

"Write the vision clearly on the tablets, that one may read it on the run." – Habakkuk



The Newspaper
of the New York
Annual Conference
of The United
Methodist Church

April 22, 2011

Web Cast Explores Increasing UMC Vitality

UMNS REPORT WITH LOCAL ACCOUNTS

"What is God's vision for The United Methodist Church?"

That question was among several fielded by a panel of three bishops, a young adult leader, and an agency head at the Leadership Summit web cast on April 6. There was a notable pause after the question as the leaders considered how best to respond on behalf of the Almighty.

Finally, Germany's Bishop Rosemarie Wenner took a crack at it. "We took the words of Matthew 28 as the mission of the church, and that really is God's wish for all of us: Making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world,"

Call to Action: *Reordering the Life of The Church*

In case you missed the April 6 web cast, or want to watch it again, or need more info, an archive of the April 6 web cast and the results of a survey taken by viewers is available at www.umcleaderships Summit.org.

she said.

Thousands of church members hoping to make more disciples gathered at sites around the world to participate in the Leadership Summit web cast. Altogether, there were more than 4,000 web connections to the three-hour event. It was the first chance for many to hear how denominational leaders plan to carry out the recommendations in the Call to Action Steering Team's final report to increase vital congregations.

About 200 laity and clergy from the New York Annual Conference gathered at a location in each of the six districts to view the web cast

Continued on page 10



The team delivered much needed supplies to schoolchildren at Las Brisas; from left are: Dee Morrone, Grant Coneys, Janet Gagliano, Philip Koerner, foreman Juan Zamoua Esquiveli, Steven Gagliano, Howard Fichtel, teacher Luz Marina Ulloa Vindas, Judy Neff, Janet Heaney, team leader Bob Hawkins, Robin Brennan, Laurie Hawkins, Meredith Fichtel, and Las Brisas community president Mario Sequeira Segura.

COSTA RICA VIM

Venue May Change, But Heart For Mission Remains

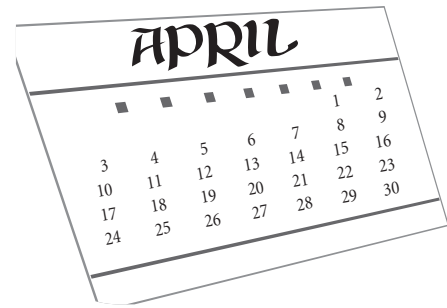
The venue was literally in the clouds—a mountaintop clearing at the edge of Costa Rica's Barbillia National Park, 11 miles from a paved road, surrounded by a seemingly limitless landscape of dense forest and rolling hills, blooming bushes, flowering plants, and rainbows. Was this Shangri-La?

On February 12, a twelve-member Volunteers in Mission team from Long Island left for Costa Rica to begin an adventure many miles, and what seemed like a world away, from the areas and people we'd come to know there. It was a trip we had been hoping would happen the year before. We had expected to be able to return to Costa Rica in 2010 to continue our work building schools and playgrounds in some of the most impoverished areas of Siquirres, a small city two hours east of the capital of San Jose. It was not to be—God had other plans!

Eight members of Centerport UMC: Robin Brennan, Grant Coneys, Meredith and Howard Fichtel, Laurie and Bob Hawkins, Dee Morrone, and Judy Neff; three members of the Babylon

Continued on page 4

SAVE THE DATE



Camp Olmsted Scholarship Benefit

April 28: Five Points Mission will hold a camp scholarship benefit at 6 p.m., Christ Church United Methodist, 520 Park Avenue, New York, N.Y. Trudy L. Grove and James W. Harbison, Jr., will be honored at the event that includes light refreshments. Silent auction at 6:30 p.m. \$60 per person. To make a reservation, call (212) 870-3938; or email olmstedcenter@att.net.

Haiti VIM ERT Training

April 30: Training for future mission teams and disaster responders from 8 a.m.–5 p.m., Stratford UMC, 2600 Main St. Stratford, Conn. Call or email Rev. Joseph Ewoodzie, conference mission coordinator, at 914-615-2233, or jewoodzie@nyac.com.

Permaculture Design Course

May 2011: Learn about living practices and land use that are in tune with nature and good stewardship at Epworth Camp and Retreat Center, High Falls, N.Y. Weekend/holiday dates in May. Kay Cafasso and Connor Stedman will lead the course with guest teachers. If interested, please contact Joan Ewing, Green Phoenix Permaculture, at mamajoane@yahoo.com, or 845-687-7646.

Spring Clergy Retreat

May 9–12: Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Kah-Jin Kuan, dean of Drew Theological School, and composer/professor Mark A. Miller will speak at the Older of Elders retreat at Mount St. Alphonsus, Esopus, N.Y. Room rates for the retreat vary from \$250 to \$310, space is limited. For the reservation form, go to: <http://nyac.com/events/detail/2703>. If you have any questions, please contact Rev. Constance Pak at 631-588-5856, or pastorconstance@msn.com.

Talithacum Ministry Event with Dr. Long

May 10: “Weaving Word & Prayer” with Dr. Thomas Long. Early registration by April 29. In this workshop, explore the map of worship and preaching in a new day, examine what is worth saving and what is excess baggage, and probe in particular what preaching might look like in a transformational church. For registration info, go to: <http://www.churchleaderny.org/>.

Workshop on Construction Ministry

May 13–15: Members of Jesse Lee Memorial UMC in Ridgefield, Conn., will share their experiences in two weekend work/study retreats. The “Spirit Building At Your Church” weekends will be held at Camp Epworth, High Falls, N.Y. Check out the new web site, www.thespiritbuilders.org. Details and registration info are also on the NYAC web site, <http://www.nyac.com/events/detail/3325>.

“Achieve Victory” Men’s Retreat

May 13–15: The men’s ministry of Christ Church United Methodist, Port Jefferson Station, N.Y., will hold a weekend retreat with Pastor David Greeley teaching about overcoming anger, fear, depression and handling forgiveness. Contact Karl Pizzo, 631-374-1800, or Bruce Wolper at 631-744-

1314, for details. Cost is \$120; space is limited.

Safe Sanctuary Workshops

Register by contacting Lynda Gomi at learningcenter@nyac.com, or 914-615-2219.

May 14: Cuyler-Warren Street UMC, Brooklyn; registration opens at 1 p.m.; workshop runs 1:30–4:30 p.m.

Bishop’s Confirmation Rally

May 14: A rally for all new confirmands throughout the conference will be held from 9:30 a.m.–3 p.m. at Jesse Lee Memorial UMC, 207 Main Street, Ridgefield, Conn. Event is free, but registration is required at, <http://nyac.com/events/detail/3384>. Bring your own lunch.

Ready to Change the World?



May 14–15: UM congregations across the conference and around the world will join in this weekend event to make a difference locally and globally. An expected 500,000 people will focus on hunger relief or global health concerns or initiatives to relieve the burdens of those living in poverty. See related story on Page XX, or to find resources, register your church’s event, or find an event in your area, go to: <http://www.umcom.org/changetheworld>.

Time for Holy Conferencing

June 8–11: Under the theme, “For Such A Time as This: We Are Heart-Warmed United Methodists in Mission,” the NYAC will meet at Hofstra University. For information on registration, or go to: <http://www.nyac.com/pages/detail/1641>. Early bird deadline is May 1.

Cooperative School of Mission

July 28–30: “All Things Made New,” is the focus for the conference Cooperative School of Christian Mission at Western Connecticut State University in Danbury. Housing is available at the Ethan Allen Hotel. The three studies available are: “The Journey: Forgiveness, Restorative Justice and Reconciliation,” “Haiti: Challenges and Hope,” and “Joy to the World: Mission in the Age of Global Christianity.” The school is open to clergy and laity, with special classes for children, youth and young adults. Registration info will be available soon; Rev. Sonia A. Jermin serves as dean.

		
The News of the New York Conference of the United Methodist Church		
Bishop: Jeremiah J. Park Director of Connectional Ministries: Ann A. Pearson Editor: Joanne Utley New York Conference of The United Methodist Church 20 Soundview Avenue, White Plains, NY 10606 Phone (888) 696-6922 Fax (914) 615-2244; Website: www.nyac.com Vision e-mail: thevision@nyac.com		

Recent New Appointments

Jessica Anschutz
Central Valley / NYCT

David Ball
Union (Brooklyn) / LIW

Hikari Chang
First (Oceanside) / LIW

Hermon Darden
Vanderveer Park (Brooklyn) / LIW

Gordon A.R. Edwards
Westchester (Bronx) / MET

John Gerlach
Trinity (Windsor) / CT

Cathy Gilliard
Park Avenue (Manhattan) / MET

Albert Hahn
Wethersfield / CT

Cedric Johnson
Newman Memorial (Brooklyn) / LIW

Christine Kim
Jesse Lee (Easton) / CT

Robert Knebel
Waterbury / CT

Luisa Martinez
First Spanish / MET

Anthony Mecca
Memorial (Avon) / CT

Edward Norman
Salem (Manhattan) / MET

Iwy Patel-Yatri
Great Hill UMC (Seymour) / CT

Hector Rivera
Broadway Temple / MET

Robert Sorozan
Prospect (Bristol) / CT

Susan Woodworth
Woodridge & Hurleyville / CH

Chris Yi
Associate, UM Korean Church
(Astoria) / LIW
Additional ½ appointment and will
continue to serve at Island Park

Together, With God, Change is Possible

BY REV. JEFF WELLS

NYAC Board of Church and Society

On May 14 and 15, United Methodist churches across the United States and around the globe will again participate in “Change the World” weekend. CTW is a two-day mission project of the UMC, sponsored and promoted by Rethink Church. Last spring, 100,000 people in more than 1,000 churches worldwide joined in the effort. We will surely exceed those figures in 2011.

This year, with so many people falling deeper into poverty and experiencing hunger—both in our country and globally—the NYAC Board of Church and Society urges every congregation to find ways to feed the hungry, and advocate for ways to eliminate the sources of poverty and hunger. As the body of Christ for the world, we are called to be the hands and feet of Jesus, reaching out in love to all those who are vulnerable, hurting, in despair, and downtrodden. If you do not have your own food pantry, you might try collecting for one. In Massapequa, we will have tables set up outside of local supermarkets. We will collect food and also talk with folks about fighting poverty and hunger and encourage them to join us in that effort.

You might also consider becoming a covenant church with Bread for the World. Bread for the World is an organization that serves as “a collective Christian voice urging our nation’s decision makers to end hunger at home and abroad.” One way to support this work is to participate in the annual “offering of letters” to members of Congress. This year, the focus is on getting our U.S. senators and representatives to work for more effective U.S. foreign aid to fight hunger and poverty around the world.

As Rev. David Beckmann, president of Bread for the World said recently, “I’m a Lutheran pastor, and I have not come across any biblical injunction against taxing the wealthy. Yet the Bible constantly reminds us to take care of the least of our brethren.”

In addition to getting members of your church to sign letters, you could set up a table where there is a lot of foot traffic and invite folks to talk and sign letters. You can find out more about Bread for the World and download sample letters at <http://www.bread.org>.

The need is very great. Globally, there are 1.4 billion people living in extreme poverty. Even in the United States—by far the wealthiest nation in the world—13 percent of our people live in poverty. On Long Island alone, there are 250,000



On “Change the World” weekend in 2010, members of Phoenicia UMC distributed labeled bags in the community to collect staples for a town food pantry.

people who suffer from hunger at least part of the time and often rely on food pantries and soup kitchens for meals. Whatever project you choose, try to both act with mercy to alleviate immediate need and also work to repair broken systems and entrenched injustice. It is also valuable to have both a local and a global focus.

Try to get people outside of your church involved. To paraphrase a Rethink Church slogan, “There are a thousand doors through which to find Jesus and his church.” Change the World weekend can be one of those mission and outreach doors into a new or renewed relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Publicize your activities and also invite people to worship with you. Use that Sunday’s worship to celebrate your church’s mission project and to highlight our broader mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Change the World weekend is just one more expression of what it means to be the hands and feet of Jesus. You can find an inspiring video about this denominational effort as well as publicity and worship materials at <http://www.umcom.org/changetheworld>. With God, and working together, we can change the world.



Targeting Hunger, Global Health

Be sure to register your church’s participation online at <http://www.umcom.org/changetheworld>. And send your photos and stories about the weekend to: thevision@nyac.com for inclusion on the NYAC web site and our Facebook page.

COSTA RICA VIM TEAM, February 12–19

A Week of Tiling, Painting and Loving

Continued from front page

UMC: Janet and Steven Gagliano, and Philip Koerner; and one member of the First Church of Baldwin UM, Janet Heaney comprised the 2011 team. All but three of the group had been to Costa Rica at least once, some multiple times.

Our first stop after a full day of travel was the church in Siquirres that had been the home base for each of our previous trips—St. Mary’s Episcopal Church. Following a delicious supper and a meeting with our local liaison, Carlos Gamboa, we unpacked for our overnight stay in the church’s dorms. The next day, before we packed up again to leave for our worksite in the mountains, we attended worship at St. Mary’s and presented Pastor Sonia with new sound equipment for the church. All of our luggage, encased in plastic because it was raining, and most of our team, were loaded into several four-wheel drive vehicles for the hour-plus trip to the community of Las Brisas de Pacaurito. Two team members had to stay behind to wait for a vehicle to make the return trip for them. We were feeling very badly for them until we learned that they were treated to a gourmet lunch and a guided tour of the area by Carlos!

It rained steadily for most of the trip, which made a difficult drive even harder. It rains here for some portion of nearly every day of the year. The average rainfall in the area is about 150 inches a year. Most local people carry umbrellas every day because it can rain at any time; and the children wear rubber boots to school instead of shoes or sneakers.

After a five-mile trip out of Siquirres to the turn off for the Barbilla National Park, we began our wild ride up a rocky mountain path to our home for the week at the Park Ranger Station in Las Brisas. Bouncing over rocks and into rain gullies, swerving to avoid cattle and washouts on this one-lane path, and losing traction frequently on the steeper inclines, we all breathed a sigh of relief when we emerged into a clearing and saw the Ranger Station ahead.

About a mile back down this road, our driver had pointed out the school where we would be working. We learned the next day that the people living in the small shacks we could see near the road were members of one of the two largest indigenous populations (of a total of 8) in Costa Rica—the Cabecar. The Cabecar people speak their own language, Cabecca, not the predominant language of the country,

Continued on page 5



ABOVE: Tiling a large covered patio was one of the jobs that the team completed during their trip. **BELOW:** Grant Coneys, left, delighted the schoolchildren with a bottle of bubbles.





ABOVE: Philip Koerner and Juan work to wire an electrical panel outside the school. LEFT: The volunteers begin preparations to finish off a classroom ceiling.

Gifts of School Supplies, Sewing Machine

Continued from page 4

Spanish. They exist mainly by farming and are among the poorest and most under-served in Costa Rica. Cabecar Indians inhabit other areas of Costa Rica as well, some of which are even more remote than Las Brisas. We also saw a small Roman Catholic church and a health clinic which we learned was open only one day every two weeks.

The school that would be the focus of our efforts had 25 children—ages 5 to 12—with one teacher who lived in a tiny house at the school during the week. However, we were told that there are more than one hundred children of school age in the area. With a grassroots effort, the Cabecar families in Las Brisas raised the necessary funds and contributed the labor to build an additional two classrooms, and a teachers' apartment, which will allow them to attract one or two more teachers, and educate at least 75 students. Unfortunately, the community ran out of money and volunteer labor, and lacked the technical ability to complete the project. Our team's assignment was to finish the tile work, install electricity and ceilings, and paint the new school rooms and teachers' quarters.

One of our team members, Philip Koerner, was a licensed electrician, and several of

the men had construction experience. With their know-how, the "jack-of-all-trades" abilities of our local foreman Juan, the daily assistance of the community's president, Mario, and the tireless efforts of the entire team, we accomplished our goals and then some. Funds contributed by the congregations represented on the team enabled the purchase of blackboards, storage cabinets, notebooks, soccer balls, craft materials, bookcases, and school supplies. The teacher told us that many of her students could not afford even a notebook.

During the second day of work, our team had the pleasure of presenting some of our gifts to the students, their teacher and two community leaders. The next day, the children came to school wearing their cross necklaces and bracelets, proudly showing us their handiwork. Later that day, the teacher brought us in to the classroom to read a letter the children had composed to thank us for the gifts. The supplies we had brought were all neatly arranged in the room, and the students had their new pencil boxes filled and in use on their desks. There were no dry eyes that morning! During the afternoon recess, a team member brought out several bottles of "bubble stuff" and showed the children the joys of making bubbles!

They had obviously never seen such a thing, but were quickly jumping wildly to catch and chase the bubbles in the air. By our last day, the children were happily sharing the bottles and blowing bubbles everywhere.

At the end of our final workday at the school in Las Brisas, we left our mountain haven, returned to civilization and our "home" at St. Mary's in Siquirres. The next day, we boarded a bus for Limon City to present a new sewing machine, donated by a family from Centerport UMC, to the Iglesia Episcopal Costaricense Sewing Ministry that trains poor women in Limon to sew clothing for their families and for others to earn a small living.

The team was then driven to the nearby Vergua Rainforest for a tour and a zipline experience for the braver members of the group. Our final night in Costa Rica was spent at St. Mary's, with the requisite visit to our favorite pastry and ice cream shop, and a trip to the local Walmart, called "Pali" here, to purchase some of Costa Rica's fabulous coffee to take home.

Our local VIM liaison, Carlos, has already begun working on preparations for 2012. Our group is hoping to add a few members and make up two teams next year! God willing, we'll be there!

HAITI ERT/VIM TEAM, March 7–14

Rebuilding Hope, 1 Church at a Time

The NYAC team traveled to Haiti with Bishop Jeremiah Park. Members included: Edwin “Van” Selden, Rev. Sara Lamar-Sterling, Kara Scroggins, Rev. Joseph Ewoodzie, Sam Phillips, Rev. Steve Phillips, and Anita Haravon. Below are excerpts from their blogs:

Steve’s Journal: Day Two

Our first morning in Haiti, we were privileged to share devotional time with Jim Gully, who is a hero of Methodism in Haiti. Jim was with Sam Dixon and Clint Rabb at the Hotel Montana when the earthquake struck just over a year ago. After being trapped for over 50 hours, he was the only one of the three to survive. . . . Jim is more determined than ever to continue his work as an agricultural specialist in Haiti. He is a real inspiration of a man.

We arrived in the Methodist Guest House in Petit-Goave around noon and were greeted by Pastor Maude, who is responsible for an eight-point circuit of churches around Petit-Goave. Meeting Pastor Maude reminded me of my ordination when Bishop Park placed his hands on my head and ordered me to take “authority” as an elder. Well, believe me, Pastor Maude is of woman of tremendous authority! All teams passing through Petit-Goave are impressed by her capabilities and her abiding faith.

After lunch, we made the 20-minute trip to a little hamlet called Fond Doux, where we would be working with a group of local Methodists rebuilding their church that had been destroyed in the earthquake. The main structure of the church has been basically completed with the help of many ER Teams that have worked here. What remains is the completion of plastering the walls, painting, clearing the surrounding area and furnishing the church. With the use of a little imagination, it is easy in one’s mind’s eye to foresee a beautiful house of worship here in this little village tucked back in the vegetation in a remote corner of southwestern Haiti.

Steve’s Journal: Day Four

. . . some of our team paid a visit to a clinic run by the Methodist Church in a neighboring village, Olivier. In February, the doctor serving this clinic . . . gave a list of medications most needed at the clinic to Joseph Ewoodzie.

Since some of the medications were

Continued on page 7



ABOVE: Bishop Park works with a young boy to sift stones from sand that will be used in the plaster for the sanctuary. **LEFT:** A young girl enjoys a game with Bishop Park. **BELOW:** The team met with Rev. Jim Gully (to the right of Bishop Park), a specialist in sustainable agriculture who works with the General Board of Global Ministries. Gully was trapped in the collapsed Montana Hotel for 55 hours after the 2010 earthquake.



Reminders of Our Connections as Humans

Continued from page 6

prescriptions drugs like amoxicillin and other antibiotics, I contacted my good friend, Dr. Mahjabeen Hassan, who is a reconstructive surgeon at Phelps Hospital and the chairwoman of the American Muslim Women's Association. Dr Hassan wrote "humanitarian aid" prescriptions and sent me to her friend, Aqeel, who owns the Tarrytown Pharmacy. Aqeel was able to supply the entire list of medications ... at a significantly discounted price.

Imagine our excitement as we ... imagined the scores of people that will benefit, perhaps even be saved, by them. ... The idea of Christian missionaries bringing medications supplied by a Muslim doctor and pharmacist must surely represent interfaith work at its best. Allah is indeed good!

Kara's Journal: Day Five

Lessons in what it means to be human:

Some things in life are purely human—not restricted to poor people or Americans or to the educated or Christians or city-dwellers or anybody. These things connect us, humble us or raise us up, and help us to realize that we are part of something greater than ourselves. Here in Haiti, some of these experiences have changed my perspective and awakened within me an innate, pure identity as a human child of God.

Spending time with the children brings out the most obvious of what we share as humans: the need to be held and to know we are loved;

driving curiosity and an endless supply of questions as we figure out relationships; even simple games such as tic-tac-toe, patty-cake, and skipping rope connect our team members with each child we meet in Fond Doux.

Then there are the experiences of working on a construction site. Today, we sifted more sand and helped to mix and pour the concrete into buckets for the Haitian workers to use. As I hauled a bucket up to the scaffolding, all of the Haitian workers suddenly shouted at me, looking alarmed. ... looking up, I realized that I was about to walk under a ladder. Apparently the superstition about bad luck from walking under ladders crosses cultural and language barriers as well.

After lunch today, our team took a walk with people from the community who wanted to show us around Fond Doux. With pride and excitement, they led us ... down to their lake, where they told us legends of crocodiles and stories about flesh-eating fish. Of course, one of the men from the village then had to prove that he wasn't afraid by swimming to the opposite shore and back. (He made it!) The strength in community that was fostered by a collective memory, a sense of shared space, and genuine love for each other and the land was powerful and inspiring to me as I prepare to go back to my own home community.

It was a full day today—we ended our workday with a tour of Petit-Goave, where we stay during the evenings, and were able to see the Methodist Church and health clinic. But

in everything we did, I believe, we grew closer to seeing ourselves as more connected, more beloved, more human.

Anita's Blog: Days Six and Seven

This morning, our last in Petit-Goave, we woke to prepare for Sunday worship in a small village, Carenage, up in the mountains about a one-hour's drive. The drive was rather bumpy, but the views were breathtaking. The village seemed less poverty stricken, than Fond-Doux and the people welcomed us warmly.

... Bishop Park's sermon was interpreted beautifully by Kissmir. It seemed as if they were in sync both energetically and spiritually. The congregation was swept up by their spirit. We heard from the small church's four choirs ... each shared a hymn especially in the bishop's honor. After the offertory, Pastor Maude announced that the congregation received a donation from our team of US \$300. ... The church has an unusual custom regarding offertory. The offerings from men and women are tallied separately. This week, the men had to sing a song for the women because their donation was smaller.

During reflection, Bishop Park spoke ... of Carenage. It reminded him of villages in Korea ... the church is a sign of hope, a means for people to experience a different dimension of their lives, and share the taste of God.

On Friday night, I lit candles and chanted the Kabbalat Shabbat prayer to share my Jewish tradition with the group.

2,000 Meals, Links of Love

The church school children of the UMC of Huntington-Cold Spring Harbor, N.Y. recently celebrated reaching the \$1,000 milestone in their *Make a*



Joyful Noise: Coins for Haiti effort. The program, begun the last week of September 2010, is a "by children, for children" weekly collection of spare change from the congregation to purchase hot meals for their counterparts at the Mountains of Hope Methodist Mission in Haiti. Their celebration included unfurling a paper chain with one link for every meal they've been able to donate. That's 2,000 links ... *so far!*

Bishop Responds to Earthquake in Japan

*Be pleased, O LORD, to save me;
O LORD, come quickly to help me . . .
You are my help and my deliverer;
O my God, do not delay.*

—Psalm 40: 13, 17b

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ our Savior and Redeemer, the Prince of shalom, Healer of our brokenness, and Hope of the world!

The earthquake and tsunami in Japan that occurred a few days ago was of historic proportion and has resulted in the death of thousands of persons with thousands more missing. The numbers are sure to rise. Unknown as yet is the full impact that this calamity will have on the amount of radiation emitted into the atmosphere from nuclear power plants. Truly, our hearts are heavy with sorrow and grief. Accordingly, I call upon all New York Conference United Methodists to pray fervently for the people of Japan, for those most directly affected, and for those who are part of the efforts to bring relief to this suffering country.

I am heartened to know that our United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) has been in touch from the earliest hours with our mission partner churches and church-related agencies in Japan. Most all of our work there is done in conjunction with ecumenical partners including the United Church of Christ in Japan, the Korean Christian Church in Japan and the National Christian Council in Japan. While the new Wesley Center in Tokyo, related to the United Methodist Women, was not damaged and is serving as a homeless shelter, the Asian Rural Institute, north of Tokyo, where we train persons from Asia and Africa in sustainable agriculture, sustained considerable damage. We can be sure that whatever we will eventually do will bear the love of Jesus Christ in tangible expressions and that we will be there as long as we are needed.

It is my fervent desire that our churches receive an offering for UMCOR and its work in Japan. You may send your checks to: Ross Williams, Conference Treasurer, New York United Methodist Center, 20 Soundview Ave., White Plains, NY 10606. Make checks payable to the "New York Annual Conference" and note for "Pacific Emergency, Advance #3021317." One hundred per cent of all monies received will go to this effort.

Having just returned from a week in Haiti, I can testify once again first hand as to the healing and hope that our gifts make when channeled through UMCOR. UMCOR is, indeed, United Methodism at its very best.

I pray for all a continued blessed and holy season of Lent.

In Christ,

Jeremiah J. Park

Youth Mission to Cambodia: Amazing, Awesome

BY CHRISTOPHER BLAIR
Fenimore Street UMC

Cambodia—most don't know where that is, some never even heard of it. They don't know what they are missing! As a Youth Mission Ambassador going to Cambodia, I am pleased. It has been a great life experience. I can remember the things we did as if it was yesterday. That's how amazing it was.

From the 23-hour plane ride to the Golden Gate Hotel; from the Golden Gate Hotel to the Freedom Hotel—another six-hour bus ride—was really interesting. Just being in another country that's across the world is astonishing. Looking at the temples was awesome. We actually got to climb the stairs that were really high in the center of Angkor Wat. From the Freedom Hotel to Kampong Thom Village Hotel, which was another four hours, to then meeting our Mission, the reason why we were there.

Okroch Village is where our mission was. We helped build a fence, broke rocks, made cement, and filled in the holes that we dug the day before. After a hard morning of working, we unwound by playing games with the village kids, which was more than words can explain. From working and playing games to giving school children school supplies was nice. Just seeing the smiles on the kids' faces. After those hard days of work we finally had our days off, and we basically just relaxed in the hotel and went shopping. We treated ourselves to some fancy restaurants. To end things off, we saw the King's Palace. He was home, but sadly we couldn't see him.



Christopher Blair, left, mixes cement that will be used to secure fence posts in the ground.

As our trip ended, we recapped everything we did with our leaders and headed to dinner before traveling back to our homes in New York and Connecticut.

This trip has been more than words can explain. Although we all had our ups and downs, we still pray to the One we adore and the Cambodians do the same. They seem so happy, smiles every day as if nothing is going on. That taught all of us a lesson that with the grace of God we will be all right. We don't have to worry about anything. They don't live like we do—nothing even close—but as long as they are happy, we should be happy. This trip was just awesome. I just thank everyone that was with us and that helped us out. This trip has been the best.

Youth Ambassador? Apply Now for 2012

Christopher Blair traveled to Cambodia in February with fellow youth ambassadors Stephen Alston and Kevona Walker, Grace St. Albans; Brian Clarke, Fenimore Street; Hannah Cover, Simsbury; Rachel Bortin, Reservoir; Tori Mason, Jessie Lee Memorial; Nicole Daniel, Bethany; and Andre Williams, Vanderveer Park. Applications are now being accepted for the 2012 Youth Ambassadors in Mission trip; for more information contact Donna Jolly at, jolly_donna@hotmail.com.

A REFLECTION ON THE “CALL TO ACTION” / REV. JEFFRY WELLS

Dry Bones Can Rise and Dance

Editor’s Note: The following article is adapted from a message by Pastor Jeff Wells to the congregation at Community UMC in Massapequa, N. Y., about the UMC’s “Call to Action” initiative. You can learn more about the “Call to Action” at www.umc.org/calltoaction. You will also find a link there for the video of the “Leadership Summit” on April 6.

The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. . . and they were very dry. He said to me, “Mortal, can these bones live?”

—Ezekiel 37:1–3

Ezekiel’s vision of dry bones being knit back together and God breathing life into them is a hopeful and powerful metaphor. On April 6, clergy and lay leaders gathered at the Conference Center and at locations in each of the districts for a web cast that was being watched simultaneously at more than 1,000 sites across the world—from the Philippines to the United States to Mozambique. Afterward, we discussed the state of the UMC. In light of this conversation, I was inspired to apply this metaphor to our denomination.

I admit that is a bit of a stretch. The UMC has not quite arrived at the point of looking like a valley of lifeless bones. On the other hand, for years we have observed danger signs on the horizon that we are headed in that direction. Over the past four decades, the membership of the UMC in the United States has declined by about one third, or around four million people. The average age of our membership has risen to 57. Hundreds of local UM churches have closed, and thousands more are in trouble. There has been a severe decline in all mainline Protestant denominations. Looking ahead, one researcher predicts that we will witness the loss of 55,000 Protestant congregations in the U.S. over the next 40 years.

Bishop Jeremiah Park called us together to learn about a new church-wide initiative by the name, “Call to Action.” The *message* of “Call to Action” is that we have to take radical steps if we are going to reverse the decline of the UMC in the U.S. The *mission* remains to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. The *means* proposed is “to redirect the flow of attention, energy, and resources” into an intensive and sustained effort to foster vital

congregations.

We should never lose sight that it is individual human persons who need to hear about God’s love and grace, and respond to it by admitting their need for God. Yet, the reality is that no one *becomes* a disciple of Jesus *in isolation*. It can happen only in *communities of disciples*—in congregations. If a congregation is not focused on ongoing, lifelong spiritual growth, on actively working for mercy and justice with those around them, and on reaching out to invite others into relationship with God through Jesus Christ, then it will not be equipped to make new disciples. The consequence will be that lives that could have been touched and transformed, and hearts that could have been healed will not be reached.

UMC leaders commissioned an intensive study of our churches in the U.S. to see how many are really alive and doing effective ministry. Of the 32,228 UM churches in the U.S., only 15 percent were determined to have a high level of vitality. Another 49 percent have a medium level of vitality. But a full 36 percent have low vitality. In other words, we are in the midst of a lot of dry bones—and God is posing the question to us: “Mortals, can these bones live?” Can we take the scattered and battered bones of the UMC and see them not just breathe, but dance again? “YES! Yes, God, these bones can live! You, gracious God, can knit them back together and breathe life into them and make them dance!”

I am not naïve. I know that some UM congregations will not survive. Some may need to die, so that others may live and thrive. On the other hand, some congregations that seem on the verge of death might be revived. Some that are now on life support will turn around and become really vital churches. Others that are already moving toward vitality will learn to energetically grow as disciples themselves and to continually reach new people for Christ. *These bones can live!* God has plans for us – plans for good and not for harm.

The study looked at what characteristics and practices are common to vital congregations. What does a church need to dance? Here are the key drivers of vitality:

- Effective pastoral leadership
- Multiple small groups for spiritual growth
- Multiple programs for children and youth
- A mix of traditional and contemporary worship services
- A high percentage of spiritually engaged laity

who assume leadership roles

- Consistently cultivating incremental increases in financial giving and engagement in outreach, witness, and mission in local communities and the world.

Both clergy and lay leadership need to be more accountable for the vitality of our congregations. Each local church in the conference ought to carefully evaluate how it measures up to the definition of a “vital congregation” and then take action to move to a level of high vitality and/or seek help within the district or conference.

Congregations that are moving in the direction of more vitality should celebrate what they have accomplished so far. Maybe you have attracted several new members and even a number of young families. Perhaps you are already engaged in significant mission and outreach work. If you do not have the resources to expand your worship offering, you might step out in faith and apply for a Parish Development grant or a Vision Bearers matching grant. Perhaps you can kick up your stewardship program and re-emphasize tithing as God’s biblical standard that all should strive toward.

Becoming a vital congregation and making disciples means recognizing and acting on the challenges we all face. For some, membership has increased, but worship attendance has not. Others have very few small group opportunities and participation. Many congregations do a good job of collecting and delivering money and things, but need to expand hands-on mission work like Habitat for Humanity and short-term mission teams. By God’s grace and power, we all need to make all of our worship experiences as excellent as they can be. Then, we need to commit to be the *inviters* God asks us to be and to grow the attendance at the new services by reaching new people so that, over time, they can become fellow disciples.

Are we in the NY Conference up to meeting these kinds of challenges? By ourselves and on our own power, the answer is “certainly not”—but with the power of God in front, behind, and inside of us—*absolutely!* We may see a vision of dry bones, but our hope is not lost. If God could revive the nation of Israel that had become like a valley of bones, then without doubt, so long as we have faith and act upon it, *these bones can live*.

What is our role as followers of Jesus Christ? Of course, we must use our gifts and

Continued on page 13



Clergy and laity gathered at New Paltz UMC, the Catskill-Hudson District's location for the "Call to Action" web cast. Right, A breakout session discusses one of the questions offered up during the web cast.

Web Cast Prompts Global, Local Discussion

Continued from front page

and participate in the interactive discussion. The locations included the White Plains Conference Center, and churches in New Paltz, Smithtown, Highland Mills, N.Y.; St. John's in Elmont, N.Y. and Nichols in Trumbull, Conn.

All five panel members featured on the web cast were part of the Call to Action team. The team's report adopted by the Council of Bishops and Connectional Table, states that the status quo of a shrinking and aging U.S. church is "toxic" and unsustainable.

The UMC's "adaptive challenge," the report says, is to "redirect the flow of attention, energy and resources to an intense concentration on fostering and sustaining an increase in the number of vital congregations . . ."

In short, the panel said, the denomination needs to change how it uses resources, and invest more in fostering thriving, disciple-making local congregations.

Illinois Area Bishop Gregory Palmer, a panel member, said the goal of the summit was to build greater understanding of that challenge.

At the event, he saw United Methodists respond with great love for the church.

"People yearn for local congregations to be effective in the mission and to make a difference together in the world," he said. But he added, "Talking about change is both necessary and threatening."

Tough questions

The panel fielded questions about how to promote evangelism, bridge racial gaps, and how to measure vitality.

In addition to Wenner and Palmer, the panel included Charlotte (N.C.) Area Bishop Larry Goodpaster, Council of Bishops president; Ben Boruff, a young adult and member of the

Connectional Table; and Erin Hawkins, the top executive of the UM Commission on Religion and Race.

Hawkins tackled the question about racial divides.

"When we look at the future of The United Methodist Church, it's one that requires us to take a serious look at how we extend ourselves out into the world in a world that doesn't look like the average United Methodist," she said. Hawkins said it is no longer effective to treat racial/ethnic, youth ministry or women's ministries as add-on ministries.

Another aspect of diversity is age, and Boruff, 21, spoke to how the church in the United States has long struggled to draw in more teens and young adults.

"It would be easy for us to say right now that we need to continue the conversation of how to approach young people," Boruff said. "The hard truth is that this is a conversation we've been having for quite some time."

Just statistics?

Church members following along on Twitter at #umclead also had their own sometimes critical take on the event.

One of the concerns on Twitter and among those questioning the panel was the church's reliance on worship-attendance and membership statistics in measuring vitality.

Goodpaster suggested that churches include the involvement and impact of their outreach ministries as part of their "scorecards."

Wenner stressed that counting worshippers is important because that's how a congregation knows that people are joining. Still, she added, she doesn't consider statistics key to moving the denomination forward.

The panelists were gratified by the

NYAC Reaction to Web Cast

"My first thought is that the sense of worldwide connection was evident and awesome. Use of today's technology to discuss and brainstorm about ways to build the church of the future was fantastic. I hope that this will be the first of many opportunities for the UMC to reinvent itself for the disciples yet to come."

—Rev. Tom Thielmann

"Global holy conferencing via the web felt like we were trying out training wheels to start anew in sharing the greatest mission of all time. The road set ahead of us shows a strong foundation. My prayer is that the proposed wheels of change meet this road hard enough to spark the Spirit's passion in our hearts—beyond what any of us can imagine!"

—Rev. Darlene E.R. Resling

participation in the summit, especially from church members in the central conferences like the 300 United Methodists who gathered at Zimbabwe's world trade center to watch the web cast.

By the end of the three-hour summit, the panel had received 513 questions – far more than the members had time to address in the time allowed. Bishop Palmer said church leaders will aggregate the questions and post responses on the web site no later than May 1.

See related commentary by Rev. Jeff Wells on Page 9.



Members of the group gathered recently for Early Response Training. After training, participants can respond to disasters—both domestically and internationally—with UMCOR or VIM.

Preparing to Respond To Disasters, Mission Needs

I anticipated a long day filled with more information than I could handle when I arrived at the New Rochelle United Methodist Church early on February 19 for a workshop on Early Response Training (ERT). Rev. Joseph Ewoodzie, who had returned from a mission trip to Haiti with Bishop Park earlier that week, greeted us with his signature broad smile.

How quickly the time went and how spiritually stimulating on a practical level the training was for me! I came away from the workshop with a better understanding of what it really means to be a team player in practice, and how important it is to actively listen. This is what some of the other participants had to say:

“The ERT provides me and our church a concrete way to put our faith into action.”—Nancy Bonomo, New Rochelle UMC

“Having worked alongside other members of a Volunteers in Mission (VIM) team in Ghana in August 2010, I now feel compelled to want to do more for my fellow human beings. This training equipped me to better understand the need for early response teams in disasters.”—Penelope Waithe, Wakefield Grace UMC

“The Early Response Training was one of the most interesting and informative trainings that I have attended. Among the many attributes I found interesting were: the importance of spiritual commitment, the importance of being a team player, the importance of being observant and listening and the importance of understanding cultural differences.”—Blossom Saunders, New Rochelle UMC

“The greatest impact I felt was in the realization that to truly care for someone



who has experienced devastation in their lives, you must be invited. So often I think most of us feel we must jump right in, take charge and fix the wrong. To truly care, your love and compassion must be welcomed to have lasting meaning.”—Frazer Pehmoeller, Trinity UMC

“The training was an eye opener for me. I did not know that as a layperson I could actively participate in a disaster situation through UMCOR and UMVIM. The lasting effect that this training has on me is that I have to treat all people involved in a disaster as children of God and worthy of my respect, and to remember that in a disaster situation, I am part of a team and I must follow my team leader.”—Fluerette Reid, Wakefield Grace

Many of you already know what the training is all about and are members of an Early Response Team in your local church. You have not only taken the training, but have put it into practice in your lives and on the mission field, both locally and globally. We thank God for you and for your response to His call to follow Him by serving others.

Does your congregation have an Early Response Team? If not, why not?

For more information, please contact Rev. Joseph Ewoodzie, conference mission coordinator, at 914-615-2233, or jewoodzie@nyac.com.

Lay Speakers Sponsor Safe Water Campaign

The NYAC Committee on Lay Speaking Ministries has joined in an effort to raise funds for safe drinking water in Haiti. The project, which is spearheaded by the Association of Conference Directors of Lay Speaking Ministries, aims to collect \$50,000 nationwide. Each \$100 raised will provide a family in Haiti with a filtration system to provide clean water for 10 years. The association has also arranged for a matching grant of \$50,000 for funds received by July 1.



The conference committee will raise funds on a district-by-district basis and bring those funds together for presentation at Annual Conference. There will also be an opportunity to make contributions via the Laity in Action table at Hofstra University during the June gathering.

For information on the HydrAid filtration system that will be used for this project, please go to, <http://www.hydrAid.org/>. For additional information on the fundraising campaign, contact your district director on lay speaking.

Churches Go For Mission Gold

Rev. Joseph Ewoodzie, mission coordinator, has put out a call for the NYAC's Mission Gold Award applicants. Churches qualify for a mission gold award if their shared ministry apportionments have been paid in full and they have participated in two or more of the mission areas listed below from June 2010 to May 2011:

- Supported at least one local mission project.
- Received “Special Sunday” offerings or similar mission related offerings.
- Fulfilled a covenant relationship with a missionary obligation
- Supported at least one Conference Mission Initiative such as Mozambique, Bolivia, Haiti, Burundi, etc.
- Sent at least one person on a Volunteer In Mission Trip.
- Attended Cooperative School of Christian Mission.
- Celebrated Mission Sunday with a mission speaker.
- Took a group on a Mission Study Tour or Volunteer in Mission Trip.
- Offered a new mission experience; did something new that your congregation had never done before.
- Supported the Conference Disaster Preparedness and Response Team.
- Supported Justice for our Neighbors

The application can be found at <http://nyac.com/pages/detail/1573>; deadline is May 7. The mission awards will be presented at annual conference.

Tips to Help Kids Deal With Disasters

The world can be a scary place sometimes. What can we say to children when public tragedies and upsetting events occur? Should we shield them from the news? How can we reassure them and help them feel safe?

Here is some advice from early childhood experts that may be helpful:

- There is no need to tell young children about disastrous world events. However, children often pick up information. Find out what your child has heard by asking: Did you hear anything about ...?
- Respect your child's attempts to make sense of what happened. You want your child to feel comfortable talking with you about confusing things.
- Children often express thoughts and worries through their play. Listen and watch.
- Answer questions honestly, but briefly. Use simple words.
- The most important thing for children to know is that they are safe and that you will take care of them.
- Enjoy lots of family togetherness, talking and cuddling.
- Children may be aware that you are worried and upset. This can make them feel scared. Talk about your feelings. Acknowledge that a bad thing has happened, but try to be reassuring and optimistic.
- Keep daily routines as normal as possible. It helps children feel comfortable. Do chores, read stories, and watch favorite TV shows together.
- Avoid adult conversations about disasters in front of young children.
- Protect young children from seeing violent images on television news.
- Help your child notice the many things caring people in your family, community, and the world are doing to help others.
- As your family reaches out to others, try to find ways your child can also participate. For example, children can donate outgrown toys to family shelters, do simple chores for elderly neighbors, or participate in a community park clean-up or walk for hunger.
- Violent events remind us how important it is to find ways to solve our problems peacefully. Help your child learn to respect others, appreciate diversity, and find healthy ways to resolve daily conflicts.



At the Children's Home we believe every child deserves a safe place. To borrow our video, or to schedule a presentation about the Children's Home, please contact Rebecca Mebert, ext 131. For more information on the Children's Home, call 800-772-6904, ext. 131, or visit the web site at www.chowc.org. Please send donations directly, or use our New York Conference Advance number 60-0588.

More Funds to Educate UM Clergy Candidates

UMNS REPORT

United Methodist schools of theology that educate more students for ordained ministry in the denomination will get more church funding in 2012 under a new formula for distributing money from the Ministerial Education Fund.

The directors of The United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry had approved the changes last fall, but tweaked the formula at their March meeting in to include money for full-time United Methodist faculty and senior administrators at the seminaries. That change came in response to concerns from some of the schools of theology.

"We want to reward the United Methodist seminaries that educate more United Methodist students for ministry in the church," said the Rev. Sharon Rubey, an executive with the board's Division of Ordained Ministry. "The new revised proposal maintains that intent, but there was some concern from the schools of theology that the incentive for hiring United Methodist faculty had been eliminated and the directors agreed to restore money for that purpose."

The changes approved last fall mean that 65 percent of the fund will be divided based on the number of United Methodist students who are enrolled in candidacy for ordination and the number of graduates who are ordained after completing seminary. The new formula will go into effect in 2012.

According to the Board's 2009 Seminaries Report, the number of ordained elders and deacons graduating from United Methodist seminaries ranged from almost 60 at one school to single digits at others. Ten annual (regional) conferences provided no data for that report.

In 2010, \$14.6 million was distributed to the 13 United Methodist schools of theology. For most United Methodist seminaries, the Ministerial Education Fund disbursement accounts for 12 to 20 percent of their annual budgets under the current formula.

Twenty-five percent of the money collected for the fund stays with participating annual conferences to support continuing education for pastors and clergy recruitment and to provide financial aid for students in the annual conference.

The change affects the funds that are disbursed to the 13 United Methodist seminaries to assist candidates for ordained ministry through scholarships and faculty salaries. For the full story, go to: <http://www.umc.org/site/apps/nlnet/content.aspx?c=IwL4KnN1LtH&b=4776577&ct=9252567&tr=y&auid=8026232>

5 Doctoral Offerings at Drew

Drew Theological School, a seminary of the United Methodist Church in Madison, N.J., has announced its Doctor of Ministry offerings for the Fall 2011 semester:

- Global Online Concentration in Congregational Leadership
- Congregational Growth and Development; hosted in North Carolina
- Congregational Growth and Community Shalom; hosted in California
- Congregational Growth and Development; hosted in Oklahoma
- Worship, Spirituality, and Preaching; hosted at Drew University

To apply or request more information about the Doctor of Ministry at Drew, please visit our web site: www.drew.edu/theo/dmin. For questions about the application, or to schedule a visit contact the admissions office at 973-408-3111, or theoadm@drew.edu.



PHOTO BY SUNGCHUN AHN

Students gather outside the front doors of Seminary Hall at Drew University, Madison, N.J.

Nourishing the Connection for Absent Elderly

BY JIM STINSON

Consultant on Older Adult Ministry

"In the journey of frailty, slowly but surely there is one loss after the other. The church should not be one of the losses." (Karla Woodward, 'Pastoral Care Ministry for the Frail,' Spring 2011 issue of Center Sage)

Karla Woodward of The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas speaks a word to all congregations, pastors and laity, which needs to be heard and embraced. Because people, as they age, often become too frail to attend church services does not mean the church is unimportant to them.

Often times, older adults gradually disappear from worship services and activities at the church. And too often, these folks are forgotten by their pastors



and church family. I am always distressed when I hear people living at Wesley Village tell me how active they used to be in the life of the church and how much they miss it and how long it has been since they have seen anyone from "my" church. The need for spiritual guidance and for fellowship with other church members does not diminish with age or frailty. In fact, in many instances, it increases. I've heard too many older adults say that the only time they hear from their church is during the church's pledge drives. For them, the church is one of their losses.

With busy schedules and other constraints on time, it is often easy to neglect the spiritual needs of older adults. An intentional ministry to this age bracket in every congregation is one sure way to see that the old and frail are not forgotten, but valued for their past contributions to the life of the church, as well as for who they still are. How this ministry is shaped is of less importance than it's intentionality. In large measure it can be a lay ministry. Regular visits, notes, phone calls, cards on special occasions are all ways to care for older adult members. (Having said that I offer an aside to pastors: Older members of your congregation feel very blessed and cared for by the church when you personally visit them).

Woodward offers a caution to congregations establishing such an intentional ministry. "The overall

needs of frail people are generally deep and wide. Without clear guidelines, determining the nature and scope of pastoral care, pastors and visiting volunteers can easily get caught up in trying to intervene in many different needs and that can be overwhelming (and at times, inappropriate). A successful and appropriate pastoral care program for the frail can be designed, developed and implemented, but it has to be done with great care and concern in defining boundaries from the beginning."

If your congregation is already offering such an intentional ministry—God bless you! If it is not, begin the conversation with your congregation and go from there.

Rev. Stinson is available to visit your church with ideas and training for older adult ministries; please contact him at jstinson@umh.org.

NYM Hospital to Honor Gudavallis, Perkins

New York Methodist Hospital will host the 2011 Board of Trustees Candlelight Gala on May 14 at the Brooklyn Museum. Proceeds from the gala will benefit the hospital's Institute for Neurosciences; with a portion going towards the renovation of the hospital's inpatient rehabilitation gymnasium.

This year, the hospital will honor Dr. Madhu B. Gudavalli, chief of neonatology; Dr. Prasad Gudavalli, attending physician in surgery, and James Perkins, a hospital trustee.

The Gudavallis will receive the Lewis S. Pilcher, M.D., Award, in recognition of their leadership and service to New York Methodist.

Dr. Prasad Gudavalli is actively involved in teaching the surgical residents and medical

students at New York Methodist. Dr. Madhu Gudavalli joined New York Methodist as chief of neonatology in 1992. She is a clinical associate professor of pediatrics at the Weill Cornell Medical College.

Perkins, a lawyer, will receive the James Monroe Buckley Award for Distinguished Trustee. His practice focuses on complex commercial litigation and arbitration. Perkins is the past president and member of the Board of Directors for the United Methodist City Society, and a trustee of the John Street Church Trust. He is also the son of a Methodist pastor.

The gala will begin with cocktails at 7 p.m., with dinner and awards at 8 p.m. For tickets, call the Hospital's Department of Development at 718 780-5342.



James Perkins

Dry Bones Can Rise

Continued from page 9

resources, plan and implement excellent worship experiences and small group ministries, and reach new people. But I believe there is something else more important that we need to do first (and continually). First and foremost, *we need to pray*. I cannot stress enough the importance and the power of prayer in this endeavor (and in everything we do, for that matter). We hold ourselves back when we fail to pray our visions and our dreams to God. It isn't just that we communicate to God our desires through prayer, but also that we open ourselves to God's inspiration, to God's leading, and to God's wisdom.

So I urge you to pray. Be open. Listen for God's gracious response. Then, when God has heard us and we have listened to God, we can act together according to the Spirit's leading. When the Spirit is with us, then dry bones begin to rattle and new sinews and ligaments start to grow. When the Spirit of God is with us and we are paying attention, then new strength and vitality can surge through bones that once seemed too far gone to ever rise again. When God breathes vitality into us, then we can dance for joy.

Talking about Justice / Tips for Pastors

This article is reprinted from the February–April 2011 issue of the Circuit Rider.

BY REV. DARLENE E.R. RESLING

Social justice can be an intimidating concept for pastors to address in the local congregation. I recently traveled with twenty-two other New York Annual Conference commissioned elders and deacons to learn about the United Methodist Church's advocacy of justice issues. Through conversation with General Board of Church and Society staff and other leaders including the Rev. Jim Wallis, Congressman Rev. Emanuel Cleaver, and Congressman James E. Clyburn, we identified user-friendly ways pastors can show church members and friends how to respond as they hear God calling them to advocate for justice both locally and globally.

I was challenged as social justice came to life for me and my fellow pastors, but I learned that starting conversations about justice does not have to be complicated. There are many techniques and tools right at our fingertips to use in bringing justice to life for our congregations.

Start with Biblical Foundations

Help congregants explore and reflect on scriptures that inspire us to seek justice. The prophets are a great place to start. The words of Micah 6:8, for example, speak to each of us the bold question, "What does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" Sermons and Bible studies focusing on these passages demonstrate to congregants that justice is central to our faith.

Displaying such Bible verses on banners in the worship space, church mailings, and websites remind church members and the public of the role the church should play in justice advocacy.

Making social justice connect with the Word of God and the local church must be an active priority for all who desire to share their witness in a church for the world to see.

Use Denominational Resources

The United Methodist Social Creed was updated at the 2008 General Conference to be more user-friendly for communal reading—and even singing—in worship. The more methodically arranged UMC Social Principles address contemporary concerns in the nurturing, social, economic, political, and world communities, plus natural world topics.

A clearly designed chart (or again even a



Rev. Darlene E.R. Resling

colorful banner) illustrating the six areas of the Social Principles might also be created and referred to often. Sunday school classes and small groups can study the Social Principles to discuss how biblical mandates can be applied to our modern social context. (Inexpensive booklets of the Principles are available from Cokesbury.)

These affirmations can be powerful signs to people on the fringes of Christianity that our faith is active and connected to doing good works in the world. They will see that the church offers countless ways to serve as social justice advocates and make a real difference in helping heal the pain, balance the inequality, and work against the oppressive injustice that is present all around us.

Use the News

A current news headline tells of how a federal crackdown on child prostitution resulted in 884 arrests. Such headlines can serve as a "hot-off-the-press" wake-up call pastors can share to help their people understand modern-day injustices like human trafficking. Pastors can connect the issue with Scripture and then ask, "Now what?" – encouraging people to respond as to what they hear God leading them to do, personally or communally.

Whenever there is a disaster like Hurricane Katrina or the Haitian earthquake, pastors can point people to the UMCOR Advance that has likely been set up to collect such gifts, guaranteed to be 100 percent directed to the need—with no middleman. If your church isn't in the habit of organizing mission trips, responding to such a well-publicized need may be a good place to start.

During the 2010 oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, one of the congregations I pastor held

a prayer vigil and fasted for a week. Feeling the need for the community to remember and to pray for a resolution to this manmade disaster and its toll on the social fabric, doors were flung open, signs posted, and all were invited to participate.

Involve the Children

Yes, children can, and should, experience being advocates of justice! While youth and adults fasted and prayed, children were invited to draw pictures of what was happening in the Gulf, and every week the worship bulletin covers displayed their visual efforts.

Children can be involved in deciding where their Sunday school offering might go. In one church, the children chose to work against hunger by donating their money to the Heifer Project, buying chickens for people in a distant land as they took a stand against hunger. The highlight was when a real chicken arrived during the children's message! Everyone in the congregation rejoiced with the children as all were connected, and as all joined in advocating for food sufficiency for people beyond their own church walls.

Bullying has become epidemic throughout our country, and teaching respect and equality can begin in the nursery and preschool classes, using creative methods to spark discussion. Puppet shows and skits can demonstrate the pain that bullying causes. Refer to the Bible and talk about how God expects us to treat each other.

Take Action

Raising congregations' awareness of social justice issues may begin with talk, but once we know, we must, as God's people, be able to hear people's cries for help and then respond.

Partner with local agencies like food pantries or domestic abuse shelters to learn how your congregation can help. Participate in a Habitat for Humanity build. Sign your church up for the Change the World weekend at www.umcom.org/changetheworld to participate in a worldwide, connection-wide effort to address hunger crises on May 14–15.

Whether you start by sharing an unsettling news event during a sermon, by discussing the Social Principles, by lifting a hammer or feeding the hungry alongside thousands of other United Methodists, start somewhere. Start TODAY. God requires it of us all.

Resling is pastor of the Highland Mills and Mountainville churches.

Clergywomen Struggle Despite Open Doors

This commentary was written for the UM News Service's celebration of Women's History Month.

BY REV. CONSTANCE PAK

Lake Ronkonkoma UMC

More than two weeks after the Northeastern Jurisdictional Clergywomen's Consultation, my heart is still warm, my spirit still full of joy and my soul still dancing with salsa rhythm.

As part of the design team, I participated in the event from the first planning meeting to closing worship. However, it is more than the joy of accomplishment that makes me so content and happy.

This joy comes from knowing I belong to the beautiful mosaic faith community of The United Methodist Church. I've met wonderful, intelligent, gifted, "bold and bodacious" sisters in Christ, all with different backgrounds, with whom I could build friendships.

Throughout the event, our energy was "bubbling up, bursting out, breaking through. . . ." I am relieved to learn I'm not alone in this faith journey. We all walk together in spite of our differences. Meeting other ethnic minority clergywomen greatly empowered me and strongly affirmed my call. I am proud to be a Korean-American clergywoman serving a cross-racial/cross-cultural congregation in The United Methodist Church.

I grew up a loyal, third-generation Presbyterian. In my second year at Princeton Theological Seminary, I courageously ventured beyond the church I knew well. With curiosity, I took courses in United Methodist history, doctrine, theology and polity. I especially liked the emphasis on sanctification and connectionalism. Finally, I decided to become a United Methodist.

The seminary president and the vice president were not thrilled. They said, "Constance, we think of you as a missionary to the Methodist Church."



Rev. Constance Pak joins in choir practice at Lake Ronkonkoma UMC in Lake Grove, N.Y., where she serves as pastor.

I answered, "Oh, no! I believe that I was predestined to be a Methodist!" I've never forgotten what I said, and I'm proud of being called by God to be a United Methodist pastor. Like Wesley, I believed that the world is my parish. I wanted to experience, embrace and create a genuinely inclusive global church.

The United Methodist Church opened its heart, mind and doors to welcome me.

Even though I am a bilingual and bicultural person, I was not particularly interested in serving Korean-American churches. I wanted to serve cross-racial/cross-cultural congregations. The United Methodist Church's appointive system allows bishops to send pastors wherever their ministry is needed. No method is perfect, but I believe United Methodism has a more apostolic and progressive system to reach out to the world than do other denominations.

Since The United Methodist Church slowly and cautiously initiated cross-racial/cross-cultural appointments more than two decades ago, our congregations have become more diverse, inclusive, alive and growing, compared to other Protestant

churches. More than 300 Korean-American pastors are serving cross-racial and cross-cultural appointments in the United States. Close to half of them are clergywomen. When we add the many other ethnic minority pastors who are serving cross-racial and cross-cultural churches, the number is much higher.

Our denomination has opened doors for ethnic minority pastors, but many local churches still resist them. Ethnic minority women pastors must put extra energy and effort into overcoming racism and sexism. However, I think of this positively. Wherever we go, we are history makers: the first non-Caucasian and often the first female pastor in a congregation's history.

Korean-American clergywomen face a double glass ceiling. While Korean-American churches have come a long way toward being open and inclusive, many still do not fully acknowledge clergywomen's authority or welcome them as pastors. I appreciate the past efforts of Korean-American churches, but we need to go further. We need more help and more support to share the burden of that yoke.

I treat whatever struggles I experience as growing pains

toward achieving the vision of the kingdom of God. It is not an easy journey. I have to put all my being into moving one rock at a time. It's hard work. The love of God in my heart provides wisdom, patience, energy and passion and will melt the fear of change that results in racism and sexism. We need to move forward together as we face the difficulties and challenges. We've come this far, and we can't give up.

One of my bold, bodacious and wild dreams for The United Methodist Church is that ALL pastors will have cross-racial/cross-cultural experiences to allow us to be a truly authentic, embracing, inclusive, diverse, evangelical, mission-oriented, growing global church. I foresee our faith community as a place where unity, peace and balance will exist harmoniously.

I keep this acronym in my heart: UNITY can happen when you (U) and (N) I (I) thank (T) Yahweh (Y). When we give thanks to God for creating us as we are, we can see each other with open hearts, minds and spirits, and love others as ourselves. I trust my fellow United Methodists to embrace my vision and walk the faith journey with me.