enough of witnessing the blind seeing, the deaf hearing, and the lame walking, and I can never get enough of God’s greatest miracle, a changed life. I pray daily that I will never get used to the sound of the footsteps of the lost on their way to hell, I will, no I must run to the front of the line and try to lead them out of the dark and into the light. I suppose this burning in my heart is in response to another leading me to Jesus, and all that God has done in my life since that day.

Statistically, The United Methodist Church has been waning in numbers for many years now, and that the loss of members far outweighs our growth. I have seen many ideas and programs implemented to overcome this tragedy, and the trouble continues and could someday overwhelm us. I have always asked one simple question to test each program and to evaluate its ability to accomplish its task, and the question is: “Does it teach us how to purposefully win souls for Christ?”

I heard persons say foolish things such as: “If you build it they will come; or just get them in the building and osmosis will take care of the rest, and that telling someone they are a sinner is insulting?” One day someone told me I was sinner and my response to them was, “and your point is...” The lost already know they are sinners, but knowing that their sins can be forgiven is what they long for, and conversation can not begin without it, “We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”

Bishop Sharon Brown Christopher had it right when she said, “The church should function. We bring them into the church; we train and disciple them, and then we send them back out to bring in more, and the process continues. Do not worry; people won’t mind the back wall of the church missing, because they know that they are just making room for new Christians.”

Friends and colleagues if you want church growth; teach purposeful evangelism; stop waiting for them to come in, rather be like John Wesley and go out and tell them. Secular humanism says we have no right to push our belief on others, but Christ did; He freed them from the oppression of the law and called it Good News.

One short story and I will cease. I taught a group of people from my church how to present the gospel and I took them out and showed them how it is done. God tells us to lead by example and so a pastor’s position should be out front. A woman went out to share the gospel, along with two others, when they approached the door of a young single mother. She asked if they could share the gospel with her and her eyes lit up and you could tell she became excited as she said yes. She listened intently about how she was a sinner and about how God provided a way for her to be forgiven, and she received the Good News. And when the question was asked if she would like to receive Christ as her Lord and Savior she almost didn’t let them finish the question, she said yes. Now here is the most amazing part of it, she was jumping up and down and she was so excited.

Do not ever let anyone tell you that the gospel is insulting or that they will simply walk in one Sunday and stay forever, although some might, instead go out and tell them. You see they are waiting to be found. Your ministry will blossom and your pews will be full. May God richly bless you.

Scott Baird
Pastor, Herscher UMC
Vermilion River District

Israel-Palestinian issue is complicated

Editor, The Current:

June Nicholson ends her January 2008 Current letter calling us to “pray for the Palestinian Arab Christians” whose land has been taken (illegally by Israel); who have lost jobs due to the (illegal) Israeli wall; who town was destroyed (illegally by Israeli) bulldozers. These are examples of injustices, says Ms. Nicholson, committed by Israel. So we should pray for Palestinian Arab Christians. Notice, there is no call for us to pray for Israel! Ms. Nicholson seems to have chosen side in a war that has been going on for almost 60 years.

The State of Israel was created legally by the United Nations Nov. 29, 1947.

See Letters on page 19 . . .
Editor, The Current: I have met few fellow clergy whose intellect, faith and dedication I respect more than that of the Rev. Bob Phillips, and I challenge his recent letter with reticence. In the spirit of his epistle in The Current (December 2007 issue), I, too, view his remarks as good news, bad news, and potential good news. I agree with everything the retired Naval Captain says, except when he criticizes the Bishops’ resolution on Iraq for lack of credibility. It is the credibility of those who led us into this disaster that lies in shambles.

And yet, those who led us into this quagmire are exerting intense pressure to “stay the course,” which Congressional leadership has failed to challenge seriously, in spite of the elections of November 2006. The American people need to hear a strong voice condemning in theological terms the intent to occupy Iraq permanently by establishing enduring military bases in that sad land. Without the Bishops’ voice, no one today is rigorously questioning the “stay the course” policy and we face the grim prospect of the war dragging on indefinitely.

From the leadership which led us into Iraq there emanates a belief that America is the visitor in this Roman empire and this country must establish imperial outposts around the world, starting with Iraq. In my opinion, this frightening ideology is more dangerous to our democracy than Al Qaeda and few American leaders are seriously opposing such an un-American policy.

I thank God that the United Methodist Council of Bishops has challenged this cruel and destructive assumption and the “stay the course” propaganda emanating from our country’s leadership.

Together in Christ,
Rev. John M. Kraps
Pastor, Donovan UMC
Iroquois River District

Thankful for scholarship support

Editor, The Current: I want to thank you for the support you provided me to enable me to attend seminary this year at Duke.

I really can’t express how grateful I am for your support. I absolutely love being here. A professor reminded us this semester when papers were piling up that it is a blessing to be able to learn that being able to spend so much time in study is not something most have the leisure to do. He was absolutely right.

My time here has been such a blessing. It was really hard for me to pick a semester when papers were piling up that it is a blessing to be able to learn that being able to spend so much time in study is not something most have the leisure to do. He was absolutely right.

I am honored to be a part of the United Methodist movement that has identified their future as well as their contributions to the life of our nation was thwarted.

In response to this injustice, the Methodist Church founded colleges for the purpose of providing higher education for African American people. As a result, we United Methodists have participated over the years in the formation of many leaders who have shaped significantly our church and our nation.

Today we United Methodists continue to support eleven historically black colleges located primarily in the South through our Black College Fund. The Illinois Great Rivers Conference has an ongoing connection with Wiley College. Every year at the annual conference session a student from Wiley speaks to us, and we receive an offering for the ongoing work of Wiley. It has been reported that Danzal Washington has contributed $1 million to Wiley for the re-instatement of a debate department.

Wiley College has doubled its enrollment, now 950 students, since 2000. Says Haywood L. Strickland, Wiley president, “[Historically black colleges] are just as important today as they were 50 years ago. There’s still a need in this country for an alternative education to public education. There’s still a need for a small college which offers a nurturing, caring, close relationship with the student. There’s still a reason for a professor…to be able to say to that student, ‘You can be the very best that you want to be,’ and ensure that that student gets that grounding, foundation, to spur that student toward that achievement.”

I am honored to be a part of the United Methodist movement that has identified racism as an injustice in God’s eyes and worked—and is working—to transform it into fullness of life for all.

Bishop Sharon A. Brown Christopher

Bennett College
Greensboro, NC
www.bennett.edu

Bethune-Cookman College
Daytona Beach, FL
www.bethune.co.ukman.edu

Clifford University
Orangeburg, SC
www.claflin.edu

Clark Atlanta University
Atlanta, GA
www.caau.edu

Dillard University
New Orleans, LA
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Philander Smith College
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Rust College
Holly Springs, MS
www.rustcollege.edu

Wiley College
Marshall, TX
www.wiley.edu
Bias sees role as ‘bridge builder’
Similarities exist in how to deal with controversy whether in the community or global church

By Paul Black

PEORIA – Rev. Dr. Timothy Bias, pastor of Peoria First UMC, sees part of his role as pastor to be a bridge builder that challenges people to deal constructively with heated issues.

As one of the leaders of the Illinois Great Rivers Conference delegation to General Conference, Bias acknowledges that when issues hit close to home, it takes a greater commitment to live out our Christian principles. “The bottom line is: we seek to lift up Christ in the heart of the city of Peoria. We know that to grow as Christian disciples, we must be obedient in loving the people that Jesus loves (everyone).”

“The church, at its best, doesn’t stand in the midst of the controversy, we speak in the midst of it. Our church is a global church and the growth of the church south of the equator has tremendous implications to us who live in the United States.”

— Rev. Tim Bias

Such a commitment has led to a variety of community and outreach ministries (see December 2007 and January 2008 issues of The Current).

Winkler meets with Caterpillar CEO
Church and Society exec meets in informal meeting on divestment petition

By Paul Black

PEORIA – Jim Winkler has been on the receiving end of many protests and angry emails.

So when the General Board of Church and Society executive met recently with Jim Owens, chairman of Caterpillar Corp., they found they had some things in common.

“I noticed the posts outside the headquarters that had been recently constructed because of protests,” Winkler said. “In Washington, D.C. (the location for the GBCS office), posts are pretty commonplace. I can sympathize with those at Caterpillar. It (protests) ain’t fun.”

Winkler met with Owens informally at the invitation of Rev. Dr. Timothy Bias, pastor of Peoria First UMC and head of the Illinois Great Rivers Conference delegation to the 2008 General Conference.

Among the items that will be considered at the 2008 General Conference will be a petition seeking divestment of $5 million in Caterpillar stock that is part of the estimated $17 billion portfolio held by the church’s General Board of Pensions and Health Benefits.

The petition, which was written by the Board’s Peace with Justice work area, seeks to use divestment as a way to leverage peace in the Middle East. Winkler said the work area targeted Caterpillar because Caterpillar equipment has been used to level Palestinian homes in the West Bank region.

Similar petitions have been filed by the Virginia and New England annual conferences. A petition was before the 2007 IGRC annual conference session, but was one of 16 items that died without action being taken when the conference ended without a quorum present to conduct its legislative business.

Winkler said his conversation with Owens was a good one. “It was not angry or bitter,” Winkler said. “We talked about the frustration of the company being held responsible for how its equipment is used once it leaves the factory. We discussed each other’s position which I think brought greater understanding.”

So when Peoria Mayor Jim Ardis called on the community to engage in 40 Days of Prayer, Bias offered the facilities of his downtown congregation for the services.

Another controversial issue that hit close to home was a petition from the Peoria First UMC, including Caterpillar Chairman Jim Owens, have strong ties to Caterpillar.

“The United Methodist Church is an extremely diverse church and we live in a time where everyone wants the church to be molded in their image,” Bias said to a crowd gathered for a meeting with Jim Winkler, general secretary of the General Board of Pensions and Health Benefits to divest its holdings in Caterpillar Corp. In protest of Caterpillar products being used to demolish Palestinian settlements in the Middle East. Many Peoria First UMC members, including Caterpillar Chairman Jim Owens, have strong ties to Caterpillar.

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Children from diverse backgrounds find common ground around a white marker board that has been placed like a table for them to draw and create prior to the 40 Days of Prayer service in Peoria. Racial tensions along with violence and crime are the leading areas of focus for the 40-day event.

Peoria gathers for 40 Days of Prayer
First UMC provides locale for congregations, people to pray for community

By Paul Black

PEORIA – Mayor Jim Ardis certainly has the community of Peoria talking.

Faced with rising statistics of crime and violence, Ardis called on the community to engage in 40 Days of Prayer. Beginning on New Year’s Eve and continuing through Feb. 8, congregations and individuals are finding their voice through the power of prayer.

With 178 persons attending the inaugural service at First UMC’s 700 Main Auditorium, crowds numbered nearly 300 on Jan. 11 for the united praise and worship service.

Rev. Dr. Timothy Bias, pastor of the downtown church, quoted from the prophet Jeremiah in the first service.

“Israel was deciphered and divided in Jeremiah’s time, but the prophet told the people, ‘Pray to the Lord for peace and prosperity for the city, because if it prospers, so do you.’”

In addition to First UMC’s participation and Bias’ preaching Dec. 31, the Rev. Tom Eckhardt, pastor of Bradley-Ewpworth UMC, has also participated in the 40 Days of Prayer, leading the Jan. 2 service.

“Thank you for challenging us to heal our community,” said the Rev. Linda Butler, a pastor of South Side Mission and a member of the Peoria District 150 school board told those gathered. “Look around…so many different kinds of people all in the family of faith.”

Ardis said he believes that prayer can make a difference. “This outward testament of our faith will truly be a defining moment in making our city a stronger community, united in prayer. Let this 40 days be the beginning of a new united spirit in Peoria and the surrounding area.”

With more than 35 congregations joining in the effort by providing leadership in the nightly services, the focus has been centered on peace (a decrease in crime and violence); unity in the family and community; a commitment to God and to Christian service; protection and guidance for city leaders and city servants and empowerment opportunities aimed at decreasing poverty and depression that contribute to violence.

The Rev. Tony Pierce, co-pastor of Heaven’s View Christian Fellowship, challenged those gathered on Jan. 11 to have community unity.

“Whether it’s the Walk for Jesus or National Day of Prayer, we have never been fully integrated,” Pierce said. “Why can’t we get over it? Two years ago, a pre-