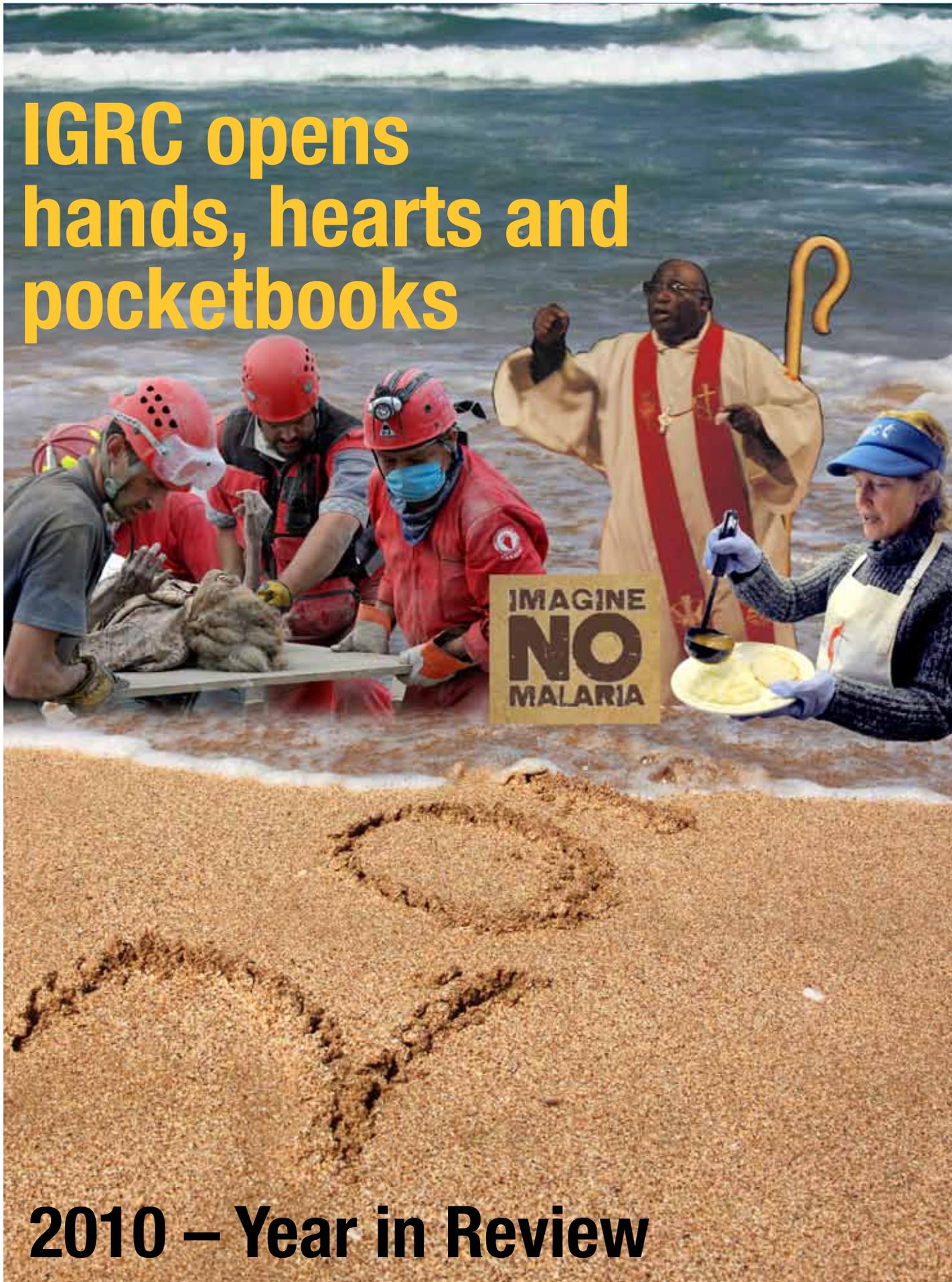


The Current

News of Illinois Great Rivers Conference of The United Methodist Church



IGRC opens hands, hearts and pocketbooks



In this issue

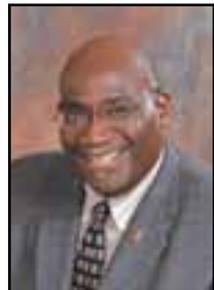
- 2011 Program Calendar available for download pg 3
- Aerobics in the church.. pg 3, 4
- Imagine No Malaria in Sierra Leone..... pg 2, 10, 11



2010 – Year in Review

News from the Episcopal Office

Our conspiracy of love can stop weeping and wailing



Dear Friends in Christ:

Merry Christmas, Happy New Year and Blessed Epiphany. The focus of this issue of *The Current*, as you know, is in part a year-end review for 2010. It is breath taking to review where we have been and exhilarating to think about where we are going. And speaking of where we are going there is significant emphasis in this issue on Imagine No Malaria.

You will recall in my Episcopal Address at the 2010 Annual Conference I announced that I was inviting you to join me in the effort to raise at least \$2.3m for this effort to eliminate deaths from malaria by 2015. I am pleased to report that everyday more and

more of the pieces are falling into place and more folks are coming online in this huge and worthy endeavor. Lots of the work of this campaign will take place in the districts.

As I thought about Imagine No Malaria and this season of the year I have been spending time in Matthew's gospel, particularly Matthew 2:13-23. Please take a moment and read this passage. Standing almost in opposition to the warm feeling we get of joining the wise men at the manger and the giving of their gifts to the Christ child is the horrifying image of the despot Herod and the "slaughter of the innocents." But it is there and we must deal with the meaning of the tension created by this picture.

Pastor Pam Fickenscher (a Lutheran pastor) has commented on this text saying "we do not live in a peaceful snow globe; we live in a world where children die and mothers grieve – not just occasionally, but every day, not just in hospitals but on city streets and mud huts." For some in our world, and I think here especially of those who live with the reality and pain of malaria especially children under five, "the sounds of Rachel weeping for her children are not uncommon."

Together you and I in an enormous conspiracy of love in action can stop Rachel's weeping and wailing. So this year when I come to the manger and look upon Mary, Joseph and the Christ child I will also be thinking about all the other mothers, fathers and vulnerable children whose lives we can make a life affirming difference in. I hope you will join me in this ambitious effort to stop Rachel's weeping. I remain

Yours because of Jesus Christ,
† Gregory V. Palmer

Deaths

Marie Lyell, widow of Rev. Leroy Willis Lyell, died Dec. 8. The Lyells served local churches in the former Southern Illinois Conference, retiring from Centralia Central City and Walnut Hill in 1975. Rev. Lyell died in 1986. Expressions of sympathy may be sent to a daughter, Alice Baugh, 17 Augusta Dr., Brownsburg, IN 46112.

Rev Diane Bigley, pastor of the Montgomery County Good Shepherd's Parish and wife of Rev. David Bigley, pastor of Brownstown-Emmanuel, died Dec. 8. Expressions of sympathy may be sent to Rev. David Bigley, 8 Westwood Dr., Hillsboro, IL 62049-1057.

Rev. Phillip R. Snider, a retired pastor, died Dec. 4. He served local churches in the former Central Illinois Conference, retiring from Avon in 1994. A full obituary may be found at www.styningerfuneralhomes.com/ and you may leave a note for the family on the website's guestbook. His wife, Treva, survives. Expressions of sympathy may be mailed to 2049 E. McCord Street, Centralia, IL 62801-6792.

Gloria Blacklock, former Southern Illinois Conference United Methodist Women president, former General Conference Delegate, and former president of the Women's Division of the Board of Global

Ministries, died Nov. 20. Memorials may be made to the General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church, 475 Riverside Dr., New York, NY 10015. Expressions of sympathy may be sent to her husband, Ray Blacklock, 40 Rodan Dr, Vergennes, IL 62294.

Imogene Smith, widow of Rev. Hugh Smith, died Nov. 15. Memorial donations and contributions may be made to the Casey United Methodist Church, P.O. Box 365, Casey, IL 62420; Martinsville Christian Church, 324 N. York St., Martinsville, IL 62442 or the Faith Fellowship Mission, 12887 E 2000th Ave., Hidalgo, IL 62432. Expressions of sympathy may be sent to the family in care of Rev. Dan Smith, 3468 E. Washington Rd., Casey, IL 62420.

Positions

Shiloh UMC is looking for a worship and music coordinator to plan, coordinate, direct, develop, evaluate, and promote worship in the life of the church to allow the church to fulfill its purpose to worship, love, teach, reach, and serve for the Glory of God through music, drama, graphics, and video. For a more detailed description, qualifications and salary, please contact Tony Paulson at churchoffice@shiloh-umc.org.



The Rev. Jan Griffith (center) walks amid schoolchildren and residents of the Gbo Chiefdom outside Bo, Sierra Leone, as part of a delegation from the Imagine No Malaria campaign. Griffith is superintendent of the Spoon River District of the Illinois Great Rivers Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.

Snapshots of Imagine No Malaria



By Janice Griffith
Spoon River District
Superintendent

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me." (Matthew 11:2-6, NRSV)

This portion of the lectionary Gospel lesson for the 3rd Sunday in Advent (Year A) contains a question from John the Baptist to Jesus. John has already proclaimed the Jesus as the Messiah, and yet it appears he now has some questions, perhaps some doubt. So he sends his messengers to inquire. Jesus' reply instructs them to report back to John "what (they) hear and see." Through their descriptions of what they had experienced, John would know the reality of the Christ – Emmanuel, God-with-Us.

I knew of the responsibility I bore as I accepted the invitation to be a part of the delegation which would be traveling to Sierra Leone to observe one of the first major

distributions of mosquito nets made possible by the Imagine No Malaria initiative. I fully understood that when I arrived home the people of IGRC would be listening for confirmation that Jesus was in the midst of this endeavor.

How am I to capture the fullness of God's presence and work in Sierra Leone? That's the question. I am choosing to follow the instructions of Jesus to John's messengers by telling you a bit of what I heard and saw...

I heard the cry of a tiny infant – a beautiful baby girl in the arms of her young mother ... and wondered if this little one would be among the 1 in 5 children who don't survive to the age of five.

I saw a woman hanging a mosquito net ... and observed that the bed on which she slept was a tattered grey mattress on the concrete floor of her bedroom.

I heard the enthusiastic singing and felt the touch of the children's dirty hands in mine as we were surrounded by the throng who greeted us at the village gates and processed with us to the courtyard where we gathered for a formal service of thanksgiving.

I saw the sincerity in the face of a thin elderly woman who stepped up to greet me after the ceremony...she bowed slightly and began gesturing gently while speaking quietly in her native tongue. I felt the warmth

See Sierra Leone on page 11 . . .

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Communications Team leader: Paul E. Black; team members: Catherine Flynn and Michele Willson. Send materials to P.O. Box 19207, Springfield, IL 62794-9207, tel. 217-529-2040, fax 217-529-4155, e-mail TheCurrent@igrc.org, web page: www.igrc.org. Periodical's postage paid at Peoria, IL, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to "*The Current*," Illinois Great Rivers Conference, P.O. Box 19207, Springfield, IL 62794-9207.

Announcement & Events

Briefs

Email marketing seminar set for Feb. 12

A seminar showing churches how they can use email marketing to assist their ministry will be hosted by the IGRC Communications Team on Saturday, Feb. 12 at the Conference Center.



Steve Robinson

Steve Robinson, Regional Development Director in Illinois for Constant Contact, will be leading the seminar. Registration is \$10 and includes lunch.

Online registration is available at www.igrc.org/emailmarketing

From 10 a.m. to noon, Robinson will be presenting *The Power of Email Marketing*

In just a few short hours, this information-packed seminar will show how email marketing – the hands-on, low-cost marketing tool – can really help you drive your ministry’s success. Discover how communicating with persons regularly can help you stay connected, and generate interest and participation in your ministry.

Participants will learn how to start and build a strong permission-based mailing list, to get your audience to open, read and act on your email; and to use your past results to sharpen your email marketing pro-

gram as you go along.

From 1 to 3 p.m., Robinson will present *Getting Started with Constant Contact*, a product-specific presentation.

Participants will see how the simple steps to selecting an email template and creating an email; branding an email to match your website; add images and links, import contacts, segment lists and review and analyze reports.

Along the way, tricks-of-the-trade and other relevant best practices will be discussed. Adequate time will be made to answer questions, provide feedback and share your experiences.

Changes to IGRC flex plan coming in 2011

Active pastors who participate in the IGRC FLEX plan (also called Section 125 Plan, Cafeteria Plan, Flexible Medical Spending Plan, FSA Plan) will notice a change in the rules regarding the purchase of over-the-counter (OTC) medications with the FLEX plan beginning in 2011.

The recent Health Care Reform Act (PPACA) vastly reduces your ability to claim reimbursements for OTC medications. Pastors should consider these changes in making plans for their salary-reduction amounts in 2011. Beginning in Jan. 1, 2011, over-the-counter medications can only be reimbursed by the FLEX plan in 2011 if they are purchased with a doctor’s prescription. The new rules do not apply to the purchase of insulin or diabetic supplies.

Will my FLEX card still work for purchases of OTC medications at the register?

No. The regulations require Flex Cards to be deactivated for these purchases.

I have a prescription for an OTC medication; how do I get reimbursed?

You will probably have to file your

claim on paper with copies of your prescriptions and receipts.

If I have money left over from 2010, can I purchase OTC medications with it in 2011?

No, the changes take effect in 2011, even for 2010 plan year funds.

What about other supplies like crutches, bandages, and self-diagnostic kits?

Generally, only medicine is covered by the new rules, so supplies could still be eligible for reimbursement.

Can I still use the FLEX Plan for copays, deductibles and unreimbursed expenses from medical providers?

Yes – no change there. However, be aware that the \$6000 limit in our current plan has to be reduced to \$2500 in 2013. So if Junior needs braces, you might want to think about it sooner than later.

Any other questions?

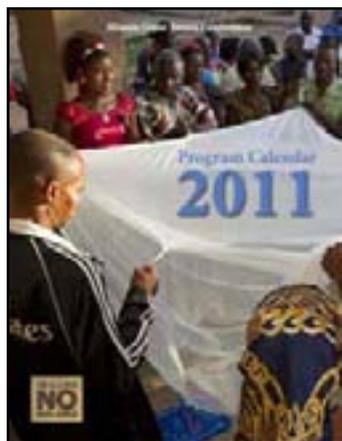
You may address questions by emailing Rick VanGiesen at rvangiesen@igrc.org

2011 Program Calendar available for download

Utilizing the theme of Imagine No Malaria, the 2011 IGRC Program Calendar is now available for download at: www.igrc.org/2011programcalendar

Due to rising production costs, the 2011 program calendar was not printed but is available for download. Persons can download the entire document and print it out. The PDF file will not be updated throughout the year. Changes to the calendar will

be updated on the conference calendar, located at: www.igrc.org/events/calendar.



Groups are reminded that as their meetings change, contact Michele Willson at mwillson@igrc.org, and changes will be made to the online calendar. Include the location of the meeting, the starting and end time and any costs associated with the event.

The Communications Team can also set up online registration for events with the only cost

being what is charged by Paypal for processing credit card sales.

Important budget numbers for 2011

IGRC Minimum Salary

Full-Time Local Pastors \$31,600
FM, AM and PE \$34,500

Denominational Avg. Compensation (DAC) \$61,716

Conference Avg. Compensation (CAC) \$61,472

(Remember that DAC and CAC generally includes a parsonage component of 25%; to approximate average salary alone, multiply DAC or CAC by .80)

Minimum Salary to qualify for CPP coverage (must be appointed full-time or ¾-time Elder; PTLP are not eligible, even at ¾-time)

With a Parsonage \$29,508
Without a Parsonage \$36,884

CRSP Defined Benefit Pension Cost to the Church:

Full-Time \$ 7,260
¾-Time \$ 5,445
½-Time \$ 3,630
¼-Time \$ 1,815

CRSP Defined Contributions Cost to the Church:

For pastor in a parsonage:
(Salary x 1.25) x 3%

For pastor in his/her own home:
(Salary + Housing Allowance) x 3%

CPP Premium (for full-time pastors)

For pastor in a parsonage:
(Salary x 1.25) x 3%

For pastor in his/her own home:
(Salary + Housing Allowance) x 3%

CPP Premium for

¾-time Elders: \$ 2,716

Health Ins. Assessment (same as 2010)

Church share \$17,520

Pastor share for self & kids \$ 780

Pastor share for spouse \$ 3,840

Standard Mileage Reimbursement

– 51 cents for business miles driven; 19 cents for medical or moving purposes; 14 cents driven in service for charitable organizations

General, Jurisdictional Conference election information

Six clergy and six laity will be elected as General Conference delegates at the 2011 annual conference.

All clergy members in full connection are eligible to be elected. Each will be assigned a number by the annual conference secretary for the purpose of electronic balloting. Clergy who submit their picture and a biography of not more than fifty (50) words will be included in the pre-conference materials published and distributed by the annual conference secretary, provided the materials have been received prior to the Jan. 30, 2011 deadline.

Lay persons eligible to serve as delegates may submit a biography of not more than fifty (50) words and a picture that will be published and distributed by the annual conference secretary, provided that the materials are received prior to the Jan. 30, 2011 deadline. All lay persons who submit materials will be assigned a number by the annual conference secretary for the purpose of electronic balloting.

The names of lay persons willing to serve may also be received from the floor of the Annual Conference session.

Send biographies and photos to Rev. Alice J. Shirley, ACSecretary@igrc.org.

General Conference Secretary Rev. L. Fitzgerald Reist announced Nov. 5 that the total number of delegates to the 2012 General Conference would be unchanged – around 1,000 in total. However, annual conferences could experience a change in the number elected when apportioned by the total membership of the global church.

Church website addresses sought

IGRC congregations that have established websites in operation are asked to submit those web addresses to the IGRC Communications Team.

Website addresses can be added to the church’s profile in the Church Locator section of the IGRC website, providing an additional link for persons looking for a church in a particular area.

Send the website addresses to Paul Black, Director of Communication Ministries at pblack@igrc.org Updates will be made as addresses are received.

Paid, electronic subscriptions to *The Current* available online

Persons wishing to purchase a yearly subscription to *The Current* may now do so online by visiting: www.igrc.org/subscriptions.

Each IGRC congregation is given a

certain number of free subscriptions for its local church leaders based upon size and worship attendance. Additional subscriptions may be purchased for \$10 a year.

Persons may also visit the Online Sub-

scription Center to subscribe to the electronic version of *The Current*. Once production has been completed on an edition of *The Current*, the electronic subscriber is sent a link to view the issue that has been

posted online. There is no limit to the number of electronic subscriptions a church/charge may have and there is no cost for electronic subscriptions.

Local Church News

Briefs

Fairview Heights Christ to host leaders conference

Fairview Heights Christ UMC will host its first Church Leaders Conference aimed at putting dynamic tools in the hands of church leaders to effect change and the to help them navigate the inevitable discontinuity that comes with it.

The conference is designed for pastors, church staff and lay leaders.

Information and online registration can be found by visiting: www.navigatethechange.com

Troy UMC hosts Fire-Up conference

The 15th annual Fire-Up Conference is scheduled for Feb. 25-27, Troy.

The senior high discipleship event will be hosted at Troy UMC and will feature Tom Richter (Queens, NY) as the weekend's speaker and Thomas Rudebeck, guest entertainment; and Harvest Worship Band leading the music for worship times.

The 2011 theme for Fire-Up is *GLOW* and comes from Isaiah 58:9-12 (The Message) "...your lives will begin to glow in the darkness..."

The event begins at 7 p.m. on Friday, Feb. 25 and concludes at 11:30 a.m. on Sunday, Feb. 27.

The registration fees cover meals, snacks, afternoon recreation, program, small groups, and seminars, Fire-Up t-shirt and lodging (with host families, if your group chooses to do so).

For more information about this weekend event or to request a registration packet, please call 618-667-6241 or go to: www.harvestministryteams.com/fireup/index.html.

Camp Electric for student worship teams

Camp Electric, a two-day boot camp for student-led worship teams will be hosted at Troy UMC Dec. 29-30.

The camp has space for eight student-led worship teams to learn about the mission of their band, the core of worship ministry, the best ways to sharpen skills and how to lead/serve the congregation as worship leaders.

The registration cost is the same for each church and the church can send all the members of the student worship team. For more information or registration, please visit: <http://harvestconferences.org/campelectric> or contact Tim Price at 618-667-6241 ext. 14.

Aerobic training combines faith and fitness

By Jim Vorel
Decatur Herald & Review

DECATUR — Decatur churches are community centers for a variety of secular activities, so it shouldn't be surprising to learn that one church is introducing some intensive physical activities to its schedule. What is unique, though, is Grace United Methodist Church's fusion of a Christian religious service with an intense aerobic training session to create a brand new church-based workout program open to anyone who wants to get healthy.

"The program is a combination of praise-influenced moves set to contemporary inspirational gospel music," said Penny Butts, the program coordinator and workout leader. "It's the first time I've ever sweated while praying."

The program, "Grace, Faith & Fitness," is held at 5:30 p.m. every Monday in Grace's Great Hall and employs a workout program called "Body Gospel." Butts works for workout program distributor Team Beachbody selling programs like Body Gospel and P90X, but she donates the program to the church. The program is also free for all who attend.

"We begin with a prayer and a devotional before the workout, and then we project the program on the wall," Butts said. "I was very involved in our church and in fitness, so I



Marj Cline of Decatur follows along during a Body Gospel aerobics class at Grace United Methodist Church.

wanted to start a club there with Body Gospel because it obviously fits the location."

Response has been positive from the congregation, and each week's session since Nov. 1 has shown increased attendance. Participants at all levels of fitness are able to join in and can benefit from the program, Butts said.

"It's a way to get healthy combining faith, fitness and fellowship. The program involves aerobics and cardio, and it will eventually work its way into light weights and resistance bands as well. I like the reli-

gious aspect, and it's a lot of fun. You can tailor it to your own fitness level, no matter where you are physically."

Even participants who were initially skeptical about the idea of working out in front of other members of the congregation have come around to the idea.

"There's no mirrors anywhere in the Great Hall, and everybody is too busy working out to focus on what you're capable of doing," Butts said. "We always stress at the beginning to just 'do what feels

See Aerobics on page 5 . . .

Pastor sees Santa portrayal as vital ministry

By Theresa Churchill
Decatur Herald & Review

DECATUR — Operation Sleighbell may be about \$2,000 short of the cash needed to provide the kind of low-cost Christmas shopping experience for needy families it wants to this year, but it will still have something extra.

Santa Claus — also known as the Rev. Kelly Cox, pastor of Christ United Methodist Church in Decatur — has promised to visit each site to find out what else the children might like for Christmas.

"Sometimes, I'm the only non-frightening male a lot of the children see," he said.

Cox, 59, has been portraying Santa for 15 years, ever since the principal at Emerson Elementary School in Cairo asked if he would. He already has gray hair, having "earned every one of them," and gets his last haircut and shave of the year on his birthday Aug. 15.

"I see this as a ministry, and I'm looking forward to the whole experience," he said.

Santa will need to shift his sleigh into high gear at least one day of the four-day shopping opportunity the week of Dec. 6 to get to all five sites — one each in Champaign, Pekin, Danville, Mattoon and Decatur.

The Rev. Rick Smith, founder of Operation Sleighbell, said Cox offered his services when he approached Christ United Methodist about donating underwear and

socks to make up for a decision by Wal-Mart stores in 2009 to stop donating clothing it couldn't sell.

Smith added that he also appreciates the work of Decatur's West Side Church of the Nazarene, which has operated the ministry's Decatur shop in the former Schnuck's grocery store space in Northgate Mall since 2006.

"They are very dedicated, hardworking

people who do as good a job as I would do," he said.

All Operation Sleighbell needs now is enough cash to put \$5,000 worth of merchandise into each site. "Usually, \$2,000 is not considered to be a lot, but to us it may as well be a fortune," Smith said.

(Reprinted with permission from the Nov. 20 issue of the Decatur Herald & Review).



The Bellmont UMC celebrated 100 years of ministry in its current building Nov. 7. Rev. Cindy Jones, Kaskaskia River District Superintendent was the guest speaker for the day. The church, which was dedicated on Nov. 6, 1910, has been home to Methodists that began as a "society" in 1825.

Local Church News

Briefs

Community Thanksgiving event offers extra helping of service

By Rob Stroud
Charleston Times-Courier

CHARLESTON – The chief goal of the Charleston Community Thanksgiving Dinner is to provide hot meals and fellowship for individuals who might otherwise be alone on this holiday.

However, the annual dinner at Otterbein United Methodist Church also provides an opportunity for extended families to join together to serve the community.

For instance, 19 members of Charleston residents Woody and Mary Alice

Kramer's family volunteered to deliver meals and help out in other ways at the dinner on Thursday as a service project.

"We are all getting together for Thanksgiving today, but we wanted to do something to help other members of the Charleston community," said Liane Foerder, one of the Kramers' daughters.

Foerder, of Noblesville, Ind., and her husband, Mark, brought their children Stephanie, age 14, and twins Lexi and Becca, both 10, to volunteer with them. These three children volunteered alongside several other youths from their ex-

tended family.

"We hope that the kids will learn that service to others is a way to say thanks for the blessings they have," Foerder said.

Other children, including siblings Keridwen, 13, and Ian, 10, McDaniel of Charleston, also helped with Thursday's dinner. They and their friend Skyler James, 15, of Charleston wrapped more than 400 sets of silverware in napkins for the event.

Skyler estimated that this was the third or fourth time she has volunteered with her family at the Thanksgiving dinner.

See Community on page 9 . . .

McDowell raises more than \$6,600 at Holiday Auction

By Donna Baker
Pastor, McDowell UMC

It has become tradition now for McDowell to hold a Holiday Auction to raise money to help others in our community during the holiday season.

Members of the congregation make, bake, and create items for an auction that has become a new way to "do" Christmas. One of our members, Freddie Immke, a professional auctioneer, helps us to raise our bids for auction items. This year turned out to be the best year ever! A total of \$6,600 was raised during one evening of fellowship and fun!

The McDowell family comes together either the Sunday before or the Sunday after Thanksgiving for a soup and sandwich meal, followed by the auction.

Many food items have become a tradition – homemade caramels, bon bons, apple dumplings, cookies and pies are eagerly anticipated for bidding. Others offer their services – such as decorating your home for Christmas, hosting a card party for eight which includes snacks, prizes, and even a meal afterward.

The card party was a very popular item this year. A comment was heard that "we must have some pretty desperate women in the church who want a night out with the girls," for the bidding went over \$350!

Another item up for bid this year was an oil painting by one of our most talented members, Jone Meister. Her painting went for over \$500.

This year's money was divided equally between the Salvation Army in Pontiac and the Livingston Food Pantry as these two organizations strive to bring a happier Christmas to many deserving families within our community.

Photo courtesy of Hope Wright



Christopher Albanese counts the number of jelly and peanut butter jars that Springfield Jerome UMC collected for Kumler Outreach Ministries during its PB & J campaign during the first three weeks of November. Jerome, which has a Food Pantry Partner relationship with Kumler, agreed in November 2009 to provide 120 jars of peanut butter each month – a week's supply for the Kumler Food Pantry. During the Thanksgiving season, members were encouraged to match their peanut butter giving with a corresponding jar of jelly. And when the church celebrated St. John's Breadline Sunday on Nov. 21, 20 of the 25 loaves purchased were donated to Kumler to complete PB & J sandwiches for holiday food baskets. In all, 135 jars of peanut butter, 120 jars of jelly, 40 cans of chili and 20 loaves of bread were delivered just prior to Thanksgiving.

Photo courtesy of Jennifer Seder



Fountain of Life UMC celebrated the dedication of its new church facility Nov. 14. Dr. Terry Harter, center, preached at the celebration service and was the celebrant at the Communion service. Also pictured are Rev. Jennifer Seder, pastor of Fountain of Life, left, and Robert McCarthy, right. Fountain of Life purchased the building and completed the first phase 1 renovations debt free. The renovations included moving a garage, moving furnaces from roof to ground level along with purchasing a new furnace for the education area. The worship space and restrooms have been completely remodeled including floors, walls, lighting and ceilings. The second phase of renovations, which focus on exterior needs, will begin in the spring.

Aerobics

Continued from page 4

comfortable to you,' and most importantly, always be moving."

Grace United Methodist has also offered other physical activities such as ballroom dance in the past, but nothing as intense as the Body Gospel program featured in "Grace, Faith & Fitness." Those curious about the program can see videos at www.gospelworkoutprogram.com, and the church also maintains a Facebook page under the name of "Grace Faith and Fitness."

The addition of weights and resistance training is one of several upcoming expansions to the program that is being considered if attendance continues to rise. In January, the program may expand to two nights per week, and a baby-sitting program at the church during the workout is likely on the horizon.

"It's a great community outreach for our church," Butts said. "It's a first for a lot of people, including me. I've never led a class before, but it's so much fun. People should just wear comfortable clothes and tennis shoes, remember to bring some water and have fun."

(Reprinted with permission from the Nov. 27 issue of the Decatur Herald & Review.



Peoria First UMC recently had a Thanksgiving celebration for Hispanic and Latino families that featured both traditional American and Mexican food. In all, 70 attended the feast, with another 20 Peoria First UMC members as it reaches out in ministry to the Hispanic community in Peoria.

Photo courtesy of Adrian Garcia

Year in Review

IGRC opens hands, hearts and pocketbooks

Despite economic uncertainties, United Methodists remain faithful to the mission of the church



Photo by Paul Jeffrey/ACT

Anna Zizi is pulled alive on Jan. 19 from the rubble of Haiti's earthquake, one week after the city was reduced to ruins in a matter of seconds.

By Paul Black

Congregations and United Methodists in the Illinois Great Rivers Conference continued to extend ministry beyond the walls of the church building in 2010, despite economic pressures that could have invited many to turn inward and take care of themselves.

Despite such financial pressures, United Methodists in Illinois continued to open their hearts and their pocketbooks and in so doing, found ministry opportunities in abundance.

The conference finished the 2009 year paying apportionments at 90.17 percent — one of the nation's highest. In 2010, that trend continued upward with receipts rising 1.5 to 2 percent above 2009 levels. As of Nov. 30, apportionment receipts were 1.22 percent ahead of 2009 and was the highest 11-month performance since the merger of the two former conferences.

Earthquake in Haiti

The year got off to a shaky start when a Jan. 12 earthquake rocked the island nation of Haiti. For United Methodists, the earthquake hit close to home when Rev. Sam Dixon, leader of the United Methodist Committee on Relief, perished in the rubble of the Hotel Montana following the earthquake. Rev. Clinton Rabb, director of the Mission Volunteers program at the General Board of Global Ministries, also died from injuries sustained in the building collapse.

A mission volunteer, Clara "Jean" Arwine, a member of Highland Park UMC in Dallas, Texas, also died.

The tragedy also had an Illinois connection. Rev. James Gulley, an UMCOR consultant, was also trapped in the hotel debris but was pulled from the crumbling concrete.

"I have no answer about why I was given the gift of life and Sam and Clint were not," said Gulley, who was ordained an elder in the former Southern Illinois Conference in 1962 and remained a clergy member of the conference until 1983. "I can't answer that any better than Job could answer why some people suffer more than others. All I can do is continue to try to use that gift in God's service in whatever way it is intended. I'm grateful to be alive, and I accept that gift."

IGRC congregations held bake sales, Zumbathons and took up special offerings to raise critical dollars for the relief efforts in Haiti. As of Nov. 30, IGRC congregations have remitted \$770,279 as its part of the larger denomination response to Haiti.

The IGRC has also been present in the disaster response. Within days of the earthquake, the Midwest Mission Distribution Center was mobilized, and working with UMCOR cooperatively, two shipments were shipped with layette kits, health kits and school kits, along with basic health supplies — soap, toothbrushes and toothpaste, infant diapers and wash cloths — for the earthquake victims.

A six-month pilot program initiated by UMCOR proved successful and was renewed for a three-year period in October.

Working cooperatively with the Eglise Methodiste de Haiti (EMH), projects were identified and prioritized for the more than 80 Volunteer in Missions teams that traveled to Haiti in 2010 and the more than 150 teams that are scheduled for 2011.

Three IGRC teams — from Living the Adventure Ministries in Waterloo; McKendree University and Champaign New Horizon UMC — have scheduled teams under the plan's pilot project.

Helping to staff the effort is Susan Meister, former IGRC director of communications, who serves as the U.S.-based calendering coordinator

Forming discipleship systems

IGRC United Methodists also were intentional in working toward developing discipleship systems.

While worship attendance has dropped by 2 percent each year for the past two years, there has been an increase in the number of professions of faith — a statistic that did not go unnoticed by Bishop Gregory V. Palmer.

"I am hunching that something is afoot and we need to be a part of it," he said during the Annual Conference Episcopal Address. "I want to throw myself in to the middle of it."

A six-week Bible study on the Book of Acts, which brought together scripture, the teachings of John Wesley and the denomination's Four Areas of Focus, was published online for use during the seasons between Easter and Pentecost. The work was a collaborative effort of several persons in the IGRC. And many churches took advantage of the study.

A Facebook group was established that enabled participants to interact and discuss questions from each of the six lessons.

At Annual Conference, a second discipleship initiative emerged from the Cabinet Address.

Cabinet co-chairs Randy Reese and Janice Griffith invited congregations and individuals to participate in First Thursdays — a day set aside each month for prayer and fasting.

A particular theme has been identified each month although individuals and churches are not bound by the suggestion and are encouraged to make it relevant for their ministry setting. Resources around the theme are posted online enabling churches to join in a common prayer and focus.

The New Streams team has also offered two Deeper Still events — one focused on Radical Hospitality and the other on Prayer and Fasting, providing additional support for these discipleship efforts.

Another event that almost flew under the radar were record attendance numbers reported by a number of churches on Easter Sunday.

A variety of reasons were given for the rise in attendance from creating a culture of invitation to providing a variety of worship experiences with a creative innovation thrown into the mix to address the emerging needs of new attendees.

Forming spiritual leaders

For the first time in a number of years, the number of persons ordained exceeded the number of pastors retiring. In all, 17 elders and one deacon in full connection were ordained. One provisional elder and

one provisional deacon were commissioned.

The trend mirrors a national turnaround in which the number of young elders, deacons and local pastors under the age of 35 increased. However, more than half of the active elders in the United States are between ages 55 and 72 and 45 percent are between 35 to 54.

Gene and Joanne Newberry of Godfrey UMC were awarded the Harry Denman Evangelism Award for laity and Rev. Randall Perry, pastor of Normal Calvary, won the clergy Denman Award.

The second of two lay witness mission team training events took place in April. The training was offered cooperatively with the General Board of Discipleship and provided laypersons some help and practical experience for sharing their witness and testimony regarding what Jesus has done and continues to do for them.

For the fourth year, Marked Leadership Camp, a four-year academy, aimed at raising up leadership among youth, regardless of their chosen future profession.

Focusing on four areas of instruction: leadership characteristics, spiritual disciplines, strengths training and working in a team, Marked builds on the previous year and continues a mentoring process for youth.

Kara Crawford and Seth Schutte represented both the IGRC and the North Central Jurisdiction at the Global Convocation and Legislative Assembly in Berlin, Germany in July.

The Global Convocation, a part of the Division on Ministries with Young People provides a time of worship, fellowship and evaluating legislation which may be forwarded to the 2012 General Conference.

Three students were awarded IGRC Leadership Scholarships — Joshua Benitone, Miranda Kennedy and Patrick Waldrop.

Two additional students were named

See IGRC on page 7 . . .



Rev. Andy Adams baptizes a child at Quest UMC in Champaign.

Year in Review



Photo by Paul Black

Ordinand Michael Paulson is ordained by Bishop Gregory V. Palmer during the 2010 annual conference. ordinand Julie Smith (center front) is in the foreground.

IGRC

Continued from page 6

IGRC Scholars – Andrew Black and Natalie Martz.

Eight students were named Merit Scholars – Paige Devary, Hannah Ebersohl, Elizabeth Hohenshell, Martenia Jones, William McClure, Leanne Noland, Jordan Riddle and Nicole Ross.

Developing new congregations and revitalizing existing ones

The Office of Congregational Development embarked on a new concept in 2010 aimed at assisting churches in their core processes.

The Fruitful Congregations Leadership Institute, based upon the best-selling book by Bishop Robert Schnase, began its initial offering with a workshop on Passionate Worship in Normal in September.

FCLI is designed to bring new life and fruitfulness to congregations. The process includes five workshops over a 2 ½ year period, each based on one of the practices of fruitful congregations.

In all, 24 lay-clergy teams from IGRC congregations began a 2 ½ year commitment to five different learning experiences. A second workshop will be held in the Spoon River District in March 2011.

Mission and Outreach – Locally and Globally

In addition to our mission work in Haiti, IGRC congregations continued their partnership with the people and churches of Liberia.

In February, the Fellheimer Trust of Macomb Wesley UMC approved as \$20,000 grant toward the building of the John Kofi Asmah United Methodist School in West Point, near the capital city of Monrovia.

A team in October completed construction on another school, the I.J. Williams School in Unification Town, and a group

conducted teacher training when they traveled to the West African nation in July.

The conference also began moving toward a relationship with Honduras as Alton Main Street UMC hosted a General Board of Global Ministries summit Oct 6.-9.

Congregations were also mobilized in disaster response when a tornado ripped across the northern end of the conference June 5.

Several disaster response trainings were held in the summer and fall months. A team of workers from East Alton First UMC acted as first responders in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, in the aftermath of flooding.

The Dwight UMC sustained damage as part of a 16 square block area near the church. Windows were blown out of the child care section of the church as well as other parts of the building. Parts of the church’s roof were also torn off by the tornado.

Arson was suspected in an Aug. 1 fire that damaged the Midland UMC in Kincaid.

Damage was sustained throughout the building and sidelined the church’s food pantry. Despite the fire, worship went on as scheduled at Kincaid High School

See IGRC on page 12 . . .



Photo courtesy of Champaign News-Gazette

Several churches, like the Arthur UMC, serve community meals as an outreach ministry.

Passings

Mary Treat, widow of Rev. Joe W. Treat, Jan. 7.

Dr. Lawrence Juhlin, a member of the Conference Council on Finance and Administration and a former lay member to annual conference from Carbondale Grace UMC, Jan. 7.

Marsha Schmidt, widow of Rev. Richard Schmidt, Jan. 8.

Orville Mueth, a member of Caseyville UMC who served in various capacities of district and conference lay leadership, Jan. 11.

Rev. Jack B. North, retired pastor and former district superintendent and Assistant to the Bishop, Jan. 20.

Linda Johnson, former local pastor and former chaplain at Evenglow Lodge, Feb. 10.

Norma Darling, widow of Rev. C. Eugene Darling, Feb. 22.

Rev. Kenneth “Doc” Bissey, retired pastor, March 9.

Marian Olsen, widow of Rev. John Arnold Olsen, March 13.

Rev. Robert “Bob” Treat, retired pastor and former district superintendent, March 20.

Donald Ray “Bubblegum” Wood, husband of IGRC pastor, Rev. Nancy Wood, March 21.

Helen Robertson, widow of Rev. Oscar Robertson, April 5.

Ferne L. Phillips, widow to two United Methodist pastors: Edgar Blaine Purdy and Stephen B. Phillips, April 9.

Leola Conant, widow of Rev. Kenneth Conant, April 24.

Sue Ellen Biggs Greene, wife of IGRC pastor, Rev. Robert D. Greene, May 10.

Rev. Sondra S. Newman, retired pastor, May 15.

Mary Lou Piper, retired deaconess in the Kaskaskia River District, May 31.

Helen J. Pitsch, wife of retired pastor Robert L. Pitsch, June 1.

Rev. Wesley I. Kersh, retired pastor, June 4.

Shirley Zivney, wife of retired pastor Oliver Zivney, June 7.

Evelyn June Miller, widow of Rev. George M. Miller, June 8.

E. L. Bosomworth, lay member of the Kaskaskia River District, instrumental in starting the lay speaking program in the former Southern Illinois Conference and two-time delegate to General and Jurisdictional Conference, June 17.

Roselyn Jensen, whose father and mother donated the original parcel of land to the former Central Illinois Conference for Jensen Woods Camp, June 28.

Emmalee F. Williams, widow of Rev. Carl V. Williams, June 28.

Anna Curtis, widow of the Rev. John Curtis, Sr. and mother of retired pastor Rev. John Curtis, Jr., July 1.

Lucy “Ellen” Hoffman, wife of retired pastor Edward L. Hoffman, July 17.

Darline Henderson, widow of Rev. John Henderson, July 18.

Wanda Corzine Robinson, widow of Rev. Wendell Robinson, mother-in-law to retired pastor Rev. Earl Renshaw and mother to Rev. Sharon Potter, July 26.

Rev. Howard B. Johnson, retired pastor, who served as chaplain at Methodist Medical Center for more than 30 years, July 28.

William E. Swyear, retired pastor, Aug. 12.

Virginia L. Wallace, widow of Rev. Wesley J. Wallace, Aug. 21.

Rev. Harold Holliday, retired pastor, Aug. 26.

Rev. Jesse James Seiber, retired pastor, Sept. 1.

Pauline Mick, wife of retired pastor Richard Mick, Sept. 12.

Rev. Lloyd H. Vinnedge, Jr., retired pastor, Sept. 12.

Ted Phillips, husband of retired pastor Rev. Lillian Phillips, Sept. 22.

Justine Louise Tunstall, widow of Rev. John Tunstall, who served 62 years of ministry in Missouri, Iowa, Kansas and the former Southern Illinois Conference, Sept. 24. The Tunstalls pastored East St. Louis Wesley-Bethel UMC from 1964 to 1973.

Walter D. Krech, retired pastor, Sept. 28.

Janis L. Muir, widow of Rev. John E. Muir, Oct. 3.

Patsy B. Conrad, wife of retired pastor Lawrence “Skip” Conrad, Oct. 17.

Rev. David H. Allin, retired pastor, Oct. 31.

Rev. C. Wayne King, retired pastor and father of IGRC pastor, Rev. Kathy King-Nobles, Nov. 4.

Phillip R. Carriker, husband of retired pastor Esther F. Carriker, Nov. 10.

Imogene Smith, widow of Rev. Hugh Smith, died Nov. 15.

Gloria Blacklock, former Southern Illinois Conference United Methodist Women president, former General Conference Delegate, and former president of the Women’s Division of the Board of Global Ministries, Nov. 20.

Rev. Phillip R. Snider, retired pastor, Dec. 4.

Rev. Diane Bigley, pastor of Montgomery County Good Shepherd’s Parish and wife of Rev. David Bigley, pastor of Brownstown-Emmanuel, Dec. 8.

Marie Lyell, widow of Rev. Leroy Willis Lyell, Dec. 8.



Conference Ministries

Briefs

Course of Study Extension School dates announced

Dates and courses for the 2010-2011 Course of Study Extension School have been announced.

The Extension Course of Study is basically for part-time pastors and exists to provide quality theological training and equipping for ministry. It is administered by the Board of Ordained Ministry of the Illinois Great Rivers Conference.

For more information, visit the Course of Study website at: www.igrcos.blogspot.com or contact the Dean, Rev. Dr. E. Michael Jones at mjones@igrc.org

Registration for the February and March classes is open through Jan. 5 at: www.igrc.org/COSFeb2011. Registration for the April classes is open through March 1 at www.igrc.org/COSApril2011.

Christian Education Sunday grant applications sought

The application deadline for the next round of grants from the Christian Education Sunday offering is Jan. 2.

Grant funding is available for new or expanding Christian education ministries for any age group. Ministries that will enhance the ministry of other district or conference churches (such as through partnerships or training opportunities) are encouraged.

For complete grant criteria and an application form, please visit www.igrc.org/cef (the link is toward the bottom of the page under "Grants") or contact Christy Blickensderfer at 217-529-2473.

Hambrick, England headline senior high youth weekend

Nationally-known speaker Chad Hambrick will be the keynote speaker and Scott England will lead worship at Senior High YAR Feb. 25-27 at Lake Williamson Retreat Center in Carlinville.

The 2011 theme is *Crash: What Happens When Heaven and Earth Collide?* and will feature a variety of small group workshops aimed at providing points of connection.

Registration is \$100 and includes lodging, meals, worship, workshops and recreation.

Download registration packets and posters at <http://youth.igrcamp.org>.

New Streams to post Bible studies online, offers redesigned e-newsletter

Church leaders will have a new tool to help people deepen their understanding of a variety of spiritual disciplines beginning in January. Best of all, there is no book or DVD to purchase – these new resources will be available as a free download from the conference website.

The New Streams Team will be posting a series of short Bible studies, each focusing on one specific spiritual practice. Disciplines covered will include both acts of piety, such as prayer, fasting, and searching the scriptures, and acts of mercy, such as feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, and visiting the sick and imprisoned. The studies will include a Bible passage, reflection/discussion questions, and a prayer suggestion, and would be very appropriate for use during opening devotions at the beginning of a committee meeting.

Those who have subscribed to the New Streams e-news list will begin receiving one of these Bible studies each month in the newly redesigned New Streams e-newsletter. In addition to the Bible study, each monthly e-newsletter will include a tip on how your church can engage more fully in one specific spiritual practice, as well as helpful links to additional online resources or upcoming events. The tips

ELCA seeking mutual ministry partners

The Central/Southern Illinois Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is seeking mutual ministry partnerships with IGRC congregations.

One of the upcoming opportunities is formation of a cluster of 12 to 15 congregations to participate in a congregation revitalization process called Partnership for Missional Church (PMC).

"PMC has been used successfully in a number of places and is a structured process that leads congregations on a journey of spiritual discernment where they discover how God is moving in their community and their role in God's mission," explained Terry Moore, director for evan-

gelical mission and assistant to the bishop. "It initiates a process of spiritual and cultural change within the life of congregations."

At the conclusion of PMC, each congregation will have a clear understanding of its unique missional vocation, a plan to carry it out and the spiritual practices to help them adapt to changes in the future.

For more information, contact Moore at 217-753-7915 or by emailing Terry.Moore@csis-elca.org.

The ELCA and The United Methodist Church entered into a full communion agreement in 2009 that enables such partnerships to move forward.

Radical hospitality to be focus of second FCLI gathering

A new Fruitful Congregations Leadership Institute (FCLI) will begin on March 19-20 at Galesburg Emmanuel UMC. The FCLI is being offered by the Office of Congregational Development and hosted by the Spoon River District.

The March 19-20 workshop is *Radical Hospitality: How to Reach More People* and will be led by Mike Crawford, IGRC Coordinator of Congregational Development.

More information and a registration form is available for download at www.igrc.org/FCLI.

The cost for a church team to attend the workshop (and cluster coaching) is \$250. There is an early registration dis-

count of \$100, if the church covenant is completed and full payment is made by Feb. 2. The registration cost is for a team of four to six people and includes snacks and Saturday lunch. Additional meals and lodging, if needed, are not included.

If you are interested in learning more about the FCLI process, contact Mike Crawford, Coordinator of Congregational Development, mcrawford@igrc.org.

The 2 ½ year process FCLI process is designed to bring new life and fruitfulness to congregations. The process includes five workshops, each based on one of the practices of fruitful congregations (*Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, by Bishop Robert Schnase). To participate,

FUMMWA Handbell Festival March 26



The 23rd Annual Handbell Festival, sponsored by the IGRC Chapter of the Fellowship of United Methodists in Music and Worship Arts (UMMWA), will be held on Saturday, March 26, from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. at the Northfield Inn Suites and Conference Center in Springfield.

Registration cost is \$35 per person if a member of the Fellowship, \$40 for non-members. Registrations will be accepted through Feb. 26. Late registrations after Feb. 26 are non-refundable and will be \$45 for a Fellowship member, \$50 for non-members. Substitutions with same bell assignment can be made by notifying Marilyn Hirschman at mjhir@aol.com, by mailing her at: P. O. Box 138, Farmer City, IL 61842-0138 or by calling 309-928-2067. Fees include a morning snack and lunch. Registrations are limited to the first 225 registrants.

Bob Bidewell, Director of Music and Organist of St. Paul UMC in Little Rock, Ark., will be the festival clinician. Bidewell has served as a church musician for more than 30 years for various congregations in Arkansas. A life-long Methodist, Bidewell has a Master of Music Education degree from Arkansas State University in Jonesboro. He is the state chair of the Arkansas Chapter of the American Guild of English Handbell Ringers, a member of the FUMMWA and the American Guild of Organists.

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.

A registration form can be downloaded by visiting the Conference Calendar and clicking on the FUMMWA Handbell Festival link on March 26. FUMMWA Handbell Festival March 26

a congregation must send a team to each event that includes the pastor and three to five laity. In between workshops, cluster coaching will be provided to encourage churches to move forward in their implementation plans.

Twenty-four churches are participating in the first FCLI hosted by the Vermilion River District and are gaining new momentum in ministry. A couple comments include, "Fruitful Congregations has helped us so very much" and "Fruitful Congregations rocks!!" Other churches have indicated that the timing of the workshops has been such that it helped answer the very questions they were asking.

Conference Ministries

How local congregations can support those in the military

Editor's note: With the announcement of the retirement of military phone cards, several IGRC congregations are wanting to continue a supportive ministry to the uniformed personnel. Rev. Phillips offers some suggestions in the following column.



By Robert Phillips
Pastor, Peoria First UMC
U.S. Navy Chaplain (ret.)

United Methodists have a rich tradition of honest, principled differences regarding issues of war and peace in our nation. What is gratifying is the unity in providing spiritual support for those who serve in the military and their families. Only one major military installation is located within the boundaries of our conference, but occasions to minister to those who serve are not diminished.

In our congregations are the children and grandchildren of those on active duty or married to those who serve. In addition, thousands of United Methodists serve in the Reserves and the National Guard, which now often includes activation for extended duty overseas. Beyond our congregations, our local communities include numerous reserve units that face deployments and stresses but lack the support available to those who live on or near military bases.

How can our churches minister effectively and faithfully to those who serve, to their families, and to the United Methodist chaplains who are our presence in Christ

to these young men and women? Every church in our conference, regardless of size, can make a difference. Here are some possibilities.

First, identify the local need and opportunity. Develop a list of those related to the church who are in the service, including members of the extended family. You may expand the list to include any local reserve units and friends of church members who serve. Develop a prayer list and keep the names before the congregation for intercession on a regular basis.

Second, be sure those connected to the military remain on the mailing list and receive all the newsletters that local members receive. Never, ever remove a service member from the rolls while they are on active duty, except at their request. An annual brief note of support and affirmation from the pastor or the lay leader can mean a lot to personalize the contact. Encouraging (but not bullyragging) the service member to find a spiritual home in their current location is fine to do, while affirming that those in their home church keep them in prayer.

Third, ask what they need and respond. The family of the active member can ask the specific question and bring the replies back to the church. While the general church phone card program has ended due to improved means of communication, other needs remain. Alton Main Street and Peoria First have sent toys for Marines to distribute to children in Fallujah, DVDs for Sailors on a cruiser in the Far East, sweat-

ers and clothes to Air Force personnel in Afghanistan, and emptied Peoria of jellybeans when a chaplain at Guantanamo said the troops really missed jellybeans.

Fourth, consider a special offering to the United Methodist Endorsing Agency (UMEA), which provides care and support for our chaplains and their families. This includes retreats for those who have been in combat, continuing education, and immediate pastoral assistance in times of crisis.

Fifth, consider 'adopting' a United Methodist chaplain. This includes a commitment to prayer for the chaplain's ministry and family, and contact to see what particular needs the people in that chaplain's unit have that the church might assist in meeting. This can include chaplains within the annual conference but the UMEA can provide points of contact for active duty chaplains of all branches and conferences whose ministries can be affirmed and supported by a church adoption.

Finally, don't lose interest. Polls indicate the nation gives Afghanistan and Iraq a back seat in interest to the economy. While understandable, our Christian witness cannot allow culture to shrug off the 150,000 Americans serving, as you read this article, in those two locations, plus their families and the other million service members serving around the nation and the world. When a young soldier or Marine is riding on a convoy through a dangerous land, knowledge that their risk of life truly matters to the church, irrespective of politics, can be deeply reassuring.

Technology replaces phone cards for military

By Aaron Cross*

NASHVILLE—The world back in 2003 was quite different from the world today. No Facebook or Twitter. No one had yet heard of Lady Gaga or "The Situation." People used phones exclusively for placing calls.

Plenty of things were not as they are

now, but one fact has endured: The people of The United Methodist Church have always reached out to those who are in need. Thus, on Veteran's Day 2003, the long-running Phone Cards for Military program began as the result of an initiative that began in the Illinois Great Rivers Conference. This year, it will end.

Charleston residents Harold Hackett and Larry McGrath. They, along with their families, have volunteered at the dinner since year one.

McGrath said the dinner had taken orders for more than 150 meal deliveries by 11 a.m. Thursday and would probably serve even more meals than that in the church's fellowship hall.

A long assembly line of volunteers served up meals of turkey, noodles, stuffing, sweet potatoes, corn, green beans, rolls and pumpkin pie into take-out containers for delivery and onto plates for those dining in the fellowship hall.

Mattoon resident Thelma Hill, whose family lives out of state, said she has been a regular diner at the Thanksgiving event ever since it began. Hill said she typically works, at Wal-Mart, on Thanksgiving, so the dinner provides her with a quick meal

Why would such a successful program cease to exist?

According to Tenzel, the number of chaplains deployed has decreased, and the use of Internet-based communications such as Skype makes the need not as prevalent.

*Cross is a freelance writer in Nashville, Tenn.

and food that is simply "the best."

Hill was joined in the fellowship hall by Windsor residents Willa Campbell and Stephen Williams, both of Windsor, and many other diners. They said the dinner is a good fit for them because they do not have family in the area.

Campbell said she has also volunteered at the dinner in past years. She recalled one occasion when a driver volunteer making a delivery offered a meal to a truck driver who was far from home, a kind gesture that brought tears to the eyes of the grateful trucker.

"It's good to reach out to people," Campbell said.

(Reprinted with permission from the Nov. 26 issue of the Charleston Times-Courier).

Confirmation retreats slated at three campsites

Four confirmation retreats are being offered at three campsites throughout the Illinois Great Rivers Conference.

Retreats are designed to complement, not replace, the confirmation classes at the local church. Register early for your first choice of camp. Materials from both *Claim the Name* (East Bay and Living Springs) and *Credo* (the new confirmation material from Cokesbury will be used at Little Grassy) will give an opportunity for students to grow as they learn.

For more information, visit: <http://youth.igrcamp.org>

Covenant Keepers 2011

Online registration is underway for Covenant Keepers 2011, to be held Feb. 28-March 1 at the Pere Marquette Hotel in Peoria.

Keynote speaker for the event is Bishop Scott Jones of the Kansas Area with Grant Norsworthy serving as worship leader.

For more information, visit: www.igrc.org/CK2011.

10 in 2010 events slated

Modeled after the Forged in the Fire events, the IGRC Evangelism Committee will host 10 in 2010 mini-evangelism events throughout the IGRC.

Several events still remain:
Jan. 23: Champaign New Horizon UMC (Iroquois River District). Rev. Sylvester Weatherall will be preaching.

Feb. 13: Normal Calvary UMC (Vermillion River District). Rev. Dr. Kent Millard preaching.

The Embarras River District will be holding their event with District Superintendent Randy Reese preaching. Additional details on the January and February events will be announced as they are confirmed.

To keep up with the latest information, visit: www.igrc.org/evangelism and select 10 in 2010 events.

Five-Day Academy for Spiritual Formation

The Upper Room and the Illinois Great Rivers Conference will host a Five-Day Academy for Spiritual Formation May 1-6, 2011 at a retreat center in Magnolia, IL (near Henry). Online registration is now available by visiting: www.igrc.org/fiveday2011.

Scholarships may be available. For information on financial assistance, contact Rev. Stan Haxton, 217-454-5543 or email at shaxton@igrc.org.

Community

Continued from page 5

"We did this one year and we just kept coming back because it is so much fun," Skyler said. She added that her family enjoys serving others and seeing the smiles on the faces of those who dine at the church.

Keridwen and Ian said they have helped with other dinners at their church, Otterbein, before, but this was their first Thanksgiving dinner there. Keridwen said they helped set up tables Wednesday night and were looking forward to helping with the dinner.

"I like helping because you know you are making someone else happy, not just you," Ian said.

The Thanksgiving dinner has entered its 13th year after first being organized by

Imagine No Malaria

Imagine No Malaria campaign in IGRC begins

Three-year campaign aims to raise between \$2.1 and \$3.5 million to eradicate malaria

By Paul Black

The Illinois Great Rivers Conference has begun its campaign to raise between \$2.1 and \$3.5 million over the next three years as part of the denomination's Imagine No Malaria campaign.

The campaign was to have launched in the Spoon River District with a Celebration to Save Lives on Sunday, Dec. 12 at Monmouth UMC. District events will be scheduled in the near future and the IGRC Communications Team, working in cooperation with Imagine No Malaria, have developed a number of resources to keep you informed.

Facebook groups established

Facebook users will want to consider joining two groups: Imagine No Malaria and IGRC Imagine No Malaria. The INM page has general information and keeps one up to date on the progress of the campaign at the denominational level.

The IGRC Imagine No Malaria page

will be a one-stop shop for all things malaria and will include a calendar of events, resources churches can use in their local campaigns and news and information about the IGRC efforts.

INM Page on conference website

For non-Facebook users, many of the resources will also be co-located on the Imagine No Malaria page on the conference website.

The address for the page will be: www.igrc.org/imaginenomalaria.

A banner link will also be located on the home page that will take one to the IGRC Imagine No Malaria page.

Subscribe to e-newsletter

Beginning Jan. 10, an e-newsletter will be produced every other Monday for the IGRC campaign. The e-newsletter will automatically be sent to pastors' IGRC email accounts. Pastors can easily forward or share the e-newsletter with their own mailing lists.

Other persons that wish to subscribe

may do so by visiting the IGRC website, www.igrc.org, clicking on Communications from the top banner and then selecting "Sign up for our e-newsletters." Make sure Imagine No Malaria is selected.

If you already receive one of the conference's e-newsletters, you will receive a response that "You are already subscribed." An email will be generated, asking you to update your profile, which enables one to check and uncheck those publications to which they are subscribed. Make sure that Imagine No Malaria is selected and when done, Submit your selections.

Resources and videos

A variety of resources, videos and artwork that can assist you in your church's campaign may be found at www.imaginenomalaria.org

Host a house party

The Imagine No Malaria campaign is asking United Methodists to support a life-saving cause by hosting a malaria house party in advance of World Malaria Day,

April 25, 2011.

Imagine the possibilities. Get creative! Call it a FUN-raiser! Throw an ugly sweater party. Have a Christmas get-together or how about a Super Bowl bash? It's a charitable approach to entertaining. "Just imagine, the fight against malaria can start in your own living room," said campaign spokesperson Bishop Thomas Bickerton. "Ending malaria-related deaths requires a commitment of United Methodists around the globe."

The campaign offers an online party planning kit that includes everything needed to have a successful FUNraiser - invitations, party tips, printable materials, checklists, even a video!

Guests can even make their donations online.

To learn more about hosting a party, visit www.imaginenomalaria.org/houseparty.



Malaria threat pervades everyday life in Sierra Leone

By Kay Panovec*

BO, Sierra Leone (UMNS) – Your joints ache. You have a fever, yet your body feels cold. You are sick to your stomach, and experience vomiting and diarrhea. You are so weak you cannot stand, let alone walk. The room spins, making you more nauseous. As lethargic as you may be, you know you are one of the lucky ones.

No one knows this better than Martha Mbriwa, 25, of Bo.

The day started like any other, except she awoke with a terrible headache. The family needed food, however, so she went to the market, where she became disoriented and collapsed. When she awoke, her speech was unintelligible; shoppers in the crowded marketplace thought Mbriwa was insane, so they carried her to a community-based health center. Because of the severity of her illness, known as cerebral malaria, Mbriwa was transferred to Mercy Hospital in Bo.

Cerebral malaria is the most life-threatening form of the disease. Parasite-filled blood blocks small blood vessels that supply the brain with oxygen and other nutrients. This blockage results in swelling of the brain or permanent damage. If left untreated, death will occur in one to three days.

While Mbriwa was in the hospital, her family received a bed net as part of a major health care campaign and net distribution sponsored by The United Methodist Church's Imagine No Malaria campaign, The United Nations Foundation, the Ministry of Health in Sierra Leone and other

international agencies.

The United Methodist Church has joined with the government of this West African country and other international organizations to provide more than 3 million insecticide-treated bed nets to the people of Sierra Leone, where malaria is a leading cause of death.

Treated with life-saving medication and intravenous fluids, Mbriwa is expected to make a full recovery.

Children are most vulnerable

On a humid day in Sierra Leone, it is easily 100 degrees in the shade. The air is stifling hot. People are covered in sweat. Air-conditioning is not available, and clean drinking water is scarce.

Inside a dimly lit room at The United Methodist Church's Kissy Hospital, John Arara desperately waves a piece of paper in front of his 16-month-old son, Henry Peter. As is the case with many children in sub-Saharan Africa, the baby is malnourished and anemic, which makes treatment even more difficult.

Just a few days earlier, Henry was a typically curious baby. When he became listless, fevered and unable to eat or drink, his parents knew the baby was in trouble. His father carried him through the city, in the heat of the day, to receive treatment. The baby was quickly admitted.

Dr. Marilyn Palmer is in charge of his care. "His condition is not good," she said. "We are hoping that medication will be enough and a blood transfusion will not be necessary. Now, we watch and we wait."

Palmer said a number of contributing factors make malaria difficult to treat.



Martha Mbriwa, 25, lies ill with cerebral malaria at the United Methodist Church's Mercy Hospital in Kulando, Sierra Leone. Just outside the hospital room the Imagine No Malaria campaign was distributing free mosquito nets.

Since mild malaria symptoms are common, many parents try to treat the children at home. When the child's symptoms become more pronounced, it may be too late to benefit from medical intervention. Africa loses a child under age 5 every 45 seconds to malaria.

Most Sierra Leoneans cannot afford transportation so they must walk to a community-based health clinic or hospital.

In the bed across from Henry is a 5-year-old boy who was treated for malaria just three weeks earlier. His mother sits in a chair beside his bed, watching and waiting.

"He is a complicated case," Palmer said. "He recovered the first time, but (the disease) has returned. But his immune system is compromised. He just isn't re-

sponding as we had hoped."

Entire family suffers

Musukula Lukulay, 30, has never experienced malaria first hand, but she is familiar with watching and waiting. Her husband and children have had been stricken several times.

In Sierra Leone, everyone has responsibilities just to maintain daily living. Lukulay's husband is a motorbike driver. Although not a high-paying job, the family is grateful for the income he provides. But when Lukulay's husband recently developed malaria, he was unable to work, which meant no money. No money, no food.

* Panovec is the executive director of new media at United Methodist Communications.

Imagine No Malaria

Reflections on malaria in Sierra Leone

Editor's note: Sangamon River District Lay Leader Pete Paulson along with Spoon River District Superintendent Janice Griffith were among the Imagine No Malaria delegation that distributed more than 300,000 bed nets in Sierra Leone. Below are Paulson's reflections on the trip

**By Pete Paulson
Sangamon River District Lay Leader**

Sierra Leone

All alone
By the sea
Hardly free

Hands upraised
People phased
Masses walk
Hardly talk

Baskets hold
Goods are sold
Those who give
Hardly live

Men have used
Women abused
Children run
Hardly fun

A place on earth
Tremendous dearth
Justice lean
Hardly seen

People fear
Shed no tear
Help around
Hardly found
In God's belief
Constant relief
In life turmoil
Toward heaven toil.

Peter Lowell Paulson
December 7, 2010

They almost didn't let me board the plane in the St. Louis International airport



Pete Paulson

because I didn't have a visa.

I am pretty careful, especially when it comes to big things in life, but I thought my U.S. passport WAS my visa. I had a copy of a letter of invitation from the United Methodist Bishop of Sierra Leone and my itinerary, but this was not enough. It was not until I said, "Fine, don't let me on this plane, my wife will be delighted that I don't have to go to Africa today", that the Delta Airline supervisor laughed and relaxed enough to say that I was only going to be in Ghana for less than 24 hours, en route to Sierra Leone so she let me go.

Several checkpoints later, a lot of talking by the leaders of our expedition, sitting in a room shame faced with three Sierra Leone officials and \$150 fee finally got my passport stamped with a temporary visa to allow me into their country.

I was pretty well anticipating in my mind the images that I would see in Africa: The masses walking on the street, the street vendors with piles of goods from clothes, shoes, baskets of vegetables and fruit, and rural areas with huts, etc.

Nothing could have prepared me for our welcoming into the village we received in Bo, Sierra Leone.

When we arrived at our first village the brownish-red dirt road was lined with people. Men, women, and children were waiting for us, and as we piled out of our vehicles we began walking up the road and the singing and drums began.

I was, as were the rest of our group, surrounded by the throng. I have never experienced being in a throng before. Children mostly surrounded me, smiling and laughing and talking. Overcome with warmth of emotion I pumped my two fists in the air and shouted, only being heard by the children closest to me, "This is BIG!" The few that could hear me above

their proper use, and returning every quarter for one year to verify that the nets are being used and share other health-related information.

I heard the story of Henrietta – a native of Sierra Leone who was instrumental in the recruitment and training process. She had taken on the job somewhat reluctantly unsure of her ability, but over the months she had been transformed into a capable and confident leader with a passion to continue the work of improving the quality of life in her country.

I saw the graph and corresponding chart on the wall which recorded the number of deaths in the village served by this UMC Health Clinic. The number of deaths caused by malaria ranked highest in many months of the year.



Dr. Pete Paulson greets schoolchildren in Gbo Chiefdom outside Bo, Sierra Leone, as part of a delegation from the Imagine No Malaria campaign.

the song smiled, and pumped their fists in the air and shouted back to me, "Yes, this is BIG!"

We were led and seated at a long table as "dignitaries" facing the seated villagers. After being introduced to them, we were introduced to their leaders. When the formalities were ended we toured their medical building. Inside the walls were lined with educational posters concerning AIDS, eye conditions, malaria, etc.

One man proudly took me into the supply room (which held only a few boxes of empty syringes), but he was especially proud of a white enameled freezer-sized, temperature-controlled storage unit for medicine. A generator kept the device at constant temperature.

I asked if I could see inside it. He acted as if he had never been asked that before, and after a bit of tugging was able to lift the lid. We both peered down into the rust lined interior of the unit only to see two single dose ampoules of medicine on the bottom. I had expected to see racks of various pharmaceuticals, but they were non-existent.

Afterward, we were educated by local leaders about the organization, communication and distribution of insecticide-

impregnated bed nets to prevent malaria.

This initiative had been well-designed, extensive and largely complete for this Bo district. Bo is only one district, and there are 11 more districts in Sierra Leone. Now is OUR chance to help our brothers and sisters in Christ complete the task.

They truly need our help, and God willing we will stand united, and help.

Please join me, for I am asking YOUR help in the form of donations to raise \$2.1 to \$3.5 million over the next three years toward preventing the deadliest disease Africa faces – malaria.

Malaria kills 1 million of the 300 million Africans each year. Most deaths from malaria are in children under the age of 5 years of age and pregnant women.

A donation of \$10 will buy a bed net which could help save a life. A donation of \$1,000 could save as many as 100 lives, and this translates to approximately \$28 per month over the three-year funding cycle. Please prayerfully consider helping the Imagine No Malaria initiative. In the name of Jesus Christ our Redeemer, Sustainer, and Healer may we all be moved by the Holy Spirit to help. Thank you!

Sierra Leone

Continued from page 2

of the Spirit flow through me. One of the tribal leaders leaned over and whispered that she was saying a traditional blessing over me and those whom I represented.

I heard the impromptu serenade of the group of women during our walk through another village – a musical expression of praise and thanksgiving for the gift of life and hope brought by the nets now hanging in their homes.

I saw the pride on the faces of the tribal representatives who had been recruited and trained as volunteers to work on this net distribution. Their role would include visiting from house-to-house to assist with hanging the nets, instructing the residents in

I heard the passion for the Imagine No Malaria initiative in the voice of the doctor who has been instrumental in the improvement of public health in his country for several decades.

I saw Christians and Muslims working in unity for the sake of saving lives.

I heard the testimony of the representative of UNICEF who affirmed the effectiveness of the partnership of the various health agencies in this initiative.

I saw photos of the mosquito net distribution on the laptop of the person sitting next to me on the plane. She explained that she was not associated with Imagine No Malaria nor the United Methodist Church, but was there visiting other projects being funded by a private endowment based in Europe. She had happened onto the net

distribution in one of the villages and had learned the story of what was happening from the villagers.

In the words of this stranger from Europe, I heard confirmation of the presence of the Risen Christ and knew that the efforts of the volunteers and INM staff were bearing fruit. In the faces so many of the people I met, I saw reflected the face of Christ. The people of Sierra Leone are not only being transformed, but they are becoming agents of transformation for the cause of saving lives.

May we trust that this same transformative power of the Holy Spirit will work among us as we engage the Imagine No Malaria initiative and partner with our brothers and sisters in Africa in this world-changing ministry.

Year in Review

Year in Review

Continued from page 7

and community leaders rallied to restock and replenish the food pantry that serves around 80 families in the community.

Parish nurses throughout the conference gathered Aug. 6-7 for the second annual parish nurse retreat – a time of renewal, networking, worship and celebration.

Embracing technology and relationships

Communications and technology continue to move a breakneck speed and the IGRC Communications Team continues to facilitate connections throughout the conference.

On May 15, the new IGRC website was launched, replacing a three-year old system. The new website incorporated features in response to a user survey initiated in the spring, providing easier navigation and more information.

The website was judged the best annual conference website by the United Methodist Association of Communicators.

Video production manager Suzy Burns also took top honors for her visual design work on the 2010 Senior High YAR promotional video.

The Current, the monthly publication of the conference, also underwent a facelift in September. The new look gives the publication more of a magazine or feature news vehicle.

Annual conference

Annual Conference was held June 2-5 in Peoria around the theme of Passionate Worship.

Theologian in residence for the conference was the Rev. Taylor Burton Edwards, director of worship resources for the General Board of Discipleship.

Bishop Palmer outlined four initiatives in his episcopal address aimed at getting

back to the “Why?” while paying attention to the “What?” and “How?”

He identified four initiatives: revival, conflict transformation, conference dashboard and participation in the Imagine No Malaria campaign.

The conference dashboard was launched Oct. 1 and the IGRC Imagine No Malaria campaign was to begin Dec. 12 with a celebration in the Spoon River District but was cancelled due to the weather.

The Cabinet Address also provided two additional initiatives: First Thursdays, a call to prayer and fasting; and a streamlined assessment process with objective of reaping three specific fruit: robust clergy community that builds up strong, effective leaders; conspicuous practice of the means of grace through accountability and small groups; and professions of faith connected to and as a result of passionate worship.

Conference Lay Leader Rhonda Whitaker proposed a new term – claity – to describe the partnership between laity and clergy.

While many see worship as the sole responsibility of the pastor, Whitaker pointed out passionate worship is a partnership between clergy and laity.

To those who might be critical of the pastor, Whitaker asked, “Did you come prepared? Did you come prayed up, praised up, fired up and prepared to receive a blessing? Did you come prepared to be a blessing?”

Bishop Palmer, in the Ordination message, urged those gathered to be trustworthy prophets.

“May it be said that when God looks for trustworthy prophets, God will say, ‘I found them in central and southern Illinois,’” Palmer said. “God doesn’t need a lot and if a few will be obedient, God can rock this world.”

In addition to the ordination of 17 elders and one deacon, the conference also expressed its appreciation to 17 pastors with a combined 478 years of service, who retired in 2010.

The 2011 budget approved at annual

conference provided less than a 1 percent increase with a freeze on all conference staff salaries.

For churches that have pastors covered by the pension program the increase is 0.6 percent when factoring in an additional \$45 per month that results from the direct bill on pensions. For churches that do not receive a direct bill because they do not have a pastor that is a participant, the decrease is 1.53 percent over 2010.

For the fourth time in five years, there will be no increase in the health insurance assessment paid by individuals and local churches.

Ecumenical relations

The ratification of a full communion agreement between The United Methodist Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has created new energy around ministry partnerships.

On March 26, following a social justice summit attended by both denominations, members of the IGRC Board of Church and Society and the ELCA Social Justice Committee held a joint meeting to discuss ministry opportunities.

Bishop Palmer joined Bishop Warren Freiheit of the Central-Southern Illinois Synod of the ELCA in a celebration of the agreement May 15 that provides common ground for ministry.

“We should always begin with what we share in common with each other. It changes the conversation; it writes a different story,” said Palmer in his message during the service. “If we stay on that street always (of how and what we differ), we will do less good than if we look at what we hold in common.”

The full communion agreement is not a merger of the two denominations but a recognition of those things the two hold in common. The agreement allows for greater shared ministry and deployment of pastoral leadership, although each denomination retains the choice of using or not using particular pastors or ministries jointly.

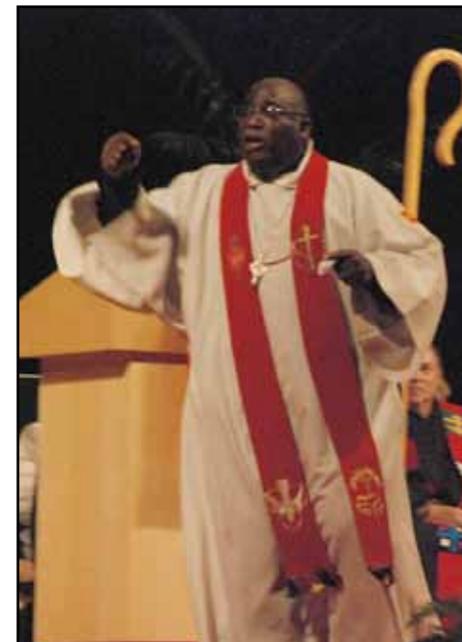
Politics

During the midterm elections, United Methodists took an active part by both voting and being candidates for office.

Don Crawford, a member of St. Elmo First UMC, was the only statewide candidate that self-identified as United Methodist when he ran for lieutenant governor on the Green Party label.

Green Party candidate Sheldon Schafer of Peoria also identified as United Methodist, although he attends the Catholic Church with his wife.

One state senator, Dale Risinger of Peoria, is the lone United Methodist in the Illinois General Assembly, and is joined by six United Methodists in the Illinois House – David Winters of Shirland, Donald Moffitt of Gilson, House Minority Leader Tom Cross of Oswego, Raymond Poe of Spring-



Bishop Gregory V. Palmer preaches during Ordination Services at Annual Conference.

Photo by Paul Black

field, Chapin Rose of Mahomet and John Bradley of Marion.

All of the listed legislators are Republican with the exception of Bradley.

Nationally, United Methodist are the third largest religious group in Congress with 53 representatives and senators and five governors.

Transitions

Bishop Palmer’s announcement of the appointment of Rev. Gerald King to Springfield Laurel UMC created a vacancy on the Cabinet.

King served on the Cabinet, having been first appointed superintendent of the Okaw River District in November 2003 and then moving to the Sangamon River District almost two years later.

Palmer appointed Rev. Dr. Terry Harter, who had served as directing pastor of Champaign First UMC to succeed King.

On July 1, Linda Smith, who served as administrative assistant in the Area Office, retired after 14 years of service to Bishops Sharon Brown Christopher and Palmer. Michelle Hammitt succeeded Smith as the new administrative assistant.

Another change to the regional church will be the reorganization within the North Central Jurisdiction in 2012.

The NCJ College of Bishops approved a plan by which the Dakotas Annual Conference and the Minnesota Annual Conference will share a single bishop, which will reduce the number of NCJ episcopal areas from 10 to 9.

The reorganization comes as a result of action at the 2008 General Conference where four of the five jurisdictions were required to phase out one episcopal area by 2012.

The Southeastern Jurisdiction was allowed to maintain its current number since the jurisdiction was entitled to an additional area but did not seek to create it.



Bishop Gregory V. Palmer receives communion from Bishop Warren D. Freiheit of the Central-Southern Illinois Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America during a May 15 celebration of the full communion agreement between the two denominations.

Photo by Paul Black