

Celebrating 50 years in the pulpit

BY LESLI BALES-SHERROD
UMCONNECTION CORRESPONDENT

Bishop Forrest C. Stith was only 17 years old when it became clear to him that he wanted to be a pastor.

"And not just a pastor, but a rural pastor," chuckled Stith, now 74. "I had it all figured out."

Fifty years into his ordination in The United Methodist Church, Stith has spent "zero" years serving rural congregations, he said with a grin. Instead, this Nebraska native ended up integrating the former Baltimore Conference straight out of seminary in 1958.

"It was an all-white conference, but churches were changing," Stith explained about the denomination, which was racially segregated from 1939 to 1964. "Washington was a mass exodus of whites to the suburbs, and churches were closing."

Douglas Memorial at 11th and H streets, in Northeast Washington was faced with a dilemma: a clause in the deed stipulated that, should the church cease to be a Methodist church in the Baltimore Conference, it would be turned over to the heirs of the woman who had given the land for the church.

Fresh from Drew Theological Seminary in New Jersey, Stith was dispatched to D.C.

"I came down with an empty building, no dollars, no budget and technically no membership," Stith remembered.

Stith "hit the streets," knocking on doors and visiting schools. With the help of Howard University, he started a summer children's program, followed by Sunday School, a membership class and a choir. By the end of Stith's first summer, Douglas Memorial had 35 new members.

This was quite a feat, when the Methodist Church was pushing mission, not membership.

"The Church turned its minds and hearts to delivery of services to the city and not on growing churches," Stith said. "Over the last 30 to 40 years, church membership has been declining, but in my day coming in, we were growing leaps and bounds everywhere - except in the city."

Stith spent nine years at Douglas

See Stith page 3



LINDA WORTHINGTON

National and local leaders consecrate the new Shalom ministries in Baltimore.

See Shalom page 3



MIGUEL GALLEGOS

Brazilian dancers, above, joined Bishop John Schol and Latino pastors and lay people at the Hispanic heritage celebration at Hughes UMC Oct. 12. Many of the different Hispanic ministries of the Baltimore-Washington Conference participated. At the end of the service, Bishop Schol called upon the congregation to pray for the Rev. Edgardo Rivera, who will be deployed to Iraq in a few months. After the service and the Communion there was Latino food and music.

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CONFERENCE COMMUNICATORS WIN AWARDS

The Baltimore-Washington Conference Communications staff was recognized for its excellence at the annual meeting of the United Methodist Association of Communicators Oct. 14-17 in Providence, R.I.

The local communicators were presented with 10 awards.

The UMConnection was named the top annual conference newspaper in the denomination.

Melissa Lauber won the Don Doten Award of Excellence as the best writer in the denomination. She also received the Excellence in Writing in the Print News category for her story, "Shalom Comes to City Streets" and was recognized for "Best Annual Conference Writing," in the feature story category.

Kate Thomas, the conference graphic designer, received four awards for her work.

She was honored with the Best Visual Design award for annual conferences for the photo "Poured Out," from the 2008 conference poster.

Thomas also won a certificate of merit in visual design for her work on the Oct. 3, 2007, issue of the UMConnection.

In addition, she received a merit award for the design of the conference Web site at www.bwcumc.org.

Tom Price won the Multimedia Certificate of Merit for his short video MAC/PC parody; and an "Award of Excellence for Videos under \$10,000" for his video on opening worship at the 2008 annual conference.

- Linda Worthington

Shalom ministry begins in city

BY LINDA WORTHINGTON
UMCONNECTION STAFF

In the neighborhood around Christ UMC in East Baltimore many of the houses are abandoned and boarded up. Debris lies scattered in the streets. Poverty shapes people's lives. It's here where the church feels it belongs. It's here where a Community of Shalom is being created.

On Oct. 25, 38 clergy and lay people came to Christ UMC to be commissioned as certified Shalom leaders.

Bishop John Schol, the Rev. Michael Christensen, national director of Communities of Shalom, and the Rev. J-P Duncan, national trainer, presented the certificates and laid hands on the men and women who had completed four of five training sessions.

Also present were the Revs. Bruce Haskins, conference director of Shalom, and District Superintendent Karin Walker.

Prior to the commissioning service, Duncan asked those present to share

what the training had meant to them.

"We in this room are the bridge builders," said Michelle Simmons of John Wesley UMC. "Because we have respect for each other, we can go forward. As long as we fight for the Lord, we can do whatever we want to do."

The Communities of Shalom Initiative was launched by the General Conference in 1992, in response to the social unrest and riots in Los Angeles.

The decision to develop Communities of Shalom in Baltimore is part of the conference's Hope for the City Plan, under the leadership of the Rev. Tony Hunt.

Leading to this day of celebration, nine churches applied last spring to the coordinating committee to take the five-month training and work toward creating the areas of peace (shalom) in Baltimore. Since then three churches in West Baltimore have teamed up to create the program in that area.

Their goals are four-fold: renewing the Spirit of God in congregations and communities; developing the shared prosperity and economies of communities; strengthening relations among multi-cultural neighbors; and improving the delivery of community services.

"This is not just about providing direct services," Haskins said, "We will seek to make systemic changes to address root causes."

That's what the training over the past five months was about - becoming catalysts to make shalom a reality in the community. Beginning with the theological basis of shalom, the training included asset assessments, planning and technical assistance, community organizing, understanding multi-cultural relationships, fund raising and grant writing, and public relations.

"Shalom ministry is changing lives and communities all over the world,"



Called to co-write God's story

Galatians 2:19-21

BY MELISSA LAUBER

"For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me."

The Apostle Paul brings up ambivalent feeling among many United Methodists. Like a Rorschach test, some readers cast their fears, phobias, fanaticism and faith against his epistles.

The Roman Catholic Church has declared this the year of Saint Paul to mark the approximately 2000th year anniversary of the apostle's birth.

Paul, it has been said, can be compared to the ocean. One can wade in and get their feet wet in his story, or one can dive in and swim out over their heads, immersed in his theology.

Dr. Michael Gorman, a United Methodist who serves as dean of the Ecumenical Institute of Theology in Baltimore, dove in. He is an internationally known Pauline scholar who has written extensively on Paul and helps to shape the church's view on New Testament exegesis.

On Oct. 28, Gorman delivered the Dunning lecture at the Ecumenical Institute. His theme was "Justification and Justice: Paul, the Mission of the Church, and the Salvation of the World."

It was a heady lecture that called upon a working knowledge of biblical Greek and a rich understanding of the concepts and nature of justification. It also delighted the imagination with the potential of what Christian and the church might be.

For those just wading in, Gorman explained that a good Jew could be described as "one who cares about what God cares about."

God, Gorman said, cares about justice. In fact, he ventured, divine justice could be defined as "love in the public sphere." It restores, rather than seeking retribution. Yet in a traditional reading of Paul, there is scant mention of justice.

In our modern mind-set, Paul gets cast in individualistic terms – writing to people about how they

might be in right relationship with their Creator through justification.

But to focus on individual salvation is to misread the epistles, Gorman said. The means of justification is not to accept and have faith in Christ; rather, the means of justification is to have the faith of Christ and be co-crucified and co-resurrected with him.

An essential element of justification becomes "participation in God's writing of the world."

In today's society, it's easy to read Paul as an individual. We can hear his voice speaking one-on-one directly to us. In fact, it's even easy to do church this way. We gather as individuals together in the same space to have private experiences of God.

But that's not what the church is intended to be and that's not how Paul wrote. He was addressing communities. He was writing to *y'all*, to *ustedes*, the second person plural, Gorman pointed out. Reading it as such, intensifies its impact.

There is a doctrine that claims that what God declares, God does.

Repeatedly throughout the Bible, God declares justice for the oppressed. God will create justice. But God depends upon the church and its people to make that justice manifest.

We are God's plan. Pure and simple – we're it. Together we are called to become the justice of God.

Church, Gorman said, is not intended to be simply vertical, a pipeline that connects us upward to God. It is also horizontal, intent to reach those by our sides and beyond. To live as church, requires us to care about what God cares about.

For Gorman, justice in Paul and for us is covenantal, communal, counter-cultural, costly and cruciform.

Cruciform is a word Gorman uses a lot. Cruciform justice is christologically-shaped justice. Cruciform United Methodists are a people shaped by the story of Jesus.

To embody justice requires a kind of bold recklessness and generosity. It also requires humility. But God offers the world shalom, and we, through the cross, are to deliver it.

CONFERENCE NOTICES

Christian Educators Fellowship

The Christian Educators Fellowship will meet Thursday, Nov. 13, at 10 a.m. at the Conference Center. For information, contact co-presidents, Marie Matthews at mamatthews_wumc@yahoo.com or Sherry Perrine at sperine@wesleyfreedom.org.

Media ministry workshop

A seminar for the media ministry team and worship design leaders will take place at First UMC, 6201 Belcrest Road in Hyattsville, Saturday, Nov. 15, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Advance registration is \$15 and \$20 at the door. E-mail Dave Armbruster at dave@daveaudio.com with the number and names of who will attend.

Mt. Auburn cleanup continues

The conference United Methodist Men and the Baltimore-Washington Conference are continuing to help clean up and beautify Mt. Auburn Cemetery, 2501 Hollins Ferry Road in Baltimore. Volunteers are needed for Saturday, Nov. 15, 8 a.m. to noon. For more information, contact Larry McCrae at 443-527-5822 or Sherman Harris at 301-299-2984.

Safe Sanctuaries training

Safe Sanctuaries training is offered Saturday, Nov. 22, 9 a.m. to noon, at Glyndon UMC, 4713 Butler Road in Glyndon. Led by the Rev. Cynthia Burkert, the class will cover the basics of Safe Sanctuaries and practical hints for implementing the policy. An afternoon session is offered for those who will be implementing Safe Sanctuaries, for an additional charge of \$3 per person. To register, send your name, church name and location, telephone number and \$5 per person (or \$30 per church) plus \$3 per person for afternoon session to Rev. Cynthia Burkert, 6601 Ebenezer Road, Middle River, MD 21220. For information, call 410-335-2172 or e-mail pastor@ebenezerchase.org.

Religious Interpreter workshop

The annual religious interpreters' workshop will be held Saturday, Nov. 22, at the Maryland School for the Deaf in Columbia, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. For information or to register, contact the Rev. Leo Yates Jr. at leoyjr@aol.com.

I Am Mission

Youth and young adults are invited to participate in the I Am Mission event Saturday, Nov. 22, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at McKendree-Simms-Brookland UMC, S. Dakota and Lawrence streets, NW, in Washington, D.C. The training program is sponsored by Strengthening the Black Church for the 21st Century and Volunteers in Mission. To register and learn more, contact Sandy Ferguson at sferguson@bwcumc.org.

United Methodist Student Day

One of the six special Sundays with offering, United Methodist Student Day will be celebrated Nov. 30, but the offering may be received at any time of the year. The Board of Higher Education and Ministry awards scholarships and loans from the offering. For information, see www.gbhem.org. To find resources, see www.umcgiving.org.

Register for ROCK

ROCK 2009, a youth revival, will take place in Ocean City Jan. 30, 31 and Feb. 1. Register online at www.bwcumc.org/rock2009.

Annual Conference 2009

The Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference session will be held June 4-6, 2009, at the Marriott Baltimore Waterfront Hotel, in Baltimore. Pre-conference briefings are scheduled for April 25.

Save the date

An Adjourned Session of the Baltimore-Washington Conference is tentatively scheduled for Jan. 17, 2009. The location will be announced.

Correction

In the Oct. 15 UMConnection, "Certified Lay Ministers launch into new calling," the name of the trainer should have been Sandra King-Shaw from Asbury UMC in Washington.



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UMConnection is the newspaper of the Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church, whose mission is to be like Christ as we call, equip, send and support spiritual leaders to make disciples and grow at least 600 Acts 2 congregations by 2012.

United Methodist Connection is published on the first and third Wednesday of every month. Material in the UMConnection may be reproduced unless item is accompanied by a copyright notation ©.

The UMConnection (ISSN 005386) is owned and published by the Commission on Communications of the Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church, 7178 Columbia Gateway Drive, Columbia, MD 21046-2132. Telephone: (410) 309-3400; (800) 492-2525; fax: (410) 309-9794; e-mail: connection@bwcumc.org.

Subscriptions are \$15 per year. The UMConnection is published twice a month. Periodicals postage paid at Columbia, Md., and at additional mailing offices.

Postmaster: Send address changes to:
UMConnection, 7178 Columbia Gateway Drive,
Columbia, MD 21046-2132.



UMConnection is a member of
the Maryland-Delaware-D.C. Press Association
and the Associated Church Press.



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Stith: Ministry of relationship

FROM PAGE 1

Memorial. He went on to serve a total of 12 years as a pastor; 14 as a conference staff person and district superintendent; and 12 as an active bishop in the New York West area. Overseeing rural congregations in upstate New York finally put all those rural classes at seminary to use, Stith said.

"My rural ministry (training) did come in handy – just 40 years late," he laughed.

Stith has retired three times – in 1996, 2000 and 2001 – but he stays busy.

For the past several years, Stith has been working with the Black Caucus for Church Renewal Inc. and other concerned African-American Methodists to establish the African American Methodist Heritage Center.

The purpose of the center, he said, is to gather materials and artifacts that tell the story of African Americans in Methodism, while helping African-American congregation also preserve their stories.

"There is a documented presence of African Americans (in Methodism) since 1774, Stith said. "All through church history, African Americans have been vital, but we feared (they) would get lost in the maze. More than 90 percent of United Methodists in this country are white."

When Stith thinks back to what it was like to be the only African American in the conference, he jokes. "I couldn't miss meetings," he said, insinuating that his absence would have been obvious.

But he also speaks passionately about The United Methodist church as "the most pluralistic and diverse" in Protestantism.

"I've watched the struggle with racism, sexism, ageism and all the other 'isms,'" he said. "Our United Methodist Church is on the forefront ... of inclusiveness and righteousness."

To Stith, it all comes down to building relationships. Caring for



LESLEY BALES-SHERROD

Bishop Forrest C. Stith

people is the foundation of his 50-year ministry and this caring guides how he prioritizes his time and energy.

"It is what our purpose has been, even now in retirement," Stith added. "Of all the stuff on my walls – the awards, the doctorates – I value most the letters, notes and cards from people who, even to this day, remember our care for them."

The simple, yet profound importance of loving people especially struck him during the three years he and his wife, Josephine, served in East Africa, supervising new congregations and mission projects in Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan and Uganda.

"They had nothing, but they had love," he said. "Love is the answer and the essence of Jesus' ministry."

"I like the phrase the Council of Bishops uses: 'to make disciples and transform the world,'" Stith said. "But I don't see those as sequential; they have to be simultaneous. We need to keep our eyes on the prize of the world itself and its systems that need transforming and need it badly."

Shalom: Delivers hope to city

FROM PAGE 1

Haskins said.

"I'm here to affirm shalom is in the neighborhood," Hunt said. "We believe we're up to something wonderful here in Baltimore."

The "up to something" is many-fold. Each coordinator presented a status report of his or her team's progress and plans for the sites during the commissioning service.

• **Ames Memorial UMC:** "Our neighborhood, our home, our responsibility," is their motto. They plan to have a program to assist ex-offenders to return to the community, with job training, self-esteem building and a referral service.

"It's been a big step for the church, but its moving ahead," said Ruth Wilkinson.

• **John Wesley UMC:** A highlight of their plan is to build housing and assisted living for seniors. "We'll be seeking interfaith help," to accomplish the ambitious plans, Calvin Lewis said. They also hope to add a nurses training component in the assisted living facility.

• **Unity UMC:** "There's a lot of violence in our area," said Kim Hawkins. "We have a lot of gangs and we want to show what peace can really do."

The Shalom ministry in that area plans to work with the elementary and middle schools nearby for after school programs; and to acquire the abandoned houses in the area, through government grants. As they accomplish these goals, they will also offer substance abuse treatment for the addicts now occupying the abandoned houses.

• **Christ UMC:** "We want the community (the one now and the one to be) to know the church is always open," said Gloria Savage. Their Shalom plans include after school programs and a large health-care awareness effort.

• **West Baltimore UMC:** The three churches will work in partnership to develop "one-stop" centers where there will be programs in education, health, for ex-offenders

and jobs creation, said the Rev. Iris Farrabee-Lewis.

"We'll also create programs in fine arts – recreation for recreation," added the Rev. Herbert Brisbon.

They plan to make the Shalom program visible to all they meet through T-shirts, bumper stickers, shopping bags, "anything visual, so they'll ask, 'What is Shalom?'" Brisbon said.

"Shalom will play a major role in adopting the corners where the kids hang out at night, said Rev. Willie Gray, a team member and evangelist who works throughout Baltimore.

• **Mt. Zion UMC:** "We're energized by what God is about to accomplish," said Karen Blake. Their program has three emphases: spiritual, financial and healthy life styles. With several medical professionals on the team, they'll do quarterly health seminars and screenings. Plans also include developing a financial literacy institute, working through the area banks to teach youth and adults how money works. Also in the plans is a sports league to engage the youth in competitive sports. "We're confident as God leads, he will furnish the means to accomplish it," Blake said.

• **Mt. Winans:** "One of our dreams was to acquire the school across the street," said the Rev. Stacey Cole Wilson. They are now in the negotiation stage. The school will be a center for job training, child care and GED training.

The Mt. Winans team is also hoping to acquire two abandoned homes to rehab, particularly for "escaping prostitutes," she said.

In a partnership with Horton Hospital, they will bring health care assistance and screening to the neighborhood, which is some distance from any health care facility.

"I knew good things would come out of Baltimore," Christensen said.

"All you're doing is a symbol of hope for the city of Baltimore and the conference," said Bishop Schol.

Church opens volunteer-run center for community

BY CARRIE MADREN
UMCONNECTION CORRESPONDENT

Terry Bonnevier teaches marketing and business administration at the local high school, but she's also in the business of helping Leonardtown's kids rise above their circumstances.

Her church, First Saints Community Church, a United Methodist congregation in Leonardtown, had been running a reading room in the Leonard's Freehold community for more than six years in a small, rented space where children could get books, play games, use a computer and play.

"A lot of them come from low income backgrounds, most live with only one parent, Bonnevier said of the community's children.

"Often, the parent is working a great deal to make ends meet so the parent is not there to help with homework," she said.

That's where her team of volunteers stepped in: to help kids get their homework done, and have a little fun in a safe place. Last year, they often shuttled kids to the church for tutoring and homework sessions.

"I knew we weren't reaching as many kids as we could reach if we were closer," said Bonnevier, who's been a reading room volunteer for some five years.

So the Southern Maryland church considered how to accommodate growing homework-help sessions. A bigger space was

needed, and preferably one closer to the Leonard's Freehold community.

They found a small building that the kids could walk to.

Just after Labor Day, the new Educational Outreach Center opened its doors. August had been a month of recruiting some 22 volunteers.

Now, kids who need homework help get it four afternoons a week. Bonnevier said a few of her students attend the after-school sessions.

A typical afternoon brings three to a dozen students, with about three or four volunteers to help.

The volunteers guide students through all kinds of homework from reading to math to Spanish.

"One young lady had to type up a report, and we have one laptop with a printer," Bonnevier said. "Most of these kids don't have access to a computer at home."

Results are evident, Bonnevier said. "We've had kids raise their grades."

But more important than raising grades is volunteers building relationships with the students.

"Through this program we've gotten kids to come to Sunday school and come to other events like Vacation Bible School," she said.

Many other opportunities can be accomplished at the new center. "The bigger goal is not just to focus on kids but to have programs for adults, offering help with resumes or interviews, teaching computer skills," Bonnevier said.

Such classes will likely start in early spring 2009.

The church's vision expands even wider to one day sponsor free nutrition classes, budget counseling and more.

"Terry has been involved in this outreach for several years and the opening of this center is but a stepping stone toward her vision of truly touching our community in important ways," wrote associate pastor Keith Schukraft.

While the church's other minis-

tries have team leaders to make programs run smoothly, Bonnevier's invested her own time and talents to the Leonard's Freehold community.

"The kids know I'm a presence here, they know they can come to me," said Bonnevier, who herself came from a poor household and succeeded with hard work and opportunities given by others.

"Every child should have a chance to be successful and know that they can be just as successful as everyone else."



BRADLEY GASS

A Leonardtown community celebrates the opening of its outreach center.

TOUGH ECONOMY, BUT GOD HAS A PLAN

BY DARYL WILLIAMS

Day by day, it seems as if the economy is on a roller coaster and we are all along for the ride.

The past few months have been an unprecedented time in the world's economic landscape. In 2008 we have witnessed the plummeting of home values, massive volatility in the stock market and the freezing of global credit markets. In addition, we have also seen pillar institutions of our financial services industry acquired, merged, and in some cases outright closed.

The problems have been so widespread that governments from around the world have chosen to intervene, in some cases making direct investments into ailing companies to prevent failure.

As Christians we are not untouched by the gyrations of the economy. We face the same stresses and concerns about economic security that everyone else faces.

What makes us different as Christians is not that we are impervious to economic swings but rather how we react when those swings inevitably come along. The first response of a Christian in these tough economic times has to be, not to panic. As Christians we must always remember that God has a plan, even when we can't see it.

In the Old Testament God sends word through the prophet Jeremiah to the people of Israel while they are in exile: "Surely I know the plans that I have for you, plans for your welfare and not for your harm, to give you a future with hope." The plans of God are not just for the exiled people of Israel but for every believer. Each one of us must rest assured that God has a plan that is unique and specific to each of us. Therefore, we have to replace panic with hope.

It is also important not to worry. Worry is one of the most effective tools that Satan has to use against believers. Worry serves the purpose of taking our eyes off the most important things in life. By worrying the believer can be deceived into thinking that the worst is upon them, and that they

must work to fix it.

The Bible values work, but Jesus himself warns us against worry. "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink or about your body, what you will wear. Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all the things will be given to you as well."

Fundamentally, believers must remember what our ultimate source is. In the eighth chapter of Deuteronomy we are admonished to "Remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today."

God's promise to provide for his people is an everlasting one. God is not dependent on the economy to provide for his people but rather we are dependent on God being true to God's word. God has promised that "he will supply all of our needs according to his riches and glory." It is in the tough economic times that we must rely on and hold fast to the promises of God.

To stay afloat in tough economic times, we must do our part as well. Our part is to remain faithful in our giving to the church. The church is the willing, working army of God's compassion in the world. In tough economic times, the world needs the church and its ministries more than ever.

As people are facing harder economic times, they depend on the church even more. Community food pantries, common clothing closets and other ministries of giving and service become all the more important as more and more people begin to feel the economic pinch. Ministries local and abroad still need our support in tough times. While others are pulling back funds, in many cases it will only be the church that is still ministering to people's needs. It is incumbent on believers to still be faithful givers in tough times.

In precarious economic times, our best strategy is counter intuitive – give your way out. In the book of Isaiah, God tells us that "His ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts," so what

is right to God may seem counter intuitive to us. Giving is the best cure for tough economic times. Continuing to be a faithful giver of time, talent and money to the church is a show of faithfulness that God has promised to bless.

Paul admonishes us in 2 Corinthians 9:6-8: "The one who sows sparingly will reap sparingly, and the one who sows abundantly will reap abundantly." Each of you must give as you have made up in your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything you may share abundantly in every good work.

While times may look gloomy, we are a blessed people. God has always taken care of God's people. Despite harsh economic times, God always sees us through. The Bible promises us that God will never leave us or forsake us. Tight economies come and go, but God stands forever high and almighty. The key for us is, don't panic, don't worry, remember who your source is, and stay faithful.

The Rev. Daryl Williams is director of the conference United Methodist Foundation, Investments and Planned Giving.

“

Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.

1 Peter 4:10 NRSV ”

IN GOD WE TRUST

At a recent worship service at Bel Air UMC, the Rev. Barry Hidey asked everyone present to reach into their wallets and pull out something that said, "In God We Trust."

"Is there a question mark there on your bill?" he asked. "Over the past few weeks, our confidence has been shaken because it's often in money, rather than God, we tend to trust."

Asking members to "trust in the abundance of God," Hidey had them raise the bills in their hands. "I want us to celebrate what we have and then I'm going to ask you to let go of what you have and drop it where you stand," he said.

The people responded, then prayed. More than \$1,300 was dropped that morning and went to benefit relief efforts for victims of Hurricane Ike.

ADVENTURE:

Claiming
abundance
in the face of
scarcity

THE IMPACT OF ECONOMIC CRISES ON CHURCHES

BY LOVETT H. WEEMS, JR.

Recent economic developments have caused many church leaders to ask what happened to churches at the time of the 1929 market crash and the Great Depression.

In the book "In Pursuit of the Almighty's Dollar: A History of Money and American Protestantism" James Hudnut-Beumler turns a historian's eye to the subject of church funding. His book provides some insight on how churches have coped in times of severe economic challenge.

As one would expect, the Great Depression was a hard time for churches. Church leaders thought things were already tight, so the prospect of operating with even fewer resources was hard to imagine. The depression hurt some church causes more than others, notes Hudnut-Beumler, because "local churches kept more of the funds they did get."

The first things to suffer were ecumenical efforts, followed by denominational work, and only then local churches. This may turn out to be true today.

A thoughtful student of church finances recently noted that the timing of our current economic distress is particularly troubling for some denominations since a major portion of their funds comes in from October through December.

The Great Depression era gave birth to a debate that continues to this day about the best approach to funding the church.

Two Methodists were leading advocates of the differing philosophies. William Leach advocated using the best systems to generate funds for the church's work. He championed the use of contemporary marketing techniques and encouraged churches to replicate fundraising plans that worked in other places.

He promoted, for example, the Belmont Plan (named for the Presbyterian church that popularized it). This approach asked members to tithe but only for two or three months. It worked so well because many people were willing to try tithing for a short period. The financial results came from the increased giving while members were experimenting with tithing and also from a large number of the people who continued the practice.

At the same time George

Morelock encouraged churches to resist the use of such techniques. He advocated a movement toward "spiritualizing church finance" – shifting the entire focus to the spiritual life of the individual. According to Morelock, only this approach can lead a person to give cheerfully and thus grow in their faith as they give.

Hudnut-Beumler says these two Methodist leaders "were setting the terms of the next half century's debate on church fundraising. The debate was between those who wished to talk about motives for giving and those who were more interested in discussing the means for attracting gifts to the church."

With the benefit of hindsight, we have learned that neither approach, to the exclusion of the other, will help move our congregations to where they need to be. We have also learned that we must take into account the context in place and time, and never more so than at this hour of crisis, which is so unfamiliar to most of us.

With so much uncertainty and anxiety, no discussion of means will make sense until we can be surrounded by the biblical assurances that begin with "be not afraid." As we remember that God's care is from everlasting to everlasting, and God has promised never to leave us abandoned, then we can go on to put money in its rightful perspective in God's universe.

Church leaders in every place will need to discern what is realistic and what is likely to engage people. While never confusing the earthen vessels with the treasure, it is important to draw wisdom from many sources to craft fruitful means for this particular season.

This article first appeared in Leading Ideas, the biweekly newsletter of the Lewis Center for Church Leadership. Read more at www.churchleadership.com.



RENEWING FAITH AMID THE DISTRESS

BY RABBI JOSHUA MARTIN SIEGEL

The current economic downturn has created much anxiety. How can religious and spiritual teaching help people cope with this situation and learn from it?

A religious-spiritual perspective is that "all things happen for a reason," which gives a sense of a larger destiny that transcends immediate circumstances.

All things are seen from the "aspect of entirety." The first question to ask in this time of economic difficulty is why did this happen, and what is it trying to teach us from the aspect of its deeper causes and meanings.

A response to this question could be, this is happening to teach us not to define ourselves by our current economic status or self-centered accomplishments.

While from most religious perspectives there is nothing wrong with living a degree of economic security, to define oneself by one's economic status or capacity to acquire and spend money is clearly against the teachings of all religious or spiritual disciplines.

In western religion we are taught that "we are created in God's image." This means that we are good as we are and do not need social status or "things" to be able to be valued or loved.

If we can truly accept ourselves as having "divine potential," we can move away from a self definition based on status or material accomplishments. Therefore, economic dislocation can be an opportunity to seek for our essential eternal selves and so become more authentic than we were before.

It allows us to see whatever wealth or accomplishments we have as gifts from God to be shared with others, to be more charitable and live kinder lives. This is another gift from a time of economic difficulty.

In short, if properly understood the present economic distress can be seen as an opportunity to renew our essential spirituality and return to a religious-based life.

Economic stress is not a failure, rather for many an opportunity to rediscover and live again our essential life purpose: to become more like God our creator and live a life based on God's teachings.

AN UNLIMITED LINE OF CREDIT

BY BARRY HIDEY

We are facing what many consider to be the greatest financial crisis of our generation. It has shaken many of our daily lives and our confidence in the future. But it also gives us an opportunity to return to the source of all that is strong, our foundation and strength.

Jesus said, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his or her life?"

In this passage Jesus reminds us that we need to go back to those Kingdom values that we see lived out throughout the Sermon on the Mount. We need to reclaim our faith and trust. To do this, we must restore our faith in ourselves, in others and in God.

Worry has a way of changing each one of us. It shakes our confidence and makes us question our abilities. We try to shape the bottom line and forget to turn to God.

Four years ago, I attended a leadership summit at the Willow Creek Church in Illinois where Tim Sanders talked about scarcity, which is the opposite of living out the Kingdom values.

At the heart of our fear and uncertainty, we tell ourselves that we don't have enough. We focus on

scarcity, taking our lead from CNBC and not from Matthew 6.

Scarcity tells us that there is not enough to go around; so we don't have enough to share with anybody else. Scarcity means that we define ourselves based on what we lack, not on what we have.

Kingdom mentality is quite the opposite. Jesus tells us that we shall have life and have it abundantly. But how do we let go of our scarcity thinking and embrace God's abundance?

We need to begin by changing our thinking. Too often we define ourselves by what we lack and in doing so miss the abundance of God that is all around us.

Along with living in a spirit of God's abundance, we need to abandon fear and replace it with faith and endurance.

When we abandon our fear, it becomes easier to practice abundance. In the Kingdom mentality, it is always better to give than to receive. But giving requires us to let go of things and trust that God will provide.

We need to believe that God, and the church as the family of God, will be there for us. Doing so means living out the Gospel, in rich times and in lean ones, each and every day.

This commentary is excerpted from an Oct. 12 sermon on Matthew 6:25-34 by the Rev. Barry Hidey. For an audio version of the sermon, visit <http://www.baumc.com/audio/oct-dec2008/message10-12-08-56K.wma>.



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MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Older adults study change

WEST RIVER – About 74 senior citizens from around the conference gathered at West River Retreat Center Oct. 7 for the fall Older Adults Day Away, a time of Bible study, fellowship and inspiration.

The Rev. Jeanne Klauda led the Bible study, speaking on “Change.” Change will always happen, “and we need to balance our values of the old ways and find hope as we adapt to the new ways,” she said.

The Rev. Rodney Smothers “spoke with fervor and humor of the technology of communicating in today’s world,” reported Mable Collier Baker of St. Paul’s UMC in Kensington. He illustrated his remarks by multitasking with his cell phone, camera, a computer, calculator and calendar.

The seniors participated in various workshops, toured West River’s shoreline, took boat rides aboard the Franklin Lee, and participated in “Don’t Forget the Hymns,” based on the TV show, “Don’t Forget the Lyrics.”

People in the news



Buckingham

is minister of education and

KENSINGTON – The Rev. Rick Buckingham was elected to serve on the national Christian Educator’s Fellowship Board of Directors, representing the Northeastern Jurisdiction. He

youth at St. Paul’s UMC.



Brito

of Education Oct. 23, at ceremonies in the Montgomery County offices in Rockville.

BOWIE – The Rev. Eun Joun Joo, associate minister at Glen Burnie UMC, is a contributor to a new book, “Those Preaching Women: A Multicultural Collection.”

It is a collection of sermons by clergywomen, published by Judson Press.

NASHVILLE – Upper Room Ministries will launch a Russian edition of The Upper Room devotional guide in November, under the leadership of Eurasia Area Bishop Häns Växby. The Upper Room devotional is published around the world in 40 languages, and has not been available in Russian since the 1950s.

— *Compiled and written by Linda Worthington.*

To submit your church’s news, send information to lworthington@bwcumc.org.



Joo



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VIM team builds communities in Zimbabwe

BY CHARLIE MOORE

I recently had the privilege of leading a Volunteer In Mission team of seven people from Community UMC in Crofton on a trip to Zimbabwe.

During our eight days there, we participated in the dedication of the Juru Community UMC and the dedication of a new solar power project at the Dindi Community United Methodist Medical Clinic.

In addition, the team distributed medical supplies, food supplies, sewing materials, shawls and lap robes, "Care Bears," choir robes and school supplies to a number of different locations.

More than 500 people attended the four-hour dedication of the Juru Church. The total funding for the church of about \$75,000 has been provided by Community UMC.

In March 2007, a VIM team from our church had spent two weeks working on the installation of the roof trusses and the building of pews.

More than 1,200 people attended the dedication of the solar power project at the Dindi Medical Clinic. This project was the capstone of the building of the Medical Clinic and staff house that Community UMC began and funded in October 2006, at a cost exceeding \$100,000. The community team also presented medical supplies, food, lap robes and Care Bears during the dedication.

While we were participating at the dedication, a baby boy was born at the clinic. The baby was wrapped with one of the lap robes Community's Shawl Ministry provided, given to the mother only 15 minutes before the baby was born.

We found that the economy in Zimbabwe is in a total tailspin. With an annual inflation rate exceeding 20 million percent, there



Community UMC in Crofton recently traveled on a VIM trip to Zimbabwe where they dedicated a solar power project, distributed items to improve the quality of life among the poor and built upon their relationship with churches there.



CHARLIE MOORE



is a severe shortage of food and medical supplies. Many businesses have shut down and the few stores that remain open have mostly bare shelves.

The team also spent time visiting the Revs. Mary and Remember Masamba, both pastors of Methodist churches in the outskirts of Harare and the parents of Fortune Masamba who was sponsored by Community to come to the United States and receive a college education.

We presented medical supplies for an orphan's pre-school program

at Remember's church and provided funding to Mary's church for the completion of their sanctuary expansion.

The team visited seven or eight other potential sites for future projects. The church has made the decision to build a primary school building in the Hanwa Mission and provided initial funding so that the area residents can begin work immediately. They've already made the bricks.

A VIM team from Community will travel to Hanwa in mid-April next year to participate in the com-

pletion of this first of many school blocks at the Hanwa Mission.

As you can imagine, this was a trip that was incredibly emotional and uplifting.

In spite of the dire economic, political and medical crises facing the Zimbabwean people, they remain grounded in their faith in God and hope for a better future.

All of us who participated in this effort have been deeply changed by this experience.

We truly appreciate the prayers and generosity that made our work possible.

Small churches provide unique and hopeful welcome

BY LEWIS A. PARKS

When small church lay and clergy leaders gather, the first comments you often hear reflect an understandable anger, defensiveness, and dread of an imminent future. This is understandable given the challenges they face.

But if you listen long enough, as I have done regularly for the last several years, you begin to pick up signs of hope — hope consistent with the empirical data showing that approximately 35 percent of small membership churches are indeed growing each year and hope consistent with the church's own theological metrics for measuring the viability and vitality of a congregation.

So who needs a small church these days? What I hear paints a hopeful picture. Call it a work of prevenient grace. Call it a wooing by the Spirit. Call it a happy confluence of the new seekers and the congregations they seek.

Whatever you call it, five types of persons keep showing up as visitors to small churches, whether those churches are located in cities, towns or rural settings.

1. People seeking surrogate family. They are separated from their families of origin by work, or school, or military. They are estranged or divorced from those once dear. They are looking for brothers

and sisters with whom they can relate in reciprocity. They are looking for aunts and grandfathers who can share wisdom for the journey of life.

They hunger for family-like gatherings brimming with assorted characters and stories. The surrogate family language that dominates Paul's letters written to congregations of 35 to 50 persons resonates with these people.

2. People seeking an alternative to the anonymity of the work place and public square. They have learned to be compliant minds and bodies so they can navigate the interstate highways to get to work or to get through airport security without setting off alarms.

They shop in big box stores like Home Depot, Target and Ikea where consumers seek products without regard for etiquette. They bank and take courses online.

But when it comes to worship and spiritual growth, they want a setting where they know and are known by name. They want to be more like performers in worship and less like audience.

3. People weary of self-absorption and in search of a corporate story into which they can jump. C.S. Lewis once observed that there comes the day when one realizes one isn't going to be a Great Person after all. So where does one go

from there? One of the healthiest answers is to find a community or institution that is more than the sum of its individual members, and give oneself over to it.

One reason small churches need to have their story ready to tell is that there are people looking for such stories. Many of the seekers are looking for a story bigger than themselves but still small enough that they might contribute to the advancement of the plot.

4. People who have a score to settle with God but want to settle it in a safe environment. They have outgrown the eclectic and nebulous spirituality of their New Age phase. They demand that God make sense of the sudden death of a child, spouse or best friend. They regret the setbacks of their lives and would like to find an overriding providence.

As they have it out with God, they have a strong preference for an intimate setting. They want to be able to ask the preacher face to face their hardest questions after the sermon. They want to tell their stories in Bible study with persons whose ongoing stories they are following. They want to be able to feel their way into new vistas of faith and know that those who see the collateral tears read them sympathetically.

5. People who are looking for a place to give back for the blessings they have received. Life has been good to them and they have reached a fork in the road. Will they be anxious and grasping like the farmer in Jesus' parable whose logic is "more, more; there's never enough"? Or will they deem themselves blessed to be a blessing? If the latter, chances are they will look for a place where their gifts make a visible difference.

Behold the small church where the budget is nearly always bare-bones and where "extras" like sending a teenager on a mission trip to Bolivia, having a 2600 lumens projector for the worship service, or making the bathrooms handicap accessible usually depend on the presence of patrons and the energy of volunteer labor.

Whether these five types of persons will come back to the small churches they visit is another story.

There are issues of hospitality and excellence of execution that must be faced. But courage for facing them surely starts with a belief that someone is likely to show up and notice. The signs are strong that someone will.

Rev. Lewis A. Parks (lparks@wesleyseminary.edu) is Professor of Theology, Ministry and Congregational Development at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C.

D.C. church steps 'into the reign of God now'

BY MELISSA LAUBER
UMCONNECTION STAFF

To celebrate its 180th anniversary, Wesley UMC in Washington, D.C., is "stepping into the reign of God now," with a jazz band, salsa dancing, Afro-Columbian food, children playing in colorful crowns and a Gospel message of extravagant welcome.

Almost two centuries ago, the people of this affluent suburb came together to create a faith community. Over the years, their faithfulness has bloomed at different moments in a variety of ways, said the Rev. Whit Hutchison. Today, the church is trying to be faithful by creating a multi-cultural community in which everyone feels equal and able to participate with joy.

"Community can be a hard thing to create," Hutchison said. "But we need to be intentional and do so. Multicultural community is what the world needs from us."

To do this, Hutchison said, "the church must create circumstances for people to encounter the large-heartedness of Jesus."

"United Methodists tend to be individualist," Hutchison said. "But what the Gospel asks of us, we can't do alone. We need to walk with one another to figure out how to respond. To do justice and love kindness is more than I'm capable of by myself. Together we create a robust faith, a faith that will be bold."

Part of the boldness of the 130-member congregation at Wesley UMC is being willing to open its door, at no costs, to diverse community groups.

The Manuel Zapata Olivella Center is one such ministry, which revolves around the needs of the under-served Afro-Hispanic



MELISSA LAUBER

The jazz band of Wesley UMC celebrates the church's 180th anniversary.

community. The center, supported by a grant from the Baltimore-Washington Conference, is under the direction of Umberto Garcés.

Among the services it offers are English and Spanish language classes, immigration counseling, career development, literacy programs, worship in Spanish and cultural events designed to raise awareness of wider community concerns such as poverty and human rights.

Latinos of African ancestry are often discriminated against. In Latin America and the Caribbean, conditions "often get worse the darker your skin is," Garcés said.

Afro-Dominicans, Afro-Peruvians, Afro-Columbians, all of which have large communities in D.C., have their own unique food, music, art, history and world view.

They are distinct cultural groups, but they are also often viewed as "other." In health care, employment and other opportunities, discrimination affects people in negative ways, said Garcés.

The Manuel Zapata Olivella Center attempts to change that. "We started with four women in English classes," Garcés said. "We're up to 40. Those women do not want to miss class. This makes me so happy."

Garcés, who came to the United States in 2001, said he came from a poor family. He remembers getting up at 3 a.m. to work before school. It was not an easy life. "I would look to heaven and ask, 'God, why are you doing this,'" he said.

When he immigrated, people in the United States opened their doors to him and his family. "So,

now we help others. We try. Why not?" he said. "It fulfills me as a human being."

Garcés believes that God opens doors, which is a prominent theme in the community at Wesley.

Rather than starting a second congregation for the Hispanics, the congregation has chosen to diversify its offerings, becoming a place where cultures can happily collide.

For example, some Hispanic people have a more relaxed version of start times. To accommodate this point of view and the people who want to begin promptly on time, worship now includes fellowship time at tables set up in the sanctuary as services begin.

Once a month, they have lunch after the 11 a.m. service and hold a Spanish-language service at 1:30 p.m.

The congregation believes "everything in church should stem from the abundance of God," Hutchison said. "Love is the center of community, not fear."

By and large, radical hospitality steers the church's agenda. "Practice and action change the nature of the relationship between people," Hutchison said. "It begins with servanthood, which can bring down the walls of difference. People know you're for real. They know you're authentic."

This bold kind of outreach, that meets people at their point of need, may be the future of the 180-year-old church. "In truth, the church gathered is not the principle context. We are not who we are on Sunday morning," Hutchison said. "Church is the dress rehearsal, the locker room. Life is the real game. At church we gain some clarity for the practice of life."



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